



Fictional Representations of Ethnicity, Nationhood, and Identity in *Kwani?* Journal and other Kwani Trust Publications

By

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A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in English in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of English, at the University of the Free State.

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November 2020

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of ethnicity, nationhood, and identity in *Kwani?* Journal, founded by the late Kenyan writer, Binyavanga Wainaina in 2002 through the sponsorship of the American Ford Foundation and other Western donors. The study specifically unpacks how ethnicity seems to influence the representation of Kenyan nationhood in some of the journal's issues. The study engages in a close reading of the selected journal issues focusing on the Kenyan socio-political space between 2003 and 2015. It considers *Kwani?* Journal as a popular space where Kenyan politics and competing national ideologies regarding the history of the struggle for independence, statehood and ethnicity are mediated. In this regard, the study relies on relevant formulations on nationhood to investigate how specific *Kwani?* texts, such as short stories, poems, reportage, and contemporary paratexts, narrate the role of the Mungiki Cult during Kenya's electoral contestations. Furthermore, the study examines how these texts use characterisation to represent different Kenyan ethnicities and discusses the ways in which the issue of ethnicity influences the journal's treatment of the nature of Kenya's different regimes. The study posits that ethnicity determines how *Kwani?* Journal represents ethnic and national violence, and thus, shows that the journal aligns with the Kenyan State metanarrative on ethnicity and political leadership. The study draws on relevant theorists of nationhood such as Anderson (1983), Bhabha (1990), and Renan (1990). It is also anchored on popular culture theory, specifically Barber (1987), Fabian (1997), and Mbembe's (2001) theorisation of the subversive relationship between popular texts and State metanarratives. Moreover, the study incorporates varied scholarship on Kenyan nationhood, as represented by Ogot (2003), Ochieng (2009), Atieno-Odhiambo (2003), Anderson (2005), Elkins (2005), Hornsby (2013), and Kanyinga (2014). The study concludes that *Kwani?* Journal is not unique in its adoption of State metanarratives on ethnicity, nationhood, and national identity. The research notes further that the journal's adoption of the narratives created by the ruling Kikuyu elite alludes to the ethnicised nature of the Kenyan socio-political space and re-enacts the popular cultures of different Kenyan communities along an ethnic interpretation of Kenya's nationhood.

KEY WORDS: ethnicity; nationhood; identity; *Kwani?* Journal; popular culture; metanarratives

DECLARATION

I, **Abenea Ndago**, declare that the thesis that I herewith submit for the Doctoral Degree of Philosophy With Specialisation in English at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank various people who made it possible for me to start and complete my PhD study. Foremost gratitude goes to Prof. Irikidzayi Manase, my main supervisor, for initiating all the processes that surrounded the study. I owe him a lot for his continued guidance and encouragement through the study. I also thank Dr. Rodwell Makombe, the co-supervisor, for his suggestions that went into shaping the final work.

Equal gratitude goes to my scholarship funders, the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).

I thank the English Department of the University of the Free State for providing a supportive environment that enabled me to complete my studies in time despite the normal challenges. The tutorials, presentations, seminars, and Mostert Room went a long way in helping me learn the academic environment.

Various colleagues assisted me in different ways. I specifically recognise Mr. Walter Kudzai Barure for taking me through the whole orientation process all by himself. Drs. Doreen Tivenga and Mwaka Siluonde also helped me in many ways. I thank Mr. Marcus Maphile, Mr. Mogopodi Lago, Mrs. Bernadine Carson, Mrs. Carmen Nel, Mrs. Hesman van Tonder, and Ms. Shaneulia Nel, all of the university's Sasol Library. The following people indirectly contributed to my studies in important ways: Mrs. Dorothy Kusienya, the late Prof. Chris Wanjala, Dr. Wasambo Were, Prof. Peter Amuka, Prof. Henry Indangasi, Prof. C.J. Odhiambo, Dr. Godwin Siundu, Dr. Tom Odhiambo, Mrs. Pauline Kariuki, and Mr. Mahat Issak Hassan.

My family deserves all the credit for its patience with my continued absence during the first two years of studies. Most importantly, I thank God for directing every step I took in the course of my studies.

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CHAPTER 1 :

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING KENYA'S NATIONHOOD AND THE PLACE OF *KWANI?* JOURNAL

1.1 The Problematic Construction of Nationhood in Kenya

The linkage between literature and politics is arguably an old one. John Lindberg's (1968) study of the relationship between American politics and American Literature suggests that both disciplines usually inform and influence each other. The 1994 Japanese Nobel Laureate, Kenzaburo Oe (1999), also makes the same observation in his examination of the orientation of, and ideological affinities between Japanese Literature and the Japanese nation after World War Two. I intend to locate the commitment of *Kwani?* writing to the narration of Kenya's nationhood and identity in the way these publications capture specific moments in Kenya's history and how this is reflected in relation to the different ethnic nations' experiences and perceptions. Oe considers commitment in his nation's writing and attributes this to the growth of "tolerance and democracy" (Oe, 1999:7) in Japanese society and the political selflessness of Japanese authors of the same period. Of specific importance to my study is the way in which the issue of ethnicity might influence the process of narrating the nation in *Kwani?* texts. I argue that ethnicity is a major factor that determines how discourses on nationhood and identity are carried out, depicted and defined in *Kwani?* texts.

With regard to African writing, the intertwining of literature and politics is visible in the roles that some authors played at different times in their countries' quest for independence. These authors include Sedar Senghor (Senegal), Agostino Neto (Angola), Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), and Milton Obote (Uganda). It is therefore possible that even African literary texts may have played their own roles in the various countries' attempts to "imagine" themselves as disparate components constructed in terms of national "communities" (Anderson 1983). Commenting on this theme, Booker (2015: 12) states that African writers have always viewed Literature as "a tool for fashioning an African identity". I perceive this view as true for many African authors as it is for sites of literary production such as journals. The only challenge is ascertaining the exact ways through which the process works. Hence, in this study, I unpack Kenya's discourses on ethnicity and how these relate to *Kwani?* Journal's depiction and imagination of Kenya's nationhood and national belonging. My study is based on the premise that the way *Kwani?* texts discuss and capture issues of national belonging might relate, in certain ways, to the atmosphere of ethnic collectivism that prevails

in Kenya. I also determine the extent to which these texts adopt a sense of ideological neutrality in their narration of quotidian politics and how this links with national identity and belonging within Kenya's context of ethnic exclusion.

The study focusses on how national literary texts such as those published in *Kwani?* tap from historical texts, intellectual debates and discursive projections of the idea of national belonging in Kenya. I draw from Atieno-Odhiambo's (2003) classification of Kenya's "nationhoods" into seven different schools. These include: the anti-colonial Kenya African National Union (KANU) party mode; the pro-colonial Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) party mode; the trade unions mode; the Mau Mau mode; the Kikuyu community mode; the children of the collaborators mode; and the all-inclusive mode. My study adopts the all-inclusive brand of nationhood since this particular typology cuts across regional, racial and ethnic myths and stereotypes in the Kenyan public space. The study is interested in racial/ethnic myths and stereotypes because these are integral to the formulations of nationhood in Kenya and other African countries, as well as in the West. Belich and Wevers (2008: 3), in their consideration on national identity in New Zealand state that it is "always full of pluralities, stereotypes, contradictions, and paradoxes". Belich and Wevers (2008) show that stereotyping in New Zealand pits the settler white community against indigenous Maori and Pakeha. The example of New Zealand shows that popular myths and stereotypes are potent inhibitions to real national integration as is the case in Kenya (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003; Wa-Mungai, 2007; Ligaga, 2009), especially since communities sometime deploy exclusionist myths revolving around political power.

Different scholars also argue that myths around Kenya's achievement of independence problematise the country's imagination of nationhood. Anderson (2003) and Lonsdale (2003) observe that the problem with Kenya's nationhood partly lies in the imbalanced attribution of national liberation to the Mau Mau and Kikuyu community alone in works such as that of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965), the war-mongering Kiama front of the struggle for independence, led by the character Kabonyi, overshadows the moderate wing led by the protagonist Waiyaki. Ngugi's novel is largely silent on the trade unions and the civil society that had a more remarkable effect on Kenya's negotiations for self-rule than the Mau Mau did. As a result, I agree with Ogude's (2003) view that such a trend of depicting nationhood would not only be false, but also dangerous, since it breeds entitlement and extremism among many members of one community while creating discontent amongst marginalised Kenyan ethnicities. This would be a good example of how ethnicity might affect

the popular depiction of nationhood.

Therefore, my analysis of *Kwani?* is interested in how the journal's publications balance between the different competing voices and narratives of Kenya's nationhood. I concentrate on how the tenures of Kenya's four presidents, Kenya's history and its people, discussions on ethnicity itself as a national malaise, the country's struggle for independence, corruption scandals, and contested occurrences that include elections and political assassinations, are captured and expressed. I focus on these areas because, as a journal, *Kwani?*'s discourse on the same issues might be a function of editorial policy, and yet such discourses influence the narration of national belonging. For instance, and as I show later, the covers of *Kwani? 01* and *Kwani? 02* contain the photograph of a dreadlocked man. Commenting on paratexts such as book covers, Genette (1997) shows that these paratextual media influence the reader's interpretation of the book. It is therefore true that book covers are never innocent; rather, they give clues to what is ideologically contained within the pages. In the case of *Kwani?* Journal, it might be right to say that the dreadlocked head is a reference to the Mau Mau and Mungiki Sect theme, which runs throughout the nine volumes of the journal. My consideration of such paratextual aspects of the journal in the study (Genette, 1997) contends that the net effect of this foregrounding of the Mau Mau/Mungiki Sect theme might limit these texts' discourses on Kenya's nationhood to the Kikuyu community alone.

Kwani? 02 also contains an elaborate investigation into the 1990s' Goldenberg Scandal in which Kenya lost billions of Shillings during President Daniel Arap Moi's tenure. The reality is that, there have been major corruption scandals in Kenya after the Moi tenure, which remain unresolved. These include the Anglo-Leasing Scandal, the Maize Scandal, and the National Youth Service Scandal, all of which cost the Kenyan treasury substantial amounts of money. It is interesting to note that only the earlier scandal (Goldenberg) received *Kwani?* Journal's attention. My study asks questions whether such omissions might be informed by the ethnicity of the president in power at the time of the scandal.

In the same vein, *Kwani? 05 (Part-1)* contains journalistic reportage of what happened during the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya. However, the journal issue's texts remain silent on the violence that the Mungiki Sect meted out on Kenyans from other ethnicities in opposition areas such as Kibera Slums in Nairobi. The study notes that the Sect draws its membership almost exclusively from the Kikuyu community and posits that the journal's popular silence on the Mungiki violence might allude to ethnicity in Kenyan national discourses. Conversely, the

journal seems to privilege the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party violence over State violence perpetrated by the Kenyan Police, which then obeyed orders from President Mwai Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU). These and similar questions form the basis of my study, since such silences and omissions impact the texts' treatment of nationhood and national belonging within the context of Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV.

Therefore, the chapter adopts a multidisciplinary approach in highlighting major voices that have theorised national identities and how the construction of national belonging relates to popular culture. I draw on the ideas by Benedict Anderson (1983), Homi Bhabha (1990), and Ernest Renan (1990). Anderson formulates that modern nations emerged out of historical processes related to the ideas of language, religion, and the novel (Literature). He argues that these three aspects of life usually act as areas of national sharing, which bring the people together. When people share a specific language or religion, they feel a sense of belonging and service to a common entity. Anderson holds that Literature too acts as an agent of togetherness in the way it represents a people's common origins, suffering, challenges, and the possibility of hope in the way the nation confronts its challenges. Since *Kwani?* falls within Literature, my study finds out how literary texts published in the journal act as a common agent that pulls together Kenyans of all ethnicities. The study does this by, for instance, examining the extent to which *Kwani? 05 (Part-1)*'s depiction of the 2007/2008 PEV rallies all Kenyans together. I examine whether ethnicity might have influenced the way in which different Kenyan communities are depicted as victims or aggressors in the electoral violence. Furthermore, I examine whether the post-election conflict is portrayed in a way that urges all Kenyans to coexist and form a nation as Anderson (1983) prescribes.

The foregoing shows that the coverage of electoral violence in Kenya raises certain important points on how Kenyan popular culture spaces such as *Kwani?* depicted the violence. For example, it is observable that the journal did not cover in its discussions one of the Luo victims who was most affected by the fighting in Kenya's Kikuyu town of Naivasha (Mr. Bernard Orinda Ndege, who lost eleven members of his family in an arson attack). Conversely, the motif of the Kiambaa Church arson in Eldoret where twenty-three Kikuyu victims lost their lives runs through *Kwani?* Journal's coverage of the 2007/2008 electoral violence in the Kalenjin town of Eldoret. Thus, my study anchors on Anderson (1983) and investigates the extent to which such coverages of the electoral violence might lend themselves to multi-ethnic interpretations.

The study also relies on Bhabha's (1990) point that narrating nationhood should ideally avoid the temptation of assigning the origins of the nation to fixed and static beginnings. Rather, it should involve a process that ensures inclusivity. This is what Bhabha refers to as the idea of an "ambivalent and vacillating representation" (Bhabha, 1990: 300). To him, nationhood becomes stable if an overarching narrative is cast as wide as possible, in terms of time and space. It is in this context that Bhabha further argues that

What is more significant [...] is the emergence of a hybrid national narrative that turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive 'anterior' and displaces the historical present – opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects. (Bhabha, 1990: 318)

My view is that the foregoing process would ideally involve *Kwani?* foregrounding the histories and narratives of the different Kenyan ethnicities in the journal's texts. It would also involve recognising not only specific ethnicities in the national space, but also the contributions of Kenya's past leaders irrespective of their geographical, ideological, racial, or ethnic origins.

The broad inclusion of different voices is important especially since post-independent Kenyan politics was fiercely divided by Cold War politics. This involved mainly the Kikuyu and Luo communities as then represented by President Jomo Kenyatta and Vice President Oginga Odinga, respectively. Therefore, there is the need to dilute this enduring ethnic rift between both communities. Bhabha's (1990) suggestion here would imply that the narration of nationhood in Kenyan popular media such as *Kwani?* should adopt an inclusive approach that recognises the contributions of Kenyan Africans, Asians, whites, civil society, trade unions, Mau Mau, and everybody else, a position that Ogot (2003) also supports. However, *Kwani?* texts seem to focus more on the Mau Mau/Dedan Kimathi/Jomo Kenyatta story than any other trajectory of the struggle for Kenya's independence. For example, a photo of the ill-fated Mau Mau leader, Dedan Kimathi on *Kwani?* 03 has the caption: "A rare photo of Dedan Kimathi. Notice the short dreads" (2003: 3). Furthermore, much of the music analysed in *Kwani?* is by the groups Kalamashaka, Mashifta, and Ukoo Flani Mau Mau, all of which laced their lyrics mainly with Mau Mau themes, and potent undertones of mono-ethnic supremacy. While I state here that Dedan Kimathi remains a deserving national hero in Kenya, I think that the danger with this formulation of nationhood and national belonging would be its justification of the view that the agitation for independence in Kenya involved only one community, while others

collaborated with the coloniser or watched from the side-lines. This depiction contradicts Bhabha's (1990) formulation already referred to above, risks hardening such myths in the minds of Kenyans, and might influence the way Kenyans define leadership and the distribution of national resources. Hence, the study examines the extent of the above trend in all *Kwani?* Journal literature, and whether this is a function of ethnicity, since such a projection would have been intended to influence debates on national belonging.

The study notes that the coming to power of Daniel Arap Moi (Kalenjin) after Kenyatta's death in 1978 created another ethnic rift between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities. This trajectory in Kikuyu popular culture, which probably includes *Kwani?* Journal, depicted the Kalenjin as undeserving of political leadership. Interestingly, most *Kwani?* depictions and writings on Daniel Moi and Oginga Odinga appear to have been intended for insults and humorous ridicule (Bakhtin, 1981). An example is Odinga's photo in *Kwani? 01* (Kaplan, 2003: 50), where the Luo is depicted as a buffoon. In the same publication, an overtly haggard caricature of Mr. Moi (Gaddo, 2003: 141) celebrates and mocks the outgoing ruler's exit from power in December 2002, when Mwai Kibaki assumed the reins of power in Kenya. The observation remains largely true for many other photo essays in the *Kwani?* Journal publications, and these photo essay texts relate to the important way in which different popular paratexts (Genette, 1997) that *Kwani?* Journal contains might relate to ethnic contestations in the national space. Thus, the study partly focusses on how paratextual media in *Kwani?* envisage a balanced portrayal (Bhabha, 1990) and how they influence readers' perceptions on ethnicity and national leadership.

However, two specific presidents, Kenyatta and Kibaki, barely receive any constructive ridicule in the *Kwani?* publication in contrast to the considered Moi tenure. The irony here is that both regimes also had specific strengths and weaknesses, whose subjection to popular ridicule would ordinarily contribute to the task of nation-building. For instance, it is understood that Jomo Kenyatta used to smack his lips in the course of speech. There are popular jokes, which construe this peculiarity as a poignant reference to Kenyatta's salivating appetite for public land, which Kenya's first president is rumoured to have grabbed at will. I will therefore interrogate the omissions in regard to the subversive ridicule (Bakhtin, 1981) that the *Kwani?* Journal directs at different presidents, and how these fulfil the conditions necessary for Bhabha's (1990) notion of a shifting narration of the nation in Kenya.

In the Kenyan context, Bhabha's (1990) notion of "vacillating" narration of the nation would

attempt to stretch the imaginary boundaries of Kenya to include all the communities that live therein. The issue of characters, how they are named, and the traits assigned to these names is particularly important in this regard. This is because communal characterisation involves engagement with myths and stereotypes. The literary invocation of stereotypical attributes that appeal to ethnic myths undermine the decision to coexist, which Bhabha (1990) refers to. Thus, I examine the scope of political narratives contained in *Kwani?* texts, with a view to ascertain their regional as well as communal breadth. Tied to this, I examine the ethno-political traits that have been assigned to characters in relation to their names, and whether there is a sense in which these myths and stereotypes speak to ethnicity and its influence on political discourse in Kenya.

The study notes that most characters with Luo names seem to display negative traits in *Kwani?* Journal's texts. I observe that even though the trend is mostly recognisable in Luo characters, this is also mostly true for the journal's fictional personae from the other Kenyan communities. Conversely, characters with Kikuyu names generally have positive attributes throughout *Kwani?* texts. Such a trend, which the study investigates, would be interesting since it shows how popular texts concretise the old, divisive Cold War politics that explains the rift between the Luo and the Kikuyu. For example, Kiprop Kimutai's short story, "The Gentleman from Iten", which revolves around the 2008 PEV, describes Wangari (a Kikuyu character) in sympathetic terms: "Her voice was soft, ever so soft, and she pronounced her name as only Kikuyus can, with liquid consonants" (Kimutai, 2015: 209). On the contrary, Chemeli (a Keiyo character) is depicted in largely negative terms: "Chemeli...like an ant snapping its jaws...snorting like a donkey" (Kimutai, 2015: 220). In the story, Wangari is portrayed as the victim of Chemeli. As happens in most *Kwani?* texts, the author's name suggests that he is himself a Kalenjin (the generic community to which the Keiyo belong), who might, ideally, be reluctant to portray characters that share his ethnic belonging in negative light. I investigate the prevalence of this trend in *Kwani?* texts and determine whether this could be informed by ethno-political discourse in Kenyan spaces.

My study incorporates the theoretical views of Ernest Renan (1990) on nationhood and identity in addition to the formulations of Anderson and Bhabha. Renan privileges the people as the prime makers of the decision to cohere, coexist, and live together inside the borders of the nation. He contends that even if a people spoke the same language, and practised a common religion, their belonging in a nation would first have to be preceded by an initial decision to live in one common political unit called a nation. Arguably, Literature itself stands out as one

of the agents through which a people may be urged to make the decision of mutual coexistence. In the context of Kenya, the analysis of the 1982 coup attempt and related separatist movements in the post-independence era, such as the Shifta War in Northern Kenya during the Kenyatta regime, become particularly relevant. This also includes the context of the February Eighteenth Revolutionary Army (FERA) of 1995 (during the Moi regime) as captured in the journal. The study analyses how *Kwani?* publications portray these separatist movements, with a view to ascertain if the depictions nurture the spirit of national coexistence (Renan, 1990).

My intention is to recognise the fact that some of the separatist movements referred to above might appear to have been legitimate symptoms of state neglect targeted at specific Kenyan communities in the wider national collective. In that case, an element of empathy and historical context would be a necessary aspect of discourse. To give an example, the Shifta War was a response to years of systematic marginalisation of the Kenyan Somali community, a trend which dated back beyond the Kenyatta regime, to the colonial times, and which continues to this day due to Kenya's involvement in the "War on Terror". In the initial case, the Somali community thought it was therefore better to break away and join Somalia. This is also the case with the current separatist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) in Coastal Kenya.

In addition to relying on the above broad theorisations on nationhood and national identity, my study borrows from postcolonial theory, specifically from the concept of "Othering" as understood by Said (1978) and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) and in reference to the dynamics of ethnicity within the postcolonial context. Said understands "Othering" as a Western project that was meant to reinforce cultural denigration of The Orient as a precursor to actual exploitation. Said (1978) observes that the project involved the act of privileging Western "civilisation" and cultural values above those of the colonised, thereby justifying the act of colonisation as a "civilising" mission. Said also recognises that European literary texts played a major role in reinforcing myths of difference between Europe and the Arab world. An example are the writings of the French author, Gustav Flaubert, which denigrated Arab characters.

Similarly, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002: 6) conceive of the binary between the coloniser and the colonised through the idea of "hegemony". I am interested in the way ethnic constituencies in Kenya might view themselves as superior, and culturally and politically more dominant than the others, which is the essence of hegemony as understood by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002). Tribalism is itself a hegemonic act that seeks to elevate specific

ethnicities and their values and histories above the rest. Since the issue of ethnicity continues to dominate Kenya's historical and political spaces, there is a likelihood that the theme is captured in *Kwani?* texts. For instance, past political assassinations in Kenya are usually thought to have been ethnically motivated. Therefore, I intend to examine how issues of ethnic Othering and hegemonies in Kenya are discussed in the journal's publications. Central to my inquiry is whether the way ethnic Othering is portrayed warns people against the practice, since the idea of a nation is antithetical to such exclusionary practices.

Fanon's (1961: 97) views on the postcolonial writer as a national cultural guide who does not fall in the "the pitfall of national consciousness" also inform my study. To Fanon, the postcolonial writer disappears in the pitfalls of national consciousness when they engage in literary production where "[t]he tribe is preferred to the state" (Fanon, 1961: 147-148). Such writing also involves the inability to carry on a two-sided discussion about the nation, especially when the writer's tribe occupies power. In the Kenyan context, having a two-sided view of national issues would involve, for instance, giving fair coverage to both the Party of National Unity (PNU), to which Mwai Kibaki belonged in the 2007 elections, and to Raila Odinga's opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party. The same would apply for all *Kwani?* reportage on the 2013 elections. Intriguingly, as I show later, there is a sense in which bias is identifiable in *Kwani?* coverage of the 2013 elections. The rumour that the Jubilee Party's Nairobi senatorial candidate was a convicted drug dealer is ignored in *Kwani?* 08 (2015), while the allegation that the opposition CORD's governor candidate for the same county was involved in corruption at Kenya's Mumias Sugar Company seems foregrounded. Hence, my study examines the texts to ascertain if the journal observes a level of balance in the treatment of ruling and opposition parties.

My study also draws on Mbembe's (2010) thoughts on the psychic nature of the post-colony. Mbembe asserts that the widespread violence, which obtained in the colonies during the process of colonisation spilled into the post-colony, and thus, resolving the unconscious crisis must involve an honest acceptance of past wrongs and inhumanities. Mbembe (2010: 49) writes that such a process "[b]egins through a meditation on the ways of transforming the physical absence of those who were lost, returned to dust by the sun of trespass, into an interior presence". This public acknowledgement of national guilt, in effect, would resemble crossing the Rubicon into national self-awareness. It would assist the post-colony to overcome its psychic disease, "the reluctance to accept" (Mbembe 2010), which would help the postcolony to "re-member" and "recollect" itself. I consider *Kwani?* writing as one way through which the

Kenyan nation can confront its past, be it political assassinations, corruption scandals, and issues of communal marginalisation. Hence, the study examines how these divisive occurrences are narrated in the journal's publications, and how they add to the effort of remembering the Kenyan nation.

Similarly, the study relies on Boehmer's (2010) views on postcolonial terror and violence. Boehmer's thoughts relate to Mbembe's, except that, to her, postcolonial writing ought to provide an avenue through which the different components of the nation can establish dialogue aimed at defeating future terror. Boehmer (2010: 149) writes that "[p]ostcolonial writing supplies channels for thinking through and beyond terror and the shocking breaks in time it inflicts, and offers ways of developing workable political responses to its horrors". In the context of Kenyan politics, an avenue such as *Kwani?* should ideally offer a space through which Kenya can discuss incidences of violence directed at specific communities during moments that include the 2007/2008 PEV. Of specific importance would be the way *Kwani?* depicts the Kikuyu Mungiki Sect, which was a major contributor to the 2007 violence, and other opposition Luo and Kalenjin militias. This would be possible if the journal maintained a sense of balance in its reportage of such occurrences, and also if it presents the actual historical contexts within which the violence took place.

The study further draws from concepts on literary space and spatiality as outlined by Manase (2017), Ljungberg (2017), Thacker (2017), Brosseau (2017), and Tally Jr (2017). Manase's study on the speculative, horror, and fantasy fiction in Johannesburg suggests that such texts carry with them our actual knowledge of the geographies to which they refer. Hence, the fictional reference to the Democratic Republic of Congo as a place of political turmoil. This is a point that Tally Jr. (2017: 4) further makes when he writes that literary spatiality is important in that it reinforces "the relation of an author or a text to its city, region, or nation". In this regard, most *Kwani?* texts are set in the urban imaginary of Nairobi City, and can be mapped as such. Therefore, my study identifies the importance of such urban mapping (Ljungberg, 2017), especially since specific Kenyan ethnicities inhabit different regions of Nairobi, and there might be underlying reasons why most of the action in *Kwani?*'s literary spaces takes place in the places they do. I consider this in reference to Thacker's (2017: 30) observation that "[s]patial stories always oscillate between discourses...lived experience". In Billy Kahora's short story, "The Gorilla's Apprentice" (2008), for instance, the setting is around Kibera Slums, which is popularly associated with the Luo community. The tone and description of the story uses innuendo to imply that the gorilla is more civilised than the community that lives in Kibera

Slums. The question that arises is what *Kwani?* Journal's implied audience is in a text such as Kahora's story, since Brosseau (2017: 20) observes that literary spatiality "recognizes the ability of the text to actively define its reader", and what this means for the construction of Kenya's nationhood. Audience is particularly important because here we consider a multi-ethnic Kenyan nation. There is a possibility that *Kwani?* does not take the whole of Kenya as its target audience owing to the popular gossip and innuendo that the journal's texts rely on. For instance, the portrayal of Daniel Moi as a sex pest who preyed on virgin school children seems to run across many *Kwani?* publications and would not possibly be meant for Moi's Kalenjin audience. Hence, the issue of audience touches on the question of Kenya's nationhood and national identity.

Further, the research uses intertextuality to identify the ways in which *Kwani?* texts rely on silence, and allude to one another in reinforcing meaning. Macherey (1978) observes that literature adopts silences and secrets, and that both are relevant to politics and ideology. He affirms that literary silence is not ideologically innocent. As a result, I unpack what *Kwani?* does not say about occurrences within the country's political terrain, and what such silences communicate with regards to nationhood.

The chapter also considers concepts located in popular culture, specifically views by Barber (1987), and Newell and Okome (2014) who define "the popular" as constituting an "epistemic" site where living knowledge on issues that emerge in discussions about Kenya's national belonging can be gleaned. Furthermore, I draw on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of carnivalesque laughter as a strategy for uncrowning the elite to examine how *Kwani?* cartoon paratexts lampoon respective Kenyan presidents. Barber's (1987) assertion that what we conceive of as popular culture is not for mere entertainment but also for inspiring emergent consciousness is instructive. The research therefore takes the view that all popular thematic referents obtainable in the *Kwani?* Journal constitute an avenue through which proactive strategies for responding to elements of state oppression can be countered. I adopt this approach since much recent scholarship (Nyairo, 2004; Ligaga, 2008; Musila, 2010; Odhiambo, 2014) has in the past understood *Kwani?* Journal within the broad continuum of subversive youth urban culture in Kenya.

However, most scholars observe that all popular cultural texts have a blind side, which usually requires caution in the appreciation of such texts (Adejunmobi, 2014; El-Nour, 2014; Jaji, 2014; Primorac, 2014; Reuster-Jahn, 2014; Tsaaior, 2014; Warnes, 2014). In the case of

Tanzanian literary journals, Reuster-Jahn (2014) concludes that most of the texts were infamous for furthering myths and stereotypes of women as sex objects. Similarly, in his study of *Bingo Magazine* in Senegal, Jaji (2014) observes that the publication took advantage of the image of children to further its sales. Tsaaior, Adejunmobi, and Primorac (2014) discuss the danger of ethnic stereotyping and ethnic ‘othering’ in modern-day football, Nigerian stand-up comedy and Zambian popular culture texts, respectively. In the case of post-apartheid South African popular culture, Warnes (2014) observes that texts are usually a result of editorial intervention and regulation. Thus, in the Kenyan context, I investigate how ethnicity relates to the way *Kwani?* Journal’s texts capture contested national issues, and if the depiction is influenced by editorial intervention, and how this might impact discourses on nationhood and national belonging.

I further consider intellectual contributions from scholars in diverse fields, whose overall inputs are generally applicable to the discussion on nationhood in any postcolonial situation, and therefore in Kenyan as well. In the case of Ogot (2003), the process of narrating nationhood in Kenya should ideally involve putting all Kenyan communities into consideration by inscribing their collective anti-colonial efforts into literary texts. For his part, Atieno-Odhiambo (2003) argues for recognition of all the different ideological blocks that informed the push for independence in Kenya. I think that both positions are viable in so far as they advocate for an inclusive paradigm in the imagination of the Kenyan nation. Some of the literary texts that echo such a theorisation of nationhood include M.J. Vassanji’s *The In-Between World of Vikram Lal* (2000), Yusuf Dawood’s *The Eye of The Storm* (2010), Moraa Gitaa’s *Shifting Sands* (2008), and Margaret Ogola’s *The River and The Source* (2004). Vassanji’s novel engages in an intricate dialogue between the trade union movement and the Mau Mau in Kenya’s independence struggle. The text recognises the Mau Mau effort even though it accords more weight to the trade unions. For their parts, both Dawood and Ogola offer a fluid and seamless understanding of the Kenyan political space, privileging the view that everybody belongs, irrespective of race or ethnicity. Gitaa’s text confronts the issues of male and female circumcision and their place in Kenya’s political discourse. The foregoing trend, I think, is what a viable narration of Kenya’s nationhood should entail. Hence, I set out to investigate if the same inheres in *Kwani?* texts.

1.2 *Kwani?* Journal and Discourses on Nationhood in Kenya

It is important, at this point, to ask questions on how the different kinds of formulations of nationhood in Kenya find expression in specific Kenyan literary texts. Only against such a background would my discussion in subsequent chapters be able to prod and weigh the mode of nationhood that the *Kwani?* Journal and its associated texts adhere to. Related to this task is an evaluation of the journal's brand of nationhood and how it impacts on the imaginaries of national identity in Kenya.

Atieno-Odhiambo (2003) and Ogot (2003) both characterise the definition of Kenyan nationhood as a problematic one. They argue that past definitions have often favoured an ethnic trajectory at the expense of all other varied efforts made by diverse components of the Kenyan society. Thus, Odhiambo's seven different "theses" for grappling with nationhood are a way of inscribing a sense of ideological inclusivity. Atieno-Odhiambo writes:

[w]hat we have got so far is the political history of nationalism to 1963, rendered by those who won the political struggle. What so far has not been documented fully is the social struggle of the non-winners, in the market place, in the sisal plantations, in the master' kitchens. All this work must be done...so that the story of political struggle is not mistaken as the only struggle, or taken to subsume the social struggle...After that decision, we shall write the appropriate history of the state and of the nation. (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003: 45)

Odhiambo made the above comments after the opposition party National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), led by Mwai Kibaki, took over power in 2003 from Daniel Arap Moi's Kenya African National Union (KANU). NARC was a very inclusive party that drew its support from nearly all Kenyan communities. Odhiambo thought that it was the best opportunity for Kenya to correct the errors that had defined nationhood since Kenya's independence in 1963. I agree with the above suggestion in that a definitive approach that includes all components of the nation offered a vision of a cohesive and stable nation.

In reference to Odhiambo, Anderson's (1983) argument that nations initially "imagine" themselves as circumscribed "communities" remains important to my study. I take the "imaginary" aspect of Kenya's nationhood to refer to the fact that Kenya is a historical construction fashioned by the coloniser. In effect, Kenyans themselves have to continue the act of "re-imagining" themselves as belonging to a collective entity and "community" in order for the idea of the nation to stand. However, belonging to a collective community goes hand in

hand with how the different components of that totality are narrated. Hence, national Literature, if not interfered with by ethnicity, remains an important part of the process of national narration. Thus, the study examines if the way that *Kwani?* texts strive to maintain a sense of optimism, fairness, and national balance, subscribes to Anderson's view of an inclusive narrative process.

A major part of Anderson's definition which privileges language as an agent of nation formation is relevant to my thesis that ethnicity is crucial to understanding the way nationhood is narrated in *Kwani?* texts. I put into focus the language that the journal's texts use, and the possibility that it might not be accessible to all Kenyans, especially considering that Sheng is mostly used in Kenya's urban discourse. I argue that, to judge how effectively the journal uses Sheng as a common language to narrate nationhood, one would first have to deal with the reality that most Sheng words are imbued with scars of linguistic pressure from mainly those communities that live around Nairobi.

Anderson's (1983: 5-6) definition of a "nation" as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" presents the idea of nationhood as anchored on an acknowledgement of the political contributions of those who live in it. He further implies that nationhood has emotional and cultural feelings of belonging to it. This means that it is necessary for national literature to intentionally create and nurture such an emotional attachment in the general community, and to encourage the citizenry to want to belong in spite of their different perceptions, ethnicities, sensibilities, and origins. As Atieno-Odhiambo (2003) and Ogot (2003) suggest above, this has been the major problem with Kenya's nationhood, since the act of defining the nation has always involved diminishing the contributions of some ethnicities, races, regions, and classes, while privileging others. My study, therefore, finds out how the depiction of nationhood in *Kwani?* balances the varied components of the Kenyan political space.

However, Renan's (1990) view differs from Anderson who emphasises religion, language, and print capitalism as the prime agents of nation formation. Being a largely Christian nation, Kenya can be said to be glued into a nation partly because of the religious imaginary created in the people's perception by the knowledge that many others are also involved in the sharing of a spiritual bond, especially on Christian holidays. This should be true for Christianity as it is for Islam, Hinduism, atheism, and traditional African religions found in Kenya. Furthermore, Kiswahili, which is Kenya's national language, and English (the official language) both act as

a linguistic nexus around which Kenyans meet for purposes of communicating with one another. These are the languages in which Kenyans share their daily and past experiences and plan for the future. Both languages are used in literary and media productions and thus contribute to a sense of connectedness in that Kenyans imagine that they are affected by the same issues and concerns. This point underlines Anderson's (1983) view about language and print capitalism. It might be said that *Kwani?* also contributes to the process of nation formation, since the journal occasionally employs Sheng (a mixture of English, Kiswahili, and indigenous Kenyan languages) as a literary medium in its writing. Nonetheless, Renan (1990) notes that the most important ingredient in the business of nation formation are not the spontaneous processes that Anderson underscores. It is the people's decision and willingness to coexist. Renan argues that

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future...the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. (Renan, 1990: 19)

Renan's views, and especially his emphasis on a people's expressed decision to exist, are more relevant to our understanding of nationhood than Anderson's. I argue that while Anderson's (1983) stress on language, religion, and print capitalism assumes that nations realise themselves through spontaneous processes, this has not been the case in Africa right from the process of colonisation, which forcibly parcelled out the continent into political states. Therefore, certain agents of cohesion such as writers and literature ought to consciously exult the citizenry about the need to coalesce around a single national entity in order to sustain the gradual progression to nationhood. For instance, Mazrui (2005) stresses that the reason Tanzania has a clearer sense of identity and national belonging than many East African countries is because of conscious steps that the late President Julius Nyerere took concerning the official language policy and his viable approaches to counter ethnicity. It is important to observe that language, religion, and print capitalism play their roles as agents of national cohesion in the postcolonial Kenyan context. I investigate the extent to which *Kwani?* Journal, as a sub-component of print capitalism treats this in its publications. I do so with the awareness that the African continent came into being through European coercion and as such, the spontaneous processes driven by language and religion stand marginal in comparison to the more active role played by writers and national literature. I take the position that the initial existence of weak agents of

nationhood, which could spur spontaneous affiliations informed by religion and language, means that other active factors come to bear in the growth of nationhood in Kenya. I incorporate Anderson's (1983) and Renan's (1990) definitions of nationhood for purposes of complementarity.

The study considers the idea of the nation being collectively "imagined" as an oblique reference to the important role of the artists who live in that collective, since they, too, stand to either divide the nation, or bind it together based on the way they narrate its actuality in their artistic texts. This allusion to the creative realm of a young nation therefore includes even writers and their writing, hence my study of *Kwani?* Journal and its portrayal of Kenya's nationhood as happened in Russia. Russian writers such as Nikolai Gogol are widely known for consciously influencing their country through literature during the years of Socialist Realism (1932-1980s). Similarly, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) might be seen as a way of narrating Britain's nationhood in the difficult years of the Industrial Revolution, though in relation to France. In Kenyan Literature, Yusuf Dawood's *Eye of The Storm* (2010), Moyez Vassanjis's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003), Henry Ole Kulet's *The Elephant Dance* (2016), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965), and Oludhe MacGoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986) all seem to grapple with the question of how to imagine the Kenyan nation from different perspectives. Indeed, Anderson (1983: 141) directly acknowledges the role of literature in the task of nation formation when he writes that "[n]ations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles." Anderson's point here informs my supposition that *Kwani?* Journal, in its different literary genres, addresses the same issues of nationhood in Kenya. Its photo essays, blogpost literature, commentaries, reportage, *mchongoano* (teasers), poems and short stories, are ideal spaces where the stories about the idea of one Kenya are told, hence the current study.

The important role that literature plays in creating and nurturing a sense of national oneness is reflected in different world literatures. Wachtel's (1998) study on Yugoslav Literature is a case in point. He writes that there is a way in which a country's literature can help it to either integrate or disintegrate, depending on the general orientation of the literature. Wachtel further notes that a nation

contains people with a broad range of both similarities and differences...its

members have agreed to overlook the differences and view the similarities as

essential”. (Wachtel, 1998: 16)

Ideally, I would expect that *Kwani?* writing urges the varied components of the Kenyan nation to engage in national discourse that is informed by the country’s history of the independence struggle, ethnicity, racism, political assassinations. It would be important in this study to investigate the general orientation of texts published by Kwani Trust¹, and examine how major historical events such as the 2008 PEV are depicted in texts. This task draws on Schodel’s (2002) opinion, based on her study on Martin Walser’s novels and their depiction of the Nazi period in Germany that, literature can impact on a state’s national identity in the way it depicts controversial upheavals in the history of a nation. Schodel’s finding and perception that Walser’s novels played a role in nurturing a sense of national identity and healing by tacitly encouraging a process of active soul-searching is important to my study. It is in this context of constructive literature that responds to national challenges that I examine how the *Kwani?* texts perform similar tasks in Kenya.

I explore, for instance, the way characters are depicted in these texts, bearing in mind the problem of negative ethnicity, as viewed by Wamwere (2003). Ethnicity, as noted by Wamwere, can be either positive or negative, depending on how it is deployed on discussions within the national space. Wamwere has no problem with ethnicity in contexts where it is used as a marker of cultural pride. However, he observes that part of Kenya’s problem with ethnicity is how ethnic stereotypes with colonial origins have entrenched themselves in everyday political discourse, as well as the danger that the stereotypes carry political undertones, which solidify into ethnic hatred. For example, popular stereotypes in Kenya erroneously view the whole Kikuyu community as thieves and grabbers based on the Emergency years when most cases of violent crime in Nairobi were committed by Kikuyus who had come to Nairobi in search of scarce work following colonial alienation of Kikuyu land. This myth has since ossified in the minds of Kenyans owing to the reality that some of the biggest corruption scandals in government usually involve personalities with Kikuyu names.

Further, the Luo community is stereotyped as “dirty” (a tacit reference to the issue of male circumcision and its politically explosive undertones – traditionally the Luo did not circumcise, and some Kikuyu believe that an uncircumcised person cannot become president). The Abagusii are generally viewed as violent witches, due to witchdoctors who have over the decades been burnt in Kisiiland, and rampant cases in the media of prevalent wife-beating. For their part, the Kalenjin are viewed as unintelligent, the context being the early 1980s, when the

Kenyan education syllabus was changed. It was rumoured that former President Moi engineered the change to suit his Kalenjin community, who – again it was rumoured – generally found the initial rigorous curriculum too difficult to pass. The Luhya are said to be gluttons.

Interestingly, however (in a case of what I may call “selective popular culture”), it is rare for *Kwani?* writing to depict the Kikuyu as thieves. There also seems to be a constant allusion to the Luo as being uncircumcised (read: unfit to be presidents). In Eva Kasaya’s memoir, *Tale of Kasaya* (2010), all Luo, Luhya, and Kisii characters neatly evince the above stereotypes. However, only the Kikuyu character is humane, and treats the author well. This might be interesting since Kasaya herself is a Luhya, not a Kikuyu. Hence, my study asks questions with regard to why certain aspects of popular culture (rumour, gossip, and stereotype) would be easy to capture in a literary journal, only when they refer to other ethnic groups.

The study considers the significance of assigning character traits in a context where names tend to signify characters’ ethnic orientations, and therefore their assumed political affiliations. I explore how such character portrayal might sometimes be interpreted as stereotyping, and therefore politically dangerous within the context of Kenya. Commenting on the same issue in the case of Rwanda, Mamdani (2001) observes the danger of “race branding” in the case of the Hutus and Tutsis and how this diminished the idea of a shared nationhood, thereby acting as a precursor to the 1994 genocide. Here, Mamdani writes that Hutu stereotyping constructed the Tutsi as a foreign race that should have been kept out of power and eliminated. Borrowing from Mamdani’s idea, I argue that there exists “ethnic branding” in Kenya associated with the myths and stereotypes that I referred to earlier on. Hence, I am interested in determining how these stereotypes are captured in *Kwani?* texts.

Aside from the way historical ethnic myths and stereotypes are deployed and sustained in writing the Kenyan nation, there might be a sense in which *Kwani?* Journal as popular culture engages with the same stereotypes. Karin Barber (1987) insists that rigid boundaries do not exist between the categories of “traditional”, “popular”, and “elite” cultural products, hence the need for caution when one defines what is “popular”, and what is official and “elite”. During the colonial times in Kenya, for instance, the context of Britain’s strategy of divide-and-rule employed communal stereotypes as a strategy for playing one tribe against its neighbours. Hence, there is a sense in which the official State appropriates popular ethnic stereotypes as weapons of ethnic exclusion in the Kenyan national space.

My study examines the extent to which the sometimes-overt inter-communal references

contained in the *Kwani?* Journal as a popular culture product drawn from the traditional communal/political spaces, which would therefore make them divisive political stereotypes rather than agents of light-hearted entertainment in the city. This is because a lot of writing in the *Kwani?* Journal is set in the urban space, and yet Nairobi was historically settled in such a way that it is today easy to know which Kenyan ethnicity dominates what part of the city. The Kikuyu live to the north; the Akamba to the east; the Luhya to the west and south west; and the Luo to the south and north-east. It might be possible that these ethnicities, in turn, continue to retain their views and stereotypes of one another. Hence, the depiction of different ethnicities and city regions in *Kwani?* Journal's fictional imaginary remains relevant to my study because it impacts nationhood and national belonging. I apply the foregoing argument to examine the possibility that the depiction of what is considered as an ordinary urban joke, might be interpreted to mirror the actual political context in the country, and thereby fuel ethnic animosity.

The issue of ethnicity invites the concept of "Othering" as used by Said (1978) in his theorising on the origins of the East-West binary. Said explains that the concept initially involved Western discourses that constructed the Arab world as a region with a lesser culture, worldview, and humanity than the West. He writes that the perception was later used to justify European conquest and colonisation under the guise of a civilising mission, thereby denying socio-political agency to the Arab world. According to Said, the concept of a "cultureless Arab other" is what is called "Orientalism", in the sense that the region is in The Orient, as opposed to The Occident. Said's concept of the "Other" is relevant to my study, in that the way different Kenyan ethnicities are depicted in the *Kwani?* Journal can either empower them, or deny them agency. I rely on Said's third definition of "Orientalism" as a site for contested discourses. I focus on how the texts captured in *Kwani?* might be a reflection of how the different Kenyan ethnicities have historically laid political claim to the idea of nationhood. I do so because the very idea of laying claim involves acts of competition and fending off ethnic "others" through discourses. Said writes that the process of "Othering" is often initially constituted in terms of an abstract formula:

Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling [the Other] very generally is a form of radical realism [...] which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities, and regions deemed [the Other], will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be

reality. (Said, 1978: 72)

Said's view as shown here relates to the way characters are constructed in a literary text. I observe that characters in most *Kwani?* texts appear to be retrieved from "ethnic stocks" where their traits assume the stereotypical epithets usually ascribed to them within Kenya's political space. This links well with Sollors' (2006) view of "ethnicity" as a practice where groups inscribe imaginary boundaries of identity for purposes of political exclusion, yet ethnic identity itself remains an ambiguous and arbitrary construct that is not defined by cultural purity. Therefore, my study incorporates the term "ethnic" to include even dominant identities within the national collective, as Sollors suggests. I interpret his view to imply that national literature ought to respond to ethnicity in a way that blunts the edges of all mini-identities (ethnicities). Ideally, it should be a brand of literary narration that dispenses with any references to ethnic stereotypes.

Here, the views of Mamdani (2001) and Prunier (1995) on the histories of genocide and ethnic othering are important to the study. Mamdani (2001) argues that what usually disturbs nationhood and causes genocides is a whole set of negative practices, one of which is a history of "branding", where one ethnicity might view the other as the unwanted. Prunier (1995) also notes that the unwanted other is often constructed in terms of negative plant and animal images and metaphors, such as the terms "bush" and "cockroach", which the Hutu used to describe the Tutsi in Rwanda. Most importantly, Prunier (1995) observes that the conception of others as animals usually has historical precedents. I use the views of the two scholars, especially because there seems to be instances in *Kwani?* writing, where specific communities are referred to in terms of insects. For instance, in describing what happened during the PEV in Kisumu, Binyavanga (2011: 326) refers to the Luo as insects when he writes: "The ants have crawled out of the logs of Kenya; some will set their own city, Kisumu, on fire, watch it burn and cheer". Here, Binyavanga assumes that Luo violence in Kisumu was natural to the Luo.

As Prunier (1995) suggests, I find out if literary othering in *Kwani?* texts might be understood in terms of precedents. In terms of precedent, Pugliese (2003) shows that much of pre-Mau Mau pamphlets, novels, and songs from Central Kenya where the Kikuyu live, such as Jomo Kenyatta's newspaper *Muigwithania*, tended to exclude other Kenyan communities from the colonial political space. Pugliese (2003) affirms that the literature was insular and inward-looking, always valorising the Kikuyu worldview. Therefore, the research asks if this is the reason critics such as Sicherman (1989) and Ogude (2003) still view Ngugi's works as being

too obsessed with the Mau Mau theme at the expense of an approach that is supranational, and if *Kwani?*'s praise of Ngugi in its every publication means sharing Ngugi's position on Kenya's nationhood. Ogude's (2003) opinion that Ngugi sanctions the use of Mau Mau violence in his writing echoes the general perception in Kenya, as can be seen in Mahat Hassan (2013), who writes that "the visibility of all literature from Kenya's Central Province is restricted to a few *mugumo* trees", the spiritual Kikuyu tree. Interestingly, Ngugi's name features prominently in almost every *Kwani?* Journal issue. As a result, the study also examines the ideological link between Ngugi and the journal, or if the Kenyan writer's thematic/literary insularity where he valorises Kikuyu identity at the expense of other Kenyan identities can act as a precedent for understanding *Kwani?* Journal publications.

This is connected to Anderson's (1983) suggestion that responsible literature strives for neutrality in its discussion of divisive national issues. Anderson writes that such neutrality can be achieved through the pairing of characters, and observes that

It remained for Mark Twain to create in 1881, well after the 'Civil War' and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the first indelible image of black and white as American 'brothers': Jim and Huck companionably drift on the wide Mississippi. (Anderson, 1983: 203)

It is possible that the strategy of pairing might, in the Kenyan case, blur ethnic lines on national differences, especially those political delineations that rely on ethnicity for overt expression.

My research uses the pairing rubric to examine *Kwani?* writing on different Kenyan issues. These include the 2007/8 PEV in Kenya; the 1982 coup attempt; and assassinations of past political leaders such as Gama Pinto² (in 1965), Tom Mboya³ (in 1969), J.M. Kariuki⁴ (in 1975), Robert Ouko⁵ (in 1990), and Crispin Mbai⁶ (in 2003). I do so to investigate if *Kwani?* depictions pair characters from communities that have had historical disagreements in the past, such as the Luo and the Kikuyu. Incidentally, many *Kwani?* stories contain Kikuyu and Luo characters; therefore, I examine what the intention might be in such cases. Further, I probe how the strategy of "pairing" in the texts that I engage with captures and mediates the Cold-War fallout between Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga in 1966⁷. This is important since the said fallout still informs core discourses on nationhood and national belonging in Kenya today, as exemplified in Mukoma wa Ngugi's short story, "Wounded Men" (2012) in *Kwani?* 07. Thus, an understanding of pairing from the above sense assists in deploying the metaphor and use of

“literary language” in fashioning out nationhood as referred to by Bhabha who writes that

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye [...] it is from those traditions of [...] literary language that the nation emerges.

(Bhabha, 1990: 1)

Here, Bhabha refers to a romantic and metaphoric depiction of characters in the nation’s literary texts. Related to Bhabha’s view, the study asks if metaphoric depictions which bond rather than “other” inhere in *Kwani?*’s writing. This is in acknowledgement of the current Kenyan reality where myths arising from the Cold War era are the salient agents which trigger continual political division between communities (Clough 2003; Ochieng⁸ 2008). Clough (2003) refers to the “*uthamaki*” (kingship) myth in Central Kenya, based on ritual oath-taking administered by Jomo Kenyatta on many Kikuyu, Meru, and Embu politicians after Kenyatta’s 1969 fallout with Odinga, to keep Kenya’s presidency within Central Kenya. Moreover, Ochieng alludes to the pre-2007 elections male circumcision myth which, he writes, Kikuyu politicians then aligned to then President Mwai Kibaki used against Raila Odinga. According to this myth, the politicians held that Raila was not supposed to become president because he is a Luo, and therefore uncircumcised. The circumcision myth revolves around the 1969 *uthamaki* myth. I therefore find out whether these political myths find metaphoric mediation in *Kwani?* writing and identify the forms in which they manifest.

My views above are premised on Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1997) observations that the African writer – and therefore African Literature – ought to confront and address the politics of the day. This is a position that Ngugi takes in his theorisation of committed literature, and the role of the African writer. He does not seem to believe in “art for art’s sake” (Guerard, 1936: 263), hence Ngugi’s observation that committed literature ought to capture the nation’s political struggles. My study agrees that the African writer has to contend with the ideological issues which influence national politics. However, such confrontation with the politics of the day ought not to involve the process of conflating the political histories of single identities to represent the national collective as Ngugi suggests in his oeuvre. In this regard, a casual reading of any *Kwani?* Journal issue reveals many references to Kenyan politics as noted in the way names such as Kenyatta, Moi⁹, Odinga, and even Mau Mau Civil War¹⁰, and the Mungiki¹¹ Sect appear foregrounded. An analysis of how *Kwani?* Journal issue addresses nationhood

within the context of ethnicity in Kenya is thus imperative. This also elicits a discussion on literary attitudes and tonalities that the texts assume in narrating the country's past and present. Thus, the study also seeks to understand whether respective presidents' ethnicities influence attitudes and tones of narration. The study unpacks the way *Kwani?* texts navigate the nuanced discussion on the freedom struggle in Kenya, taking into account the myths that surround the issue and how the journal ultimately maps the idea of Kenya as a nation.

Primorac's (2010) study of the contemporary Zimbabwean literary scene, which shows that even literature is open to myth-making by the state, resonates with Belich and Wever's (2008) view on state myths. Primorac argues that some works by Garikai Mutasa, Edmund Chipamaunga, Claude Maredza, Rodwell Machingauta, and Lilian Masitera intentionally adopt the official state master narrative by vilifying the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), endorsing the forcible 2000 land reforms, and creating fictional heroes and heroines which identify with the Chimurenga narrative. According to Primorac, such a depiction of characters creates the illusion that there is only one metanarrative about Zimbabwe's nationhood. My study concedes that such generalisation and essentialising of national narratives usually creates sectarian discontent. As such, the intention of my research on *Kwani?* Journal's narration of nationhood in Kenya is to determine the extent to which these texts adhere to, or veer from, the largely official but problematic attribution of Kenya's independence to the Mau Mau uprising¹².

Primorac's findings are similar to Shelton's (2010), in her study on "The Role of Literature in Post-Soviet Russia, 1996-2008." Here, Shelton (2010: 196) observes that "In the post-Soviet era it appears that Literature has retained its function as a political tool [...] In this sense it seems that little has changed between the Bolsheviks' employment of literature and the post-Soviet use of the same medium as a method of influencing the masses." Thus, my study finds out the possible relationship between *Kwani?* Journal texts and official Kenyan political thinking on issues such as ethnicity and leadership.

Most studies reveal the central role that literary journals play in enabling the way societies re-imagine and reconstruct themselves. Peter Benson's (1986) analysis of *Black Orpheus* and *Transition*, one of the earliest studies on literary journals in Africa, posits that literary journals always almost invariably have editorial philosophies on national and regional politics. Benson (1986: 32) cites, in support of this significant role of literary journals, Wole Soyinka's statement that "One knows exactly what one wants to do with a journal". Similarly, in his study

of short stories published in the South African literary journal, *Staffrider*, between 1978 and 1996, Manase (2007) observes that popular culture texts act as archival materials with which the ordinary inhabitants not only memorialise their past, but also use as a weapon of resistance against the official state narrative. My study considers the short stories, interviews, reportage, as well as visual paratexts such as cartoons, blogposts, text messages, and photo essays published in *Kwani?* as popular culture. I examine how these texts are subversive in the way they foreground and privilege the lives and marginal geographies of Nairobi's urban space, while silencing and challenging the official elite culture. I also explore how the different Kenyan ethnicities that inhabit Nairobi's spatial geography are configured in the process of subversion in times of electoral contestations in *Kwani?* is important to my study.

Further, Manase (2007) points out that the *Staffrider* was instrumental in enlightening readers about the socio-economic and political conditions that obtained in the black townships of Johannesburg in South Africa, under apartheid. He reveals some of the literary strategies that *Staffrider*'s writers used to subvert apartheid conditions, aside from the journal acting as an "imagined community" which bonded its readers. This view supports Gikandi's (2004) related assertion that pioneer East African writing may have inspired regionalism in East Africa in the early years of independence. Therefore, my study sets out to examine and name the way in which the issue of ethnicity plays out in the active processes of re-constructing and re-imagining Kenya. I am interested in how these processes work in the relationship between *Kwani?* writing and the contending formulations of Kenya's nationhood.

1.3 History and Place of the *Kwani?* Journal

My discussion has been mainly centred on the contesting formulations in defining nationhood in Kenya, and the ideas that inform my study. I now turn to the history of the *Kwani?* Journal itself and locate the journal with regard to the narration of nationhood in Kenya. The *Kwani?* Journal, which was established in 2003, played an important role in promoting Kenyan, East African, and African literatures. The journal's official website, <http://www.kwani.org>, summarises its mission as: "developing quality creative writing and committed to the growth of the creative industry through the publication and distribution of contemporary African writing, offering training opportunities, producing literary events and establishing and maintaining global literary networks." The website also lists the Ford Foundation (American), Stichting Doen (Dutch), and the Lambent Foundation (American) as the journal's funders.

The mainly Western support which *Kwani?* received for its operation raises important questions regarding the journal's portrayal of nationhood and national identity in Kenya. One might argue that these Western donors exerted some form of influence in the way the popular production depicts nationhood and ethnicity in Kenya. This also takes into consideration the fact that specific Kenyan communities took sides in the Cold War politics that dominated Kenyan politics in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Jomo Kenyatta (Kikuyu) supported Capitalism while Oginga Odinga (Luo) leaned towards Socialism. These binary political sentiments still dominate Kenyan politics to this day, and ethnic feelings often inflame them. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out how *Kwani?* Journal, which was founded by a Kikuyu writer, negotiates the socio-political divide that the Cold War dynamics compounded with ethnicity created in national politics.

It needs to be observed, however, that Kwani Trust stopped publishing the *Kwani?* Journal around 2015. The possible reason behind this was Western donors' withdrawal of financial support. The motivation behind the withdrawal of the funding is difficult to speculate about at this point, and only further research might yield possible answers. A possible reason might lie in the journal's overt support for one of Kenya's presidential candidates in the 2013 elections, whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted for crimes against humanity.

Nevertheless, one of *Kwani?*'s major contribution has been the promotion of literary activities as evidenced by the publication of authors from within and without the East African region. For example, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's debut novel, *Kintu* (2014), was published by Kwani Trust (Makumbi is Ugandan winner of the 2014 Commonwealth Short Story Prize), while the Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2003) and Liberian Saah Millimono's *Boy Interrupted* (2014) were also published by the Trust.

Some observers, such as Ligaga, Odhiambo, and Kamencu (in Strauhs, 2013), also note that the success of the journal lies in the way it gives visibility to the "general silence" in East African Literature. Ligaga views *Kwani?* as an essential "re-birth" in Kenya's literary discussions while Odhiambo sees the journal as an agent of literary transnationalism as it connects writers from Kenya with those from other African countries and the Diaspora. Similarly, Kamencu adds that the journal can be seen as a powerful counter-narrative against the Kenyan canon. Mwangi (2015: 174) summarises *Kwani?* Journal's impact on the Kenyan literary scene in his statement that "Binyavanga Wainaina's winning of the Caine Prize for Writing in Africa in 2002 heralded the rise of a new generation of Kenyan writers." While I

agree with the above positions, my study notes that the idea of youth identity is a neutral statement in reference to the formation of nationhood. I contend that *Kwani?*'s glittering successes need to be tested in regard to how the journal's writings impact discussions on Kenya's nationhood and national belonging. However, these commentators rightly observe that authors who include Yvonne Owuor (2003, Kenya), Okwiri Oduor (2014, Kenya), and Namwali Serpell (2015, Zambia), won the Caine Prize for African Writing through association with the journal. This is an indisputable evidence of *Kwani?* Journal's positive work.

Apart from the journal's place as a space for emergent African literary voices, my contention on the need to situate *Kwani?*'s success within a certain socio-political context is informed by the circumstances surrounding the journal's origins. *Kwani?*'s founding by Binyavanga Wainaina (the 2002 Caine Prize winner) in 2003 came when Kenya was witnessing huge political changes. The opposition National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) had just removed the independence party, Kenya National African Union (KANU) from power. As I observed earlier on, NARC represented the general good will that nearly all of Kenya's ethnicities placed on President Mwai Kibaki. I am interested in how *Kwani?* captures specific occurrences after the 2002 elections. For instance, Murunga (2011) writes that President Mwai Kibaki soon betrayed Kenyans' trust, by appointing mainly people from his Kikuyu community into the cabinet and parastatals. The study examines how *Kwani?* captures such political occurrences that characterised the Kenyan political space.

The journal has also occasionally offered overt political commentary in its past publications. A good example was *Kwani?*'s founder's intriguing comments immediately after the 2013 Kenyan elections. Binyavanga's article in *The Guardian*, titled "Kenyans elected a president we felt could bring peace" (March 10, 2013), publicly took sides in a contested election and came at a time the issue was still in Kenya's Supreme Court. The commentary was a bit biased against the opposition party and depicts Binyavanga's conservative views on Kenyan politics. This probably indicates the general direction of the journal's political leanings with regard to ethnicity and Kenyan politics.

Kwani Trust has so far published eight journal issues alongside several novels. The journal issues include: *Kwani? 01* (2003), *Kwani? 02* (2003), *Kwani 03* (2003), *Kwani? 04* (2007), *Kwani? 05 Part-1* (2008), *Kwani? 05 Part-2* (2008), *Kwani? 06* (2010), *Kwani? 07* (2012), and *Kwani? 08* (2015). Other titles include Godfrey Gaddo's cartoon collection, *Crisis...? What Crisis?!* (2012); Eva Kasaya's memoir, *Tale of Kasaya* (2010); Stanley Gazemba's *The*

Stone Hills of Maragoli (2002), Ed Pavlic's *But Here are Small Clear Refractions* (2013), and related anthologies. The journal issues, the focus of this study, contain short stories, poetry, urban jokes, photographs, drawings, music reviews, cartoons, and other genres inspired by Nairobi's evolving urban landscape. Not all the above material is relevant to this study, even though *Kwani?* Journal has achieved a lot in terms of actual publication since its inception in 2003. A sizable component of the literature focuses directly on Kenya's nationhood and national belonging. For instance, *Kwani? 03* is dedicated to Dedan Kimathi, the ill-fated leader of the Mau Mau, and articulates the memory of one aspect of Kenya's struggle for independence. This is an important act in the process of narrating nationhood in that it triggers the recollection of one of Kenya's many heroes and heroines. Similarly, *Kwani? 04* is written in memory of David Sadara Munyakei, another ill-fated Kenyan anti-corruption crusader. The story of Munyakei is of further importance in the way it points out the weaknesses inherent in Kenya's body politic with a view to warning and correcting the nation (Renan,1990; Bhabha,1990).

Cartoons and other related paratextual forms (Genette, 1997) are another aspect of popular culture which find expression in *Kwani?* Journal publications. Genette (1997: 1-2) notes that paratexts shape our understanding of the message that they communicate and comments further that "[m]ore than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or [...] a vestibule that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" from a text. Commenting specifically on cartoons, Press (1981) observes that the popular cartoon form has been used as a potent propaganda tool to further political agenda across time. I view politics as a central part of the process of nation-making, hence the relevance of *Kwani?* Journal's cartoons and other forms of paratexts to this study. In addition, Oduro-Frimpong's (2014: 147) study on political cartoons in Ghana observes that Akosua's political cartoons acted as "a communicatively competent speaker on sensitive issues, especially in the public domain". Therefore, cartoons are important in the way they satirically treat uncomfortable topics that the general public might not want to discuss. In this regard, Gaddo's (2012) cartoon collection is a caricature of the Kibaki¹³-Raila¹⁴ crisis talks that were then mediated by the Ghanaian diplomat, Kofi Annan, after the Kenyan 2008 PEV. The said violence, which is also the subject of the two issues of *Kwani? 05*, is hence negotiated, discussed, and humanised through cartoons. My study focuses on how the cartoon collection negotiates the political space between then opposition leader, Raila Odinga, and President Mwai Kibaki, since the PEV in Kenya was of an ethnic nature.

Further, the issue of language and its use in *Kwani?* has been a major concern for a number of researchers. The general view seems to be that the appropriation of Kenya's urban slang, Sheng, marks an important break from the way the preceding generation of Kenyan writers used English in their texts. This is viewed as an indication of the journal's appeal to the urban youth in Kenya and a marker of their urban identity. Thus, Journo (2009) analyses the way contemporary Kenyan Literature uses Sheng as a linguistic bridge and I agree with Journo that Sheng slang acts as a unifying factor that revolves around youth identity in Kenya. However, I am also aware of the use of Sheng as an agent of "Othering" against the elderly generation in Kenya, as already pointed out by Maranga-Munsonye (2014). My study therefore bears in mind the fact that it is possible to deploy the same Sheng language for purposes of inter-ethnic "Othering", thereby impacting nationhood and national belonging.

Journo also notes that *Kwani?* employs a multiplicity of Sheng words and as a result, its writers subvert their linguistic "otherness" through the use of Sheng (2009). The other view is that the use of urban slang enables these writers to transcend their ethnicities, as observed by Kaviti (2015). Kaviti explains that this process works in the way Sheng slang has its dialects in the varied regions in Nairobi. She writes that these dialects function as signifiers of identity beyond the different ethnicities that comprise them. However, Partington (*Daily Nation*, February 9, 2013) disagrees with the above position and seems to favour the cultural divide debate that stresses the journal's style over its content. The cultural divide debate on *Kwani?* is often pegged on the journal's use of contemporary and urban literary markers such as blogposts, email printouts, visuals, photo essays, and *mchongoano* teasers. I agree with Partington's position to the extent that these literary markers are inherent in the journal.

However, although there is evidence of linguistic innovation and agency that is associated with the use of Sheng, the language has its own use limits. Sheng writings cover a tiny setting of the Kenyan space, namely the urban centres (specifically Nairobi), which marginalises a huge chunk of the country's literary space. Kiswahili and English are Kenya's adopted languages and have considerable reach as they are generally widely spoken in the country. However, most Sheng words are derived from both Kiswahili and English languages and lose themselves in ways that make it difficult for the ordinary speaker to identify them. I give the specific case of the Kiswahili word for a car, which is "*gari*". Its equivalent in Sheng is "*dinga*", which has fairly invisible etymological connections to both "car" and "*gari*". This debate continues, especially since literary scholars insist on seeing *Kwani?* Journal as a contemporary signifier of Kenyan popular culture, in the mode and tradition of the works of some Kenyan authors

such as David Maillu, whose works revolved around wine and women in the city, and Meja Mwangi, whose texts largely concentrated on initiating discourses about the socially rotten core of Nairobi. Thus, my study argues that the use of Sheng and *mchongoano* might not in itself be innocent of ethnic imagery, stereotypes and innuendo, as identified by Maranga-Musonye (2014).

The use of Sheng slang in *Kwani?* has also been viewed as a kind of code, rather than simply as a means of communication. Rinkanya's (2015) study which focuses on contemporary Kenyan women authors' use of code-switching is instructive here. She perceives the switching of linguistic codes as markedly different from that of the earlier generation of Kenya's women authors such as Rebeka Njau, Grace Ogot, and Marjorie Oludhe. Rinkanya's position is that women authors from both *Kwani?* and Storymoja (a literary platform almost similar to *Kwani?*) switch codes with the intention of capturing a socio-cultural reality, as opposed to women authors before the year 2000. Rinkanya argues that the pre-2000 authors employed the same technique for a different purpose, which was that of adding local flavour to their texts. While my study supports the view of code-switching as an agent of group identity, I further test the possibility that code-switching falls within Said's (1978) concept of "Othering". I make the supposition that characters in a text can switch codes in order to exclude characters from a different ethnic identity.

Some studies on *Kwani?* Journal examine the significance of the literary platform in treating the Kenyan political story within the context of the different regimes that have occupied the presidency over the years. Musila's (2014) study of the *Kwani?* writer, Kantai, identifies an element of political narration that is specifically situated in the Daniel Arap Moi era. Musila's study concentrates on the way state-sponsored fear and official cronyism dominated the Moi regime. My study examines the journal's sense of balance in capturing this national malaise in Kenya's national psyche across the different regimes.

Other studies situate the journal's writing within a constructed dialectic which pits "the old" against "the young". This view generally assumes that the journal's writers represent "new blood", while the preceding group of Kenyan writers are perceived to represent "the old guard". In this regard, Strauhs (2013) situates *Kwani?*'s writing within the context of its breaking away from the "conservative", old guard tradition in Kenyan writing, which is argued to have marginalised the younger generation of Kenyan writers. I however hold a contrary view, as noted in my article titled "Let age not be divisive issue in Kenyan literature discourse" (*The*

Standard on Saturday, November 4, 2014) in which I argue that, generational debates and the constitution of literary markers of political and ethnic belonging seems to echo political debate in contemporary Kenya. My views on the possible linkage between the *Kwani?* age debate and Kenyan politics are premised on the fact that much of Kenya's political debate from 2002 till the writing of Strauhs' study in 2013, revolved around the issue of age, pitting Uhuru Kenyatta (young) against Raila Odinga (old). I further observe that the founding of *Kwani?* in 2002 coincided with the Kikuyu inter-generational rite of *ituika*, where the so-called leadership "old guard" was expected to relinquish power to the subsequent generation. As I show later, my interest is to find out whether this overlap between a Kikuyu traditional rite and Kenyan politics, *Kwani?*'s attention to politics became tilted in favour of the candidates the journal could culturally identify with, and against those politicians who came from other Kenyan communities. The overlapping of *Kwani?* aesthetic as a new and dynamic group tended to influence the journal's view of the Kenyan political space. For instance, an anonymous paratext in *Kwani?* 08 (2015: 375) glorifies a proud facial picture of Uhuru Kenyatta, while there are no such pictures on Raila Odinga. This, may therefore, explain why much of *Kwani?*'s writing depicts Uhuru Kenyatta in more positive light than it does Raila Odinga.

My study also takes into consideration Barber's (1987) view that popular culture texts are influenced by the context in which they are produced. Commenting on the theme in the case of Kenyan popular culture, Nyairo (2004) suggests that the concept of "juakalinisation" (informalisation) of the Kenyan cultural space during the early 2000s led to the sudden blossoming of the country's popular culture scene. She draws on the founding of *Kwani?* in 2002 to assert that popular culture texts can only be understood within their contexts. In many Kenyans' popular imagination, a particular characteristic of the Moi years is generally taken to be the problem of ethnicity. Hence, I analyse *Kwani?* texts with a view to ascertain the extent to which the journal itself may have been influenced by the ethnic context of the Moi era. I do this with the awareness that writers have a responsibility to rally behind the theme of nationhood as noted earlier in my review of Anderson (1983).

Africa indeed faces unique challenges that spring from the problematic definition of statehood in relation to the existence of different ethnic groups. This is evident in the current impasses in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, and Gabon. Nonetheless, I am aware that ethnicity used to be and is still a problem in Europe as specifically noted in the upheavals where minority ethnic groups were purged in Ireland in 1652, Scotland in 1740, Turkey in 1910, Germany in the 1940s, and Bosnia in 1992. The delicate debate on

national belonging often comes to the surface in political contexts. The discussion in Kenya has invariably revolved around who contributed most to the “struggle” for independence, and who then, it is subtly argued, should be entitled to political leadership and all the trappings of wealth and power that come along with it. This perception resonates with Fanon’s (1961) ideas on the weaknesses that later show after the anti-colonial struggle, where the independent nation puts more emphasis on individual ethnicities than on the nation as a whole. It is this same logic that has been used to confine some ethnic groups to the periphery of political leadership. Nonetheless, writers do not operate in a political vacuum. It will therefore be interesting to examine how *Kwani?* writers represent ethnic and national issues in their writing.

There exist different imaginings of ethnicities and nation in Kenyan literary and cultural studies. One can argue that the focus of most of Ngugi’s texts differ from that of writers such as Moyez Vassanji, Yusuf Dawood, Marjorie Oludhe, Henry Ole Kulet, and Margaret Ogolla with regard to the narration of the idea of ethnicity vis a vis statehood and national belonging. It is indeed possible that Ngugi’s foregrounding of the Mau Mau contribution to Kenya’s independence “others” the communities (mostly consisting of the Kalenjin, Luo, Luhya, Somali, and Mijikenda) that did not participate in that uprising, and therefore diminishes the stature of these communities’ negotiated efforts by personalising the independence movement and appropriating it to just one community, the Kikuyu. Conversely, there is a way in which texts by a group of authors such as Dawood and Kulet stand out as inclusive in the way they speak to the collective sensibilities of Kenya’s different ethnicities. For instance, Dawood’s novel, *Eye of The Storm* (2010) contains characters from nearly all of Kenya’s communities. Thus, my study thus seeks to investigate *Kwani?* Journal’s stand on matters such as ethnicity and seeks to establish the shade of nationhood that is reflected in some of the journal’s productions such as “The Gorilla’s Apprentice” by Billy Kahora. The study will therefore unpack *Kwani?*’s perspective with an awareness of the fairly inclusive strand of nationhood propounded in Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), Tom Mboya’s *Freedom and After* (1963), Oginga Odinga’s *Not Yet Uhuru* (1968), and Rasna Warah’s *Triple Heritage* (1998).

My study’s focus on how the issue of ethnicity influences the way Kenya’s nationhood is depicted in *Kwani?* texts is connected to the way in which different literary journals have impacted East Africa’s nationhood in the past decades. Knight writes that

This fact was a consequence of the inter-territorial outlook which had

been part and parcel of British colonial policy in East Africa and which was reflected in the status of Makerere College and in the diversified authorship of the writing in *Penpoint*, in *Transition* and in Cook's

Origin: East Africa. (Knight, 1986: 130)

Mwangi (*Daily Nation*, February 2, 2013) observes that *Penpoint* was later superseded by *Dhana* in 1971. In addition, Benson (1986) observes that *Transition* (founded in 1961) was one of the East African region's earliest journal, which was fashioned after Ulli Beier's *Black Orpheus* (in 1957) in West Africa, the latter also launched as an equivalent of the French-based *Presence Africaine* and South Africa's *Drum*. Knight notes further that the decentralisation of Makerere College after 1963 produced sister journals in Kenya and Tanzania. The journals *Darlite* (in 1966) and *Umma* (in 1970) were both based in Tanzania. The year 1967 also witnessed the Oxford University Press' founding of *Zuka* Journal. Other journals included *Nexus*, which was founded in Nairobi in 1967. Knight notes that the East African Publishing House founded *Ghala* in 1967 as a special issue of the *East Africa Journal*. Knight underscores the history and mission behind the establishment of the literary journals thus:

As to the East African Literature Bureau which had been founded after World War II for the purpose of stimulating vernacular writing, its Nairobi and Kampala branches started publishing original imaginative work in English in 1970 under their 'Student Book-writing Scheme.'

(Knight, 1986: 890)

There were also other journals such as *Mzalendo* and *Viva* in the 1970s and 1980s, and *Joe* magazine in the 1970s. The journal *Mwangaza* was banned in the 1980s but re-launched in 2001 (Mwangi, 2013). Further, Mwangi observes that other past Kenyan journals include *Wajibu* (founded in 1985), *Souvenir* (in 1999), and the *Nairobi Journal of Literature* (2002). He acknowledges the establishment of the recent ones, *Jahazi* (founded in 2006) and *Sanaa* (launched in 2013). My study therefore adds to the knowledge about the different ways in which East Africa's literary journals have influenced discourses on the region's nationhood in general, but specifically on how the same discussion has been carried out in the past.

Kenya has therefore had a long list of literary journals that played their part in commenting on

nationhood. Different reasons account for their demise. These reasons range from political repression to irregular funding. Mwangi (2013), aware of this possibility of journal decline, says how the “Literary journals’ ride on sex, money and booze leads readers to an intellectual desert” in his expression of advice to *Kwani?* Journal. My thoughts on Mwangi’s advice are that, in popular culture terms, it is important to view sex and booze as important ways through which the lower stratum of Nairobi’s urban spatiality registers its agency in daily discussions, the same way Manase (2007) argues in the case of Johannesburg’s crime. Politics is entwined with nationhood in the way society distributes wealth across the different classes that comprise it. Sex and booze are metaphors of poverty and official neglect of a certain national constituency, which therefore underscores the need for redress, hence the impact of the same on nationhood.

As such, my study adds on to the body of intellectual enquiry about the nature and role of literary journals in how nations see and imagine themselves. The focus of my study is the *Kwani?* Journal and particularly the way ethnicity exists in the Kenyan political space I posit that the prevalence of ethnicity in Kenya’s popular culture might have an influence on the kind of texts published in the journal, and how these texts depict, narrate and map the idea of Kenya’s nationhood. The study further seeks to determine the ways in which *Kwani?*’s narration of, and contribution to the debate on nationhood in Kenya might be different from the strains that inhered in journals which existed in the East African region in the past.

1.4 Conceptualising the Analysis of Literary Texts in *Kwani?* Journal

The above review situates the analysis of nationhood and identity in texts published in *Kwani?* Journal within contemporary thinking around the two issues of statehood and ethnicity. I anchor my study on Anderson’s view that literature bears a potent influence on the way nations imagine themselves as collective identities. Further, Bhabha’s emphasis on the need for the process of narrating the nation to involve inclusivity is relevant to the study. I also draw on views by scholars such as Mamdani, whose research on race and ethnicity in East Africa adopts a political and historical perspective. The study also incorporates Gerard Prunier’s views on the psychology of genocides and political othering, and how these possible alienating influences relate to Kenya’s ethnic coexistence and imaginaries of the nation. Lastly, Gerard Genette’s ideas on the role and function of paratexts in the process of textual consumption will guide my analysis of how varied *Kwani?* Journal cartoons, text messages, photo essays and

other paratexts condition the reader's understanding of Kenya's nationhood.

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One outlines the background to the study and examines the possible ways in which the issue of ethnicity influences how *Kwani?* Journal narrates Kenya's politics and the political space. It also introduces the different formulations of Kenya's nationhood as contained in the works of varied Kenyan writers and scholars.

Chapter Two examine the way the issue of ethnicity informs *Kwani?* Journal's valorisation of the Mungiki Sect. The chapter further examines how ethnicity affects the journal's reportage of the Mungiki Sect's role in the 2002, 2007, and the 2013 elections. It also focuses on how references to the Mau Mau civil war in Kenya are captured in the journal, and how the said civil war is depicted in relation to the Mungiki Sect and the possible implications of such portrayals on the narration of nationhood in Kenya.

Chapter Three discusses the issue of ethnicity and how this is depicted in *Kwani?* texts through the lens of characterisation. It examines character depiction and its implication in Kenya's political context. The chapter considers the naming of characters, their placement in terms of geographical origins on the Kenyan map, how they are described in terms of physical appearance, their psychological make-up, intelligence and lack thereof, and the implied meanings of these associations in regard to nation formation.

Chapter Four examines *Kwani?*'s interpretation of the country's nationhood through the journal's representation of the Kenyan presidency. It focuses on how the journal reports the successes and failures of the different regimes that have ruled Kenya. The chapter examines how the issue of ethnicity might be seen to influence the way that the journal depicts these regimes. The successes and failures include events such as The Airlifts of the 1960s, the trades union movement in Kenya, the civil society agitation, and the Mau Mau, political assassinations in both pre- and post-independence periods.

Chapter Five analyses *Kwani?* Journal's use of popular paratexts in the representation of political contestations in the Kenyan space. These paratexts include cartoons, emails, blogposts, Short Message Service texts, and photo essays. The chapter analyses how the journal's popular paratexts capture Kenya's nationhood in contested times, specifically during Kenya's 2013 elections, and also the 2007/2008 PEV.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes the study. The chapter also suggests possible areas for further research on the *Kwani?* Journal.

Endnotes

¹ Publisher of *Kwani?* Journal.

² The first politician to be assassinated in postcolonial Kenyan history. He is said to have been a Communist tactician allied to then Vice President Oginga Odinga.

³ A then young and charismatic Kenyan politician. See David Goldsworthy's *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (1982).

⁴ A charismatic politician said to have rivalled Kenyatta in Kenya's Central Province, and who had ambitions to succeed Kenyatta.

⁵ Then Minister for Foreign Affairs (1979-1983, 1988-1990).

⁶ A Nairobi University political science academic. See Kenya's *TJRC Report* (2013).

⁷ This fallout reached its climax in Kisumu, where scores of people were gunned down by the police. See Goldsworthy above.

⁸ Ochieng refers to the myth of male circumcision as inscribed and misused in contestations for political power in general, but specifically in Kenya's 2007 general elections.

⁹ Kenya's second president for the period, 1978 to 2002.

¹⁰ Caroline Elkins' *Britain's Gulag* (1995) gives the impression that it was more of a civil war.

¹¹ A proscribed sect based mainly in Central Kenya known for its murder of members of the Luo community in the aftermath of the 2007 elections, see *The Waki Report* (2008).

¹² Elkins' *Britain's Gulag* observes three times that the Mau Mau lost the war.

¹³ Kenya's third president (2003-2013).

¹⁴ Kenya's long-time opposition leader.

CHAPTER 2 :

SECTARIAN NATIONHOOD: THE DEPICTION OF MUNGIKI CULT VIOLENCE IN *KWANI?* JOURNAL'S WRITING

2.1 Introduction

Kenya's controversial 2007 elections provide an entry point to discussions on the Mungiki Cult. Cheeseman (2009) observes that President Mwai Kibaki who came to power in the previous 2002 elections, became the country's third president and second member of the Kikuyu community to lead Kenya. Many believed that Raila Odinga (a Luo) had played a major role in making Kibaki president.¹ However, Raila Odinga's side of the political formation accused President Mwai Kibaki of dishonouring a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which their respective coalitions of parties² were rumoured to have entered into prior to the 2002 Kenyan elections. The basis of the MoU was that Mwai Kibaki would institute a change in the constitution and include a powerful Prime Minister's position, to which Kibaki would appoint Raila Odinga (a son to the first Vice President, Oginga Odinga). Cheeseman (2009) further notes that the peaceful transfer of power in 2002 showed the maturity of democracy in Kenya. Nonetheless, Mwai Kibaki did not honour the MoU and the document remains ingrained in the Kenyan political imaginary. Interestingly, the above fallout echoed a 1966 one between Jomo Kenyatta (a Kikuyu) and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga (a Luo) which peaked in the Kisumu shootings of 1969.³ The post-2002 'betrayal' was located within the context⁴ of Kenya's 2005 referendum. Kanyinga (2013) observes that President Mwai Kibaki lost and responded by sacking the LDP cabinet members, including Raila Odinga, except one. The resultant bad blood formed a problematic background to the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya, pitting the two leaders' ethnic communities, the Kikuyu and the Luo, against each other. The Mungiki Cult group attacked opposition Luo voters during this election in order to keep and protect political power within President Mwai Kibaki's ruling Kikuyu elite.

This chapter examines how ethnicity as a context of Kenya's political spaces might be perceived as influencing the way the Mungiki Cult's violence is depicted in *Kwani?* Journal. I concentrate on the interplay between ethnicity and violence because this theme continues to command dominant attention on discussions about nationhood in the African continent. In Kenya, violence cuts across all the four regimes of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-78), Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002), Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013), and Uhuru Kenyatta (2013-). History also confirms that though colonial violence affected all Kenyan communities, the Kikuyu community

suffered the most as they were unfairly targeted. Perhaps an ironic twist to the story of political violence in Kenya today is that the Mungiki Cult is primarily associated with the former victims of colonial violence, the Kikuyu community.

The study focuses on the cult because its presence is foregrounded in all the *Kwani?* volumes while the Mungiki violence dominates Kenya's political discourses. The study examines the cult's connectedness to the Mau Mau sentiment in Kenya's history and how the Mungiki rituals are iterated in *Kwani?* writing. As Wamue (2001) shows, the initial Mungiki Cult oaths were administered by Mau Mau veterans. In a way, the Mungiki's re-enactment of the oath that rekindles Mau Mau memory implies that there is a strong ideological bond which both groups share.⁵ Hence, the chapter further interrogates the generally-held assumption that Mau Mau was a pan-Kenyan liberation movement, especially in view of the Mungiki's violently linear and hegemonic interpretation of Kenya's nationhood.⁶

The analysis in this chapter draws on Ukiwo's (2005) understanding of ethnicity as the act of "mobilising ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation" (2005: 4). The study is interested in the aspect of ethnicity, which privileges one ethnic group over the rest in a multi-ethnic state such as Kenya. It examines whether the *Kwani?* depictions of the cult as a circulating text, in view of the Mungiki's overtly violent nature, shape Kenya's public discourses on nationhood. Since the cult espouses Kikuyu nationalism, investigating how the Mungiki is depicted in *Kwani?* enables the study to unpack the journal's interpretation of the issue of ethnicity in Kenya.

Similarly, the study relies on Barker's (2013: 4) definition of a cult as a movement that subscribes to "heretical beliefs, political intrigue, child abuse, criminal activity, financial irregularity, the breaking up of families, sexual perversion, medical quackery, and/or the employment of mind control or brainwashing techniques". The Mungiki seems to personify Barker's definition of a cult in the way it lends itself to all the five characteristics she propounded about a cult. These characteristics include: fanaticism, appeal to the low classes, charisma of a cult founder, the cult's self-definition in terms of us versus the rest of society, and a cult's creation of fear and suspicion in the general public. The last of the above characteristics of cults is problematic in that it is prone to subjectivity. For purposes of objectivity, I am aware of the possible benefits of law-abiding cults such as Mouridism Cult⁷ in Senegal, which is said to contribute to social wellbeing through savings and business creation. Pointing out the pitfalls of dismissing all cults as dangerous, Barker argues that

[m]embers of [a cult] ...will select for inclusion what they consider...to be positive features, while keeping silent about any skeletons that may be lurking in the cupboard. The movement's opponents, on the other hand, are more likely to select what they consider to be bad or harmful actions in their depiction of the movement. (Barker, 2013: 4)

Therefore, the study weighs the Mungiki Cult's identification with ethnic violence and other occult practices and rituals against its spiritual/religious side in order to guard against the pitfall of mere suspicion and fear as Barker points out. The intention is to find out how *Kwani?*'s depiction of the two sides of the cult contribute to discussions on Kenya's nationhood

My discussion draws on Anderson (1983) and Renan (1990). I anchor the chapter on Anderson's view that religion is an agent of nation formation since people gel into a shared identity based on their allegiance to a common divinity. The religious aspect of the Mungiki Cult is therefore important here, as I examine how the same galvanises or disrupts the notion of Kenyan nationhood. I also rely on Anderson's idea that literature has the potential to mediate in the process of nation formation. The discussion takes *Kwani?* Journal as a literary production and examines how its depiction of the Mungiki violence can be said to mediate between the different Kenyan communities that were involved in the 2007 electoral violence. Following Anderson, the chapter examines how *Kwani?*'s depiction of the cult's violence might be perceived as inspiring a sense of pride and belonging in the minds of all those who live in the Kenyan nation. Moreover, I incorporate Renan's view that a people's decision to live together within the boundaries of the nation forms the main pillar of nationhood in my analysis of the significance of the journal's depiction of the cult to the constitution of a collective coexistence in Kenya. I investigate whether the way the Mungiki is narrated in *Kwani?* speaks to Kenyans' decision to live together in one nation and confront violence as an inhibiting factor to their coexistence.

By incorporating Homi Bhabha's (1990) notion of a liminal space and how postcolonial identities constitute the same, the study takes the "national" and the "ethnic" as forming two distinct categories in the context of how the cult's violence is depicted in *Kwani?* Journal. Based on Bhabha, Renan, and Anderson, the study therefore asks four important questions. First, what kind of image does *Kwani?* Journal paint of the Mungiki Cult? Second, how does the journal depict the cult's participation in violence, especially in the 2007 elections? Third,

how does the depiction of the cult's violence during the 2007 elections compare with violence committed by gangs from other Kenyan communities in the same election? Lastly, how might such an association with or participation in violence, impact discussions on the narration of nationhood in Kenya and nurture the spirit of critical citizenship as suggested by Mpitseng and Makombe (2017)? I argue that *Kwani?*'s depiction of the Mungiki silences the cult's violence and privileges the Kikuyu community, thereby occluding the imagination of Kenya as a nation where all communities enjoy equal representation.

The chapter is divided into two broad parts. In the first section, I trace a brief history of the Mungiki and the cult's inherent ideology. The second section identifies the different ways in which this ideology is contained and communicated in *Kwani?* writing. It is in the second section that I also examine whether the depictions might be a function of the ethnic context of Kenya's socio-political space and the implications thereof.

2.2 A Brief History of the Mungiki Cult and its Ideology

Most studies trace the origins of the Mungiki Cult to the 1987 activities amongst the Kikuyu community resident in certain parts of Kenya's Rift Valley Province (Wamue, 2001; Kagwanja, 2006; International Crisis Group, 2008; Section and Tribunal, 2009 ; Frederiksen, 2010). However, other studies vary in the way they define the exact circumstances in which the cult was formed. Thus, while the National Crime Research Centre (2012) traces the Mungiki's origins to 1980, Miller (2012) suggests a spiritual approach which identifies the cult's beginnings in the 1960s when Ngonywa wa Gakonya⁸ founded the Tent of The Living God sect. Furthermore, Wamue (2001) identifies the call to utopian Gikuyu "nativism" in Ngonywa wa Gakonya's church and explains that the Mungiki members apply coercion and violence to achieve their aim. Wamue recognises the link between the Mungiki and Mau Mau and writes that the first members of the cult came from The Tent of the Living God sect and drew inspiration from the conservative dogma that traditional Gikuyu religion espouses. Indeed, anti-Christian rhetoric contained in Gakonya's sect has dominated some discussions by the *Kwani?* founder.⁹ These past pronouncements speak to the religious aspects of nationhood in Kenya.

The 1980s are a major decade in the history of the cult. The victimisation of the Kikuyu community in the Rift Valley during the 1980s' intensification of President Daniel Arap Moi's autocratic rule account for the emergence of the Mungiki Cult during this period. This political

victimisation revolved around the politics of land. It is important to observe that the Rift Valley Province boasts a huge Kikuyu community who arrived in the region as immigrant labourers for white farmers during the colonial times. Historically, Kenya had eight provinces, each dominated by specific ethnic groups. The Kalenjin community dominates the Rift Valley, although the Maasai, Turkana, and Samburu communities also live in this province. It should be noted that, there is a level of credence to the claim that the Kikuyu community in the Rift Valley felt threatened since President Moi came from the Tugen sub-tribe of the larger Kalenjin community. Hence, the Kikuyu armed themselves to pre-empt forcible eviction from their land. The assertion is perhaps true in that politicians from the Kikuyu community, such as Wambui Otieno, Koigi wa Wamwere, Mwai Kibaki, and Kenneth Matiba, formed a visible presence in the opposition politics taking root in Kenya at the time. Thus, most of the research on the Mungiki situates the emergence of the Mungiki Cult within the dysfunctional economic and socio-political atmosphere that characterised the Moi regime towards the early 1990s, shortly before Kenya had its first multi-party elections in 1992.

Three important questions arise with regard to how the Mungiki Cult positions itself in discussions on Kenya's nationhood. First that the cult was founded to safeguard and cater for the specific interests of a section of one Kenyan community, implies that the Mungiki pits itself against the very idea of an overarching multi-ethnic Kenyan nation. The second issue is on the cult's approval of violence as a means to achieving its aim of keeping Kenya's political power in the hands of the Kikuyu community's elite (Wamue, 2001). Third and most importantly, the Mungiki is markedly different from Kenya's other proscribed militia groups, such as Taliban in Nairobi's Huruma Slums, Bagdad Boys in Luoland, and Chinkororo in Kisiiland, all of which emerged in the 1980s. This suggests that the Mungiki Cult's politico-spiritual ideology predates the dysfunctional nature of the late 1980s' Moi regime. Kagwanja (2006) writes that the late eighties' economic collapse of the Moi regime, owing to the negative impact of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes, caused the emergence of these militia gangs. However, the aforementioned militias do not have the occult indoctrination procedure, which is synonymous with the Mungiki Cult (NCRC, 2012). Therefore, Miller's (2012) spiritual definition of the origins of the cult, which connects the Mungiki to a Mau Mau ethos, becomes potentially plausible.

The Mungiki Cult has for long fashioned and articulated its public image on the idea of a youth revolution. Kagwanja (2006) writes that the Mungiki situates itself within the traditional Kikuyu concept of *ituika*, which is when the young generation was supposed to take over

leadership from the old. What is however interesting about Miller's (2012) study is that it challenges our association of the cult with youth culture. To Miller, Gakonya's church is deeply rooted in the tradition of Gikuyu elderhood, a concept which reveres longevity and age as is common in many African cultures. Miller shows that cultural rootedness in the ways of the Gikuyu people is one of the most important qualifications for elderhood, and it is my opinion that there is a sense in which such rootedness to a large extent relies on a person's age. Miller further writes that

Marriage renders a man an elder. After having raised his children, following all the prescribed rituals, and after at least one of his children is successfully married, the father then becomes a candidate eligible for elderhood.

(Miller, 2012: 3)

Miller's observation about the place of longevity in Kikuyu elderhood and Gakonya's church is therefore important in the way it disrupts our notion of the Mungiki Cult as a purely youth affair. Miller's view is further corroborated by Maribe, who states that, in a study on the cult's activities in Kigumo, one of the districts in Central Province

The membership of the Mungiki in Kigumo is not limited to the youth although the youth are the majority. There are elderly men of about 65-80 years who help to offer *Kirira* - Kikuyu traditional education and expertise in oathing ceremonies.

There are also elderly women who help in the circumcision of girls.

(Maribe, 2010: 31-32)

Maribe's study also brings in a new angle, which is on the Mungiki's belief in the oppressive practice of female circumcision. Therefore, the fact that the Mungiki's indoctrination ritual procedure relies on elderly members of the Gikuyu community suggests that the salient philosophical foundation of the cult runs farther in the past than the Moi regime of 1987, which is often given as the era in which the cult originated.

There are various proscribed militia groups other than the Mungiki in Kenya. These include the Bagdad Boys, a violent gang that is associated with the Luo community, the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) associated with Kenya's Coastal communities, and Angola-Msumbiji, which is thought to identify with the Luhya community in Kenya's Western

Province. Most of these militia gangs have been used to achieve economic, social, and political aims. The National Crime Research Centre (2012) identifies forty-three criminal gangs and further categorises them on the basis of their recognised degree of socio-political threat. It is therefore interesting to note that the Mungiki is listed as the most dangerous of the gangs and the only one specifically referred to as a ‘cult’. The above study clarifies that the

Mungiki is coined from *muingi*, a Kikuyu word meaning people and *Ki* meaning multitude...[T]he cult also attached themselves with [...] 3 x 3 giving 9 [...] the nine communities forming the Gikuyu community.
(National Crime Research Centre, 2012: 61)

The study further notes that

The peaks of *Mt. Kenya* are believed to be the domicile of their God, *Ngai*...Ritual performance is associated with the group...The followers were also associated with *dreadlocks*, *tobacco sniffing*. [emphasis mine]
(National Crime Research Centre, 2012: 61)

As shown here, the deeply ritual context and beliefs of the cult therefore situate the Mungiki within a communal rather than the wider national sphere. The above emphases are important in that they echo the recurrent motif of “Mount Kenya” (the mythical Mount Kirinyaga in Ngugi’s novels) and the Gikuyu God “Ngai” in much of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s writing and later, in all *Kwani?* writing. There is also a narrative thread that is tied to Jomo Kenyatta’s book, with the title *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) which affirms the primacy of Mount Kenya as the expression of Gikuyu power. Thus, it is interesting to determine how such communal political power negotiates its presence within the context of the larger Kenyan nationhood. At the level of ideology, there seems to be an affinity between what the Mungiki Cult stands for, and Ngugi’s long-held position on African languages as contained in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), namely that African writers should adopt indigenous languages in their writing. I consider the Mungiki Cult’s nativist call to Gikuyu “cultural and political roots” as a possible misappropriation of traditional Gikuyu rites, and as alluding to the eponymous founders of the Kikuyu community, the “Gikuyu and Mumbi” couple which dominates Ngugi’s oeuvre. Furthermore, the cult’s privileging of one community’s history in a multi-ethnic nation and the inscription of that valorisation in the national psyche is, in my view, rife with interpretative

difficulties. These challenges relate to the way in which other communities might view themselves as the alienated “Other” (Said, 1978) in their own nation, given the impression that the valorised community represents the valid “Self”.

The above problem further complicates the process of real political integration in Kenya since it is imbedded in the Mungiki ethnic ritual. I suggest that the reason the Mungiki is the only militia gang that the NCRC report (2012) refers to as a “cult” is located in the context of elaborate occult practices that come to bear in the cult’s recruitment process. These ritual acts, which echo past Mau Mau oaths, involve stripping naked, the slaughtering of goats, the drinking of goat’s blood, and the use of banana leaves (Landinfo Report, 2010). More importantly, the induction procedure also includes indoctrination lessons, which inculcate a sense of ethnic particularity and pride that is rooted in the honour of Gikuyu and Mumbi, and the Kikuyu community. Indeed, studies show that the most important aim of the Mungiki’s occult procedure is to prevent recruits from contemplating desertion. As a result, the Mungiki binding ritual is reinforced through actual death threats which are usually executed.

It should be noted that the elaborate Mungiki initiation ritual process stresses on both the purity of a Gikuyu identity and intimate attachment to the history of the Mau Mau. This fact is attested to in the *Kwani?* Journal by the constant reference to the Mau Mau civil war in Kenya and to past icons of the war. Maribe (2010) writes, on the connection between the Mungiki and the Mau Mau that, “The Mungiki members are concentrated in the areas where there were high numbers of Mau Mau fighters. This shows the influence of the Mau Mau history on the young people” (2010: 31). Although there is nothing wrong with such memorialisation of the Mau Mau, there might be a problem in that the process of memory-making (Abubakar, 2013) sometimes involves conscious forgetting, as Kenya has witnessed in the recent past. For example, there is the tendency in Kenya’s political spaces to project the Mau Mau as “the only” group that fought for the country’s independence. An interesting case was during Kenya’s 2016 Mashujaa Day¹⁰ Celebrations, in which President Uhuru Kenyatta honoured mainly former Mau Mau fighters and was castigated in the public media by the usually liberal-minded Kikuyu intelligentsia.¹¹ The afore-noted castigation points to a certain public awareness that Kenya’s nationhood exists in a contested space and discussing it requires the inclusion of different voices.

The privileging of one voice in literary depiction has the potential to undermine the inclusion of divergent voices. As I later show in Chapter 3, *Kwani?* Journal tends to valorise the concept

of Gikuyu “sainthood” through a sustained positive depiction of all Kikuyu characters in the journal’s writing. Referring to the same tendency in the Mungiki, Henningsen and Jones (2013) identify a purely Gikuyu “millennial vision” as the overarching undertone in the cult’s ideology. The above study stresses that the Mungiki adherents attest

to their belief in Maina Njenga’s¹² prophetic powers and divine role as a saviour of Kikuyu people...a divine call for Maina to wake up to the task of ‘leading his people out of its misery’ – like Moses.

(Henningsen and Jones, 2013: 380)

I am of the view that the very idea of “emancipation” precludes a certain oppressive “Other”. With regard to the cult’s origins, therefore, it is possible that the religious projection of the Mungiki’s communal mission presupposes redemption from a certain ethnic “Other”, namely President Daniel Arap Moi’s ‘non-Kikuyu’ regime of the 1980s. Hence the Mungiki vision is evaluated in order to determine whether it allows for the idea of access to equal political power to all Kenyans irrespective of ethnicity.

The Mungiki Cult is entangled with ethnic politics in Kenya. Frederiksen (2010), Wamue (2001), and Kagwanja (2006) spell out the ethno-philosophical specificity of the Mungiki Cult, and how the cult’s ideology is intertwined with the memory of Mau Mau and the mythical origins of the Kikuyu community. These studies show that the cult approaches Kenya’s nationhood through the perspective of only one community. Wamue (2001) specifically decries the Mungiki’s dominant trope of violence against other communities by observing that:

[m]uch as these people [the Mungiki adherents] appear to condemn ethnicity and tribalism, but by establishing a sect that is purely Gikuyu in terms of culture, beliefs, and practices, they are promoting the same vices they oppose. Although the sect condemns fighting and bloodshed, the alternative that they offer in order to unite Kenyans and attain peace seems military, ethnic and ‘tribalist’. (Wamue, 2001: 466)

In his identification of the coercive character of the cult, Frederiksen (2010) points out that the Mungiki adherents recognise, honour and feel attached to tales of classical Mau Mau veterans who fought in the forest. Frederiksen (2010: 1081) observes that the Mungiki ideology and the cult’s members “[m]ake appeals to history, and mobilise on the basis of memories associated with Kenya’s Mau Mau liberation struggle led by the Kikuyu and the history of displacement

of the Kikuyu population more generally”. The notion of the forcible Kikuyu displacement from their land has lived in the collective memory of the community since pre-Mau Mau times. Indeed, Elkins (2005) shows that these communal displacements and the politics of land alienation in the Central Province, where the Kikuyu live, formed the main precursor to the Mau Mau civil war. Frederiksen further observes that the first oath performed on the original six founders of the Mungiki was administered by some Mau Mau veterans in the Rift Valley. Similarly, Wamue (2001) notes that the first Mungiki leader, Ndura Waruinge, was the grandson of General Waruinge, a Mau Mau veteran. Therefore, the connection between Mau Mau and the Mungiki situates the latter within the ritualistic components of old Mau Mau practices such as goat-slaughtering, the smoking of bhang, and the sniffing of tobacco snuff. While Fanon (1961) recognises the importance of liberationist violence in the anti-colonial context, the connection between the Mungiki and Mau Mau problematises the boundaries of violence in the postcolonial context.

The Mungiki identification with violence points to the cult’s aim of creating a parallel universe to the official Kenyan state machinery. This objective would be antithetical to Anderson (1983) and Renan (1990) who advocate for a multi-voiced nationhood. The Mungiki mission is further complicated by the problem of ethnicity in Kenya. As Wamue (2001) shows, the cult sees its aim of forming a parallel and utopian Kikuyu nation as a divine right. Hence, the Landinfo Report (2010) depicts the Mungiki as a militaristic gang with a defence council that uses modern AK47 guns to enforce coercion. Nonetheless, the cult’s militarisation can be attributed to the tenuous but cordial relationship it has with the Kenya Police. This fact is also acknowledged by the National Crime Research Centre (2012). Perhaps the relationship is tenuous in the sense that the cult is sometimes seen as a usurper of police powers by maintaining a semblance of law and order in certain Nairobi slums. Similarly, the relationship can be cordial since there exist claims that the Mungiki colludes with the police. The NCRC reports how “[T]he view that police collude with members of organized criminal gangs was supported by 236 (17.6%) respondents who strongly agreed, and 441 (32.8%) who agreed” (NCRC, 2012: 49). I think that the gun menace is further compounded by the problem of policing porous borders in Kenya.

There is a general association of the Mungiki with national crime in Kenya. Kagwanja (2006) observes that the Mungiki was proscribed in 2002 because of its access to guns and involvement in openly criminal activities. Kagwanja (2006: 65) writes how “[M]ungiki movement stepped up collection of protection money from households in insecure estates and

indulged in car-jacking, armed robbery and, to a lesser extent, gun-running activities.” Access to guns is a real threat to Kenya’s nationhood. This is because the ability to acquire guns means that the cult has the potential to mete out violence against national constituencies that it views as enemies or competitors. Still, it is possible to understand the cult’s gun-carrying character in terms of the Mungiki’s ties to a section of Kenya’s powerful political class. In Kenya, as is the case elsewhere in Africa, political office is usually a position from which to flout rules and disobey the law. Kagwanja (2006) establishes a link between the Mungiki Cult adherents and patron Kikuyu members of parliament. Henningsen and Jones (2013) confirm this in their observation that “[P]rior to the 2002 election Mungiki was brought under the wings of the Kanu party and rallied in support of Moi’s presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta. In the 2008 PEV, the Mungiki was allegedly mobilised by senior members of the government to carry out revenge attacks on non-Kikuyus” (Henningsen and Jones, 2013: 375). The fact that members of other communities were targeted reinforces the Mungiki’s ethnic character and complicates the idea of nationhood in Kenya.

The above political ties are indicative of the political power that the Mungiki has wielded since its formation. Most Kenyans believed, prior to Kenya’s 2013 elections that, the reason the Kenyan courts allowed Uhuru Kenyatta to run for the presidency in spite of his indictment charges for crimes against humanity by the ICC was because of a threatening letter that was allegedly written by the Mungiki, which warned the Chief Justice of dire consequences if Kenyatta was barred (*Daily Nation* March 2, 2013). These rumours are worsened by the recent emergence of the narrative of “dreadlocked and bearded policemen” (*The Standard* August 15, 2017) in Kenya’s political space. The ‘policemen’ were reported to have killed people in opposition areas during the 2017 elections.

In the above elections, the gangs that attacked opposition supporters in some settlements¹³ in Nairobi were reported to have worn police uniform and dreadlocks and were suspected to be members of the cult. In addition, a dreadlocked Kikuyu group calling itself “the Nairobi Business Community”¹⁴ reportedly sought to “protect” Kikuyu businesses from destruction by opposition (read ‘Luo’) demonstrators. Newspaper reports alleged that the “Community” was the Mungiki. Similarly, in early 2018, a vocal member of the opposition¹⁵ reported that “bearded and dreadlocked policemen” abducted him from his home in Runda Estate, Nairobi (*Daily Nation* February 7, 2018). The politician was subsequently deported to Canada by the Ministry of Interior on grounds that he was in Kenya illegally, but the decision was later quashed by Kenya’s High Court. Therefore, the Mungiki Cult’s possible presence in the police

force points to the cult's potential to influence political decisions in Kenya especially during times of ethnic contestation.

The Mungiki may be viewed as revolving around the idea of Kikuyu nationalism since it is a defender of the two concepts of *ituika*¹⁶ (occasionally "*itwika*") and *uthamaki*.¹⁷ While *ituika* might be a harmless traditional Gikuyu rite, which marked inter-generational transfer of power, *uthamaki* is rooted in the 1969 historical Gikuyu oath-taking ritual against the Luo, which was presided over by President Jomo Kenyatta (Ochieng, 1995). The Mungiki appears to operate on the hegemonic notion that other Kenyan communities do not "belong," since they did not take part in the Mau Mau war, and therefore are not fit to have access to the country's political power. Yet this is itself contestable since Elkins (2005) and Anderson (2005) show that the Mau Mau lost against the British colonial war machinery. Wamue (2001) writes that the Mungiki has a flag bearing the red, green, and black colours of the Kenyan national flag, and "[I]t is important to note that the cult has vowed to use physical force to change the political system, since the government does not seem to recognise that the *itwika* ceremony should take place" (2001: 464). This way – and through its association with the Mungiki – the *Kwani?* Journal confirms Karin Barber's (1997) observation that popular culture texts usually tend to re-new specific aspects of traditional culture. How the journal fashioned out itself as a revolutionary outfit against official Kenyan literary texts also affirms the view of popular culture as acting on the "us" versus "them" binary (Barber, 1997: 3).

It is in this context of popular culture's potential to "re-traditionalise" old material that the Mungiki's impact on debates in the Kenyan political space can be understood. Frederiksen (2010) suggests that the Mungiki cult should be viewed as a benevolent 'political society' that engages in micro-finance services in its areas of operation. The cult is credited for job creation through start-up loans for businesses, security, and real estate earnings. Wamue observes that

[T]he movement is estimated by its national co-ordinator to have about one and a half million members, including 400,000 women. These numbers are questionable, however, since it appears that most Kenyans shun the sect.

(Wamue, 2001: 454)

Hence, this study also examines how *Kwani?*'s depiction of this aspect of the cult balances out with the Mungiki's public association with ethnic violence in Kenya. It is important to observe that Kenya's Kikuyu community, according to Wamue (2001), stood at around 9.3 million

people at the time of the study. Wamue further estimates that the cult earned Ksh. 4.5 million (45 000 dollars) every month as early as the year 2001. However, this figure represents earnings from membership fee alone and excludes income from other illegal activities, which the cult engages in. Frederiksen's view that the Mungiki cult is an informal approach to job creation is important. There is no doubt that the above financial figures speak to a certain measure of success on the part of the cult. However, this success should not hinder an objective analysis of what the Mungiki Cult stands for and how this inevitably impacts on Kenya's nationhood. The question is whether the Mungiki's financial success does not pose certain challenges to the victims of the cult's violence, to Kenya's nationhood, and the place of women in Kenyan society, due to the cult's conservative view of women. Maribe's (2010) study shows that the cult insists that girls be circumcised, targets women as noted in the case of Kigumo District, and taxes women who transport agricultural produce to the market. Maribe's study also found that the Mungiki's extortion activities have penetrated marriage ceremonies in Kikuyuland, where the cult taxes dowry.

The fact that the Mungiki might be associated with *Kwani?* Journal points to a scenario which is reminiscent of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where Prunier (1995) shows that the genocide partly succeeded because of an aspect of Rwandan popular culture. He writes that *Kangura*, a Hutu magazine, actively spread ethnic hatred against Tutsis in the decades preceding the genocide. Mamdani (2001) further explains that *Kangura* contributed to the murder of Tutsis and moderate Hutus as its views became accepted "popular culture" in the eyes of Hutu extremists. Kagwanja's (2006) observation that the Mungiki can influence the media and hire lawyers ought to be seen within the context of the cult's dislike of other Kenyan communities. It would therefore be important to ask whether the Mungiki's depiction in the *Kwani?* Journal might have the same results as *Kangura* Magazine.

Having outlined a brief history and the underlying ideology of the Mungiki cult, I now turn to the specific ways through which the ethos of the cult is contained in the *Kwani?* Journal. The following section examines how the cult's use of violence is depicted in the journal, and how such constructions impact on debates about ethnic violence in relation to Kenya's nationhood. I argue that the Mungiki's articulation of ethnic hegemony might be informed by historical circumstances in Kenya's political spaces, which continue to inform the body of acrimonious debates on Kenya's nationhood to date.

2.3 How *Kwani?* Journal's Texts Portray the Mungiki Cult

Kwani? writing contains the Mungiki Cult in four different modes. These are “advertorial”, “associative”, “allusive”, and the “silence” modes. I use the term “advertorial” to refer to those instances in which the Mungiki Cult is seen as a cultural product that is deeply embedded in the Gikuyu cultural specificity and lends itself to advertising in the journal's texts. The “associative” mode takes the trajectory of flaunting the iterative practices, symbols, metaphors, and images that are usually associated with the cult to the reader without necessarily mentioning the name of the cult. The performance of this mode includes the presence of texts that revolve around the theme of cults in *Kwani?* volumes, even though such texts might be written by authors from elsewhere. In the same vein, the “allusive” definition concentrates on the way the cult is captured as both a continuation of Mau Mau history and a keeper of undiluted but misappropriated Kikuyu history. Finally, the “silence” mode shows how the violent activities of the cult appear to be intentionally concealed. These modes situate the Mungiki within a positive sphere that masks the cult's violence and its impact on the story of Kenya's nationhood and identity. I argue that the Mungiki depiction in *Kwani?* Journal points to a pattern, which generally masks the cult's true identity and its impact on issues of nationhood and identity in the context of Kenya. This raises important questions pertaining to the pitfalls of nationalism as identified by Fanon (1961). Moreover, it brings into focus both Anderson's (1983) and Renan's (1990) formulations on the spirit of nationhood as well as Bhabha's (1990) on the style of nationhood; Barber's (1987) on the nature of popular culture; and Mbembe (2010) and Primorac's (2010) on how violence disrupts the narrative process of nation formation.

The advertorial mode of the Mungiki portrayal in the *Kwani?* Journal masks the ugly side of the cult, while presenting the Mungiki as an ideal product of authentic Gikuyu culture. The intention here might be to advertise the cult to both the younger generation of the Kikuyu community, and to the Western world. In “Kalamashaka” (Wainaina, 2003) published in *Kwani? 01* where the author interviews a Kenyan music group, there is an attempt to valorise the achievements of the Mungiki and portray the cult as an act of God. A member of the music band, Kama, responds to Wainaina's question about his thoughts on the Mungiki thus, “They're just trying to restore culture and God is leading them” (Wainaina 2003: 57). This declaration is further qualified by Kama in the outline on how things have changed in Nairobi's Eastlands with the arrival of the Mungiki, as noted in the statement that

Before Mungiki came, women were being raped, and people were killing each other at random. But now, all the chaos has stopped... There is no more theft, and even police are scared of arresting people without cause as they may be caught doing so by Mungiki members. (Wainaina, 2003: 58)

The reader catches a sense in which the interviewer hides behind the utterances of the three interviewees with the intention of subsuming his own views in theirs. The interview conceals the fact that the Mungiki imposes illegal levies and extorts money from people who live in the areas that the cult controls. Furthermore, the interview masks the cult's involvement in robbery with violence and killing of those who are opposed to its demands. The general orientation of the interview depicts the Mungiki Cult as a defender of women's rights, yet one of the guiding principles in the cult's ideology is its low opinion of the very concept of womanhood. As Elkins (2005) shows, the nature of Mau Mau rituals, which the Mungiki heavily borrows from defends masculine courage as noted in the way cowardly men are described as "women". What is interesting about "Kalamashaka" is that its author was also the founder of *Kwani?* Journal.

The projection of the Mungiki as an advertised product in *Kwani?* is further evident in the different stories that project the cult as a desirable ideal. Here, *Kwani?* stories paint a picture of the cult which might appeal to the young. Appearing in *Kwani? 06* (2010), Gikunda's short story "Game Plan V 2.3" depicts a proud but frustrated young man in search of a job after Kenya's 2007 elections. Since the protagonist looks unkempt in his shaggy hair, he cuts the image of a member of the Mungiki Cult. In fact, the officer who records prospective applicants' names exclaims that, "We don't take Mungiki" (Gikunda, 2010: 410). The protagonist goes away dejected and, as he sits to have a cup of tea in a dilapidated hotel, he discovers that luck has come his way. The story ends on a triumphal note as the protagonist discovers that he has won a charity sweepstake bet on T.V. The protagonist's Mungiki self-image comes out in his own view of himself as a "tall brown man, dark lips, dark scar on the forehead and brown dreads" (2010: 410). Here, the narrative voice foregrounds the Mungiki identity by embellishing the self-image of the protagonist. Hence, the story makes no mention of the violent aspect of the cult. The fact that this story is silent on the Mungiki murders suggests that (Mbembe, 2010) is viewed in *Kwani?* views the malaise of postcolonial violence through lenses calibrated with ethnicity. In this case, the journal views national violence through an ethnic lens, which depicts the cult as harmless. Fanon (1961) identifies this tendency as forming a "pitfall of national consciousness" in that, in the Kenyan case, this pitfall tends to view

violence emanating from a section of the Kikuyu community as a minor threat to nationhood. The danger with approaching violence from such an angle is that, as Mbembe (2010) suggests, the process of “psychic diagnosis” becomes faulty, the “prognosis” ineffective and impotent. In the Kenyan context, the ineffectiveness of the diagnosis implies that *Kwani?*’s depiction of the Mungiki fails to view the cult’s violence as a threat to nationhood.

Some *Kwani?* writings actively urge young members of the Kikuyu community to join the Mungiki Cult as a religious duty. I interpret this as another aspect of the advertorial mode since it achieves the effect of recruiting younger members of the cult. Matathia’s “Kikuyu Dialogues” (2007) as contained in *Kwani? 04* initially suggests that the story specifically addresses members of the Kikuyu community. This is a story in which a young protagonist chooses to rebel against his conservative father. In reference to the inter-generational misunderstanding, the narrator confesses that “[b]ecause I had dreadlocks and didn’t go to church, he [his father] had categorically branded me a Mungiki adherent” (Matathia, 2007: 49). The narrator’s acceptance of the Mungiki tag is evident in the way he dismisses his father. The young rebel then explains his view of the Mungiki by saying, “I see that *bangi*,¹⁸ and Mungiki and so called [sic] devil worship are metaphors for youthful rebellion, both today and the past” (Matathia, 2007: 52). Thus, *Kwani?* literature here depicts the cult as a legitimate agent of youth rebellion, which seeks to detach itself from and re-traditionalise conservative ways of the older generation. This echoes Barber’s (1997) view of the subversive role of popular culture texts and also the fact that such texts are often a renewal of what existed before.

Matathia’s story also speaks to the politics of dreadlocks and bhang, or tobacco snuff, and their association with the Mungiki. The narrator’s belief in the Mungiki ideology seems to rely on a sense of religious-cultural justification, yet this is antagonistic to the way Anderson (1983) conceives of religion as a means through which the nation is imagined. Anderson’s view of religion as an agent of national belonging presupposes equal treatment of all communities in the nation. In this regard, the religious component of the Mungiki seems to position the cult against the idea of a Kenyan nationhood. This is because Ngonywa wa Gakonya’s Tent of The Living God sect, which the Mungiki associates itself with, is rooted in traditional Gikuyu religious beliefs, and recognises Gikuyu and Mumbi. This implies that the other Kenyan communities come last in the sect’s imagined hierarchy. Wamue’s (2001) interview with one of the Mungiki founders, Ndura Waruinge, points to this possibility. The cult leader responded thus, when he was asked about the Mungiki’s communal vision, “Soon [...] Kenyans will witness the inauguration of, among others, the Mijikenda (Coast), Abagusii (Nyanza), Akamba

(Eastern), and Abaluhya (Western) kingdoms” (2001: 459-460). It is important to note that the Kalenjin and the Luo are excluded from the above hypothetical kingdom even though the two communities are populous in Kenya. In this case, therefore, it is possible to deduce that the depiction of the cult in *Kwani?* stands to entrench the exclusion of specific Kenyan communities from the larger nation.

The idea of ethnic exclusion as disseminated in the Mungiki ideology and *Kwani?* resonates with Renan’s (1990) postulations on the spirit of nationalism as contingent upon a people’s collective will to live together. As an inward-looking cult, which identifies with a single community in Kenya, the Mungiki seems to represent both the dramatisation of sectarianism and hegemonic view that national leadership belongs only to Kenya’s Kikuyu community. The extent of the cult’s separatist agenda can be inferred from Wamue (2001), in an incident when the Kenyan government attempted to interrupt a Mungiki function in Central Province:

Chanting Mau Mau war songs and reciting traditional prayers, the sect hoisted their flag with the stern warning that they would not tolerate further disruption of their religious activities by the government. (Wamue, 2001: 465)

As shown here, the cult envisions a state that is parallel to the officially recognised Kenyan state and guided chiefly by a hegemonic worldview. This underlines the Mungiki’s ideology of general reluctance to co-exist with the other communities in the Kenyan nation.

Moreover, some *Kwani?* texts lure the Kikuyu youth into joining the cult by employing the strategy of “the specialist’s view” as often used in journalism. In media theory, the specialist’s view refers to the inclusion of inputs from authorities in the field of the news item with the objective of giving credence to the news story. This journalistic tendency in *Kwani?* is interesting in that, of the three managing editors that the journal has had, only Billy Kahora has claimed that he is a trained journalist.¹⁹ A journalese case in point is Paul Goldsmith’s “Return Of The Tribe” (2007), which focuses on the problematic relationship between the tribe and the state in contemporary times in *Kwani? 04*. Goldsmith (2007: 79) writes that “gang, tribe, clan, ethnicity, religion, and more can power a much more cohesive organizational alternative to that of the nation-state”. Goldsmith’s concept of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) sees cults as a way through which the tribe challenges the state, and his view therefore privileges the tribe over the nation. The author endorses 4GW methods that are “often violent and disruptive, for the most part, they reflect the clinical use of bloodshed and target existing grievances and long-

standing aspirations of oppressed and threatened groups” (Goldsmith, 2007: 76). Goldsmith’s justification of cultic violence contradicts Mbembe (2010), Boehmer (2010) and Primorac (2010) regarding the need to examine the causes and symptoms of sectarian violence in the national space. In the Kenyan context, such an endorsement of violence sees past Mungiki murder of other Kenyan communities as acceptable and therefore fails to address a serious issue in the way Kenyans discuss the dominance of ethnic violence in Kenyan nationhood.

Goldsmith’s writing in *Kwani?* is syncretic because he is not a Kenyan but an American. His contributions to *Kwani?* are reminiscent of Paul Simon’s work with Ladysmith Black Mambazo in South Africa (Erlmann, 1997) and the Greek Jeronimidis brothers with the growth of Congolese music (Stewart, 2000). Nyairo (2004) observes that syncretism is an important part of Kenyan popular culture texts, especially Kenyan music. This syncretic component applies also to *Kwani?* writing on the Mungiki, where even white writers overtly praise the cult. Partington’s long poem on the state of Kenya as a nation, “Mindfuck”, asks the question, “Who’d first get my vote: Leakey or these new chaps, Mungiki [Mungiki]?” (Partington, 2005: 385). The name “Leakey” refers to a prominent white palaeontologist Kenyan family, which the persona seeks to barter in exchange for the cult. The positive image of the Mungiki in Partington’s poem echoes Kopecky’s (2012: 492) description of the cult’s members as “a diligent crew of benevolent, red-eyed Mungiki sat rolling finger-thick joints for *mzungus*²⁰ like me” in his short story “Sojourn” published in *Kwani? 07*. The story narrates Kopecky’s experiences as a Canadian journalist working in Africa. Partington might not have known the Mungiki’s violent nature at the time *Kwani? 03* was published in 2005, but Kopecky’s view is intriguing in that *Kwani? 07* was published in 2012, five years after the Mungiki’s role in the 2007 PEV had been made public in Kenya (*The Waki Report*, 2008). Therefore, Kopecky’s positive image of the Mungiki sanitises the cult by giving the impression that even a white Westerner concurs and yet the Mungiki was proscribed in 2002 because of its violent extremism.

The second and associative mode used in *Kwani?* writing does not mention the word “Mungiki”. It arouses the reader’s memory of the cult through associative acts, which attribute positive agency to the cult. This echoes Said’s (1978) identification of the way in which the European novel constructed an East-West binary prior to colonisation in which everything positive was “civilised” and Western, while everything located outside the Western half of the binary was worth conquering and “civilising”. My interpretation of Said in the context of the associative power that *Kwani?* arrogates to the Mungiki is that the cult then becomes a

performative force on a mission to “civilise” other Kenyan communities that fall outside the Kikuyu communal imaginary, thereby viewing other Kenyan communities as the “Other”. Thus, the associative mode articulates the cult’s existent ideology through references to symbols and metaphors, which include the smoking of bhang, sniffing of snuff, and male dreadlocks that link with the Mungiki.

The associative power of dreadlocks forms an important para-text in *Kwani?* writing. This may be in the way that dreadlocks memorialise the Mau Mau story since the fighters are often depicted in Kenya’s popular culture discourse as having donned such hair in the 1950s. It is possible that this trend in *Kwani?* writing lends the story of Kenya’s struggle for independence to only the Mau Mau, and situates nationhood within a fixed ethnic specificity in a way that Bhabha (1990) argues against. Abubakar identifies this limiting tendency in Kenyan discourses and writes that

[T]he question of memory, memorialization and nation building has two interrelated parts: what our nation remembers, how it remembers and why it remembers; and what has the nation forgotten, how it has forgotten, and more importantly, why it has forgotten. (Abubakar, 2013: 23)

Dreadlocks therefore privilege only one aspect of the story of Kenya’s struggle for independence by inscribing the Mungiki trajectory. In this regard, the back covers of *Kwani? 01* (2003) and *Kwani? 02* (2003) depict the face of a dreadlocked man with the contents of both volumes making tangential references to Mau Mau and Dedan Kimathi.²¹

The politics of dreadlocks, bhang, and snuff in *Kwani?* writing overlaps onto the pages of *Kwani? 03* (2005). Male dreadlocks appear on page 3, and their historical specificity is clearer than in the first two volumes of the journal through the presence of a picture. This is because the photograph in question here is that of Dedan Kimathi, and with a caption that reads: “A RARE PHOTO OF DEDAN KIMATHI: notice the short dreadlocks...” (*Kwani? 03*: 3). If we rely on the agency of the caption, then there is a way in which *Kwani? 03* functions as a continuity of the dreadlocks in the first two volumes of the *Kwani?* Journal. Further on, the poem “Next Christmas” (Gatumu, 2003) captures the persona’s longing for snuff, as he yearns for “2 pinches of freshly ground highlands snuff/inhale it slowly through each eager nostril/then await in anticipated bliss/for that heady buzz and building rush” (2003: 61). The persona’s glorification of snuff might be related to the practice of tobacco sniffing as viewed through the

eyes of the Mungiki Cult. The persona derives joy from snuff and equates the feeling of its effects to a kind of virtual “bliss”. Inherent in the poem is the suggestion that the persona will repeat the act, and this in itself is a possible reference to the cult. Therefore, the poem is an indirect affirmation of the Mungiki values. Snuff articulates associative power with the cult, since Wamue (2001) and Kagwanja (2006) both identify its sniffing as an integral part of the Mungiki ethos. The fluidity of the boundary between Mau Mau and the Mungiki in terms of ritual practice and political beliefs leads to the conclusion that dreadlocks are as much a signifier of the Mungiki ideology as they are of Mau Mau history. Dreadlocked hair might represent both and thus, privileging the Kikuyu community’s national history above the other Kenyan communities’, and complicate the narration of nationhood in Kenya.

The prevalence of stories that exult cultic themes and bank robberies in *Kwani? 08* further suggests the depiction of the Mungiki Cult in the associative mode. Irenosen Okojie’s “Why is Pepe Canary Yellow?” (2015) which glorifies a London-based bank-robber hero focuses on a crime that Wamue (2001) associates with the Mungiki Cult in Kenya. The prowess of the hero, an African immigrant abroad, is in the way that he commits bank robberies in London. Similarly, in Melissa Tandiwe Myambo’s story, “Blood Guilt” (2015), a ghost called Beatrix represents a powerful and pervasive force that haunts a sitting government in Zambia. Cabinet ministers are depicted as disturbed and unable to perform their state duties as required. However, the progression of the counter-revolutionary war resonates with the Mau Mau in that it echoes specific contexts of the latter war as contained in Kenyan popular texts such as Meja Mwangi’s *Carcass for Hounds* (1974). The reader is able to recall Jomo Kenyatta in detention during the Mau Mau war when the narrator says, “His Excellency was still in prison” (Myambo 2015:535). Related to both stories is Tesiro Dore’s “Seven Yellow Brassiere for Fried Eggs” (2010) which describes the experiences of a girls-only sex cult at a university in Nigeria. The protagonist’s initial reluctance to join the sex cult is expressed in her stance against the very idea of joining a secret cult. She asserts that “I felt emboldened. They were university girls like me. The only difference was that they were weak enough to join a secret cult” (Dore, 2010: 35). In this case, the protagonist’s willpower is severely tested due to constant pressure from her friends. However, the protagonist refuses to join the cult even though she discovers that the very qualities that should help her resist the secret society are the traits that the cult yearns for in its prospective members. The protagonist confesses,

Those leadership attributes [in her] had been noticed by the Yellow

Bras and Laide's tales had corroborated my cult personality. This visitation was actually my confirmation ceremony, the muscular Squad Leader enunciated. (Dore, 2010: 42)

The moral of the story is tacitly suggested in the way the plot ends. It is the cult that wins since its members succeed in killing the protagonist due to her refusal to join the secret society. The moral of the story is instructive in that it speaks to a Kikuyu cultural sphere (Fabian, 1997) which views the Mungiki as an invincible power. This literary act therefore seems to glorify the tribe rather than the larger nation in Kenya in the way it conceptualises the country's nationhood.

The associative portrayal of the Mungiki Cult in the journal is also underpinned by "authorial" advice directed at the younger members of the Kikuyu community. This advice in *Kwani?* writing gives reasons why it is beneficial to adhere to traditional Gikuyu rituals. A writer called Njoroge Matathia (alias Potash) dominates all *Kwani?* Journal volumes and boasts vast knowledge of the Gikuyu ontological world. Like all *Kwani?* writing, Matathias's pieces glorify specific Gikuyu figures such as Dedan Kimathi, Jomo Kenyatta, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mau Mau, as well as practices such as the smoking of bhang and valorising following a strictly Gikuyu way of life. The most respectable Kikuyu figures to Matathia are the past seers and prophets. Here too, Matathia's definition of a Gikuyu way of life is located in rituals associated with the Mungiki Cult, which again indicate the Mungiki's misappropriation of traditional Kikuyu rituals. This suggests that the *Kwani?* depiction of the national story silences the other voices that speak to Kenya's nationhood. As Renan (1990) points out, with regard to the spirit of nationhood, this might imply Kenya's unwillingness to exist as a nation.

A curious occurrence in *Kwani?* writing is Matathia's "treatises", in both *Kwani? 06* (2010) and *Kwani? 08* (2015), which valorise the virtues of Gikuyu rituals associated with the Mungiki. While errors occur in publishing, the fact that the same treatise appear under different titles in the two volumes suggests that it was not included by accident. In the piece titled "Some Gikuyu Words" in *Kwani? 06*, Matathia uses Biblical allusion, in the same way as Ngugi wa Thiong'o does in some of his texts, to authenticate Gikuyu cult ritual with the name of Mugo wa Kibiro,²² a mythical Gikuyu seer. The *Kwani? 08*'s title of the same story is "Wiyathi Against the Art of Mole-Catching". In the ritual, the narrator looks on with pride as his grandfather, *Guka*²³ Muniu

[c]ontinued dipping the leaves into a small bowl of herbs that Mabu had prepared, sprinkling green matter all over the goat carcass Jacob and I had slaughtered and skinned...I sealed the kidney package, knotting a string made from dry banana leaves around it and handed it to the prophet. He toyed with it in his hands. A little green bag like those in which a few Wangige²⁴ men...sold snuff. (Matathia, 2010: 468-469)

The scene conjures up a context that resonates with every Kikuyu reader, in the way that it incorporates components such as banana leaves, “prophet” (the initiator, possibly), herbs, goat carcasses, and snuff, ingredients that are indispensable in a Mungiki ritual. The name ‘Jacob’ might even be read as an allusion to the Biblical character. Finally, the narrator expresses his admiration of the pristine Gikuyu world to which he has been introduced at the end of the ritual. That the above ritual scene is much more than an ordinary sacrifice is contained in the narrator’s tacit statement at the end of the story in which he observes, “So believe me when I tell you that only a *mugo*²⁵ can understand the social meaning of some Gikuyu words” (Matathia, 2010: 470). This narrative confession suggests that the story is based on a communicative context which only the initiates may understand and appreciate. While creating a communicative barrier between Gikuyu cultural “outsiders” and “insiders”, the story appears to invite young Kikuyu readers to appreciate the Mungiki’s cultic world. The readers, therefore, imbibe the cult’s political ethos. It also means that *Kwani?* does not include other Kenyan communities in its understanding and definition of nationhood in Kenya.

Unlike the first two modes of the Mungiki depiction in the *Kwani?* Journal, the allusive mode relies on perceived affinities between the cult and the Mau Mau fighters. These affinities may be in terms of ethnicity and ritualised practices such as oath-taking, memory of Gikuyu political history, religion, assumed political motive, and valorised physical attributes such as the donning of dreadlocks. These affinities echo Mau Mau and attribute Kenya’s nationhood and identity to only the Kikuyu community. There is a sense constituted here that to write about the Mau Mau as *Kwani?* does in all the eight volumes of its nine issues considered in this study is therefore to write about the Mungiki in an indirect way. In this regard, *Kwani?* writing does not deviate from how Ngugi wa Thiongo’s literary oeuvre deals with the Mau Mau theme from the publication of *Weep Not, Child* (1964), to *Wizard of The Crow* (2006). My view is that if Ngugi was accused of “valorising” the Mau Mau, then *Kwani?* literature tends to view the Mau Mau narrative through what I may term the Biblical “golden calf syndrome”, where the literature nakedly worships the Mau Mau.²⁶ The journal re-affirms the Mungiki notion of

Gikuyu political history that superimposes the Gikuyu political experience onto the Kenyan one. The result is that much of *Kwani?* writing on Mau Mau reduces Kenya's national space to the Kikuyu Community's Central Province, which then undermines Bhabha's (1990) view on the need to recognise all sub-narratives in the national space. This process of obliterating the wider national experience, while inscribing a single communal narrative problematises Kenya's nationhood, substitutes a national identity with an ethnic one.

Related to the above process of narrative obliteration is that of silence. I use the "silence" mode to refer to instances where the journal appears reluctant to publish the role of the Mungiki Cult in Kenya's 2007/08 Post-Elections Violence. *Kwani?*'s refusal to name or discuss the ethnic context of violence might be indicative of the Kenyan nation's reluctance to dialogue with itself as Bhabha (1990) suggests. Theorising on silences, Bakhtin (1981) refers to the concept of "heteroglossia", which holds that texts articulate their "speech acts" in three possible ways. These include what the author says, what the characters say, and what the narrator says. Bakhtin notes further that the interplay between these three modes of "utterances" are usually subtle and silent, and therefore require decoding to ascertain the truth. I consider the prevalence of the word 'Mungiki' in the *Kwani?* Journal as constituting a silent speech act which falls in the category of "thematic silences" as theorised by Kurzon (2007). Kurzon writes that "in the case of thematic silence, the S [speaker] deliberately chooses not to talk on a specific topic because it may embarrass him or her if s/he does" (Kurzon, 2007: 1678). Thus, *Kwani?* Journal shows its silence about the Mungiki Cult in the way it subdues the violence perpetrated by the cult on other Kenyan communities as treated in the two issues of *Kwani? 05* (2008). The irony is that the editorial spells out that the purpose of *Kwani? 05 (Part 1)* and *Kwani? 05 (Part 2)* was to enable Kenyans to have a conversation with themselves, using the 2007/08 violence as the central theme and yet the volumes do not focus on the theme. There is a possibility that the journal's editor had not read *The Waki Report* (2008) that gave a detailed analysis of the 2007/2008 electoral violence, and which was also published the same year. However, the editor's prior awareness of the Mungiki violence comes out in several ways. Interviews in both volumes occasionally make references to the Mungiki Cult. A particular instant where the journal is aware of intense Mungiki presence is revealed in a "denial interview":

Interviewer: The Mungiki have been very active in other parts of Mathare, is their presence being felt in Mathare North?

Interviewee: The Mungiki has not been felt here, however, they are making inroads. They have started asking people in Area One for security fees. You can imagine what will happen when they meet with the Luo gangs. (Munene, 2008: 255)

That the *Kwani?* editor mentions the cult in his introduction of a painter who lives in Nairobi's hotspot, the Mathare Slums, attests to the deliberate silencing of the Mungiki violence in the journal. The editor writes that "[i]t meant violence from Mungiki and police; *pangas*²⁷ [sic] and bullets, helicopters and ambulances" (Kahora, 2008: 158) for people who lived in the said slum during the post-election skirmishes. The editorial acknowledgement here stands out as an ironic indicator of the editor's knowledge of the cult's violence in Mathare and shows that there are slim chances that the editor was unaware of the role of the Mungiki Cult in the PEV. If so, then it is interesting that the journal did not interview the cult's members. The strategy of "denial interviews" as a form of silence on the Mungiki violence is extensively employed in *Kwani?* reportage. Thus the journal considers the Mungiki issue to be mere conjecture and rumour in all its interviews in the two Rift Valley towns of Nakuru and Naivasha:

Interviewer: Did you have any warning that this second wave [of violence] was coming?

Interviewee: [I] called the government like crazy, but you don't wait for such rumours to be confirmed. You take precautions. The people in town decided, let's call reinforcements. By the 25th, 6:00 in the morning, we had reinforcements from Naivasha and other places – what everyone calls Mungiki. (Kopecky, 2008: 38)

The dismissive attitude shown above might be because the interviewee is a Kikuyu businessman, Mr. Jesse Njoroge.²⁸ It is possible that those who knew exactly what happened would try to hide the truth because they might have taken part in organising the violence. The tendency to dismiss the Mungiki fact as a myth in the Naivasha-Nakuru axis of Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV is further seen when the interviewee is asked whether they had armed the 'reinforcements':

Interviewer: Did you arm them [the Mungiki]?

Interviewee: You don't arm them. They just need to be seen. If they [victims] see a hundred boys here, two hundred there, and all of them Kikuyu, they'll [people who voted for the opposition] say these are Mungiki and no one will try to harm them. (Kopecky, 2008: 39)

One of *Kwani?*'s intriguing lapses, when digging up for truth in regard to the Mungiki, which further contributes to the mode of silence, is that, nearly all respondents in discussions on the cult are Kikuyu and as such may not have suffered the brunt of the cult's violence. It is curious that *Kwani?* did not seek to interview the Luos, Kalenjins, and Luhyias in Nakuru's Afraha Stadium, an Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camp then meant for perceived opposition communities. It might be strategic that the Journal chose a member of the Kikuyu community who worked in the opposition IDP camp to outline what happened. The interviewee, Mercy Murugi,²⁹ confesses that

[I] witnessed a lot. I remember one Friday when young Kikuyu men attacked the Luos in Langa Langa, where I live, and in the Ponda Mali area. They would force every man to strip naked and those who were not circumcised were killed."³⁰ (Muraya, 2008: 63)

If the interviewee worked as a volunteer in an IDP camp that housed the same victims who are being talked about, the reader might question why the interviewer does not talk to the victims themselves. This apparent silencing of opposition victims of the Mungiki violence suggests that *Kwani?* does not consider the cult as an agent of violence. This strategy fails to measure up to Brennan's (1990) view of the postcolonial writer as a critic of the excesses of the state in regard to violence as a national challenge. There are chances that, in the above interview, ethnicity determines when and where a violent act counts as one, and this interferes with the Kenyan nation's attempt to confront violence.

There is a sense in which the prevalence of "understatement" in discussions on the Mungiki Cult in the *Kwani?* Journal builds onto a narrative of silence with regard to the cult's role in the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya. Understating the Mungiki's violence in the context of the 2007 elections falls within a continuum of denial, thereby portraying the cult as less dangerous than it is perceived to be. One detects a suspicion that many victim interviews in *Kwani?* reportage of the violence may have been a result of editorial intervention, so as to project a specific image of the Mungiki. A possible instance for understating the Mungiki violence is the case of Lucky Summer Estate, a predominantly Luo settlement situated to the north-east of Nairobi. The Mungiki violence in Lucky Summer was intense since the estate borders Dandora Estate to the south-east that is a Mungiki hotspot. However, in one of its interviews, *Kwani?* Journal quotes a Luo respondent as saying that the Mungiki did not target the Luo who live in Lucky Summer:

When Mungiki came looking for the ‘traitors,’... they broke down the door, caught my brother who was trying to defend the family and beat him up. When my sister-in-law and I started screaming for help, some came and hacked the Kikuyus to death. (Mugo, 2008: 51)

What is interesting about the above interview is that the initial perpetrators of violence end up being the victims. Moreover, the Kikuyu victims of the violence were hacked to death both on the doorstep, and in the living room. It is highly doubtful if, in the heated and visceral context of Kenya’s 2007/2008 P.E.V., it was possible for either a Luo to target a Luo traitor while leaving a Kikuyu, and vice versa. An important question would be the exact context in which the Lakisama Kikuyus were traitors, and why such was not the case elsewhere in Nairobi. For one, Lakisama is found within Ruaraka Constituency in Nairobi, and the Member of Parliament has always been a Luo. Thus, the interview complicates discussions on Kenya’s nationhood by ironically suggesting that the Mungiki themselves were victims of Kenya’s 2007 violence, committed against them by “non-Kikuyu” communities (read ‘Luo’).

Further, “denial interviews” about the Mungiki Cult in the *Kwani?* Journal take the form of dismissals of the facts as a lie and a myth, which then should not be confronted as a national malaise (Mbembe, 2002). In the hotspot of Nakuru Town, still, it is Naftali Lepo (a Turkana boy) who says, “I only saw people fighting. It all started when some people came to our area and lied that Mungiki had been brought into the area” (Muraya, 2008: 60). Similarly, in Kisumu, it is the Kisii wife of a Luo who is interviewed on what happened to them in Naivasha, near Nakuru. Kemunto’s response also implies that the Mungiki did not attack people in Nakuru as noted in her statement that “[t]he Mungiki threatened to invade the post and deal with all of us” (Oballa, 2008: 67). In all the above cases therefore, we do not come face to face with the Mungiki violence in the Rift Valley towns of Nakuru and Naivasha, which *The Waki Report* (2008) singles out as the two places where the worst forms of the Mungiki’s violence was perpetrated on those who had voted for the opposition. This is the exact reverse of *Kwani?* reportage on Kikuyu settlements in the Rift Valley that include Burnt Forest and Eldoret. In the latter settlements, Kikuyu victims receive exhaustive interviews on what transpired in the course of the violence. Hence, as Primorac (2000) suggests in the case of the state-friendly aspect of Zimbabwean writing, the *Kwani?* coverage on the 2007 violence echoes the Kenyan state metanarrative that continues to deny the Mungiki violence.

2.4 Conclusion

Bhabha's all-inclusive views on nationhood and the national space agree with Ogot's (2003) and Atieno-Odhiambo's (2003) thoughts on Kenya's nationhood. Ogot and Atieno-Odhiambo advocate a liberal way of defining Kenyan nationhood that includes the narratives of all Kenyan communities. The valorisation of the Mungiki in *Kwani?* implies that the story of Kenya's nationhood is exclusively anchored on the Kikuyu community, which Ogot identifies as the long-running problem with Kenya's nationhood. According to Ogot, the absence of other forty-two Kenyan communities such as the liberal white people, the Kenyan-Asians, Somalis, Abagusii, Luhya, and Luos from the presumptive national space tends to entrench a monolithic view of the history of Kenya. Hence, the journal's valorisation of the Mungiki disregards Boehmer's (2010) suggestion that there is need for postcolonial writing to identify, acknowledge, and discuss all kinds of terror in the national space. Further, the bond between the Mungiki and Mau Mau means that the definition of Kenya's nationhood does not include other independence movements and forces, such as the civil society, the trade unions, journalists, and the publishers, as is pointed out by Atieno-Odhiambo (2003). According to Bhabha, the fixed style of narrating nationhood, in this that of Kenya, means that certain geographical spaces in the nation are not taken into consideration, so that the country may gel into a multivocal representation of the national narrative.

It should also be stated that, *Kwani?* Journal's silence is unique in the way it shies away from naming the Mungiki Cult's involvement in Kenya's 2007/08 PEV. The journal's conscious strategy of interviewing PEV victims in the case of the Kikuyu and perpetrators in the case of the Luo, Kalenjin and Luhya communities, effectively locks out any chances of confronting the violence perpetrated by the cult. It should have been possible for the journal to find and interview the Mungiki members after the violence, especially since some *Kwani?* writers actually come from Dandora Estate, which is one of Nairobi's Eastland spaces inhabited by the cult. The fact that the Mungiki acted on the side of the government on the said violence with the journal making sympathetic depictions of the cult Mungiki confirms Barber's (1997: 2) assertion that African popular culture usually gets "contaminated from above". It is unlikely that any young readers of *Kwani?* in Kenya will practise "critical citizenship" in their discussion on national violence as suggested by Mpitseng and Makombe (2017). Mpitseng and Makombe define critical citizenship as a participative disposition and engagement that helps learners to "understand and engage with the underlying causes of social problems in society" (2017: 418). Any reader of the Mungiki violence as portrayed in *Kwani?* would identify with

cultic violence. My discussion shows that Siundu's identification of the concept of "nativist nationalism" (2007: 34) where Kenyan literature and popular culture generally adopt an ethnic approach to nationhood is true in the case of the *Kwani?* Journal. This tendency generally has the potential to galvanise an ethnic rather than national identity in Kenya.

Endnotes

¹ This is probably true. Kibaki was involved in a road accident, which left him immobile at a crucial time during the 2002 campaigns. Odinga vigorously campaigned for him. Kibaki was later sworn in as president in a wheelchair.

² Kibaki's coalition was the National Alliance of Kenya (NAK), while Odinga's group of parties was the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

³ Scores of Luo were shot dead for allegedly throwing stones at Kenyatta over Tom Mboya's assassination months prior to the incident. Odinga was put under house arrest even though he had – perhaps politically naively – sacrificed the presidency for Kenyatta.

⁴ The 2005 referendum revolved around a Proposed Constitution for Kenya. The original document, which proposed a parliamentary system of government, was called 'The Bomas Draft' and it had been arrived at through consultations at the Bomas of Kenya Building in Nairobi. However, the then Attorney General, Amos Wako, changed sections of the original Bomas Draft and made it retain a presidential system of government, and this document became known as 'The Wako Draft'. The 2005 referendum was on The Wako Draft, which Odinga's wing of the coalition successfully urged Kenyans to reject because it concentrated too much power in the presidency.

⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965) shows the binding nature of these oaths, as depicted in the way the revolutionary 'kiama', led by Kabonyi, administer the same to its members before going to war against the coloniser.

⁶ Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) collapses mythological Gikuyu origins on Mount Kenya with the story of Kenya's nationhood so that Central Province becomes the central pillar of the story of Kenya's nationhood.

⁷ Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour is said to be a member of the Islamic Mourides, hence his music and business success.

⁸ Ngonyo wa Gakonya came from the Kikuyu community, and the church was nativist in that it advocated a return to the traditional Gikuyu form of worship.

⁹ Wainaina once appeared on a Kenyan TV channel sometime in 2013 and said he did not believe in Christianity because it was a Western import.

¹⁰ Literally, "Heroes Day", when Kenya celebrates its past heroes and heroines.

¹¹ The late environmentalist and Nobel laureate Prof. Wangari Maathai, human rights lawyer Maina Kiai, Anti-Corruption Crusader John Githongo, and Media Owner S.K. Macharia stand out. All three have in the past received curses and death threats.

¹² The current Mungiki leader.

¹³ See *Reuters* August 14, 2017.

¹⁴ It was allegedly formed to counter opposition demonstrations in the city.

¹⁵ Miguna Miguna, a Canadian-based Kenyan lawyer.

¹⁶ This is a traditional Gikuyu ceremony where the old guard hand over power to the next youthful group.

¹⁷ A Gikuyu ritual myth, administered by Jomo Kenyatta in 1969 on members of the Kikuyu and associated communities, to the effect that a Luo must not ascend to the Kenyan presidency.

¹⁸ Kiswahili word for “bhang”.

¹⁹ Binyavanga Wainaina and Ebba Kalondo are the other two. Kahora writes in *Kwani? 07* that he trained as a journalist at Rhodes University in South Africa.

²⁰ Kiswahili term for “white man”.

²¹ The ill-fated leader of the Mau Mau.

²² In Ngugi’s *The River Between* (1965), Kibiro is eulogised for having foretold the coming of the white man to Kikuyu land.

²³ Gikuyu word for “grandfather”.

²⁴ A Kikuyu settlement near Nairobi, the setting of the story.

²⁵ A modern-day Mugo wa Kibiro.

²⁶ See Ogude (2003) on how Ngugi’s valorisation of the Mau Mau begins with *A Grain of Wheat* (1967).

²⁷ Kiswahili word for “machetes”.

²⁸ “Njoroge” is a Kikuyu name.

²⁹ “Murugi” is a Kikuyu name.

³⁰ Traditionally, the Luo do not circumcise. Hence, inspection after stripping naked was used by the Mungiki to identify their Luo victims.

CHAPTER 3 :

THE PLACE OF CHARACTERISATION AND ETHNIC STEREOTYPES IN *KWANI?* JOURNAL

3.1 Introduction

The Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) banned a popular song called *Ikamba*¹, which it deemed inflammatory following Kenya's indecisive repeat elections in early 2018. The singers were subsequently charged with hate speech. The banning of the song at a time Kenya's Kikuyu and Kamba communities occupied opposing sides of the political divide re-enacts past trends where producers of popular texts in Kenya appropriate such texts for ethnic political grievance. However, that popular songs have historically spoken to, and contested state power in Kenya's socio-political spaces is not a recent phenomenon² as observed by Nyairo (2004). What is new is the overt way in which popular texts in Kenya have progressively become potent carriers of ethnic stereotype and hate in times of inter-communal political contestations such as national elections. This chapter therefore examines how *Kwani?* texts navigate ethnic stereotypes, their political use through characterisation, and how this impacts the way we think about nationhood in Kenya.

Maranga-Musonye (2014) shows that the communal performance of stereotypical texts in the Kenyan urban space is largely humorous. However, what is also incontestable is that the humorous in one context may be politically divisive in another. The salience of ethnic stereotypes in Kenyan popular texts (Nyairo, 2004) and their dissemination through social media platforms during contests for power (Ligaga, 2009) points to justifiable concerns about the possible efficiency with which the stereotypes might be prone to political manipulation as happened in Rwanda (Prunier, 1995), Ivory Coast (Akindes, 2009), and Kenya (Ogude, 2007; Siundu, 2007). Akindes (2009) shows that the concept of 'Ivorite,' as initially invented by founding President Houphouet-Boigny, triggered the 2002-2004 and the 2011 civil wars in Ivory Coast. Akindes explains that Ivorite was a hegemonic ethnic concept, which used stereotypes to conceptualise political leadership in the country around the Baoule group of tribes between 1960 and 1993. The Baoule were therefore constructed as a diligent ruling class while Mande, Gour, and Krou tribes were described as lazy and docile. Furthermore, Prunier (1995) writes that the *Kalinga* royal drum was historically decorated with the scrotum of murdered Hutu males in Rwanda and thus created the stereotype that the Hutu were the vanquished slaves of the Tutsi ruling class. Ligaga (2009) shows that cyber communities during

Kenya's PEV stereotyped then opposition leader Raila Odinga as 'a boy' and his Luo community as 'lazy'. Conversely, the same blog texts depicted Mwai Kibaki and his Kikuyu community as 'thieves'. This, therefore, points to the important role that ethnic stereotypes play in African and particularly Kenyan politics.

Arguably Kenya's most divisive ethnic stereotype is centred around the male phallus and involves Kikuyu and Luo communities.³ The rift is partly based on the fact that the Kikuyu community is Kenya's largest ethnic group and consists of about 22 percent of the population. The Luo feature in the top four most populous communities at about 13 percent. The stereotype of the male phallus formed a subtle subtext in the 2007-2008 election violence in Kenya (*The Waki Report*, 2008), as noted in the Kikuyu stereotyping of the Luo as unfit to lead because they are uncircumcised while the Luo stereotyped the Kikuyu as thieves. Ogot (1995), Ochieng (1995), Atieno-Odhiambo (2003), and Goldsworthy (1982) write that both stereotypes can be traced back to the immediate post-independence period in Kenya when Cold War politics divided President Jomo Kenyatta (Kikuyu) and Vice-President Oginga Odinga (Luo). Goldsworthy further observes that the Kikuyu political class secretly referred to Tom Mboya⁴ and Oginga Odinga as '*kihi*' so as to stereotype the two as 'little boys' because both were assumed to be uncircumcised.

Given the above Cold War background to the said stereotypes, it is important to note what Ligaga (2009: 72) terms "ethnic stereotypes and the ideological manifestations of ethnicity" and its existence in Kenya. In the case of the Luo and the Kikuyu, ethnic stereotypes represent loaded references to political inclinations since Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga identified with the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) respectively. Ligaga adds that,

[I]n Kenyatta's public speeches, the stereotype of the industrious Kikuyu was played out over and over, until it became part of the reality of Kenyans. Kenyatta sustained this stereotype by comparing the Kikuyu with the lazy Luo – the ethnic group to which his rival belonged – who, to paraphrase him, could not lift even a *jembe*⁵ to save their lives. (Ligaga, 2009: 76)

It is possible that the power of the national media disseminated the above myth as an indelible line of difference between the Luo and Kikuyu communities. The legendary laziness of the Luo and the inexhaustible hard work and business sense of the Kikuyu dominates the Kenyan political space to this day. Ligaga's observation about the ideological content of some Kenyan

stereotypes and how these invariably intertwine with ethnicity is therefore instructive. Ligaga further notes that both trajectories in Kenyan politics and subsequent triumph of Capitalism over Socialism paints the Kikuyu as better managers of the Kenyan economy than the Luo. Hence, one of the many effective propaganda materials usually circulated around electioneering periods in Kenya is that a Luo candidate would mismanage the Kenyan economy and destroy Kikuyu businesses should he become president.

Said (1978) observes that stereotypes of identity usually have channels and media within which to renew themselves across time and generations. Said writes further that identity,

while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences [...]
involves the construction of opposites and “others” whose actuality
is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation
of their differences from “us”. (Said, 1978: 332)

Thus, the above-noted ideological undertones of Luo-Kikuyu stereotypes underpin recent electoral disagreements in Kenya just as they did with the initial fallout between Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga in 1969. This perceived rift might partly have informed the acrimonious 2007 elections where Raila Odinga (Luo, and Oginga Odinga’s son) challenged Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu). The same may be said of the misuse of the two stereotypes (Ligaga, 2009) during the 2013 and 2017 elections where Raila Odinga contested against President Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu, and Jomo Kenyatta’s son). This therefore underlines the fact that ethnic stereotypes are part and parcel of daily discussions on the idea of nationhood in Kenya.

There are other benign ethnic stereotypes which circulate within the Kenyan social space. This category of Kenyan stereotypes remains indifferent to mainstream discourses on politics and the management of the Kenyan economy. Some social stereotypes depict the land of Kenya’s Kamba people as teeming with witchcraft and peopled by Kamba women sex maniacs, and submissive Kamba men. In addition, the Kisii community from Nyanza Province in Western Kenya is stereotyped as witches, while the Kisii and Meru men are said to be overly irritable. The Luhya are said to be gluttonous, while Luo men are stereotyped around the idea of spending heavily on the women they love and for being wife-inheritors. Kikuyu men are described as stingy and their women are stereotyped as equally money-loving. Finally, women from all communities on the Kenyan Coast are said to be consummate lovers and good cooks.

Even though these stereotypes are etched in the collective Kenyan imaginary, what is important is that they are all based on popular assumptions that are difficult to prove. There are, nonetheless, certain historical specificities that inform the stereotypes. Elkins (2005) notes that the British colonial administration in Kenya invented and exploited the construction of Kamba men as obedient and submissive and therefore used the stereotype to recruit many Kamba men into the Kenya Army. Gunga (2009) shows that widow inheritance was – and still is – a common practice among the Luo. He writes that “[W]idowhood rituals in the Luo community have often taken centre stage in the community’s politics, especially when such practices are perceived to expose surviving spouses, particularly widows, to certain levels of indignity” (2009: 166). Gunga’s observation transcends the Luo social space and aptly captures the justifiable public revulsion of the practice of widow inheritance especially in regard to statistics on HIV-AIDS infections in Kenya.⁶ Hence, discussions on widow inheritance today form part of national debates in Kenya.

Similarly, Luongo (2006) indicates that many witch killings in colonial Kenya of the 1930s occurred in today’s Eastern Province where the Kamba people live. This practice still holds considerable visibility in the Kenyan media with specific reference to the Kisii community of Nyanza,⁷ Western Kenya (*Daily Nation*, October 22 2016). Elkins’ (2005) and Anderson’s (2005) tracing of the racial, ethnic, and occupational composition⁸ of Nairobi City, prior to the Mau Mau years, is instructive in that it offers a glimpse into the possible origins of the stereotype of Kikuyu women as money-loving. It is likely that this stereotype is embedded in the traumatic experiences of the Kikuyu community prior to, and during the Kenyan Emergency. Similarly, the constant stereotype of Kikuyu men as thieves might have its roots in the pre-Emergency years when members of The Forties Group⁹ regularly committed petty crime, bank robberies, and mass murder in Nairobi (Anderson, 2005).

What is interesting about these stereotypes is that even though they might appear generally mild and lack overt political agency, their deployment in times of political contestation turns them into potent and sometimes insensitive¹⁰ weapons of ethnicity and ethnic exclusion. I discuss later how ethnic stereotyping constructs HIV-AIDS as a political disease in Kenya. In this regard, Musonye-Maraga’s (2014) analysis of urban *mchongoano* (urban teasers which employ mild insults to denigrate an interlocutor) recognises the light-hearted nature of the popular genre but fails to give a possible explanation to the gender politics of its content. It is likely that the dominant proximity of matriarchal Kikuyu language and culture (Park, 2008) is related to why *mchongoano* texts generally belittle fathers as opposed to mothers. This reason

might further explain why the Gikuyu word ‘*cucu*’ has been accepted in many parts of Kenya as the term for ‘grandmother’, but not ‘*guka*’ for ‘grandfather’. Here, then, we are talking about ethnic stereotypes and *mchongoano* texts as gendered power (Reuster-Jahn, 2014) and this therefore relates to the way stereotypes are themselves subtle performances of political power.

Given the above context, this chapter examines how characterisation mediates ethnic stereotypes in *Kwani?* Journal and how this strategy might influence discussions on Kenya’s nationhood and national belonging. I thus analyse representative texts in the nine issues of the journal and examine how stereotyped character portrayal might be seen to speak to Kenya’s ethnic political reality (Ochieng, 1995; Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003; Ogot 2003; Kwatamba, 2008; Kanyinga, 2009, 2013). Kwatamba (2008) recognises the fact that negative ethnicity thrives in Kenya because the political class also happens to be the economy’s business class as rightly prophesied by Fanon (1961). This means that politics is part and parcel of doing business in Kenya. Kwatamba therefore proposes a systematic delinking of politics from business. Conversely, Kanyinga’s approach views the problem of ethnicity in terms of general dishonesty on the part of the political class. It is this dishonesty that Kanyinga blames for the absence of ethnic pluralism in the history of constitution-making in Kenya. For their part, Atieno-Odhiambo and Ogot perceive greed, stereotypes, and long-held ethnic myths as major stumbling blocks to the realisation of real nationhood in Kenya. My study therefore purposes to investigate how *Kwani?* Journal’s texts use characterisation to mitigate the myths and stereotypes that hinder national integration in Kenya.

The chapter is mainly anchored on the concept of ‘Otherness’ which is a central component of the idea of ‘Orientalism’ as formulated by Said (1978). Said describes Orientalism as an alienating project and “a cultural and a political fact” (1978: 13) which deploys “knowledge about and knowledge of [the Other], their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities” (1978: 38) for purposes of silencing, domination, and exploitation. He further defines the concept of the “Other” as that which is “*contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks” [emphasis in original] (1978: 40). I consider ethnic stereotypes as an aspect of the “Other” given their potential to classify human beings into generic categories for purposes of denigration and exploitation. This essentialisation of cultural categories silences, dominates and exploits the objective “Other”, and this might be intended to deny power to the Othered when the stereotype is uttered within a political context. I apply Allport’s (1954: 191) definition of a stereotype as “an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalise) our conduct in relation to that category”. As Allport suggests, these exaggerated

beliefs and denigration affect the narration of nationhood (Bhabha, 1990) by elevating some while ignoring other communities since we are focusing on discourses of power in relation to Kenya's varied ethnic identities. The concept of "Otherness" assist study on the use of ethnic stereotypes in regard to characterisation and how this relates to concerns about the politics of marginalisation and historical injustices inherent in discussions on Kenya's nationhood.¹¹ The study recognises the positive side of some stereotypes as Brink and Nel (2015) point out in the case of South African work place stereotypes. Hence, I determine the nature and significance of stereotypes depicted in *Kwani?* and analyse their role in narrating nationhood in Kenya.

Fabian's (1997) view that context influences popular culture texts is important here in that it brings into focus how ethnicity, as an extant agent in the Kenyan space, might influence the treatment and construction of ethnic stereotypes and characters in *Kwani?* texts. Furthermore, I rely on Fabian's concept of 'thematic dispersal' (1997: 20) to examine the way in which the problem of negative ethnicity might reflect itself in *Kwani?* Journal in contrast with how it does in other areas such as sports, music, and politics in Kenya. Fabian further warns that "the concept of popular culture [can be] exploited for illegitimate political interests" (1997: 26). I situate Fabian's view within an ethnicised context. This is particularly relevant to my study since Anderson (2005) reiterates that British colonisation conceived of Nairobi City as a space for racial and ethnic differentiation. In connection to the foregoing, Okiche (2016) observes that the didactic tone of Onitsha Market Literature was a Christian carryover from the missionary origins of Onitsha Town. I also examine the extent to which the initial spatial imagination of Nairobi City (Manase, 2007) as racially and ethnically differentiated might reflect on *Kwani?* Journal, which is a largely urban popular text, as well as the implication of this to the narration of Kenya's nationhood.

Bhabha's (1990) notions, which are central to this study as noted in Chapter 1, especially that of "ambivalence" as a strategy for narrating the nation, are considered here. Bhabha defines the "ambivalent" as that which establishes "the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production" (Bhabha, 1990: 20). While I recognise the potential of ethnic stereotypes in crystallising and hardening ethnic boundaries, I understand the above statement to refer to the need to blur and dissolve the margins of respective ethnicities contained within the nation so that a new overarching entity might emerge. As a result, I am interested in how the attachment of names and ethnic stereotypes to fictional characters in *Kwani?* might be interpreted as associating these characters with specific Kenyan communities

and what such literary associations generate to historical and contemporary political issues in Kenya as Ligaga (2009) observes.

Ligaga (2008) further shows that the Radio Theatre Series aired on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) in the early- to mid-1990s intentionally inscribed and accommodated competing narratives on the struggle for independence in Kenya. In a particular play, *Jamhuri Day Special* (2004), Ligaga shows how “[t]he narrative of love and marriage prevails over [...] argument about betrayal and war” (Ligaga, 2008: 23) in the case of two historically acrimonious families. The said families are traditional enemies due to the way that they interpret their contributions to the struggle for independence in Kenya. What is important in this play is that one of the families bears a Kikuyu name (Gakuo, a Mau Mau fighter) while the other has a Maasai name (Tobiko) but represents the loyalist Kikuyu class that sided with the British colonisers. The fictive strategy stands as the writer’s conscious attempt to include the efforts of Kenya’s varied ethnicities in the national narrative through characterisation. Hence, this chapter interrogates to the extent that *Kwani?* texts employ similar strategies of characterisation to comment on Kenya’s nationhood within the context of prevalent ethnic stereotypes.

Bakhtin’s (1981: 271) views on characterisation are contained in the concept of “heteroglossia” as the stable foundation of textual meaning. Wall (1984) interprets heteroglossia as the sum of all socio-historical circumstances, which privilege context over text. In this case, therefore, how a character is depicted becomes meaningful only within the context of prevailing socio-political circumstances. This view is important to my study on *Kwani?* in that such circumstances include the Kenyan social space. Wall (1984) further underlines the importance of characters in a text by stating how the task of literary characterisation compares with other aspects of the novel. He writes that

[t]he literary character attains a special status in the novel over and above that afforded to other linguistic entities of a text precisely because readers happen to be human beings who identify with human figures.

(Wall, 1984: 51)

This explanation by Wall invokes the reality that the ordinary Kenyan reader might identify with, or hate the human characters as depicted in the texts I analyse in *Kwani?* Journal. The role of ethnic stereotypes in such depiction becomes important in the way that these stereotypes

influence whether or not the reader will love or hate the character in question. It is this aspect of love and hate, which makes Wall's point relevant and central to my study. As Anderson (1983) and Renan (1990), cited extensively in Chapter 1 both observe, issues of love and hate form the core of nation formation in as far as disparate components of the nation choose to, or not to, live in the nation.

Forster (1927: 118) echoes Wall's (1984) views in the observation that characters depict real people because "[t]heir nature is conditioned by what he [the novelist] knows about other people". This suggests that the characters depicted in *Kwani?* texts are drawn from their authors' understanding of the Kenyan socio-political space. With this in mind, I rely on Siundu's (2007: 65) observation that characters are "representative of wider interest groups and the ways they position themselves in relation to contests for different forms of [national] resources." My study, therefore, asks three important questions. First, is it possible to explain the general ethnic composition of characters in *Kwani?* texts and what are the possible ethnicities of their creators? Second, what are the stereotypes attached to these characters and how do these stereotypes impact on the characters' ethnic hierarchy in the said texts? Lastly, how does this hierarchisation mediate the narration of Kenya's nationhood?

3.2 Making Meaning of the General Composition of *Kwani?* Journal's Characters

The characters and ethnic stereotypes depicted in *Kwani?* Journal's texts are drawn from, and situated within Kenya's socio-political experience. This is visible in the way that character names seem to be loaded with, and echo the communal stereotypes that people associate with these characters' assumed tribes of origin. Weststeijn's writings on the cognitive approach to understanding characters support this position as noted in his observation that a

[...] character's attributes can make him or her a plausible person, a unique individual, but may at the same time have a thematic function. This function 'generalises' the character so that he or she becomes the embodiment of an idea or the representative of a group. (Weststeijn, 2004: 60)

My application of Weststeijn's view is that the visible dominance¹² of characters with Luo names and stereotypical attributes in *Kwani?* Journal can be understood within the context of Kenyan politics (Fabian, 1997) where Kikuyu stereotypes associate the Luo persona with

buffoonery and being uncircumcised (Ligaga, 2009). Interestingly, the names of most *Kwani?* writers suggest that they are largely Kikuyu. Later, I show how writers with non-Kikuyu names stereotype the Luo around the issue of male circumcision, a fact which makes relevant Driver's (1996) observation that *Drum Magazine's* editors engaged in ghost-writing and coaching of their writers. This point is particularly important because some of the Non-Kikuyu writers who I refer to in this chapter come from Kenyan communities, which are not traditional "enemies" of the Luo.¹³ My chapter therefore raises questions regarding the degree of creative authenticity and spontaneity in these stories as they might appear to form an intentional pattern that silences and expunges some communities from Kenya's political space by constructing them as every Kenyan community's enemy.

Atieno-Odhiambo (2003), just as Ligaga (2009), notes that ethnic stereotypes have been at the centre of the historical politics, which divides the Luo and the Kikuyu. He writes that the Kikuyu often deploy the stereotype of the Luo male as uncircumcised to keep the Luo away from the Kenyan presidency in line with Allport's (1959) view that stereotyping is often intended to justify actions directed at the stereotyped category. In addition, Atieno-Odhiambo (2003) asks, in regard to the contested space of Kenyan politics:

[w]hen will an uncircumcised Luo presidential candidate be voted for by subscribers to a socially produced political language, organised around the idea of citizenship articulated in terms of "manhood", which in turn is constructed within the cultural geography of circumcision, while facing Mount Kenya? (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003: 244)

As the extract shows, Atieno-Odhiambo refers to the issue of male circumcision as is historically inscribed in Kenya's political spaces. Yet Luo characters enjoy disproportionate dominance in *Kwani?* writing even though most *Kwani?* writers are Kikuyu by name. This trend has narrative repercussions even though it might be merely circumstantial. It is therefore possible to view *Kwani?* Journal's interest in Luo characters as a plausible mirror of the political contestation, which defines the relationship between Kikuyu and Luo communities. These politically charged stereotypes influence the narration of nationhood in Kenya depending on whether *Kwani?* texts are indifferent to, mediate, or exacerbate them.

Muthoni Garland's short story titled "Obituary Man" (2007), published in *Kwani? 04*, exemplifies many *Kwani?* texts that define the Luo as uncircumcised and associates the same community with HIV-AIDS in a socio-political context that revolves around politics and

power. Set in Nairobi City, the story depicts the tribulations of a half-Indian-half-Kikuyu protagonist, Wacha Dev, who works in the obituaries section of a Kenyan newspaper. Wacha Dev discovers that his girlfriend and possible wife, Tichi, has infected him with the dreaded HIV-AIDS. The narrator explains that “[H]e extracted a nondescript brown bottle and shook his AZT tablets onto the notice. Pink. Brown. White. He’d been taking them for four months” (Garland, 2007: 148). Wacha Dev therefore has to navigate between the future of his job and the trauma that he himself will be an “obituary man” in the sense that he will soon die and his photo will grace the obituaries section of the newspaper he works for. The point about Garland’s story is that it is possible to deduce the ethnicity of the protagonist even though he is depicted as a Kenyan-Asian with a Kikuyu mother. The story achieves this through the use of innuendo and collocational strategies that identify the protagonist as a Luo.

Men (2018: 30) defines collocation as “combinations of two or more words which are characterised by a restricted range of co-occurrence in at least one of their constituent words and by relative transparency in meaning.” Adhering to the above definition, Garland sets her story within a literary context that foregrounds a stereotypically imagined Luo space that is identifiable with the prevalence of HIV-AIDS as in real-life Luoland. Thus, the author describes that: “On an amplified stereo of a yellow souped-up car, Suzanne Owiyo¹⁴ boomed her famous ode to Kisumu City. On another, Marvin Gaye promised sexual healing” (Garland, 2007: 155). The Luo are stereotyped in Kenya as the owners of the best cars and people who play loud music as a performance of the cultural concept of *nyadhi*.¹⁵ In this context, however, Garland reaches for an ironic and collocational language that marks out Kisumu (and therefore the Luo) as a sinful and sexual city, hence the probably justified prevalence of HIV-AIDS. Said identifies this “sexual orientalism” when he writes that the French novelist Gustave Flaubert cultivated a “uniform association between the Orient and sex” (1978: 188). The Orientaly acceptable Luo stereotype that Garland’s short story alludes to occurred in 2004 when President Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu) pardoned a convicted Kikuyu parastatal head¹⁶ who had misappropriated Ksh. 27 million (\$270000) meant for HIV-AIDS victims. Therefore, sex becomes a marker of “Otherness” in Garland’s “Obituary Man” and HIV-AIDS is a justifiable punishment for Wacha Dev’s licentious character. I revisit this issue in my chapter that examines how ethnicity determines the narration of the Kenyan presidency.

The fact that Garland’s story refrains from assigning a specific ethnic name to her protagonist even though the name of Wacha Dev’s immediate boss is given as Mr. Simiyu (a Luhya name),

points to Kervyn, Bergsieker, and Fisker's observation on the textual use of innuendo. They write that

when listeners hear person descriptions that contain objectively positive content but fail to provide relevant information, they will make negative inferences on the omitted dimension about the person described.

(Kervyn, Bergsieker, and Fisker, 2011: 77)

The narrator's intentional withholding of enough details with which to identify Wacha Dev's real and overt ethnic origins results in the reader's viewing the character with negative suspicion. It is instructive that the protagonist does not carry a Kikuyu name even though his mother is Kikuyu. The narrator's choice of the double-worded name 'Wacha Dev' itself echoes the stereotypical way most Kenyans assume the Luo speak Kiswahili.¹⁷ This way of naming Luo and 'Luo' characters is further visible in Wainaina and Garland's (2003) blog text called "Vain Jang'o" and might refer to the way language and speech mannerism sometimes act as a putative marker of intelligence or lack thereof in Orientalist discourse. Said (1978) observes that Western philologists maliciously studied Arabic languages and used the same to affirm Oriental inferiority. Hence, it is debatable whether a text that is predicated on differences and hierarchies of intelligence might constitute a narrative process that is helpful to the process of nation formation (Anderson, 1983).

The link between Garland's story and many in other *Kwani?* volumes is that their writers depict Luo and 'Luo' protagonists negatively in comparison to Kikuyu characters. The depiction of these Luo characters as impecunious figures plays on the popular Kikuyu stereotype of the Luo as wasteful. Ligaga (2009) points out that this stereotype is informed by the Kikuyu association of the Luo with Communism, which Oginga Odinga subscribed to. This is a point that is clearly reinforced in the literature of *Kwani? 07* in which the *Kwani?* editor writes that the issue of the journal was meant to capture the 1990s when many Kenyans emigrated to other countries due to autocracy. However, the issue goes on to draw an imaginary line between the Kikuyu (represented by Jomo Kenyatta, and the Luo Tom Mboya) and the Luo (represented by Oginga Odinga) as Capitalists and Communists respectively. Thus, while Mutiso's (2012) "Diasporic Chronos" publishes a long list of mostly Kikuyu names that Mboya (a Luo) airlifted to America, there is no list of names that Oginga took to Russia or Eastern Europe. The text therefore paints an inaccurate narrative, which suggests that Oginga took only Luos and

Kalenjins to Russia. Mutiso writes that, “Among those who went overseas on Russian scholarships – most to Moscow – were Kipng’eno ArapNg’eny [sic], Moses Arap Keino, besides Oburu and Raila his [Oginga Odinga’s] two sons. Odinga also arranged for scholarships to Indian universities” (Mutiso, 2012: 29). This implies that Oginga Odinga was a selfish man who did not like the Kikuyu as the names listed above are Kalenjin. However, this is inaccurate because Hornsby (2012: 144-145) notes that Odinga took even Kikuyu students to Russia: “On 24 April 1964, another group of Kenyan ‘students’ left for Eastern Europe for military training. Just as with the Bulgarian airlift of November 1963, these were not predominately Luo: 79 of the 105 were Kikuyu; only nine were Luo”. Hornsby’s writing here debunks the *Kwani?* myth that constructs the Luo as Kenya’s only Communists. It is indeed interesting how *Kwani?* conveniently forgets that Tom Mboya was himself a Luo Capitalist. In addition, *Kwani?*’s nurturing of an imaginary ideological dichotomy between the Kikuyu and the Luo means that the two occupy the same national space as disparate communal entities tied to supposedly divergent historical pasts. The depiction contradicts Renan’s (1990) view that nations are ideally constituted by people who share common historical experiences.

This aside, Kikuyu construction of the Luo as debtors was probably picked up from the fact that Kikuyu landlords and their Luo tenants have traditionally clashed over rent and tenancy issues in Nairobi estates.¹⁸ The stereotype of the Luo as wasteful is well captured in the short story “The Life and Times of Richard Onyango” in *Kwani? 01* (Onyango, 2003) where Onyango, who is a Luo, tries to become a musician at the Kenyan coast. However, like all Luo characters whom Kikuyu writers construct in *Kwani? Journal*, Onyango fails because he succumbs to a life of excess, booze, and sex with an overbearing white tourist called Drosie, who leaves Europe and comes to enjoy easy life at the Kenyan coast. Onyango comes out as exceptionally cowardly in the way he relates and socialises with Drosie. He cannot hold himself against the white woman. Inaugural cowardice is therefore the connection between Onyango and Wacha Dev. Garland writes of Wacha Dev’s visible fear of circumcision when the protagonist reads a newspaper advert that the character thinks refers to his own private concerns with the rite:

[B]esides, this [the idea of being cut] had the whiff of something more personal, more desperate. More like the manoeuvres going on beneath his skin. Wacha Dev underlined ‘some part of me’. His mind leaped to an obvious conclusion. After all,

A Whole Penis was an endangered species. In its vicinity, somebody was always sharpening a knife. (Garland, 2007: 150)

The narrator in Garland's story adopts an ironic and celebratory tone when constructing an uncircumcised and cowardly protagonist to fit the Kikuyu stereotype of the Luo. The celebratory attitude comes out when the narrator draws a disease boundary between Murang'a (a Kikuyu town where HIV-AIDS is supposed to be non-existent) and Kisumu which the narrator stereotypes as the epicentre of the disease. The writer equates the idea of being uncircumcised with political cowardice, a construction that confines the Luo to a political 'Other' within the Kenyan political context. The narrator's erasure of the Luo experience from Kenya's 'health' space echoes Said's (1978: 308) Orientalist thought that the Othered category is "[n]ot to be trusted and must be fought interminably as one fights any other fatal disease" and connects with Garland's other story contained in *Kwani? 03* where she uses ethnic allegory to narrate the Kenyan presidency. The short story titled "Eating" (Garland, 2003) imagines the Kenyan political space along a marital duel between three male contenders for the hand of a beautiful woman. The male characters, Ndung'u, Kiptur, and Okoth, have names that correspond to Kikuyu, Kalenjin, and Luo communities respectively. It is important to note that the beautiful girl, Doris, is the rightful wife of the Kikuyu character since Ndung'u's parents had already paid dowry to Doris' parents some time before. In the end, Ndung'u outwits his Luo and Kalenjin antagonists and marries the beautiful Doris. "Eating" presents an interesting allegorical scenario about Kenyan politics since the Kalenjin, Kikuyu, and Luo communities are the most dominant communities in the country's political space. This reference to who is the rightful owner of the bride suggests the Kikuyu political myth based on a stereotype (Ligaga, 2009) which paints the Kenyan presidency as the Kikuyus' by birth right. The birth right itself results from the tendency to attribute the story of Kenya's freedom struggle to the Mau Mau (Ogude, 2003).

While theorising on the need to dissolve sub-national boundaries, Bhabha (1990: 291) writes that "[t]he nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor." Bhabha's thoughts here speak to the possibility of constructing fluid characters that might be easily substituted with another in terms of traits and ethnic affiliation. It is this fluidity that makes it possible for a given character to represent any community within the national space and inscribe the metaphor of a collective oneness as Bhabha (1990) suggests. This further refers to the writer's conscious effort to soften the spatial margins of the tribe in order to accommodate the communities that do not belong. Matathia's

(2010) short story titled “Some Kikuyu Words” in *Kwani? 06* resonates with what Bhabha (1990) refers to in that it inscribes ethnic symbolisms and metaphors, which exclude other Kenyan communities from the national space. The writer uses heavy Biblical allusion from Deuteronomy to affirm the Mau Mau myth that constructs the Kenyan presidency as a birth right of the Kikuyu community by depicting two Kikuyu characters, both young men, sitting under a Mugumo tree listening to their grandfather’s sagely guidance according to the traditional Kikuyu concept of *kirira* (elderly guidance). The story weaves the Biblical allusion in a way that makes the tale relevant to the Kenyan historical context in regard to the Luo as explained by Goldsworthy (1982).¹⁹ The narrator in Matathia’s story urges the two characters to employ the Kikuyu concept of *wara* (trickery) in outwitting other Kenyan communities in national contests for political power as Jacob did to Esau:

[w]ara that saw Essau [sic] tricked out of his father’s blessings by his brother Jacob. Jacob who subverted the will of his father, wrestled with the God of his father, Isaac, and the God of Abraham, and won the right to be all Israel. Forever a master over his brothers and their children’s children; lord over all the land, women, children and the father of only the people his God had chosen. (Matathia, 2010: 466)

Matathia’s story is a visceral agent of ethnic galvanisation in that it is set in the Kikuyu market of Wangige in Kenya’s Kiambu District that borders Nairobi. The writer populates the story with traditional Kikuyu imagery, such as goat kidneys, banana leaves, tobacco snuff and the spiritual Kikuyu *mugumo* tree, which valorise Kikuyu ethnic presence. The fact that the narrator utters the words in the above extract in an atmosphere that is primordially Kikuyu in a context that involves the contestation of land and political power in Kenya invokes the relationship between the Kikuyu and other Kenyan communities, particularly the Luo community that the narrator constructs as having lost their chance to lead Kenya. It might be right to argue that the above stories belittle and “Other” the Luo in an ideological sense by alienating the community from the Kenyan presidency. Conversely, the naming of Kikuyu characters cements the presence of the Kikuyu identity in the Kenyan socio-political space. Ligaga (2009) rightly affirms this in her argument that one of the stereotypes that were circulated in the Kenyan cyber communities during the 2007 electoral contest between Raila Odinga (a Luo) and Mwai Kibaki (a Kikuyu) warned the latter’s supporters to “[N] ever send a boy to do a man’s job” (2009: 81). Ligaga writes that this was in reference to the Kikuyu view that an uncircumcised man is still a boy and therefore unfit to lead. Ochieng (2009) further observes that the politics of male circumcision has dominated Kenyan politics from the 1960s

as noted for instance in its impact on the 1992 elections with regard to the late Oginga Odinga's candidature for president. The debate further dominated the 1997,²⁰ 2013, and 2017 elections. Nevertheless, the issue of circumcision did not feature in Kenya's 2002 elections probably because Raila Odinga supported Mwai Kibaki for president. This fact suggests that Kenyan politics appropriates the issue of male circumcision as a strategy for divisive political opportunism and not as a matter of genuine concern.

Some *Kwani?* texts combine the image of the uncircumcised Luo with the stereotype of violence. Mbugua Kimani stretches this stereotype and further projects it onto Luo women in his short story titled "Blood and 100% Human Hair" (2005). This story is fictionally set in Nairobi's Kenyatta Market and captures a public fight between two female salonists over customers. This short story, as many other *Kwani?* texts, revolves chiefly around the 'Kenyatta' name in Nairobi. One of the two characters in the story under discussion is a Kikuyu while the other is a Luo. The Luo woman beats her Kikuyu adversary but four other Kikuyu women join their humiliated sister and all five succeed in beating the Luo woman who then runs away. The narrator draws a line between the two fighters thus:

The athletic woman whose accent marks her as Luo occupies center [sic] stage: she has great height²¹ and violent pronouncements. I like her instantly. My partner is Luo too, and is also tall and dark. Her rival, a Gikuyu, or at least able to curse in that language, is too fat and of such a light complexion that everyone in the crowd knows that she has always been regarded as beautiful and that this is part of her power. With such good-skin confidence, I imagine she is a woman used to wielding words that cut to the quick. (Kimani, 2005: 244-255)

The extract draws the reader's attention to several Kenyan stereotypes such as those based on height and complexion that differentiate Luo from Kikuyu. The narrator interprets the admirable athleticism of the Luo woman as his own subjective judgement and then projects the beauty of the Kikuyu woman as an objective matter in the eyes of the onlookers in the crowd. It is also curious that the narrator avoids a very popular Kenyan stereotype on Kikuyu and Luo women that projects Luo women as having ample behinds and thus more endowed than their Kikuyu counterparts²² which underscores the mistaken stereotype of Luo women as sexually prolific. I have already noted Said's (1978) observation on how sexual innuendo forms part and parcel of cultural Othering and that the same is inevitably connected to the politics of power. While acknowledging the same, El-Nour (2014), in a study on contemporary Sudanese

songs, observes that the debate on sexuality and the female body involves discourses on power. In Kimani's story, therefore, the physical fight between the two women and allusive references to their female body might refer to real politics involving Kikuyu and Luo communities in the Kenyan space, since Kikuyu characters win against the Luo in an allegorical situation, which seems to re-enact Kenyan politics between the two communities in 1969, 2007, 2013, and 2017. The salon drama therefore becomes a metaphorical public performance of Kenyan politics and the Luo woman loses performative communal/political duel when she is symbolically beaten. Yet this is a predictable feature of all *Kwani?* texts, which depict symbolic contests between Luo and Kikuyu characters. It is the Luo characters that lose such contests in a way that reinforces the myth that a Luo candidate must always lose to their Kikuyu competitor on the national political space. It is therefore possible to appropriate such a myth for political use as is widely accepted to have happened during the 2007 Kenyan elections when Raila Odinga was generally acknowledged to have won against Mwai Kibaki but the latter refused to concede defeat.²³

Unlike Kimani's story which deals with a female Luo character, Billy Kahora's short story called "The Gorilla's Apprentice" published in *Kwani? 05 Part-1* (2008) shows how Kikuyu popular culture constructs the Luo male as a violent man.²⁴ This story captures the nature of ethnic violence around Kibera Slums in Nairobi in the aftermath of the controversial 2007 elections in Kenya. Brink and Nel (2015: 3) observe that "[m]any stereotypes have a kernel of truth" and the truth of the image of the violent male Luo soccer fan in the Kenyan Premier League lends marginal credence to the stereotype of communal violence. This explains how the stereotype of the violent Luo overlaps with similar perceptions in the Kenyan political imaginary where the Luo are deemed belligerent even in cases they could be the actual victims of state violence. Chapter Two of this thesis showed how *Kwani?* Journal elides the violence that the Mungiki Cult waged on Luo victims during the 2007-2008 electoral violence in Kenya.

Kahora's story is particularly important because its author has been a part of the *Kwani?* editorial team since the publication of *Kwani? 03* in 2003 where he appears as the journal's Assistant Editor to the *Kwani?* founder Binyavanga Wainaina. Both are co-editors in *Kwani? 04* that was published in 2007. The writer of the above short story appears in *Kwani?* editions, which suggests that much of the journal's editorial work reflects the ideology of this editor. Kahora, the writer of "The Gorilla's Apprentice" co-edited one, and edited six out of nine issues of *Kwani?* Journal, and has therefore been the moving spirit behind *Kwani?* since the journal's founding in 2002. This is significant in that how Kahora's stories depict Kenya's different

ethnicities and nationhood is a clue to the journal's editorial inclinations and has a considerable bearing on the way other *Kwani?* writers imagine the Kenyan nation.

The above short story, which is set near the Luo Kibera²⁵ Slums during the 2008 Kenyan election violence, describes the experiences of a Rwandan zoologist called Professor Semambo during his visit to see an old gorilla called Sebastian. The gorilla has been kept in the Nairobi Animal Orphanage for close to sixty years and this period is ironically the approximate age of the slum itself. The reader meets a young Kikuyu boy called Jimmy Gikonyo who sees Professor Semambo speaking with the gorilla and requests the Rwandan to teach him how to speak with the primate. Another aspect of the plot depicts Kibera Slum burning amidst the night violence and the gorilla is angry at the noise coming from the slum. Meanwhile, the characters hear more noise coming from Kibera and the narrator seems to suggest that the gorilla is more human than the usually noisy and violent Luo who live in Kibera when Professor Semambo tells the gorilla, "That must be Kibera. Maybe time I also left, old man" (2008: 313). The zoologist also states to Gikonyo that "We primates have a lot of capability in reacting to the environments we live in" (2008: 321), which could be a literary double entendre implying that the animal's trauma is as much its response to Kibera's usual violence as it also is a pointer to the way in which Kibera's residents have learnt their violence from the marauding hyenas in the animal orphanage. In addition, there is a collocational meaning of the story in regard to the proximity of the Luo to the animal orphanage and the Kikuyu stereotype of uncircumcised people as children contained in the writing at the back of Gikonyo's pass which reads "*This Lifetime Family Pass Is Only For Couples And Children Under 18 Years Of Age*" [italics in original] (Kahora, 2008: 310). My interpretation of the reading at the back of the pass is that Kibera residents have had a lifetime 'pass' to the Nairobi Animal Orphanage due to their historical proximity to, and experience of, the orphanage for all the sixty years that the slum has been situated near the animal orphanage. Thus, it is possible that the story denigrates Kibera residents to a level lower than that usually assigned to wild animals.

Kahora's story relies on subtle innuendo to capture the Kikuyu stereotype of the Luo as a violent people. This is partly seen in the narrator's use of innuendo to describe what Gikonyo and Professor Semambo see on the way as the two characters go to visit Gorilla Sebastian and euthanise him to save the animal from Kibera's sixty-year savagery. The depiction of violence through innuendo suggests that the violence of Kibera's residents surpasses that of the wild animals in the orphanage:

On the Langata side of the city, the screams, wails, and animal sounds began. By the time they were near the Nairobi Animal Orphanage their faces were lit up in the cabin of the Land Cruiser by the fire on Kibera plain. They sped down Mbagathi Way, turned up Langata Road, past Carnivore as if driving around in hell. Figures danced in the road, yelling and waving pangas [machetes], grotesque as gargoyles in the firelight. They did not try to stop the Land Cruiser. (Kahora, 2008: 324)

The above scene intentionally uses hyperbole in the description of what happened in Kibera in the course of the 2007 violence. It is possible that such exaggerations are informed by the ethnic composition of the slum. I noted in Chapter Two that possible *Kwani?* bias in the journal's reporting of the PEV attributes only to the Luo as is further seen in this case where the narrator's description and foregrounding of Kibera residents' mayhem silences premeditated Mungiki and police violence on Kibera's people. Notably, the above extract refers to the rioting people as "figures", a metaphor which reduces their humanity. This is indicative of what Fanon (1961) identifies as the unwitting tendency of the post-independence artist to ape colonial literary styles that end up dividing the nation. Fanon writes that the native writer

fails to realize [sic] that he is utilizing [sic] techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country [colonial literature] ... shuts himself up in a stereotyped reproduction of details. (Fanon, 1961: 223-224)

Hence, there are intertextual resonances between the above story and white colonial Kenyan writings such as Robert Ruark's novel, *Something of Value* (1955), which portrayed the Kikuyu community as naturally thieving and violent without examining the root causes of Mau Mau violence. Kahora, a Kikuyu, therefore replicates colonial stereotypes in his imagining of a different ethnic group, the Luo. Its effect is that it naturalises violence as the domain of a specific section of the nation and in that way echoes Said's (1978: 287) observation that the West saw the Orient only as "[m]arauders, pirates, native 'insurgents'". In this case, therefore, ascribing violence to the Luo alone in the context of the 2008 violence avoids an honest discussion of violence within the national space as the narrator appears to assume that there was no premeditated state violence directed at the Luo.

The pattern in *Kwani?* texts where writers pick up colonial stereotypes associated with their own communities and direct the same at Luo characters is also reflected in Wambui Mwangi's "Internally Misplaced" in *Kwani? 05 Twin Edition Part-2* (2008). In this story, the protagonist

who is a Kikuyu character called Seth Karanja, acts as a 'skelm' (crook) figure in the same way that Manase (2007) identifies Magawulana in *Staffrider* magazine. But while such skelm characters were "constantly subverting and remaking [...] spaces of segregation and domination" (Manase, 2007: 39) under the apartheid regime in *Staffrider*, Seth Karanja is portrayed as a Kikuyu 'skelm' that outwits other Kenyan communities during the spiral of 2007 election violence by using his boss's car to dodge spaces of opposition violence in Nairobi City. Karanja also maintains sly silence when he finally reaches the house and does not tell the other Luo and Luhyia characters how he escaped the violence.

In addition, the narrator profiles a Luo mechanic, Ezekiel, in the description that the Luo "[h]as a duplicate invoice and receipt book" (2008: 315) to imply that Ezekiel is defrauding his boss. Ironically, this is a colonial stereotype that was associated with the Kikuyu community in Kenya. I indicated in Chapter One, how Mehul Gohil's short story "West of Uhuru Highway" (2015) turns the colonial stereotype of Asian uncleanliness onto the Luo. Siundu (2007) shows that the white Kenyan colonial imaginary depicted Asians themselves as dirty people. Gohil's reverse stereotyping of the Luo also resonates further with a short story by another Kenyan-Asian, Rasna Warah, who depicts her Luo character Owino as lazy in her "The Unbearable Heaviness of Comfort" (2003). Mwangi's and the other cross-referenced stories are indeed a contradiction in the Kenyan understanding of inter-communal relations.²⁶ The result of these communal stereotypes appears to single out the Luo for political Othering in the Kenyan national space.

Yet there is a sense in which stereotypes are usually a symptom of little knowledge. Nel and Brink (2015: 14) observe that "[t]he reason for these subjective perceptions may be people's own narrow-mindedness, lack of knowledge of others or simply the result of a timesaving mechanism". This might be the case in *Kwani?* Journal's construction of its Luo characters concerning circumcision and inter-ethnic violence in Nairobi since it is not possible to use stereotypes to understand the colonial roots of contemporary urban violence in Kenya. Anderson (2005) and Elkins (2005) both show that the history of inter-ethnic urban violence in Nairobi's Eastland depicts Luo and other Kenyan communities as the victims, which is the opposite of what the *Kwani?* construction seems to suggest. Similarly, such constructions disregard the fact that communities have exchanged and assimilated certain aspects of their cultures for so long that it is now impossible to claim that a particular ethnic group is 'pure' (Ogot, 2009). Ogot observes that the traditional rite of male circumcision originated in Egypt with the Nilotic communities including the Luo and introduced to East Africa. East Africa's

Bantu communities, to which the Luhya, Kisii, Kamba, Meru, Embu and Kikuyu belong, borrowed and adopted the rite through the Tiriki tribe of Western Kenya. This implies that male circumcision is more a Luo rite than it is Kikuyu. Ochieng and Tomaselli (2014) agree with Ogot that the prevalence of tetanus (lock-jaw) in lowland Luo settlements compelled the Luo to abandon male circumcision. Both go on to explain the importance of the adoption of the removal of six lower teeth as a substitute for male circumcision.

As Atieno-Odhiambo (2003) observed earlier on, Ochieng and Tomaselli's explanation shows that Luo abandonment of male circumcision and the community's adoption of an alternative rite of passage was an adaptive strategy through which culture countered an environmental vicissitude in the course of Luo migration from Egypt. It implies that the stereotype of male circumcision in the Kenyan space, as depicted with regards to Wacha Dev in Garland's short story "Obituary Man" (2007) I considered earlier, might be a project intended to deliberately exclude those who do not practise the rite from public participation and national governance. This agrees with Said's (1978) observation that the concept of Orientalism adopts cultural differences and uses the same to concretise imaginary boundaries, which define the domination of power between the "Self" and the "Other". Therefore, the stereotype of male circumcision and its depiction in *Kwani?* negates the idea of nationhood by hardening the margins of inter-communal contact (Bhabha, 1990) in the Kenyan nation. It eliminates the possibility of genuine and meaningful sharing of leadership between the different communities that live in Kenya.

Yet the use of ethnic stereotypes in *Kwani?* Journal is probably indicative of the state of mind of the supposedly middle-class *Kwani?* writers themselves. In his analysis of national identity and the trans-nation in the stories of two South African writers, Gomolemo Mokae's "Milk and honey galore, honey!" and Phil Ndlela's "A question of identity", Makombe (2010) identifies Themba in the former story, as an insecure Mosotho immigrant who displaces his own paranoia on unsuspecting immigrants. Makombe (2010: 69) observes that, "[T]hemba's intense phobia is founded on traditional stereotypes and generational falsehoods inculcated in his imagined national identity". Themba's is therefore the ironic case of failed transnationalism since he cannot reconcile his two identities as a Mosotho and an immigrant in South Africa. Like Themba, most narrators in *Kwani?* short stories probably do not understand their own urban middle-class, interstitial in-betweenness between the communal and the national.

I conclude this section by observing that the Kikuyu writers whom I examined here use the stereotype of male circumcision in a story such as Garland's "Obituary Man" (2007) to

construct Luo characters in *Kwani?* texts following along the lines of Kenyan politics. However, the negative construction of the ethnic “Other” is not a preserve of the Kikuyu alone. Ogude (1999) shows that the late Luo Benga musician D.O. Misiyani refers to the Kikuyu community as ‘*bimbe*’ (the baboon tribe) in one of his songs. Onyi Papa Jey is also a Luo singer of *ohangla* music who took up the baboon imagery of the Kikuyu and used it to capture contestations between Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki during the 2007 elections. Much of contemporary Luo *ohangla* music has recently degenerated into lionising Raila Odinga while disparaging the Luo politician’s perceived opponents.

3.3 How Writers of Other Kenyan Ethnicities Construct Characters in *Kwani?* Journal

This section examines the significance of character construction in *Kwani?* in relation to other communities’ stereotypes of themselves, the Kikuyu and the Luo. My assumption is that other communities’ stereotypes about the Kikuyu, the Luo and of their own communities should ideally come to the surface if *Kwani?* Journal has a spontaneous editorial approach to the way its texts capture inter-communal constructions and imaginaries in the Kenyan space. Nonetheless, Prochazka (2010: 16) observes in the comments on the relationship between characters and names that, “[Un]doubtedly the most common character-indicator in a text is the name. Proper name is the most direct way to set up an ontological entity with a clear-cut identity”. In this regard, Eder outlines that

[A]ll characters are embedded in different kinds of contexts: as fictional beings, as artefacts, as symbols in its themes, and as symptoms in the socio-economic frameworks of its productions and reception.

(Eder, 2010: 29)

A consideration of Eder’s argument suggests the possibility that any bias in characterising Luo (negative) and Kikuyu (positive) in the preceding section might merely be the result of one community’s view of the other as a political ‘enemy’. Ideally, therefore, this section ought to yield different results on characterisation since I consider writers from other Kenyan ethnicities. My thought here is that the historical circumstances, which define the troubled relationship between Luo and Kikuyu communities do not necessarily influence the other writers’ depiction of Luo, Kikuyu, and characters from these writers’ own communities.

Characterisation in Kenyan popular culture draws from the political space where different Kenyan ethnicities engage in communal contestations for power. Ligaga (2009: 79) writes that “[t]he Kikuyu subject emerges as the dominant, superior ‘us’, while both the Luo and the Kalenjin inferior ‘other’” in her study of Kenya’s cyber communities that supported Mwai Kibaki in the 2007 elections. However, *Kwani?* writing confirms the possibility that writers from other Kenyan communities have internalised the political stereotype, which elevates the Kikuyu above all other Kenyan communities. This pattern is visible in Abdul Adan’s short story called “The Somalification of James Karangi” in *Kwani? 08* (2015). Adan’s by-line describes the writer as a “Somali-American writer who grew up in Kenya” (2015: 363). The main character in this story is a Kikuyu man called Karangi who falls in love with a marriageable young Somali woman called Ayaan. However, Karangi cannot marry the beautiful Ayaan until he recants his Christianity and ‘Kikuyuness’ in a process that the narrator calls ‘Somalification’. Other Somali characters in the story are Ayaan’s cousin, Khalid, and her elder brother Sharmake. The third, HassanZuu, is the other Somali man in whose house the process of Somalification is to be carried out. The procedure fails even though Ayaan desperately yearns for Karangi to marry her.

As Ligaga (2009) observed earlier, the author creates a meek Luo character called Othis (usually ‘Odhis’) who also acts as a potent foil to Karangi’s dominant attributes. The narrator says that Karangi “was stronger than both of them [Othis and HassanZuu]” (Adan, 2015: 359) thus suggesting the dominance of the Kikuyu protagonist over even the writer’s own Somali characters who are depicted as violent, querulous and foolish. This depiction of characters from other communities as more foolish and uglier than Kikuyu characters is reminiscent of Kiprof Kimutai’s short story “The Gentle Man from Iten” (2015) which I referred to in Chapter One. Kimutai’s story is exceptional in that the Kalenjin writer is able to transcend the emotive politics of land, which historically divides the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin in the writer’s Rift Valley Province. Ligaga (2009: 80) observes that the politics of land is behind the Kikuyu social construction of the Kalenjin people. She writes that “The [Kikuyu] stereotype of the paranoid Kalenjin is related to the issue of land, given the large number of Kikuyu that were re-settled in the Rift Valley after being displaced by British settlers”. Thus, the fact that Kiprof Kimutai somewhat manages to disparage characters from his own community while elevating Kikuyu characters where even the emotive issue of land is involved points to the coincidence of connection between his story and Abdul Adan’s.

The narrator's curious depiction of Othis in Adan's story as "a short, muscular fellow" (Adan, 2015: 358) shows that the writer intentionally "inferiorises" and denigrates the Luo character by subverting the popular Kenyan stereotype of the tall Luo and the short Kikuyu. The narrator's contrived description that "HassanZuu and Othis cowered on the floor, terrified" (Adan, 2015: 362) when Karangi squeals might suggest cowardice on the part of the two meek characters and thus indicating a reversal of Karangi's apparent courage. Moreover, the narrator's reference to the Kikuyu popular association of the Luo with fishing and the politics of male circumcision is significant. The reference shows that the Somali writer does not draw the spatial experience of his short story from his own Somali socio-political universe in reference to Luo and Somali communities in Kenya.²⁷ Karangi imperiously admonishes Othis when the latter carries breakfast to him, "I don't eat from the hands of one who smells of lake fishes" (Adan, 2015: 360). While this is an ordinary Kenyan stereotype of the Luo as fishermen, it is Karangi's reprimand to Othis that suggests possibilities of editorial intervention in how writers from other Kenyan communities construct their Kikuyu and Luo characters. Karangi tells Othis, "I am not even sure you are circumcised" (Adan, 2015: 360). Ligaga (2009) shows that the ideological content of ethnic stereotypes in the Kikuyu socio-political imaginary seeks to maintain the status quo in Kenyan politics. Thus, Adan's story is interesting because it reflects a Kenyan Somali writer who maintains the status quo of Kenyan officialdom that has historically marginalised his Somali community (Abubakar, 2013) since independence in 1963. The story is also intriguing because it shows how possible it is for a writer from a different Kenyan community to appropriate other communities' stereotypes and use the same in the exact context that those other communities would as they fictionally treat issues of supremacy and nationhood in the political space.

It should also be noted that Adan's story replicates Eva Kasaya's semi-autobiographical novel, *Tale of Kasaya* (2010) in the way it privileges the Kikuyu perspective in the national space while silencing other Kenyan communities and the sensibilities of the author's own community. In Kasaya's novel, which was also published by Kwani Trust, the author who is from the Luhya community, recalls her own life as a house-help in Nairobi. Her Luo, Luhya, and Kisii bosses mistreat her except her two Kikuyu bosses. The narrator discovers that her Luhya boss is a glutton while the Kisii is a witch, attributes which neatly coincide with the stereotypes associated with the two communities in the Kenyan social imaginary. As is usual in *Kwani?* writing, violence and extreme simple-mindedness are reserved for the Luo couple that the narrator works for in Kibera:

It was now my second month, and I was sleeping in a chair beside Nancy and Ben [the Luo couple] ...One night I was washing the dishes, and I went to sleep late. I covered myself and was drifting off to sleep [when] I felt someone touching me. “Eva... Eva... Eva...” came the voice as the hands reached for my pants. I coughed loudly and shouted for him to get off me. Patrick [Ben] retreated quickly. Nancy slept through the whole thing. I kept thinking how close she was and how Patrick knew this but still tried to rape me. (Kasaya, 2010: 113)

It is true that domestic workers face extreme challenges, including rape by the husbands of their own female bosses, in Kenya. However, a contextual analysis might want to question the veracity of the situational hyperbole described in the above extract. It is highly unlikely that a husband who is not drunk or insane would even contemplate sleeping with a house-help in the actual presence of his own wife – let alone when the chair on which the maid sleeps is so close to their matrimonial bed. Husbands do sleep with their house-helps. Yet I would suspect that the arrangements are quite different from the one Kasaya’s novel captures. The narrator’s tone appears to imply that Nancy colludes with her husband in his attempt to sleep with the house-help. The significance of this depiction is that the text portrays the Luo community as comprising irresponsible people who appear inferior in the national space. The above scene depicting a probably insane Luo husband contrasts well with a separate one where Kasaya’s novel portrays a courageous picture of her female Kikuyu boss as they drive to Murang’a Town in Central Province. It is a tense journey and

Mama Jacky was driving at a high speed...The car hit the side of the road, overturning thrice. For a moment, I thought I was dead. The car was quiet. I tried to open the door. I was upside down, squashed between the backseat, very scared. Mama Jacky was still holding the steering wheel; I thought she was dead. (Kasaya, 2010: 154)

There is a pattern where all Kikuyu characters in *Kwani?* Journal manage against very steep odds. Hence, after the above scene, Mama Jacky still manages to drive the car safely home in spite of a “high-speed” accident where the car overturns “thrice” and its occupants are still aware that the car turned that number of times. This researcher interacted with Kasaya and promoted her novel in 2014. He found out that Kasaya did not go to school beyond the basic Grade 8 in the Kenyan system. Even though Kasaya speaks very good English, she did confess to this researcher that she worked very closely with a female *Kwani?* editor in writing the novel.

Hence, it is possible to draw conclusions on the above exaggerations, which depict the Luo characters as simple-minded while enabling Kikuyu ones to achieve miraculous tasks. Furthermore, this creatively-inscribed ethnic dichotomy makes us understand the subtle intricacies and implications of Abdul Adan's "The Somalification of James Karangi". The tacit implications of the story to nationhood in Kenya is that it creates ethnic animosity by overstating assumed differences between Luo and Kikuyu people in what Said (1978: 347) refers to as an "attempt to force cultures and peoples into separate and distinct breeds". Adan's story, just as the cross-referenced Kasaya text imagines a Kenyan nation of eternal enemies.

If Adan's story shows the extent to which *Kwani?* writers from other Kenyan communities write against their own communal stereotypes of the Kikuyu and the Luo then, Uwem Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast" (2003) and Brian Cooper's "Dirt People" (2007) represent stories, which prove that foreign writers adopt popular Kikuyu stereotypes of the Luo and Kikuyu in constructing characters from the two Kenyan communities. While Akpan is a well-known Nigerian writer, the by-line of Cooper's story shows that Cooper is an American who lived in Kenya's Nakuru Town for two years. Akpan's story captures the circumstances of a family, which has been evicted from their shack in a Nairobi slum and is therefore living in the streets. There are allusive references to Kibera Slums and to the names of the family's twin babies as Atieno and Otieno. The narrator further describes experiences about the avoidance of female circumcision in a collocational style that uses innuendo to refer to male circumcision. Akpan depicts the family's father figure as a lazy thief who sleeps most of the time. The father is also heavily indebted to his landlord and exhibits the Kikuyu-based stereotype of the Luo as I showed earlier on. The street living conditions are so filthy that

[T]he dog ate the shit so fast that soon Otieno was defecating straight into
her mouth and had to hold up his private parts away from the snapping
jaws. (Akpan, 2003: 147)

It is important that the dog which feeds on Otieno's 'shit' is curiously given the Kamba name 'Musioka' (normally 'Musyoka'). I showed earlier on in the introduction that a Kikuyu song stereotyped the Kamba people as dog-eaters. I therefore interpret the naming of the dog in this story to represent a subtle innuendo, which echoes the Kikuyu stereotype of the Kamba community as dog-eaters and as inferior members of the Kenyan national collective.

In Akpan's case, as in others discussed above, most *Kwani?* writers invert the popular Kenyan stereotype of a Kikuyu character as a thief and assign the same to Luo characters. In this story, the street family survives on the father's pickpocketing job and the daughter Maisha's sex work with tourists. Moreover, one of the daughters called Naema carries Baby every night so they can stand at a regular spot and beg. A Kikuyu taxi driver called Kinyanjui brings back Maisha after the prostitute's night escapades and Maisha's father pickpockets the money his daughter has just paid the Kikuyu driver. The Kikuyu is then seen as the victim of Luo theft as Naema leaves the street family to start a life of her own. Thus, the construction of the Kikuyu as a victim of Luo vices in this story echoes other *Kwani?* stories and can be interpreted to entrench suspicion between the two Kenyan communities.

Akpan's story stereotypes the Luo as deceptive, jealous, and thieving people even though it comes out as a fair representation of what has been going on in Nairobi's streets since the 1940s (Anderson, 2005). The newly-constructed stereotype of Luo deception comes out in the juxtaposition of the Luo family's crooked ways of eking out a living with the honest work of the Kikuyu character Kinyanjui and thus places an imaginary boundary of ethnic difference between the two communities. Said (1978: 347) writes that "[c]ultures and civilisations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality". I thus view the imaginary boundary between the Kikuyu and the Luo inscribed in this story as an expression of Said's view in that it alienates the two communities and embeds feelings of caution and extreme distrust. These social and national anxieties are indeed antithetical to Renan's (1990) view that the components of the nation ought to concentrate on the histories and values that glue them with a common memory rather than those that divide them.

Cooper's (2007) story is different from Akpan's even though both writers are foreigners. The story describes an actual incitement of inter-ethnic murder and recalls Benson's (1986) observation that pioneer literary journals in Africa such as *Black Orpheus* and *Transition* were tools of Cold War patronage. Cooper's story describes the experiences of a beautiful but loose Luo girl called Alice Atieno Okoth as she travels from Nairobi to Marsabit Town in the marginalised North Eastern Province of Kenya to meet Stephen, a white seminarian priest and a friend of hers. The narrator depicts Alice as a sly liar who is hitchhiking a long ride where she is seated between two Kikuyu brother-drivers, Mugo and Karanja. It is instructive that the lorry which they travel in is delivering food aid to refugees in Marsabit. This contextual representation is apt in the sense that it captures the arid North Eastern Kenya's reliance on

relief food over the years. The beginning of the plot shows that Alice is initially closer to Mugo than to Karanja, and Mugo tells her, “You are a Luo. I told my brother that you looked like a Luo” (Cooper, 2007: 90). The plot of the story intensifies when the lorry reaches Isiolo Town and the wait at a police station roadblock for other vehicles to arrive so the police can give escort in the bandit-infested area of North Eastern Kenya. Coincidentally, it is in Isiolo where Alice alights to take a look at the police station and Karanja follows her as Mugo jealously looks on with the tacit intention of challenging Karanja’s dominance. Karanja tells Alice, “[Y]ou know what people say about Luos? ... They say you people really like sex. All the time. Even the women” (Cooper, 2007: 91). Karanja then has sex with Alice to test if the stereotype is factual and his brother feels betrayed. Later, it happens that Stephen is not around and Alice has to spend a night at a lodge in Marsabit Hotel when the lorry reaches its final destination. Apparently angry, Mugo enters Alice’s room and the two have a conversation in which Alice asks Mugo if he loves Karanja. Yet Mugo appears reluctant to answer the question, and Alice bluntly urges him to hate his brother by stating: “You hate him” (Cooper, 2007: 96). Under pressure, Mugo accepts that he indeed hates his brother. The narrator then intensifies Alice’s evil intention to plant rivalry between the two siblings by making the female Luo character tell Mugo, “So why don’t you kill him?” (Cooper, 2007: 96).

The plot shifts to the next day when the white seminarian, Stephen, arrives. A suggestion is made in the plot that Alice hates Marsabit so much that she cannot stay a minute longer and therefore she and her intended lover have to travel back to Nairobi. During the return journey, Alice’s gestures constantly remind the reader that she is a loose woman who wants Stephen to impregnate her and this therefore echoes the Kikuyu stereotype of Luo women as promiscuous. There is a sub-textual that while the two Kikuyu drivers love and help the surrounding Marsabit community by delivering relief food, Alice hates the community and its marginalised region. On the way, Alice and Stephen learn that Mugo has murdered Karanja in Marsabit Hotel. Alice lies to the police that she does not know about the case even though she is the inciter, which reiterates the Kikuyu stereotype of the Luo as liars. To Stephen, Alice only confirms her vengeful traits by observing, “I am glad that man [Karanja] is dead. It is the punishment of God for him to die and go to hell and burn and burn” (Cooper, 2007: 102) after which she enters her father’s Nairobi house in the Luo Langata Estate where she discovers that her bag has remained in Stephen’s car. Here again, she lies to her happy father that the bag has been stolen. Strong indications in the text suggest that Alice’s loose ways and evil nature have been inculcated in

her by her father and mother. Thus, the story ends with Alice using her Kikuyu stereotype of the Luo as sly and cunning to induce a Kikuyu character into killing his own brother.

It would be interesting to ponder the place of feelings of ethnic hatred and animosity created by Cooper's story in narrating the Kenyan nation as Bhabha (1990), Renan (1990), and Anderson (1983) suggest. I however note that Chapter Two of this thesis singled out American and Canadian contributors whose stories in *Kwani?* identify with and glorify the Kikuyu Mungiki Cult. This raises important concerns especially in view of the fact that *Kwani?* Journal receives most of its funding from the American Ford Foundation. The answer to the above concern might lie in what could be lost in a country where two African communities still jostle for power along the old but still-palpable rivalries of Communism (Luo) and Capitalism (Kikuyu) as Ligaga (2009) has explained. Related to this is the misleading scholarly excitement that swept through the Kenyan popular culture space shortly after *Kwani?* emerged and still equates the magnitude of youth convergence at the popular culture market to quality and versatility of the same (Nyairo, 2004; Musila, 2010; Maranga-Musonye, 2014). Odhiambo has specifically written:

Kwani? has been a site, an institution, a group of people, an idea that has not sought to displace what exists – as its detractors would say – but has wished to provoke something new. (*Daily Nation*, September 13, 2014)

My discussion attempted to establish the way in which *Kwani?* texts negotiate, rely on, appropriate, and re-deploy ethnic stereotypes as in Kenya's socio-political spaces. Perhaps Odhiambo's view above would have been more helpful had it explained exactly what "the new idea" in the journal is in relation to *Kwani?*'s treatment of ethnic stereotypes and how these impact imaginations around Kenya's nationhood.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to analyse how characterisation in *Kwani?* Journal mediates the presence of ethnic stereotypes in the Kenyan socio-political space and its impact on Kenya's nationhood and national belonging. That politics sometimes appropriates social stereotypes in contestations for power informed my assumption that the journal was responsive to the agent of ethnic stereotypes. The chapter found that most *Kwani?* writers are Kikuyu by name and

that, conversely, their writings contain a disproportionate number of Luo characters by name. The traits which Kikuyu *Kwani?* writers attribute to Luo and Kikuyu characters perpetuate the divisive ethnic stereotypes which date back to colonial and immediate post-independence times when respective leaders of the two communities adopted different political paths due to Cold War politics.

The chapter also found that *Kwani?* contributors from other Kenyan communities centre their writing around the imaginary difference between the Luo and the Kikuyu. In doing so, their writings intentionally denigrate Luo characters, those from these writers' own communities and elevate Kikuyu characters. These writers further appropriate and re-deploy against Luo characters those ethnic stereotypes that were colonially associated with their own communities. This, therefore, suggests either a level of 'editorial intrusion' or an unconscious response to the kind of character depiction that *Kwani?* Journal usually publishes. Much more intriguing is the fact that even non-Kenyan contributors to the journal also structure their characterisation according to the same Kikuyu/Luo formula.

The chapter therefore adopts the term "chameleon transnationalism" to explain what Odhiambo calls "transnationalism" in regard to *Kwani?* writing. What I mean is that Odhiambo is right to claim that the journal's writing is "transnational". Yet this is only in as far as some *Kwani?* writing comes from outside Kenya and these texts draw on issues that resonate with other parts of Africa and the world. On close analysis however, the reader discovers that even the so-called "transnational" foreign writers measure and balkanise Kenyan communities on the superior/inferior scale in the same way that Kenyan writers do. As such, a reader would need extraordinary intellectual hyper-subjectivity to not see the clear pattern of ethnic bias in *Kwani?* Journal's character construction – and this has a negative impact on the way Kenyan communities imagine themselves as members of the same national entity.

Endnotes

¹ The Kikuyu singers stereotyped all members of Kenya's Kamba community as prostitutes and dog-eaters at a time when President Uhuru Kenyatta was not on good terms with Mr. Kalonzo Musyoka, a prominent member of Kenya's opposition party National Super Alliance (NASA). A Kenyan politician later bailed out the singers.

² Tanzanian-Kenyan benga music founder D.O. Misiani once escaped arrest by fleeing to Tanzania during the Moi regime. Kenyan singer Osumba Rateng' was once arrested for his song, which decried the poor performance of the Kenyan economy. Two Kikuyu singers who composed a song, in the run up to Kenya's 2013 elections, which sang against the idea of an uncircumcised community leading Kenya were charged with hate speech against the Luo community.

³ Its context is the 1969 *uthamaki* ritual in President Kenyatta's Gatundu home where his Kikuyu and associated communities took a ritual oath to defend the presidency from the Luo, who are assumed to be uncircumcised.

⁴ A Luo politician who was aligned to Jomo Kenyatta and was assassinated in 1969.

⁵ Kiswahili word for 'a hoe'.

⁶ The ritual of widow inheritance and the fact that the Luo do not practise male circumcision, are sometimes cited as the two factors which worsened the HIV-AIDS scourge in Luoland.

⁷ Nyanza Province, which is inhabited by the Luo (the largest community in the province), Kisii, and Kuria communities, continues to make interesting headlines in regard to ethnic stereotypes. In early 2011, an informal night-runners' organisation in the Luo Homa Bay County appealed to the government to recognise and register their organisation.

⁸ Both writers observe that Nairobi's Pumwani Estate was a Kikuyu settlement and most of the buildings were lodges where, due to extremely difficult economic circumstances caused by colonial victimisation, Kikuyu women and girls resorted to prostitution.

⁹ It was the precursor to the Mau Mau. See Anderson (2005) on muggings, burglaries, atrocities and mass murders committed by this cult. Of course, the ethnic dimension to corruption cases in Kenya has generally tended to reinforce this stereotype.

¹⁰ On social media platforms and public political spaces, the Kikuyu sometimes accuse the Luo of bringing and spreading HIV-AIDS in Kenya in total disregard of the many AIDS orphans in Luoland. Hence, AIDS is viewed as a political disease in Kenya.

¹¹ Narratives of ethnic/regional marginalisation dominate debates on nationhood in Kenya. North Eastern, Coast, Nyanza, and some parts of Rift Valley province are always mentioned. The Somali, Mijikenda, Luo, and Turkana communities respectively inhabit the said regions.

¹² Luo names begin with letter 'O' (masculine) and 'A' (feminine).

¹³ For instance, Kenyan-Asians, Luhya, and Kisii of Western Kenya have traditionally voted for Luo presidential candidates.

¹⁴ Owiyo is the Luo singer of the famous 'Kisumu 100', a popular and successful song released and performed during the centenary celebration of the Luo city in 2001.

¹⁵ The term is used to refer to excessive pride and class, and is understood to dominate the Luo understanding of a good life.

¹⁶ Dr. Margaret Gachara was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment before President Kibaki pardoned her. Kibaki's action caused uproar in Luoland, the region most affected by HIV-AIDS in Kenya.

¹⁷ The Luo are Nilotic (believed to have migrated from Egypt along River Nile) while Kiswahili is a Bantu language influenced by Arab slave traders along the East African coast in earlier centuries. Most Luo struggle to master the basic structure. Other Nilotic communities such as Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana, Teso, and Pokot have a surprisingly better grasp of Kiswahili.

¹⁸ This came to a head in 2003 when Raila Odinga was the Minister for Public Works and Housing in President Mwai Kibaki's government. Luo tenants killed around thirteen people rumoured to have been Mungiki members sent to evict them from rental houses in Mathare North.

¹⁹ See David Goldsworthy's *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (1982) on how Britain gave Oginga Odinga a chance to be Kenya's first Prime Minister but the latter turned down the offer in favour of Kenyatta who was still in detention. This historical fact has morphed into a popular Kikuyu myth which stereotypes the Luo in the traditional African thinking of 'wasting one's luck' (because Oginga Odinga turned down the God-given offer) as having squandered their chance to lead, and therefore must never lead Kenya.

²⁰ Oginga Odinga passed on in 1994 and Raila Odinga inherited his father's political gravitas.

²¹ The Luo are generally bigger, taller, and darker than the Kikuyu due to anthropological differences. The Luo are traditional fishermen (protein) while the Kikuyu are land cultivators. This is visible in the 1952 'Kapenguria Six' photograph where Achieng Oneko (Luo) is way taller than his fellow Mau Mau prison inmates Jomo Kenyatta, Kung'u Karumba, Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai (all Kikuyu) and Paul Ngei (Kamba).

²² The term 'sitting allowance' was at one time used to describe the Luo female behind.

²³Raila's Orange Democratic Party (ODM) won 99 constituencies while Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU) managed only 43.

²⁴ A Kenyan stereotype holds that Luo men are consummate stone-throwers. The stereotype has been reinforced by the overtly violent behaviour of the fans of the predominantly Luo Kenyan Premier League team, Gor Mahia. These fans used to fight with AFC Leopards team (largely dominated by players from the Luhyia community) so regularly that it did not matter whether Gor lost or won. In recent years there have been claims that the Kenya Police intentionally incite Gor Mahia fans through altercations and throwing tear gas so as to reinforce the stereotype of Luo violence.

²⁵ Kibera is conceived of as a Luo settlement in the Kenyan popular imaginary even though the Kikuyu and other communities live there.

²⁶ Like Kenyan Somalis, Kenyan-Asians have historically been on very good terms with the Luo and a large Asian community lives in the main Luo city of Kisumu. The late Gama Pinto was the first post-independent Kenyan politician to be assassinated in 1965 and he leaned towards Oginga Odinga, Raila Odinga's father. The current two-term Member of Parliament for Kisumu East on Raila Odinga's party is a Kenyan-Asian called Mr. Shakeel Shabir. Before then he was the mayor of Kisumu City.

²⁷ There is a large Somali community in the Luo Nyanza Province. The current two-term Member of Parliament for Nyanza's Suna-East Constituency is a Somali called Junet Mohammed. He is an inner circle member of Raila Odinga's party and was the Mayor of the Luo Migori Town before entering politics.

CHAPTER 4 :

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KENYAN PRESIDENCY IN *KWANI?* JOURNAL

4.1 Introduction

Kenya has had four presidents since independence in 1963. These presidents attempted to balance between national and communal interests and each contributed to the definition of discourses on nationhood, which have been subjected to various interpretations by Kenyan popular media. The leaders, Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002), Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013) and Uhuru Kenyatta (2013 to date) ascended to power in contexts that involved last-minute convergence of inter-ethnic consensus. For instance, the current President, Uhuru Kenyatta, ascended to power after the 2013 elections partly because two Kenyan communities, which had fought in the 2007/2008 PEV, united for the common interests of their respective leaders.¹ These shared interests made it convenient for the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities to shelve the emotive issue of land, which historically divides both communities. Therefore, this chapter draws on the concept of ethnicities as a unit of analysis to examine how *Kwani?* Journal uses sex and its related tropes to depict and subvert the excesses of the Kenyan presidency within a context of inter-communal negotiations that usually precede national elections.

Some Kenyan scholars concur that the reason the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities united for the 2013 elections was the 2008 ICC charges levelled against Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto for the roles that they allegedly played in Kenya's 2007/08 violence (Kanyinga, 2013). Ruto was then a member of Raila Odinga's opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), while Uhuru had abdicated his role as opposition leader of Kenyan African National Union (KANU) and joined Mwai Kibaki's ruling Party of National Unity (PNU). Kanyinga (2013: 48) writes that "[t]wo of those indicted by the ICC [Uhuru and Ruto] exploited the numeric strength of their hitherto warring communities to form an alliance to win the March 2013 general election". The assumed aim of the joint electoral effort was to access the levers of state power and use the same to defeat the course of justice at The Hague.² What is important here is that popular analyses of the Uhuru regime tend to stress Uhuru's overall comparative youthfulness at the expense of actual performance. Thus, the chapter investigates how *Kwani?* uses youthfulness as a possible trope of sexual activity to negotiate the wider ideas of the presidency, ethnicity, and nationhood.

Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi, and Mwai Kibaki became presidents under unpredictable circumstances whose depiction in *Kwani?* Journal seems to allude to the ethnic contestations between Kenya's Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. Unlike Daniel Moi who assumed power at the comparatively younger age of 54, Jomo Kenyatta and Mwai Kibaki were in their seventies when they became presidents. However, popular Kenyan discourses construct Kenyatta as a revered father figure, and describe Kibaki as an aloof, fence-sitting³ but effective technocrat who helped grow Kenya's economy. *Kwani?* writing contrasts the successes of Jomo's and Kibaki's regimes against the failures of the Moi regime. This juxtaposition echoes Nyairo's (2004: 212) observation that the Redykulass⁴ comedian who lampooned Moi depicted him as "exceedingly dim-witted" in his mannerisms. Scholars and observers use this construction of the Kenyan Kalenjin presidency (Ajulu, 2002; Karimi and Ochieng, 1980) to describe Moi's submissive disposition before he became president. The unstated popular subtexts of these discourses further seem to associate Moi's comparative youthfulness with sexual activity and its possible deployment in the violation of the Kenyan political space, which is compared to a mistress. The foregoing analysis interrogates the ethnic dimensions of age, sexuality, and the Kenyan presidency, in relation to popular discourses portrayed in *Kwani?*.

The issue of ethnicity occupies a central position in discourses on political leadership in Kenya. It primarily focusses on how people assume that the tribe and character of a particular president determine their success or failure in national leadership. This popular tendency also inscribes an exclusivist approach to the presidency by denying and silencing the initial roles played by communities that do not hold power. This is especially so given the fact that "king-maker" Kenyan communities such as the Kalenjin and the Luo usually stake their claims to political power on the roles that they are perceived to have played in electing an incumbent president (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003). Therefore, one of the objectives of this chapter is to investigate how selected *Kwani?* texts use sexual tropes to depict salient claims to the presidency and state power, how the journal defines a "good" or a "bad" president, and how this definition is seen as a circulating text that might influence debates on the construction of national belonging in Kenya. The chapter also examines how the journal texts' use of the sexual trope in portraying each presidency's violent treatment of the opposition parties. This is informed by Anderson (1983: 150-167) who recognises the accommodation of divergent opinion as part and parcel of the building blocks of nationhood and national identity.

This chapter borrows from Anderson's (1983), Bhabha's (1990), and Renan's (1990) theorising on how polities become national identities over time. Anderson (1983) recognises

the role that literature plays in nation formation, particularly in literary creativity's power of collective depiction. The chapter considers *Kwani?* Journal a literary space where Kenya imagines her own nationhood and national identity, hence the analysis here, of how the journal constructs the four presidents with reference to sexualised depiction in relation to the leaders' ethnic affiliations. Following Anderson (1983), who stresses the importance of language and religion in nation formation, the study examines how *Kwani?*'s depiction of the four regimes can itself be viewed as a form of sub-textual "language", which tacitly calls on Kenyans to unite and overcome their ethnic differences. The analysis focuses on the different ways in which *Kwani?*'s unpacking of the brutal and sexualised excesses of the Kenyan presidency as a national institution might be equated to a collective national "language". The chapter finds out how the journal's depiction establishes points of contact between Kenya's disparate ethnicities and galvanises collective national thinking.

Similarly, the chapter incorporates Renan's (1990) view that past pain and collective compromise are vital agents of national rebirth. The chapter determines the extent to which *Kwani?*'s narration of sexualised negative experiences with the Kenyan presidency in past failures might be viewed as collective national failures rather than as shortcomings of the ethnic groups of respective presidents. I analyse *Kwani?* Journal's depiction and interpretation of past successes, such as the optimistic enactment of the 2010 Constitution⁵, which is viewed to have widened the country's democratic space. On one hand, the pigeon-holing of the sexualised deficiencies of the presidency into sub-national cleavages would imply that these weaknesses are ethnic rather than national concerns. On the other hand, foregrounding and attributing the successes of a particular regime to one ethnicity hardens the myth that only presidents from that community make good leaders. These ethnic-leadership myths might be used to either impose or alienate certain communities from national leadership, which then hinders the process of nation formation. Hence, the chapter examines how *Kwani?* Journal uses the trope of sex to negotiate Kenya's leadership myths in its publications.

The study further adopts Bhabha's (1990) notion of dissemination and in particular the notion of the need for a transmutable national narrative to analyse how selected *Kwani?* texts blur the ethnic identities of the four presidents and subsume these into the larger Kenyan nationhood. I examine how the journal's depiction of the achievements and excesses of the different regimes avoids the fixity of ethnic categories while acknowledging them as national challenges that need addressing. Since Kenya has had only Kikuyu and Kalenjin presidents, the chapter asks how *Kwani?* texts avoid the pitfall of attributing the successes and failures of the four

presidents to the two communities, thus avoiding the risk of hardening leadership stereotypes. The chapter adheres to Bhabha's (1990:5) view that "[n]ational traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation." Bhabha (1990) explains that it is this multiplicity of contesting views, forces, and narratives in the national space that congeals into a new constituted identity that is the nation. Hence, the chapter explores the extent to which *Kwani?* Journal's depiction and narration of the grotesque and sexualised excesses of the four presidencies destabilises long held notions and stereotypes on the Kenyan presidency. It finds out how the journal's depiction of these sexualised tropes argues for the forging of a new national identity that is a collage of affiliated Kenyan communities.

Finally, the chapter ties the broad theories on nationhood considered above with aspects of cultural theory, which revolve around subversion. Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the "phallographic" postcolonial state in relation to the "vulgar and the grotesque" is important here. Mbembe observes that

phallic domination has been all the more strategic in power relationships, not only because it is based on a mobilization of the subjective foundations of masculinity and femininity but also because it has direct, close connections with the general economy of sexuality. (Mbembe, 2001: 13)

I draw on Mbembe's idea to determine how *Kwani?* explores and exposes the sex lives of the four presidents. Following Mbembe, the chapter examines how *Kwani?* depictions of the four regimes' sexual obscenities might articulate popular culture's role of subverting the four regimes' performance of power. It relies on Barber's (2018) notion of popular subversion to examine how the texts considered here might be seen to apply guerrilla tactics to attack and disempower State hegemony. Thus, the chapter borrows from Fanon's (1961) concept of "bourgeois ideology" to analyse how the categories of class and ethnicity construct the Kenyan presidency as the preserve of a single class that relies on an ethnically exclusivist ideology to prolong its hold onto power. Fanon (1961: 55) observes that such linear visions of the national space exacerbate tribal feuds, which "[o]nly serve to perpetuate old grudges buried deep in the memory." Fanon's reference to memory echoes Renan's (1990) view of the role of collective national memory in nation formation. Thus, the study investigates whether *Kwani?* Journal's texts re-enact national or ethnic memory in their depiction of the Kenyan presidency. As Ligaga

(2008) observes in the case of Kenya, these old grudges may be in the form of national myths, which view leadership in ethnic terms and attribute positive qualities to some communities, while ascribing denigrating traits to the others. The chapter unpacks further how selected *Kwani?* texts represent the narration of the ideology that only the Kikuyu community is entitled to rule the nation in its publications in view of Kenya's leadership myths involving the Kikuyu and Kalenjin presidents, and how such literary depictions link with discourses on nationhood in the Kenyan political imaginary. Ultimately, the chapter focuses on the four important questions: how do selected *Kwani?* Journal texts depict the sexual character of the four regimes? How do selected *Kwani?* Journal texts portray the political and economic successes and failures of the respective regimes? How does the depiction relate to the ethnicity of the presidents in question? And, how might such depiction influence the narration of a collective national identity in Kenya?

4.2 Background: Class, Ethnicity, and Presidential Performance

Scholars differ in their interpretation of the Kenyan presidency's tolerance to alternative views, economic performance, appropriation and deployment of state violence, and the intensity of dictatorial tendencies in each regime. Kanyinga (2013) views history, class, and ethnicity as bearing a significant influence on the nexus between Kenya's democratisation process and the land question over the decades. He observes that the land problem in Kenya started with British colonisers who forcibly alienated African land, thereby rendered the Kenyan population a source of cheap labour for European farms. The fact that the land redistribution process after independence was skewed in favour of the rich political class meant that people from whom the initial land had been taken did not eventually access it. Lack of access to land is therefore a collective national injustice that needs to be confronted in order to crafting a sense of nationhood (Anderson, 1983). In addition, Kanyinga (2013) observes that addressing the question of land ownership remains an integral pillar of confronting nationhood in Kenya, since political violence in the country historically revolves around this natural resource.

The above Kanyinga view is tied to the respective presidential families' benefitting from state land at the expense of ordinary Kenyans. Hornsby (2012) acknowledges the initial failure of Jomo Kenyatta's first regime, particularly how ethnic preference interfered with the process of land distribution, but points out that the problem of class and ethnicity in Kenya can be traced back to the colonial times. *Kwani?* Journal contributes to Kenya's nationhood through its

engagement with stories about land concerning the Kikuyu and the Mijikenda at the Kenyan Coast in *Kwani?* 08 (2015). Hornsby (2012) shows that President Kenyatta's favouritism of his Kikuyu community was a historical re-enactment of how the British colonial regime sustained a mythology of land, which attributed its rightful ownership to the white minority. Similarly, Ogot (2003) singles out Jomo Kenyatta as an ineffective leader who laid the foundation of the ethnic Kenyan state. Ogot (2003) postulates further that building a sense of nationhood in Kenya ought to involve the process of confronting weaknesses of the first Kenyatta regime.

There also exists opposing contestations, which view Kenya's second regime as having been far worse than the first. Atieno-Odhiambo's (2009) analysis foregrounds the failures of the Moi regime over Kenyatta's and points out that, while Moi followed Kenyatta's "nyayo" (Kiswahili for "footsteps")⁶ in the skewed sharing of national resources, Moi's second regime also entrenched a culture of intolerance to alternative opinion⁷ in Kenya's political psyche. Yet it is important to observe, as Hornsby (2012) suggests that, all the four regimes exist/ed in different epochs and the degree to which each performed both in terms of their micro- and macro-economic policies, as well as human rights records, were possibly influenced by global trends. These regional and global forces include the 1973 Oil Crisis, the collapse of the East African Community in 1977, the 1970s and mid-1980s boom in foreign aid and Kenya's coffee production, which created the impression that Kenya had a vibrant economy, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1991 that witnessed the end of the Cold War. Therefore, the way *Kwani?* Journal narrates the story of the Kenyan presidency to craft nationhood within the context of the presidents' class, ethnicities, and the above tumultuous occurrences (Anderson, 1983; Renan, 1990) is important to this discussion.

Cheeseman (2009) takes a nuanced position on the economic and political performance of respective Kenyan regimes and especially, their commitment to democratisation. Cheeseman (2009) explains that the Jomo Kenyatta regime was "neo-patrimonial" and "clientelist" rather than "dictatorial", and therefore more oppressive and nepotistic⁸ than all subsequent regimes. This underscores the way nepotism has dominated national discourses in the Kenyan space under all the four regimes. Even though the Kibaki tenure is sometimes viewed as having been technocratic and the least encumbered with socio-political vices that hinder the efficiency of state bureaucracy, recent revelations show how President Kibaki influenced the illegal appropriation of Ksh20m (\$200 000) to fund two of his nephews' children who were going to study in Australia (*The Standard* October 2, 2018). These allegations consistently puncture the

myth that ethnicity and nepotism are problems associated with the Jomo Kenyatta and Moi regimes and attest to the fact that both (Wamwere, 2008), are systemic national problems, which are not determined by the ethnicity of the president in power.

The intense ethnic authoritarianism, which Kenya has experienced since independence, makes it difficult to name the country's mode of democracy. Mustapha (2009) classifies Kenya as a "liberal autocracy" alongside specific African countries such as Zambia. Larmer (2009) shows that the ethno-autocratic forces that have shaped Zambia's political trajectory over the decades usually operate along the same lines as Kenya's and exhibit similar hiccups. Mustapha and Whitfield (2009) explain that Kenya and Zambia are actual autocracies, which employ the charade of regular elections to mask their undemocratic tendencies. This, however, does not deny credence to the fact that Kenya's Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta regimes are generally considered more democratic than the first two, even if deceptively so.⁹ Nor does it excuse the sometimes purely subjective decisions the respective regimes make where regional preferences are evident concerning reliable road networks and national government support of cash crops and public education.¹⁰ Thus, *Kwani?* Journal's depiction of the strengths and weaknesses of the four regimes might disrupt and neutralise the ethnically rigid ways in which Kenya's popular media and discourses often conceive of the presidency.

The omission of the Ngoroko Affair in *Kwani?* writing is one of the interesting silences on class, ethnicity, and presidential performance in Kenyan popular discourses on national leadership. The nine issues published between 2003 and 2015 capture Kenya's 1982 coup attempt, which the journal overtly attributes to the Luo community as a whole, even though there are pointers to the involvement of the Kikuyu. Karimi and Ochieng (1980) outline that the Ngoroko special police force numbered about 250 Kikuyu (95 per cent) policemen with sophisticated weapons, which were diverted mainly from the Kenya Army. The special force took orders directly from its Kikuyu founder in collaboration with GEMA leaders in President Kenyatta's inner circle, and was based in the Rift Valley Province's Nakuru Town where Kenyatta was planned to die. Vice-President Moi (a Kalenjin) and his Kikuyu allies such as Mwai Kibaki and Attorney General Charles Njonjo were supposed to be killed so that a conservative Kikuyu from the Kiambu District could succeed Kenyatta. It is unlikely that *Kwani?* is unaware of the Ngoroko Affair on Kenya's history since Maliti's "An Interview with Philip Ochieng" in *Kwani? 08* (2015) makes a muted reference to Karimi and Ochieng's book, arguably Kenya's most authoritative text on the Ngoroko Affair. This bold omission represents *Kwani?*'s missed opportunity to act as a palliative agent in the narration of Kenya's

nationhood and national belonging by failing to name and mediate situations of violence in the national space. It therefore makes the “Kikuyu-led” secret police a more legitimate form of state contestation than the “Luo-led” 1982 coup attempt. The narrative omission of the Ngoroko Affair possibly stereotypes the Luo as an anti-democratic section of the Kenyan society as Ligaga (2009) points out in her analysis, and hinders the process of nation formation.

The above *Kwani?* silence on the Jomo Kenyatta regime’s Ngoroko Affair cements the myth that Kenya’s first president was a wise, benevolent, and effective leader who presided over a peaceful nation. However, the perception that Kenyatta was a “natural leader” is difficult to sustain (Cheeseman, 2009). This is evident in Nyairo’s (2004: 212) description of President Moi as “a crafty but ruthless politician, exceedingly dim-witted but nonetheless authoritarian.” Nyairo also neatly detaches Moi’s ruthlessness from the ethos of the Jomo Kenyatta era. Furthermore, Hornsby (2012) observes that Kenya’s General Service Unit (GSU) police was predominantly Kikuyu during the first regime and that Jomo Kenyatta surrounded himself with a ruthless all-Kikuyu “Ichaweri” bodyguard unit that terrorised Kenyans until the president’s death in 1978. In my view, the rubric of a “natural leader”, which Kenyatta is rumoured to have fulfilled and that *Kwani?* Journal espouses in most of its texts, carries with it the fundamental ability of such a leader to accept their own transient mortality as did Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela. Karimi and Ochieng (1980) write that Kenyatta did not personify the selfless acceptance of the inevitability of death, since he was Kenya’s life-president since 1974. Therefore, Karimi and Ochieng’s view of Kenyatta’s own humbling senility at the time of the ageing president’s death is what might have contributed to the emergence of the Ngoroko police:

[h]is [Jomo Kenyatta’s] mind had become that of a toddler and that it was, therefore, extremely easy to play around with and confuse it [...] the Old Man “looked like a ghost”. Kenyatta [...] faltered in speech, was incoherent some of the time and often could not remember things which had just taken place.

(Karimi and Ochieng, 1980: 163)

Like Nyairo (2004) above, *Kwani?*’s construction of a negative image of the Moi regime on one hand, and a positive one of Jomo Kenyatta, Mwai Kibaki, and Uhuru Kenyatta, on the other, is recognisable in the journal’s treatment of Kenya’s involvement in internal war situations such as the Shifta War. Renan (1990) observes that national identities converge when

the nation decides to memorialise past tragedies such as war. This happens when the nation acknowledges that war is pain. It is thus interesting that *Kwani?* does not name war situations, which happened outside the Moi regime – unless it is the Mau Mau war. The journal is silent on the 1964 army mutiny in Lanet Barracks, the 1971 attempted coup, and the 1975 Nairobi bombings, all of which threatened the Kenyatta regime. Another muted occurrence is the 2008 Mount Elgon operation where the international media accused the Mwai Kibaki regime of gross human rights violations. Conversely, *Kwani?* presents a commendable and detailed analysis of the 2012-2013 Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) problem at the Kenyan Coast in *Kwani?* 08. The MRC began as a civil society, which was founded to address the perennial land problem in Kenya's Coast Province. However, the government later vilified and banned the grouping because of its ethnic militancy against mainland Kenyans, and also due to MRC's alleged links to Al-Shabaab terrorism in Kenya's neighbour, Somalia. Thus, it is possible that the question of ethnicity informs *Kwani?* Journal's coverage of land issues at the coast, since a popular national rumour holds that a majority of Kenya's mainland communities that corruptly acquired land at the coast are Kikuyu. Even so, it can be said that the journal's detailed analysis of the issue at the Kenyan Coast is an important way through which *Kwani?* attempts to open up dialogue on Kenya's historical and sensitive land problem.

Kwani? Journal's most visible silence on Kenya's trajectory of war is the Shifta War that occurred during the Jomo Kenyatta presidency in which the army killed 3 000 Kenyans (Hornsby, 2012) mainly from the Somali ethnic group. This is particularly curious, since all nine issues of *Kwani?* make direct references to the Mau Mau war, which still remains a traumatic experience in the Kikuyu collective memory. Hornsby (2012) writes that the Kenyatta regime ironically employed anti-Mau Mau tactics against the Kenyan Somalis that included forced villagisation, livestock confiscation and the poisoning of communal wells. Two important points can be noted here. The first is that both Mau Mau (1952-1956) and Shifta (1963-1967) wars ran for four years each. The second point is that there are Somali writers who regularly contribute to *Kwani?* Journal from abroad. Interestingly, the constant theme in these Somali writers' texts is homosexual and lesbian sex. Diriye Osman's (2010) "Earthling" is a short story about the haunting conditions in which a psychotic lesbian girl called Zeytun lives. This is one way through which *Kwani?* Journal positively disrupts normative definitions of sex. Yet it is still possible to raise questions of authenticity regarding how Kikuyu contributors to *Kwani?* find it easier to memorialise the Kikuyu community's collective experience of the Mau Mau war, than Somali contributors do the Shifta war, when both wars lasted for four

years. The fact that the Shifta war is more recent than the Mau Mau war makes the former even more readily available for literary treatment than the latter. Therefore, the relevant question arises on what reason informs the journal's silence on the Shifta war, and how this interesting omission impacts our understanding of Kenya's nationhood and national identity.

This finally brings me to the *Kwani?* writing around national security, familial and presidential sex situated in Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta's regimes. The term "Artur" lives on in the Kenyan socio-political imaginary and refers to a hired goon or mercenary. It originated in the 2006 Kenyan political space when two Armenian mercenaries and drug lords led a section of the Kenya Police and attacked the offices of *The Standard* newspapers in March 2006, purportedly on the orders of a government minister (*Daily Nation*, 13 March 2006). Focussing on the same, Hornsby writes that

Their house [the Arturs'], when raided by reluctant police, uncovered police and Presidential Escort weapons and materials, and evidence that one of them had been appointed as deputy police commissioner with unrestricted access to sensitive installations. (Hornsby, 2012: 744)

The heist was ostensibly to stop the publication of a story on the smuggling of cocaine into Kenya. A popular rumour about "The Artur Brothers" referred to their connection to Mwai Kibaki's second wife, and to their private liaison with Kibaki's daughter. The second rumour linked the Armenians to a plot by the Kibaki government to assassinate Raila Odinga. It is interesting that no *Kwani?* Journal issue captures the Artur saga even though the term endures in Kenyans' everyday imaginary, and represents the contested way in which the Kenyan nation attempts to confront and overcome its challenges (Anderson, 1983) across different epochs. However, it might be possible that no *Kwani?* writer has chosen to fictionalise the Artur saga the way Parselelo Kantai's *Kwani?* short story, "The Cock Thief" (2009), does the Moi regime's sexual drama.

Perhaps President Mwai Kibaki's embarrassing family drama referred to above would ordinarily not escape a popular culture product that claims any contact with the Kenyan popular space. This is seen in how editorial cartoons in Kenya's daily newspapers regularly captured King Mswati and Jacob Zuma's controversial marriages, as well as the marital drama that surrounded President Kibaki's family. Kibaki's first wife, Lucy, demanded recognition as the president's only wife when the Kenyan rumour held that Kibaki had two wives (*IOL News* 12

January 2004). President Kibaki eventually obliged by publicly announcing that he had only one wife. Most Kenyans concluded that Lucy had mental health issues after she slapped a journalist and refused to greet the Kenyan State House Comptroller in public, and the media wisely gave Lucy a blackout towards the end of her life. The only reference *Kwani?* makes to Lucy Kibaki's public tantrums, which were pre-emptive of Grace Mugabe in Zimbabwe, is in Gathara's (2008: 35) mute picture of President Kibaki's wife in *Kwani? 05 Twin Edition Part-2*, and in Wainaina's silenced newspaper reproductions of Lucy's drama in "The Life of Mzee Ondego" (2010). Lucy's thick lips, knotted forehead, melancholic look, and intrusive face in the picture summarise the humorously repulsive source of laughter she had become to most Kenyans. Similarly, the *Kwani?* oeuvre plays its popular culture role by potently lampooning the presidential realm in the Moi regime through pointing out, naming, mocking, and deflating the presidency's compromised domestic situation. This suggests how the Moi regime is over-fictionalised, while Jomo, Kibaki, and Uhuru's tenures are under-represented in *Kwani?* publications. Thus, the agent of ethnicity might be a factor in the journal's commentary on the Kenyan presidency as a national institution.

The Uhuru regime also has past moments of embarrassing familial and presidential sex. No *Kwani?* issue refers to Uhuru Kenyatta's tenure in 2015, when the then controversial Devolution and Planning cabinet secretary was accused of grand corruption. It might be observed that these silences on the shortcomings of the Uhuru presidency cultivate a false image of Uhuru's reign, and therefore complicate the nation's attempt to confront its weaknesses. Uhuru's tenure witnessed the ruthless deployment of police to opposition areas in election times and this came out in the police murder of the six-months old Baby Pendo (*The Standard* 15 February 2019) during the 2017 elections. Baby Pendo's murder reverberated in the Kenyan national psyche and confirmed Mbembe's (2001: 201) observation that "[p]ower, in the postcolony, is carnivorous." It showed the indiscriminate way in which political violence becomes illogical, dominates the national space and repels genuine nation formation.

There have been popular contestations on the nature and fairness of political leadership in the Kenyan social imaginary (Musila, 2008), specifically with regard to the presidency. The disproportionate relationship between the country's presidency and the question of ethnic representation might be the reason behind these debates. In this case, and as I have shown above, the Kikuyu community is generally perceived to have dominated the Kenyan presidency. While it is true that the interplay between class and ethnic cleavage (Fanon, 1961) prevents the fruits of incumbency associated with the presidency from trickling down to the

poor majority of the community in power, this phenomenon raises important issues on how popular culture texts challenge official metanarratives (Nyairo, 2004) even though they might sometimes appear ethnic. Thus, Nyairo's observation that the Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji's song, *Unbwogable*, subverted autocracy and exclusion by simultaneously speaking to two publics (the ethnic and the national) during the Moi regime, is relevant. Therefore, this study also argues that *Kwani?* Journal's texts situated within a specifically Kikuyu context and space (Fabian, 1997) speak to national concerns through their ridicule and subversion (Mbembe, 2001) of the leadership vulgarity and grotesqueness of the postcolony.

Various studies examine how Kenyan communities define themselves in relation to the presidency and nationhood (Ogude, 2003; Nyairo, 2004; Odhiambo, 2005; Siundu, 2007). Regime comparisons which foreground lines of ethnic delineation in turn lend themselves to the idea of group "otherness" (Said, 1978) and form the ideological basis for communal myths and stereotypes that relate to national leadership in Kenya (Ligaga, 2009). Hence, popular exchanges about the presidency might inform the way *Kwani?* Journal depicts the familial and sexual aspects of the Kenyan presidency in so far as the journal appears to subvert Mbembe's (2001) notion of the "phallographic" postcolonial state.

The above indicates that *Kwani?* Journal's writing, particularly that narrating the character of the presidency across Kenya's four regimes, seems to speak to the way class, ethnic ideology, and silencing impact imaginations about nationhood. The performance of each regime is connected to the politics of ethnicity as a dominant agent in discourses on nationhood in Kenya. This relates to national literature and popular culture as important spaces through which postcolonial nations contest questions of identity (Anderson, 1983; Fabian, 1997).

The next section examines how selected texts in *Kwani?* Journal invade the sexual sphere (Mbembe, 1997) of respective regimes and presidents, and the linkage with ethnicity and nationhood. The section also analyses the ways in which presidential sex mirrors a deep-seated source of national violence, in the same way that violence might echo patriarchal categorisation (Van Huffel, 2011).

4.3 The Presidential Bedroom in *Kwani?* Journal

Ogude (2007) notes that the sexual space in Kenya is one of the most contested sites where communal creators of literature and popular culture construct discourses on the nation and

national leadership. This echoes Mbembe's (2001: 127) ideas on the link between sex and the postcolony in which "[t]he ecstasy of the organs [...] characteristic of an economy of pleasure may be seen as an integral part of a larger world." This is particularly true with the cultural practices among the Luo community in western Kenya. Here, the social baggage of the practice of 'ter' (widow inheritance) still looms large, with the demeaning trope of the male widow inheritor employed in novels and popular music texts such as Ohangla and Benga genres (both genres of Luo music incorporate short self-praises, which depict the wife inheritor as a social parasite who comes to exploit the widow). Ligaga (2008) articulates this point as well in her analysis of Kenyan radio plays, many of which castigated the practice of widow inheritance among the Luo. The low opinion of the practice of widow inheritance is treated in Luo-centred texts such as Margaret Ogola's *The River and The Source* (1994) and Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986), where the female protagonists, Akoko and Paulina respectively, battle against the shackles of patriarchy. Ogude (2007) observes that the late D.O. Misiani's Benga song, 'Rainbow' (2002)¹¹ satirises President Moi as an inheritor who preyed on Jomo Kenyatta's widow, Mama Ngina Kenyatta. Ogude (2007:190) suggests that, "[w]ife inheritance, especially outside the family circle, is often left to deranged men who have made a profession out of wife inheritance and are simply following their greed." Hence, performing sex in an inherited space is both a subtle pointer to a man's mental depravity and associated with individual greed, which makes one unsuitable to hold high office.

Mbembe (2001) further theorises the nature of postcolonial disruptions and establishes a link between state performance of sex and national violence. Mbembe compares state brutality to the violence of the male genitalia, which can be conceived of as "[t]he violence of the penis that 'makes' a hole in a woman is indistinguishable from that of the gun that dangles and awaits its prey" (2001: 158). Mbembe's statement on sex and violence alludes to Bakhtin's (1981) concept of "the unsaid" about sex and state violence, and to how *Kwani?* negotiates this relationship in the case of nationhood in Kenya. The perceived sensitive nature of the topic of sex and sexuality necessitates the use of the term "slippages of silence" (Clyne, 2019). Hence, the concern here with investigating the extent to which these silences occur in the journal and how their possible presence in relation to the ethnicities of respective presidents in Kenya impacts the narration of nationhood.

Muriungi (2004:291) notes that sexuality is "a domain of morality showing how competing moral discourses about sex [...] coexist within the Kenyan space." The observation is important to this chapter in that it alludes to, and attaches certain normative moral codes to the actual

mechanics of sexual intercourse and to those who perform it. Since the theme of sex is generally regarded as secretive and even sacred, the mere fact that *Kwani?* Journal adopts sexual commentary in its depiction of state power counts as a subversive act (Weeks, 1985) against Kenyan officialdom. *Kwani?*'s peering into the sexual behaviour of the presidency means that the journal desecrates the sanctity of sex and state power by laying both bare for public discussion and ridicule. Thus, the denudation of the sacred theme of sex in the journal goes against society's totalising strictures of secrecy on sex, about which Foucault (1976:84) observes, "[T]o deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex." *Kwani?* Journal's creation of a discursive topic out of the sexual behaviour of the presidency breaks the walls of instinctive inhibitions, which surround sex and leadership. Thus, the journal encourages the ordinary public to question the weaknesses of national leadership in Kenya.

Kwani? texts that focus on the Kenyan presidency capture the sense in which society views sexual licentiousness as symptomatic of state authoritarianism or as being antithetical to good leadership as shown in Kantai's short story, "The Cock Thief" (2009). This story re-enacts a recurrent rumour that circulated during the Daniel Arap Moi presidency and foregrounds Moi by imagining what Ogola (2007:86) terms as an "immediate exegetical context", which teems with Moi's sexual shadow. The text narrates the story of the character, Naiguran, a driver of the "Old Man", a term that alludes in the popular imaginary, to President Daniel Arap Moi, and the president's loyal driver for many years who decides to steal the ruling party's golden cock symbol while the Old Man is on an international visit to Sudan. Naiguran escapes by night across Kenya's border into Uganda. The story employs satire, which Musila (2010: 295) identifies in Kenyan popular culture as the act of "unmasking of state power, the fracturing of the culture of fear, and [...] a culture of critique of the workings of state power." The symbol of the ruling KANU party at the time was a 'cock', but the title of the story can be read as an ironic pun on Moi's phallus, which the Magawulana-like (Manase, 2007) protagonist character steals and runs away with, thereby humorously emasculating Moi's dictatorial testosterone of power. Thus, Naiguran transforms himself from an ordinary low-class citizen to a super-hero who subverts Moi's autocratic tendencies.

Kantai's story also mocks state power by exposing its sexual vulnerabilities, which even supposedly powerless citizens like Naiguran exploit. The narrator's reference to female pupils in the story alludes to Moi's alleged clandestine sexual relationships with female school heads

and high school students, which circulated in the form of rumour in the 1980s and 1990s. Kantai's story captures the lewd and lecherous aspects of the Moi regime and deflates the president by bringing him down to the level of the ordinary Kenyan man. The reader becomes aware of this reversal of roles by anticipating how the Old Man will find that he has been outwitted when he returns from the international visit. Mbembe (2001: 112) alludes to this symbolic act by observing that "[T]he penis of 'His Excellency,' too, turns out to be no more than a peasant's, unable to resist, amid the aromas of everyday life, the scents of women." Thus, the president's involvement in parasitic sex with schoolgirls demeans the image of his public persona and denies his office the clout that it conjures in the minds of the citizenry.

The main setting of Kantai's story is a school choir performance at a function presided over by the president. The narrator uses innuendo, symbolism, and metaphors, which revolve around school choirs and their popular association with public loyalty during the era of President Moi.¹² The narrator's description of the scene glorifies the metaphors of power, which include Moi's infamous 'Fimbo ya Nyayo' (literally, 'the Nyayo stick') and therefore bestows magical properties on the short staff that the president used to carry. This is visible in the audience's sense of awe created by the sight of the majestic stick in the president's hand. It then suggests a subtle allusion to the president's penis, and echoes Mbembe's (2001: 110) observation that "[T]he male ruler's pride in possessing an active penis has to be dramatised, through sexual rights over subordinates [which is] one pillar upholding the reproduction of the phallocratic system". The narrator's belief in Moi's talismanic powers comes out in his dramatic description of how his uncle submissively conducts the school choir before the president. The narrator tacitly draws the reader's attention to the fact that his uncle has no mind of his own when the choir performs. The narrator achieves this by showing how Uncle Mpeti was "[g]esticulating like a mad man to prove his undying loyalty to the Old Man [...] shouting and ad-libbing the Old Man's praises over the tender sopranos of the little girls [...] The little girls were replaced by bigger girls" (Kantai, 2009: 29). The repetition of "the little girls" plays on the association of the predatory tendencies of the president on school girls and the unquestioning loyalty, which Naiguran shows towards the president. This allusive dramatisation of predatory sex and its contamination of school children foregrounds Moi's devalued reputation as an unsuitable national leader whose immoral character taints the apex of national leadership.

Kantai's "The Cock Thief" (2009) also alludes to the popular Kenyan rumour about how President Moi separated from his wife in the 1970s by projecting a feared but wifeless ruler, and whose public morality is therefore questionable in regard to leadership. The social

construction of the ideal leader as a responsible family man/woman renders Moi's ambiguous marital status a stain on his claim to leadership. The potency of popular culture's ridicule of Moi's wifelessness was easy to see in the president's gender nervousness, which formulated an unwritten rule that cabinet ministers were prohibited to flaunt their spouses in the national space (Nyairo, 2004). Nyairo further explains that the above perception was so entrenched in the people's popular imaginary that many Kenyans immediately recognised how the most overt marker of difference between Moi and Kibaki's regimes was the fact that the latter allowed ministers and their assistants to be accompanied by their spouses to public functions. While tracing the circumstances surrounding Moi's wifelessness, Hornsby goes on to explain that

[A]t a New Year's Eve dance on 31 December 1973, there was a public crisis [...] either Lena [Moi's wife] refused to dance with Kenyatta [...] or Moi chose to take another woman onto the dance floor. [...] a furious row ensued in front of Kenyatta [...] Moi banished Lena to a farm in the Rift Valley, where she was kept securely for 25 years. He spent the next three decades as a bachelor. (Hornsby, 2012: 259)

Kantai's story echoes Moi's embarrassing marital circumstances by showing not only the way in which Old Man adores his own sense of power, but he also feels socially harried by the public nature of the function constructed in the setting. This is observable in Old Man's overt self-consciousness at the public function as he sees the school choir performing in his sole honour, an act that is laced with his own despotism and sexually predatory eye. This relates to the subversion of the normative state's authoritarianism by engaging in what Mbembe (2001) describes as the embarrassing nature of the autocrat's 'coital bonus' in Cameroonian cartoons. Mbembe (2001) centres on the anatomical vulgarity of sex and depicts the autocrat as a powerful weapon with which popular culture deconstructs state dictatorship in cartoons, and writes that Cameroonian cartoons capture an image of the autocrat in nude and compromising situations. Thus, Mbembe (1997: 155) describes the president as "the autocrat, pushed forward like a ball, knows how to moan with pleasure and letting it all hang out". The importance of the picture that Mbembe paints is that it portrays the autocrat in a position of virtual powerlessness, which then undercuts and loosens the autocrat's symbolic hold onto national power as "The Cock Thief" (2009) seems to do. Musila's (2008) analysis alludes to this presidential embarrassment by referring to the possible criminality of a section of Moi's family

in her findings, where one of Moi's sons is allegedly implicated in the murder of the British tourist, Julie Ward. Although Kantai's story is a satirical rendition of an idealised image of the late 1980s' Moi regime, its popular effectiveness is denied balance and de-ethnicised potency by the fact that there are no *Kwani?* stories that refer to the embarrassing domestic circumstances of Kenya's other three regimes. Thus, ethnicity seems to inform the above selective 'trap' in *Kwani?*'s depiction of the presidency and inflames the seams of the nation (Bhabha, 1990) by elevating a section of the national collective (Kikuyu presidents) while denigrating the "other" (Kalenjin president). The point here is that while writers have the freedom to choose their material, Bhabha's (1990) proposition implies that the question of bias comes into focus, especially in contexts where varied ethnic sub-nations occupy the national space. There is a sense in which "The Cock Thief", which is a potent commentary on the sexual and familial aspect of dictatorship, might be viewed as an indulgent obsession with the Moi regime in the same way that Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) might be.

Kwani? Journal's deployment of sexual impropriety to subvert state power in Kantai's "The Cock Thief" bears affinity with the trend of possible ethno-nationalism as suggested above, and in pre-Mau Mau Kikuyu journals as Pugliese (2003) shows. Pugliese (2003) observes that pre-Mau Mau Kikuyu journals drew an ethnic boundary between not only the Kikuyu and the Luo, as my discussion also pointed out in Chapter Three in the case of *Kwani?* Journal, but also between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin community. Barber's (1997) and Fabian's (1997) view that popular culture texts are usually protean in nature, and tend to renew and re-traditionalise over time is evident in the way that the journal uses the depiction of the presidency to achieve the aims of problematic pre-Mau Mau journals. It is important to note that the narrative trajectory of pre-Mau Mau journals as it relates to discussions on Kenya's nationhood is as potentially divisive today as it was in the 1950s' Kenya.

While writing about the regenerative aspects of Kenyan popular texts, Cloete (2007: 76) observes that "[t]he fact that it [the Bear] has evaded capture and scientific classification during the colonial era, has enabled it to move backwards and forwards from the realms of reality into mythology and legend insinuating itself into new, unregulated, and flexible forms of popular culture." Echoing Cloete's observation here, *Kwani?*'s depiction of the Kenyan presidency as captured in Kantai's "The Cock Thief" (2009) entrenches an ethnic mythology by eliding weaknesses associated with Kenya's Kikuyu presidents while focussing on the flaws of a Kalenjin president. This possibly denies the nation a chance to confront all the challenges of its presidency and therefore stymies the process of nation formation. The literary lapse in the

selective use of presidential sexual embarrassment leaves certain aspects of the Kenyan leadership uninterrogated, inspiring no attempt to address the wrongs therein. It therefore runs contrary to Anderson's (1983) suggestion that the nation needs to engage in an honest appraisal of all aspects of its inter-communal life (Hornsby, 2012) as represented here in the historical relationship between sex, ethnicity, the presidency, and leadership violence in Kenya.

However, Hornsby's (2012) placing of the origins of the sex/leadership failure in the Jomo Kenyatta regime might be misleading since it does not extend far enough. The dominance of ruling class sex in the Kenyan popular space might be a carryover from elite white culture. Ruark (1955), Anderson (2005) and Elkins (2005) show that Kenya's Naivasha Town was the epicentre of colonial promiscuity. As a result, it is possible that this colonial culture may have rubbed on the collective psyche of the Kenyan ruling elite in a way resonating with Fanon's (1961: 47) theory that the postcolonial bourgeoisie usually displays "[t]he manners and forms of thought picked up during their association with the colonialist bourgeoisie". That the socio-political association of sexual immorality with leadership failure in *Kwani?* journal surfaces only in the journal's depiction of the Moi regime suggests the element of ethnicity, since Moi has been the only non-Kikuyu Kenyan president. The depiction also risks stereotyping Moi's Kalenjin community as unfit for political leadership, and partly confirms Barber's (1997) observation that elite ideology sometimes seeps into popular culture production. The portrayal of the failure of presidential sexuality and its association with only the Kalenjin presidency in Kenya borders on the essentialist practice of ethnic profiling and runs against Bhabha's (1990) advice. Bhabha's point that the process of narrating the nation avoids stereotyping practices that freeze the margins of sub-national identities and attribute leadership qualities to the "self" and not to the "other" (Said, 1978) is relevant here. This leads me to the next section, where I examine *Kwani?*'s depiction of political violence as a sexual metaphor.

4.4 Presidential powers, sex and state violence

State violence bears a psychic connection with sexual performance. While identifying this relationship as one of the characteristics of the postcolony, Mbembe (2001: 148) defines the 'potentate' as "[t]hat form of exercise of domination that combines brutal fantasy, convulsive and noisy laughter, and endless exchange of pain and pleasure between agents and victims – in short, orgiastic enjoyment of power." This interpretation of the relationship between sex and psychic violence as an orgy implies the presence of the dominator and dominated, and sees the

subjugated body of the state in terms of a woman. As Okech shows in the context of Kenya, the political sphere is a militaristic and phallocratic space where

statements such as *Kama wewe ni dume* (If you are a bull) – references to uncircumcised men as ‘unprepared’ for leadership – as well as instances of forced circumcision during the post-election crisis form part of a larger process of producing violent heterosexual masculinities as key to state-building. (Okech, 2019: 8)

Musandu (2019) weighs in on the foregoing and identifies the historical prevalence of gender bias in the Kenyan political representation to forces, which stem from the androcentric nature of colonial domination as well as patriarchal African culture. She concludes by observing that, “[W]omen’s struggle for balanced political representation in Kenya and elsewhere has been an uphill climb because it is a struggle against deep seated socio-cultural gender biases and the attendant politico-economic marginalisation of the female” (2019: 602–603). Thus, gender bias in the Kenyan political arena becomes a trope for state violence and ties to Mbembe’s (2001) formulation above that speaks to the way in which the potentate demands total obedience from the collective citizenry.

The idea of citizen submission to state violence results from what Mbembe (2001: 13) defines as “[t]he individual male’s ability to demonstrate his virility at the expense of a woman and to obtain its validation from the subjugated woman herself.” Baaz and Stern (2013: 42) acknowledge the foregoing argument and write that “Rape as a Weapon of War has become the most prevalent [...] conflict-related sexual violence,” thus underscoring that rape represents the satiation of sexual desire and performance of patriarchal domination. Politics itself is a space of patriarchal domination and an aspect of this contestation might be understood in the context of power and its sexual undertones. Weeks (1985: 44) establishes a link between sexuality and political power and observes that “[T]he erotic acts as a crossover point for a number of tensions whose origins are elsewhere: of class, gender, and racial location.” Class is shown here as an important component of politics, which spurs me to anchor the idea of sex within the Kenyan political space and examine the different ways in which political violence might be said to stem from national sexual tension (Weeks, 1985: 44). Here, sexual tension refers to how the political class “rapes” the postcolony into a state of submission and unquestioning silence and in that way prevent the citizenry from speaking out against the

immoral obscenities of bad governance. This also validates Mbembe's (1997) point, in his analysis of the relationship between sex and the polity that, state violence avails itself as a symptom of the political fear and anxiety, which the ruling class exhibits when it runs out of viable ideas. The fearful and erratic aspect of political violence stems from Mbembe's (2001: 110) view of the postcolony as "[a] world of anxious virility". The despot is anxious to accomplish two simultaneous objectives, namely, diminishing the sense of shame represented by his nude body, and silencing his victim into the inability to speak out.

Thus, *Kwani?* Journal mocks and ridicules presidential violence in the national space. *Kwani? 07* (2012) captures the violently sexualised 1990s' Moi regime and the associated crumbling of Kenya's economy as well as resultant citizens' migration for better opportunities elsewhere. The issue's editorial states that "[o]ne of *Kwani?*'s singular narratives has been this collapse of the '90s intertwined with 'leaving'" (2012:14). The journal depicts Moi's tenure towards the end of that decade as the highest point of naked, and therefore sexualised, political violence in Kenya. The texts in *Kwani? 07* (2013) narrate the lives and experiences of Kenyans who went to the US, Mexico, Brazil, Britain, India, and Southern African countries because of the nude banality of the Moi autocracy. As Anderson (1990) and Renan (1990) suggest, the journal's collation of Kenyans' painful experiences as they fled a brutal regime act as a reference point for nationhood, since the people who share such memories realise their sense of a common past. Citizens do this by symbolically expressing their collective opprobrium to the sexualised character of the Moi regime. Those whom they left behind also identify with the shared past by memorialising the sexual-political violation of their loved ones.

Jaoko's (2012) blogpost titled "President Moi, My Dad, and I", in *Kwani? 07*, is an autobiographical rendition of the violent obscenities of the Moi regime. The blogpost is about a Kenyan who relocated to the US after fleeing Moi's dictatorial regime. The narrator remembers the tensions and horrors of the Moi regime and juxtaposes them with the peaceful experiences during Kibaki's presidency. The writer uses flashbacks to portray the pervasive mood of imprisonment. He explains that to have lived through the Moi regime meant "[t]o have spent time in prison through no fault of your own and come out to find your assets seized and your house under repossession" (2012: 234-235). The narrator also conjures a hopeless situation marked by the anguished image of his father, and the story's tone paints a picture of helplessness in the Moi era, which contrasts with the rejuvenated atmosphere anchored in the new Kibaki regime. In addition, the crowning sexual vulgarity of the Moi era is depicted in the narrator's confession that his friend told him on phone, "[t]hat Moi used to rape school girls.

That he'd [Moi] visit a girls boarding school and handpick his victim who'd later be whisked to State House. That he also did this to Headmistresses" (2012: 236). The narrator's description points to the indiscriminate nature of Moi's alleged sexual desires, which then alludes to the president's laughable immorality and lack of self-control. The narrator uses both a reprehensive tone and reference to gross sexual vulgarity to scoff at and subvert Moi's power. This is also shown later in the way Moi is contrasted with the heroic image of the Kibaki regime in the same story. Therefore, Kantai's text contributes to the crafting of Kenya's nationhood by identifying and mocking the moral weaknesses of public figures. Moi-like figures suggest that they should not be allowed to assume positions of leadership.

The narrator's contrasting heroic exultation of the Kibaki regime and its achievements emerges in the trope of a journey. The blogpost story views President Kibaki as the saviour who travelled with, and brought Kenyans out of the oppressive misery of the Moi regime. The narrator regrets that "[W]e are relics from the bygone Moi era [...] We never really moved into the Kibaki-decade with its talk of democracy [...] its new roads, old wealth and fiber [sic] optics internet, all of which are victims of our blinding sight" (2012: 235). The narrator's ironic tone in this story, which is invoked in the phrase "victims of our blinding sight", suggests that Kenyans are a thankless people who cannot appreciate President Kibaki's good work. Kibaki's efforts are contained in the new roads and in technological infrastructure such as the internet and the dazzling blogosphere in the story. As I show in the next chapter, there are instances where *Kwani?* writers hide behind the anonymity of paratextual modes of literature to actively defend the weaknesses of the Kibaki regime against public criticism, thereby creating the impression that Kibaki's was a perfect leadership. Nonetheless, this and other texts mark out the preceding Moi regime as an "othered" space (Said, 1978), which is antithetical to responsible political leadership in Kenya.

Another text that subverts Moi's dictatorial regime by painting the loneliness of exile is the *Kwani?* managing editor, Billy Kahora's "The Cape Cod Bicycle War" (2012). The story is significant in that it acts as a clue to the journal's editorial bent. This is a piece of self-writing text where Kahora retells his journey to America via South Africa towards the end of the Moi regime. The narrator's dismissive attitude towards the oppressive Moi regime comes out in the statement that his father "[f]elt that Arap Moi's immediate post-millennial Kenya was not the place to go back to. After the man's 23-year (and counting) rule, my options, according to my father, were either to wait it out in South Africa or do all I could to head to America" (2015: 552). The story suggests that the narrator's revulsion is caused not only by the serious

shortcomings of the Moi regime, but specifically by Moi himself. This might point to the two people's ethnic difference and how the agent of ethnicity is usually constructed in debates on leadership in Kenya.

It should also be noted that both Jaoko's "President Moi, My Dad, and I" (2012) and Kahora's "The Cape Cod Bicycle War" (2012) depict the Moi regime's cruelty with a level of credence by laying bare the fear and anxiety that the narrators go through. The narrators suffer from intense alienation, which the fact of exile imposes on them. Both stories attest to *Kwani?*'s agency as a space for contesting autocratic postcolonial power and building a sense of nationhood, since the act of suffering itself functions as a common bond that brings its victims together to challenge oppression. The texts do this by showing the narrators' actual suffering under the violent nature of the Moi regime, about which Mbembe (2001: 43) observes that "[a]lmost universally in sub-Saharan Africa, any practical distinction between the task of conducting [...] public affairs (government) and the institutional and unbridled use of violence and coercion was virtually non-existent." Hornsby (2012) attests further to this excessive use of violence in an outline of President Moi's authoritarianism and use of coercive power evident in the purge of perceived opposition figures.

However, one might argue that the positive depiction in *Kwani?* of the post-Moi regimes, such as Kibaki's, overlooks some human rights abuses perpetrated during these eras and constructs leadership myths, which contrast the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. Cheeseman (2009) observes that three out of Kenya's four prominent political assassinations¹³ occurred during Jomo Kenyatta's rule. Kibaki's tenure saw the assassination of the opposition intellectual, Dr. Chrispin Mbai, during a constitutional review process that Kibaki's party was opposed to. Moreover, and as shown in Chapter Two, *The Waki Report* (2008) notes that the Kibaki tenure witnessed the government's enlisting of the Mungiki cult to kill opposition supporters, with 1 133 victims succumbing to police guns, during Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV. Thus, *Kwani?*'s attribution of libidinous political violence to only the Moi regime as shown in "President Moi, My Dad, and I" (Jaoko, 2012) tallies with Barber's (1997) view that some popular texts identify with official metanarratives. In addition, such texts silence the nature and causes of political violence (Mbembe, 2010) in the Kenyan national imaginary.

There also exists an inversion of state violence in Kenya that is characterised by a turning of sex outside-in, which is evident in acts of nepotism and ethnic favouritism in all of Kenya's regimes. I am interested here in the way that bonds of ethnicity, nepotism and other filial ties

sometime prevent the fight against corruption in government, and how this failure might be perceived to impact discourses on nationhood. These inversions of sex and their ties to corruption are also indicative of the neo-patrimonialism existing in Kenya as depicted in Wainaina's "The Life of Mzee Ondego" (2010). This is a humorously bitter story that narrates the unfulfilled life of an old man, Ondego, who used to sing for President Jomo Kenyatta. A primary school teacher by profession, Ondego comes out as a playful and cheeky young man who begins composing patriotic songs before Kenya's independence. Ondego continues this pastime and composes praise songs for President Jomo Kenyatta, with whom he develops a personal relationship that flourishes until the president's death in 1978. The narrator's stubborn character is contained in his own confession that "But, you see, I was very stubborn in those days" (Wainaina, 2010: 8). Ondego reminisces about his own music career and how the Jomo, Moi and Kibaki regimes treated him, and concludes that the Kenyan state took advantage of, and wasted his life. The scars of State brutality are visible in the sense that Ondego is a poor old man living in Mombasa at the time of the interview in 2008. He has no chance of accessing justice due to old age. Ondego also describes how Jomo would invite him into a private room where both would drink beer. Still, the narrator accepts responsibility for his own lack of wisdom when he confesses that "If I had been wise [sic] I would have told him [Jomo] that I had no land" (Wainaina, 2010: 31). *Kwani?* Journal's inclusion of this particular self-writing is important not only in the way it points to the continued plight of the producers of Kenyan culture and how this affects Kenya's nationhood, but also in how it appears to understate some of the sexualised brutalities of the Jomo Kenyatta regime.

This story's representation of the workings of the Jomo regime represents one of *Kwani?*'s bold attempts to disturb the ethnic and nepotistic tendencies of Kenya's first and third regimes. This attempt, however, is diminished by possible authorial intrusion on the part of the writer. Nonetheless, Wainaina's narrator describes how Kenyatta used to invite Kikuyus only to his home in Gatundu, where Kenyatta would then direct government officials to give land to the invitees. The narrator, who is from the Maragoli tribe of Western Kenya, is depicted in bad light as his description of events is replete with strategic lies and memory lapses that render his version questionable. One of the narrator's exaggerated lies, which Wainaina fails to probe further is Ondego's assertion that he swallowed bitter pepper, which made him appear nervous, and that he was therefore admitted to Nairobi Hospital in his attempt to avoid singing for President Jomo on that particular day. Furthermore, Ondego boldly claims that he would play cat-and-mouse games with the president, especially in the case where the narrator hides in his

home village in Maragoliland, and would reject letters that the president had sent to him: “They would send a letter and I would write RTS. Return To Sender. They would show it to Mzee and say I was not at home” (Wainaina, 2010: 21). I think that it would have been impossible for the narrator to elude the pervasive presence of the Kenyan state machinery, not to mention the fact that he could not have been present to see such letters being returned to the president. Ondego also initially denies ever receiving money from President Jomo Kenyatta. In the end, the narrator confesses, “But I lie, there is a time I got money from Mzee” (Wainaina, 2010: 20). This particular retraction therefore serves to deny credence to the truth of what the narrator witnessed, and hence paints the first president as a faultless leader. It avoids naming the weaknesses of the Jomo regime just as *Kwani?* does the Kibaki regime by merely reprinting one newspaper reportage of Kibaki’s wife’s misbehaviour (Wainaina, 2010: 35-39) rather than engage in actual subversion as the journal does in Moi’s case.

In the above regard, Cheeseman (2009) characterises the first Kenyatta regime as an exclusively neo-patrimonial, clientelist, and prebendal regime in comparison to Moi’s “dictatorial” rule. This comes out in subtle ways when the narrator explains that even though he was an elderly school teacher, the president could summon him to his Gatundu home by whim. Mustapha and Whitfield (2009) stress that prebendal rule is associated with much more intense and nepotistic state control than exists under a dictatorship. The possible proof that Jomo Kenyatta was a prebendal and intensely nepotistic ruler who took the Kenyan nation as his family business can be seen in the prevalence of a popular Kenyan rumour that Kenyatta used to whip errant cabinet ministers with a walking stick at his Gatundu home. This authoritarian and omnipresent father figure, is what Wainaina’s (2010) story alludes to above when the narrator observes that “[w]e were taken to Gatundu” (Wainaina, 2010: 22) so they could sing for the president. Arguably, nepotism itself begins in the bedroom and is anchored on sex, since it relies on blood relationships. Karimi and Ochieng (1980) confirm the narrator’s version of life under the Jomo presidency and capture the sexual aspect of prebendalism by referring to popular rumours that circulated then. These rumours held that “[s]pooky characters who slept with women members of the Family [Kenyatta’s clan and ruling elite] became directors of wealthy companies in the name of President Kenyatta” (Karimi and Ochieng, 1980: 78). This description underlines the extent to which sex and sexual relations became important determinants of national decisions, as well as nationhood.

In addition, the narrator, Mzee Ondego, in Wainaina’s “The Life of Mzee Ondego” says that “Kenyatta only gave money to people from his tribe [...] and beach plots in Mombasa” (2010:

19). This conforms to the intensely ethnic character of prebendal rule as suggested by Mustapha and Whitfield (2009), and its negative influences on the process of nation formation. However, this is the truth that Wainaina renders as a rumour through an authorial intrusion, which denies authenticity to the narrative voice. Barber (1997) observes that the everyday rumour is a legitimate source of information in African popular culture. Even though Karimi and Ochieng's claims ought to be treated as rumour, Hornsby's (2012) position that President Jomo Kenyatta's intensely oppressive tendencies should be blamed on Kenyatta's personal experiences under white colonial rule is obviously unconvincing. In my view, President Kenyatta had a responsibility not to resemble the white man who detained him. The problem with Hornsby's (2012) position is that it is blind to its own pitfall. It would then follow that if the prebendal character of the Kenyatta regime should be blamed on the colonial regime, as *Kwani?* depiction of Kenyatta's reign in Wainaina's (2010) story above might suggest, then Moi, Kibaki, and Uhuru would all have learnt the violence of their regimes from those whom they succeeded. Hornsby's prescription here turns the sins of the Kenyan presidency into an infinite series of deferred transgressions with no transgressor. Anderson (1983) and Renan (1990) suggest that communities cement their sense of togetherness when nations address their unique weaknesses. I interpret this to mean that there ought to be a limit to which the nation is willing to apportion blame to other agents of its problems. Perhaps a fundamental danger with the mode of narration inherent in "The Life of Mzee Ondego" (2010) is that it is escapist, and therefore it creates a situation whereby the Kenyan nation cannot critique both the weaknesses of the first regime and the subsequent ones. This implies that the Kenyan nation can neither address its unique challenges that are related to the presidency (Anderson, 1983), nor identify and strengthen the occasional successes of the same office.

Some of the *Kwani?* writing on political violence adheres to the escapist mode through their use of the metaphor for presidential sexuality. The narration portrays the Jomo Kenyatta's tenure as Kenya's golden era, which is then interrupted by Moi's dictatorial regime as exemplified in Jaoko's "President Moi, My Dad and I" (2012). This is a story where the narrator uses the memory of his father who lives in Kenya to capture the pain and anxiety of his own exile in the Americas. The narrator leaves the country during the brutal Moi regime, and returns at the beginning of the supposedly perfect Kibaki regime. The agent of ethnicity seems to be a factor in the way that Jaoko's *Kwani?* Journal story silences the shortcomings of Kenyatta and Kibaki's tenures, while possibly overdramatising the cruelty of the Moi regime. "President Moi, My Dad, and I" reinforces this perception of the flawless Jomo Kenyatta regime in other

texts under *Kwani?* Journal's stable such as Tee Ngugi's "When You Arrive at the Far End of a Continent" (2012), which masks the other weaknesses of the president's rule such as intolerance to political opposition. Ngugi's story narrates the self by depicting the narrator's journey from Kenya during the Moi regime, to Southern Africa where he finds comparative respite. The story's narrator attributes his self-exile to the cruelty of President Moi, and aptly observes how Zimbabwe is not any different from Kenya, and that "Robert Mugabe was another Daniel Arap Moi with intellectual and socialist pretensions" (2012: 161). The dismissive tone of the narrator's allusion to Mugabe here downplays both the reverse capitalist pretensions of the Jomo Kenyatta regime and silences Jomo's handling of the land problem in Kenya as depicted in Wainaina's "The Life of Mzee Ondego" (2008) above. Hornsby (2012) implies that the haven of peace depicted in Tee Ngugi's "When You Arrive at the Far End of a Continent" (2012) of the pre-Moi times is misleading in its overt embellishment of the first regime. It is intriguing that the narrator avoids any reference to his own impression of how the assassinations of Tom Mboya and J.M. Kariuki impacted on the Kenyatta presidency at the domestic level. Thus, the depiction of Jomo Kenyatta as a benevolent father figure in the story masks the first regime's weaknesses such as detention without trial, public preaching of violence against opposition parties (Ochieng, 1995), and this inserts a warped perspective of nationhood into the Kenyan socio-political imaginaries. In addition, Hornsby (2012) suggests that an objective analysis of Kenya's experience with multi-party democracy should acknowledge other global forces at play during the different regimes, such as Foreign Aid conditionalities, the oil price shocks of 1973, European Union market protectionism in the 1970s, the shrinking of markets for Kenyan goods due to the collapse of the East African Community in 1977, and the end of the Cold War in 1991.

The nakedly pornographic nature of detention without trial is one of the colonial laws that the Kenyan nation fought against till its abolishment towards the end of the Moi regime. Onyango Oloo's "Up North" (2012) is an interview contained in *Kwani? 07*, which represents *Kwani?*'s grappling with the controversial law that Kenya's first two regimes inherited from British colonisers and used to entrench themselves in power. In this interview, the former detainee narrates the pain of his incarceration after Kenya's 1982 coup attempt against President Moi, and of his eventual exile to Canada. The narrator uses layers of flashback to recollect and explain the brutal nature of the tentacles of state security under the Moi dictatorship, such as the way in which Kenyan security forces pursue their targets abroad, Tanzania in Oloo's case. The political detainee writes that "[i]n the course of the same year, 1988, Kenyan state agents

started appearing in Dar es Salaam to abduct political refugees” (Oloo, 2012: 317). This interview brings out the sexualised paranoia of Moi’s political power which targeted dissidents’ genitalia as Weeks (1985) showed earlier, and proved by Oloo’s (2012: 317) testimony that Kenyan dissidents in Tanzania “[w]ere rounded up by the Tanzanian government and handed over to the Moi regime who later hanged some of them.” These abductions and hanging are interesting in that they were accompanied by narratives about State torturers castrating the detainees. The interview with Oloo, like similar ones with Kenyan victims of detention without trial, exclusively covers only the Moi regime. The fact that *Kwani?* stories elide victims of this law during the Jomo Kenyatta regime, who either died recently or are still alive suggests a level of intentionality in selectively naming and narrating the evils of the Kenyan presidency. These victims include Ngugi wa Thiong’o (alive), Koigi wa Wamwere (alive), Chelagat Mutai (d.2013), and Martin Shikuku (d.2012). As a result, the absence of counter narratives on detention without trial stories renders only the Moi regime culpable, and constitutes a skewed memory and cultural imaginary of Kenyans’ struggle against the law.

Kwani? Journal’s contribution to discourses on Kenya’s nationhood further employs opinion pieces of writing, which shed light on specific aspects of the nation. Andia Kisia’s “Kenya and its Discontents” (2003) falls in this analytical genre by speaking to the Kenyan opposition’s struggles against the incumbent regimes across the decades. Andia Kisia’s elaborate analysis shows how some of the *Kwani?* Journal depictions focus on sexuality as a trope for state violence to map the Kenyan government’s historical coercion, violence, and outright banning of the opposition. The Kenyan opposition parties’ struggles against intense incumbent dictatorship is shown in the way that Kisia’s analysis captures sexualised fears and anxieties (Weeks, 1985) of the Kenyan state beginning with the colonial regime:

[B]y 1966 however, they had all but been reintroduced under the Preservation of Public Security Act. These powers first came into use on a large scale in 1969 when the opposition KPU party was disbanded and its leadership detained. Here was a clear signal by the government that opposition of any kind would not be tolerated. (Kisia, 2003: 301)

As stated above, the sexualised nature of State terror as contained in the cited warning included molesting and castrating dissidents. This extract speaks to what I would term as “the testosterone of coercion”, which Kisia’s (2003) analysis shows in the state’s treatment of the

Kenyan Left. Mbembe (2001: 106) refers to this impulsive extravagance of naked force as “[t]he commandment in the postcolony” where the state machinery applies all force at its disposal to enforce submission. However, it is important to note that political violence in Kenya sometimes emanates from the opposition (Ajulu, 2002). Still, a nuanced and “vacillating” (Bhabha, 1990) analysis of the gains and losses of the Kenyan Left would reveal mostly positive achievements despite the opposition’s own internal weaknesses. An objective view of the oppositional terrain of Kenyan politics would have to begin by first acknowledging that all four Kenyan presidents were at one time members of varied opposition parties.

Kisia’s (2003) historical analysis represents *Kwani?* Journal’s attempted narration of the role of the Kenyan opposition in challenging the political Centre under the subtitle “Mau Mau, Mwakenya and After”. The subtitle suggests that the analysis bears an ethnic bias by privileging only moments of the Kenyan Left when the Kikuyu community was most involved. In effect, Kisia’s (2003) analysis does not recognise the fact that Kenya attained her independence under a multi-party constitution where Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga led KANU before their 1966 fall-out, while Daniel Arap Moi and Ronald Ngala were the most prominent members of the opposition party KADU. This explains the reason why the analysis focusses mainly on the role of the opposition during the Moi regime, which then functions to overshadow Moi’s initial past as an oppositionist, and constructs him as the archetypal Centrist after the 1982 coup attempt.

The journalese piece traces the origins of the underground “Mwakenya” intellectuals who opposed the Moi regime in the mid-1980s, a time when the Kenyan popular rumour held that the state’s torture regime centred around squeezing and castrating dissidents’ male genitalia. The political dissidents included George Anyona, John Khaminwa, Kangethe Mungai, Maina Kinyatti, Wafula Buke, Willy Mutunga, Raila Odinga, Oduor Ong’wen, Koigi wa Wamwere, and many others. The inclusion of the analysis in *Kwani?* is important in that its circulation as a corpus of knowledge relating to the Kenyan people’s struggle against an oppressive state qualifies it as a popular text. Kisia’s historical account uses irony to show how even though the Moi state applied detention and torture to crush the opposition, the latter still won against the violent regime. She writes that “[M]any lecturers left the country for exile. Some of the detained lecturers would be incarcerated for years” (2003: 303). The foregoing state hawking of violence personifies Boehmer’s (2010: 141) observation that the postcolonial space is a context of “[a]ccelerated flux, marked by convulsive periods of crisis, impasse”. It further

alludes to Mbembe's (2001) notion of the trinity of violence, transfers, and allocation, a spontaneous process, which the potentate does not want the opposition to interrupt.

Kisia's account also gives insight into how the state used its machinery to defeat Kenyan dissidents who then went on exile. The vulgar and sexually suffocating nature of the Kenyan state was contained in the petty extremism with which the state criminalised all human activities. According to Mbembe (2001), and as is apparent here, the Moi regime's demand for total submission from the citizenry could be symbolic of sexual orgasm, which demands immediate, coercive fulfilment and satiation. This is alluded to by the incident in which the late Kenyan Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wangari Maathai, organised women who stripped in Nairobi's Uhuru Park to stop Moi's government from grabbing the land. The police ignored the sanctity of the women's nakedness and beat them up. Kisia (2003: 304) summarises this by explaining that "[t]hinking critically, indeed thinking at all, was from all evidence a criminal offence." Thus, Kisia's historical analysis represents *Kwani?* Journal's recognition of the important role that the Kenyan opposition has played in contributing to the building of the country's nationhood across the decades. This trend then suggests that the journal recognises the idea of legitimate opposition only to the Moi regime.

In addition, Kisia's historical narration shows how popular texts use symbolic power to subvert state authoritarianism and create moments of triumph against autocracy (Fiske, 1989). The analysis is subversive in so far as it employs the strategy of discussion to defuse the state's sexualised violence against the opposition. The libidinous link (Mbembe, 2001) that defines the relationship between the state and the opposition can be deduced from the excessive mercilessness of state power when it is directed against Kenyan exiles in Tanzania. Kisia (2003: 307) captures this state by explaining that "Most exiles lived in Dar es Salaam on meagre refugee allowances with Kenyan state agents dogging their steps." The opposition's determination against the state even under these oppressive conditions symbolically represents "the desire for change, both personal and social, and for the belief in the possibility of change" (Barber, 1997: 6). The implied desire for this change comes out as a phonic subtext of Kisia's analysis, and is later stated in the observation "[A] revolution implies change to the status quo and the status quo in Kenya" (Kisia, 2003: 311).

However, there is a sense in which Kisia's (2003) analysis exposes the contradictory nature of the postcolony as Mbembe (2001) observes. This comes out in the way that the genes of state authoritarianism replicate in the Kenyan national space and infect even the opposition parties

themselves. Kisia (2003) notes that the 2003 President Kibaki space in which the analysis is written might not be different from its Moi predecessor. Further, the writer does not say that the same President Moi whom the Kenyan opposition was rallying against, later anointed Uhuru Kenyatta to vie for president in 2002. This strategic silence is significant in that it amplifies Moi's evil nature and cuts any associative link between him and Uhuru. Moreover, the analysis does not acknowledge that Mwai Kibaki was Moi's Minister of Health in the years of state autocracy, which then agrees with Barber's (1997) view that popular texts sometimes subscribe to metanarratives that mask the weaknesses of the state. Ogot (1995: 212) writes that it was Kibaki who "moved a procedural motion requesting that the requirement for its [the bill that intensified Draconian laws during the Moi regime] notice of publication be reduced from the usual fourteen days to five days." It might be right to argue, as Mbembe (2001) does, that Kibaki reproduced in his regime the authoritarian tendencies that he learnt as Moi's vice president. This is one of the contexts in which Kibaki was nick-named "General Kigwea" by his fellow Kikuyu people as I observed earlier, since he could not stand up to President Moi. Ogot (1995) further notes that some of the most prominent members of the ruling party's autocratic central committee such as Okiki Amayo were Luo members of parliament, thus showing the fluid nature of Kenyan politics, and also the ease with which the victim of oppression becomes the oppressor (Mbembe, 2001). Here, then, state authoritarianism becomes an incestuous relationship in which different Kenyan regimes engage in with one another. It is therefore evident in Kisia's analysis considered here, that the Kenyan opposition politics has always had specific inter-ethnic nuances in its struggle against the might of the state machinery.

Kwani?'s muted approach to national violence and its relation to the trope of sex is also visible in the journal's denigration of the opposition whenever the Kikuyu community is not associated with the national Left. Fiske (1989:2) explains that popular texts exhibit this contradictory character since "[t]hey carry the interests of the economically and ideologically dominant". This feature is evident in Serumaga's (2008) "An Interview with Siri-Kali", which documents an interview with Dr. Alfred Mutua, spokesman of President Kibaki's then ruling Party of National Unity's (PNU). Dr. Mutua attempts an honest diagnosis, in this piece, of what went wrong with the 2007 elections that later spilled into national violence. Understandably, the interviewee apportions all blame to the opposition, since he represents the Kibaki government. Dr. Mutua's appointment was made after the contested 2007 elections as a way of enlisting the support of Kalonzo Musyoka's Kamba community against Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). In the text, Mutua's voice comes out as an all-knowing narrator whose

knowledge of Kenya's 2007 violence and the culpability of the opposition no one should question. For example, he states that "ODM leaders actually organized the massacres that we saw" (Serumaga, 2008: 42). This textual strategy confirms Barber's (1997) and Fiske's (1989: 2) view that popular texts "[h]ave lines of force within them that are hegemonic and that work in favour of the status quo", since the narrative that the text constructs aligns itself with the official view. The boldness of Dr. Mutua's statement serves as an authorial force, which the reader has no choice but to believe and this skews the reader's perception against the Kenyan opposition. Interestingly, the same *Kwani?* issue does not contain a similar interview with the opposition spokesman, and therefore does not uphold a sense of objectivity in its reporting of the 2007 violence. The vilification of the Kenyan opposition when it faults Kikuyu presidents inscribes a national narrative that is hostile to the achievements of the opposition, and therefore entrenches an ethnicised gap in the story of Kenya's nationhood and national belonging.

Unlike the above cases, Gathara's (2015) discursive analysis "Moving on To What?" is a committed coverage of Kenya's 2013 elections, which employs Fiske's (1989) notion of textual taste to show the grotesqueness of the government's intimidation of the opposition. Fiske (1989: 6) writes that popular texts rely on "tasteless and vulgar" depiction to subvert official narratives. Here, "Moving on To What?" (2015) captures the graphic and pornographic nature of state violence during Kenya's 2013 elections as characterised by the gagging of the media and pre-emptive deployment of the police to opposition areas. The textual description challenges the reader to witness the sense of injustice engendered by the state's retributive violence on unarmed people. This is shown in the statement that "[B]y then the government had, again contrary to the constitution, banned public protests. Nobody mourned the two individuals shot dead by police in Kisumu for daring to express their dismay at the turn of events" (2015: 18). Even though the writing is factual and objectively shows some opposition weaknesses, Gathara's writing is the first item in *Kwani? 08* and therefore the sheer volume of reportage, which depicts Uhuru Kenyatta as having fairly won the 2013 elections later dilutes its force. All *Kwani?* reportage of the 2013 elections uses age as a "clitoral" reference point with Uhuru Kenyatta's youth being contrasted to Raila Odinga's seniority. Thus, *Kwani?* writing on age and the 2013 elections confirms Barber's (1997) view that popular culture tends to adopt a subversive posture against elite gerontocracy. In the Kenyan context, the 2013 elections constructed the narrative that the nation needed a younger leader (Uhuru Kenyatta) and not an older one (Raila Odinga). However, the association of the elections with age difference is deceptive, since what was viewed as revolutionary in the 2013 elections was

actually conservative in regard to class and ethnicity. Uhuru symbolised the conservative Kikuyu ruling class whose origins can be traced to colonial chiefs. In addition, *Kwani?* Journal's portrayal masks other issues, which came to bear during the 2013 elections, such as the ICC cases that sought to address the explicit and grotesque nature of state violence during Kenya's 2007 elections. This phenomenon in *Kwani?* writing further suggests the possibility of narrative silencing in narrating nationhood in Kenya.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined ethnicity and its possible influence on how *Kwani?* Journal texts represent the "sexual" character of the Kenyan presidency. The discussion noted that popular culture sometimes appropriates the notion of sex and sexuality to embarrass, contest, and challenge the excesses of state power. The chapter also unpacked the interconnectedness between presidential sexual arena as a trope and metaphor for aspects of bad governance such as negative ethnicity, insidious state corruption, political violence, nepotism, and mismanagement of the broader Kenyan economy.

The major observation in this chapter is that *Kwani?* uses sexuality as a popular culture weapon with which to subvert state power. However, it is apparent that ethnicity determines how *Kwani?* Journal represents particular the presidents under focus. For instance, the journal appears reticent and subdued on the sexual transgressions of Kikuyu presidents and peppers up the same in the case of Daniel Arap Moi's Kalenjin presidency, thus falling short of what is expected of a journal that grapples with the important issue of nationhood. The fundamental observation is that the journal's strategy of contrasting regimes based on ethnicity ignores the successes and failures of leadership in Kenya. The chapter therefore underscored the role of popular culture and negative ethnicity in mapping the imaginaries of the nation. It also underlined how both ethnicities and imaginaries sometimes influence the way we think about nationhood and national identity in Kenya.

Endnotes

¹ The historical but unresolved land issues in the mainly Kalenjin Rift Valley Province led to Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV fought primarily between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities.

² These cases arose out of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto's alleged funding of Mungiki and Kalenjin Warriors, respectively, to engage in violence during Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV. The ICC eventually withdrew the Crimes Against Humanity charges due to lack of witnesses. However, some of the witnesses were threatened and others killed under mysterious circumstances in Kenya.

³ The Kikuyu people nick-named President Kibaki "General Kigwea" (General Coward) to capture the fact that he shied away from confronting Moi in the late '80s and early '90s when other Kikuyu politicians, such as Charles Rubia, Kenneth Matiba, and Paul Muite, did so.

⁴ This is a Kenyan stand-up comedy group, which was famous in the late 1990s.

⁵ The 2010 Constitution institutionalised devolution of power from the central government by creating 47 counties and increased female representation in parliament to 20 percent.

⁶ Moi publicly declared that his regime would follow the late Kenyatta's footsteps when he assumed office in 1978.

⁷ Atieno-Odhiambo narrates the state crackdown on the "Mwakenya" underground movement comprising University of Nairobi intellectuals who agitated for multi-party democracy in the early 1980s.

⁸ Interestingly, nepotism is not the preserve of only the government elite in Kenya; Raila Odinga and his late father have sometimes been rightly accused of nepotism in opposition party appointments. Raila Odinga nominated his elder brother to parliament in the controversial 2007 elections. The opposition leader was also accused, in the 2013 elections, of imposing his sister – who was very unpopular with Luo voters – as the Deputy Governor of Kisumu County. There

are credible rumours that Raila Odinga's cousins, together with those who are married into the Odinga family, unfairly dominate the opposition Orange Democratic Movement.

⁹ Mwai Kibaki's tenure is widely regarded as the most democratic even though the highest number of election-related deaths occurred during his tenure.

¹⁰ Prior to the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution, some of the best schools in Kenya were found in Kikuyu and Kalenjin districts. Ajulu (2002) shows that both Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi used regional educational quotas to benefit the Kikuyu and Kalenjin, respectively, at the expense of Kenyans from other communities or regions.

¹¹ 'Rainbow' was the slogan for Mwai Kibaki's opposition party National Rainbow Coalition (Narc), which won the 2002 elections against Uhuru Kenyatta.

¹² Although it originated in the Jomo Kenyatta regime, one of the enduring features of the Moi presidency was the Presidential Choir, which included even university students, apart from annual national school music festivals, which culminated with performances at State House.

¹³ See Gama Pinto (1965), Tom Mboya (1969), J.M. Kariuki (1975), and Robert Ouko (1990).

CHAPTER 5 :

EXAMINING ETHNO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN SELECTED *KWANI?* JOURNAL PARATEXTS

5.1 Introduction

Kwani? Journal employs paratextual media to capture and archive specific events in Kenya's history, thereby articulating the idea of 'Kenyaness'. These contemporary and syncretic forms of popular culture such as cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and Short Message Service (henceforth 'SMS') act as a disruptive entertainment to the ordinary reader and play the traditional role of paratextual media, which is to guide the reader's process of making meaning out of a text (Gray, 2010). The new media texts speak further to ethnicity and its discourses on national identity in Kenya. This chapter draws on perspectives by Anderson (1983), Bhabha (1990), and Renan (1990), cited earlier in Chapter 1, which outline how ethnic groups, as sub-components of the nation, rely on popular culture to enhance the process of coalescing around a common destiny. Further, the discussion relies on Genette's (1997) paratextual theory, which considers paratexts as important literary elements that condition the reader's consumption of a text. The chapter also employs Bakhtin's (1984) concept of carnival to examine how *Kwani?* Journal's paratexts use festive laughter to influence the reader's interpretation of Kenya's nationhood. The chapter recognises *Kwani?* as an aspect of Kenyan popular culture, and examines how selected paratextual media in the journal mediate national discourses on ethnicity and its relationship to nation formation in Kenya.

The existence of blogposts and emails in *Kwani?* Journal's repertoire suggests the adaptive nature of popular texts. Barber (2018) situates this characteristic of popular texts within contested moments. Kenyans witnessed these moments of inter-communal conflict during the 2002, 2007, 2013, and 2017 national elections. In addition, past research on *Kwani?* Journal (Nyairo 2004; Musila, 2010; Rinkanya, 2010; Journo, 2009) elides the role of paratextual media but is silent on how these forms of media narrate ethnicity and national identity formation in Kenya. This is in regard to how the journal integrates cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and SMS into its commentary on ethnicity and Kenya's nationhood. Thus, this chapter draws on popular culture theory, specifically on the concept of carnival and festive laughter, to examine how *Kwani?* Journal's cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and SMS mediate ethnicity during 2007 and 2013 elections. *Kwani?* however, did not cover Kenya's equally emotive 2017/2018 elections, since it published its last issue in 2015. The analysis uses

Popular Culture Theory to unpack how the paratextual media act as a rhetorical strategy that influences the reader to adopt a given interpretation of Kenya's nationhood. The discussion centres on three broad themes, namely the ethnicised binary between laziness and hard work, the country's divisive 2007/2008 PEV, and the violence that followed Kenya's related 2013 elections. The chapter also examines how specific paratexts assist the reader to understand the journal's depiction of electoral violence and the politics of male circumcision in the above two elections. The chapter further considers the wider debate about the history of political leadership in the country.¹

The chapter seeks to answer four specific questions in its analysis of paratexts. First, what forms of paratextual media does the *Kwani?* Journal employ in its publications? Second, how do these paratexts depict violence and other sensitive socio-political issues in Kenya's 2007 and 2013 elections? Third, does ethnicity influence how these paratextual media depict presidential candidates and their respective communities in the two elections? Lastly, to what extent do the paratextual forms influence the reader to align with or subvert the Kenyan state ideology in regard to the two elections?

5.2 Paratexts and political commentary in Kenya

According to Genette (1997: 1), paratexts are "those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader." Gray (2010: 26) expounds that "the study of paratexts is the study of how meaning is created, and of how texts begin." Genette (1997: 1) further writes that a paratext is "what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public." The definitions allude to the reader as the audience and refer to how the strategic textual devices in use influence the reader's ideological interpretation of the text. Genette (1997: 2) qualifies this view in the observation that paratexts are "[a]lways the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author." This, for instance, is observable in Muchilwa's (2010) comic strip titled 'Leaving Eldoret' published in *Kwani? 06* (2010). The comic captures the predicament of two siblings caught in the 2008 electoral violence in Kenya and how both have to flee the Kenyan town of Eldoret. Pete, the elder sibling, ensures that his younger sister occupies the only available seat in Mr. Dylan Walcott's car. Unfortunately, Pete does not make it to safety as the Kalenjin warriors use arrows to strike him dead in the course of his attempted escape. The fact that Eldoret is mainly

inhabited by the Kalenjin community suggests that both victims of the violence are Kikuyu, since the Kikuyu were expelled from the town during the 2008 violence. This shows how the comic strip, as do many other narrative forms published in *Kwani?* Journal, plays a paratextual role (Genette, 1997) in influencing the reader's understanding of national discourses that link violence to ethnicity. Hence, the chapter examines how *Kwani?* Journal's specific cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and SMS on the 2007 and 2013 elections comment on ethnicity and nationhood. It analyses how these paratexts invite the journal's readers to interpret the story of Kenya's electoral nationhood. In addition, the chapter investigates the scope of the national ideology that *Kwani?* paratexts espouse, especially considering the existence of competing communal sub-narratives in the Kenyan space.

The chapter recognises *Kwani?* Journal as an important popular culture medium that published in Kenya from 2003 to 2015. Nyairo (2004), Ligaga (2008), Musila (2010), and Odhiambo (2014) stress that the journal provided a space for the convergence of sub-cultural and communal identity in Kenya. In my view, both identities are related to the wider concern with nationhood. This is for instance observable in Matathia's (2007) blogpost titled 'October holiday galore', where the writer uses the context of a Kenyan holiday,² which celebrates Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, to remind Kenyans about the struggle for independence. The blogpost is subversive as it deconstructs Kenya's dependence on the global IMF and the World Bank-dominated finance systems that exploit the Third World. The blogpost particularly points out that Kenya has lost direction as a nation due to neo-colonialism, class, and ethnicity. Interestingly, the blogpost recognises only the Mau Mau aspect of Kenya's struggle for independence, and shows how issues of ethnicity penetrate paratextual discourses in the *Kwani?* Journal. The post therefore contains a paratextual message, which "[n]ecessarily has a location that can be situated in relation to the text itself" (Genette, 1997: 4) in regard to the construction of Kenya's nationhood. Thus, the chapter examines how fair, credible, and ethnically sensitive the paratextual media is in influencing the reader to understand the journal's printed word. The discussion is important mainly because opposing Kenyan communities usually send hate messages during elections, hence, the chapter examines how *Kwani?* mediates the political effects of such messages in its publication.

Photo essays and SMS also play discursive roles relating to nationhood. This comes out in Kaplan's (2003) transnational picture essay, 'Scenes from The Past', contained in *Kwani? 01*. The paratext uses photo essays to capture tumultuous political events in Congo during Mobutu's coup in 1967, as well as a photograph of President Idi Amin of Uganda, who seized

power in 1972. The photo essay also contains photographs of Kenya's then Vice President, Oginga Odinga, as well as those of the funeral of the Luo politician, Tom Mboya, who was assassinated in 1969. Mboya's photograph speaks to a certain painful moment in Kenya's history and therefore significant in the imagination of nationhood (Renan, 1990). Thus, the chapter finds out how other photo essays in *Kwani?* Journal use similar strategies to narrate nationhood in the context of ethnicity, as SMS paratexts do. Akena's (2003) SMS titled 'Machoco, maSMS, Hanyaring na Kompe' contained in *Kwani? 03* uses language to allude to Kenya's sense of national identity. The SMS employs light-hearted humour and Sheng language to show two boys buying a certain girl flowers and chocolate in competition for her attention, but both soon discover that the girl is not interested in them. The use of Sheng language as a pointer to youth identity in the SMS and speaks to Anderson's (1983) identification of the importance of language in the process of nation formation. Thus, the chapter seeks to examine the different ways in which similar paratexts in *Kwani?* Journal use language to forge nationhood.

Kwani? Journal's use of paratextual media to engage with the sometimes overtly ethnic dimensions to the distribution of national resources and public positions across Kenya's four regimes (Hornsby, 2013)³ underlines the need to investigate the mediated sense of nationhood. This is because "[p]aratexts draw many of the battle lines that surround media consumption" (Gray 2010: 36). The extensive inclusion of paratextual texts such as cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and SMS that comment on the successes and failures of leadership in Kenya attests to *Kwani?* Journal's leading role in shaping quotidian discourses on politics and nationhood in Kenya. The journal's engagement with the forces that shape historical events in Kenya offers a mediating space where ordinary Kenyans critique and conduct discussions on the deeds and misdeeds of the political elite. Thus, the intention is to determine *Kwani?* Journal's subversive role (Barber, 1997) in desecrating the arena of elite politicians and make them vulnerable to ridicule and laughter (Bakhtin, 1984) from the ordinary Kenyan public. The chapter is indeed interested in how the journal's paratextual media invite the reader to either align with, or subvert state metanarratives mainly in regard to Kenya's 2007 and 2013 Kenyan elections and the imaginaries of the nation.

The study is particularly important in that the social media, much as it functions as a site of youth identity formation, has played a significant role in teasing out ideas about the nation and belonging. In the case of narrating Kenya's nationhood, the chapter discusses how Wainaina's and Garland's (2003) email paratext titled 'Vain Jango' contained in *Kwani? 01* mediates the

political relationship between the Luo and Kikuyu communities. This is evident in the email's treatment of the relationship between its male Luo character and its female Kikuyu protagonist who interact in a drinking pub set in Nairobi, and how this depiction complicates the narration of nationhood by retelling the old stereotypes and myths that have divided the two Kenyan communities. The chapter remains aware of both uses of paratextual media referred to above, and how this is reflected in Wainaina's and Garland's (2003) email paratext. In the current case, this implies analysing whether the ethnicities of respective candidates in Kenya's two elections, Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, influenced the way *Kwani?* Journal's paratexts treat the two candidates in the journal's depictions and subsequently impact on discourses on Kenya's nationhood.

The chapter uses specific aspects of Social Semiotics Theory that are relevant to Popular Culture Theory (Barber, 1987; Fabian, 1997) to determine the possible narrative challenges that the new media published in the *Kwani?* Journal present to the construction of nationhood. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue that Social Semiotics Theory is a method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that privileges both the context of the production of the sign, and the interest (motivation) of the sign-maker. These 'signs', according to Bhabha (1990), form part of the collective symbols and discourses that go into narrating nationhood. By context, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 6) mean the "[c]ultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker [and] the specific context in which the sign is produced." The 'sign' here refers to the cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and SMS in *Kwani?* Journal. The 'sign-maker' are the journal's cartoonists and producers of relevant paratextual media. Drawing on Anderson (1983), the fact that *Kwani?* Journal contains paratextual media that speak to the issues that divide and unite Kenyans makes the journal an important site for the formation of a Kenyan national identity. The chapter assumes that the complex socio-historical context of Kenya's ethnic-based politics informed the journal's cartoons considered in this study and that the cartoons play the paratextual role (Genette, 1997) of revealing the journal's ideological position on the said issues. Similarly, 'interest' refers to what "[g]uides the selection of what is seen as the criterial aspects of the object [...] and is then regarded as adequately or sufficiently representative of the object in the given context" (Van Leeuwen 1996: 6). The second assumption is that there are specific reasons why *Kwani?*'s editors selected particular paratexts to represent the journal's ideological position in regard to sensitive socio-political themes relating to the two elections.

The above political themes include male circumcision, the 2007/2008 electoral violence and the ICC trials. The chapter is interested in how mocking or praising (Bakhtin, 1984) certain aspects of these themes ought to be responsive to the ethnic sensibilities that problematise nationhood in Kenya. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 12) stress that the main role of the Social Semiotic approach in analysing visual communication is that “[w]e see images of whatever kind as entirely within the realm of ideology.” Oamen (2019: 10) supports this view in her study of the gendered representations of women in Nigerian cartoons by observing that visual modes of signification such as cartoons and comics are “[s]emiotic resources used by text producers to subjectively express power and ideological positioning.” The study examines how selected paratexts reveal *Kwani?* Journal’s ideological stand concerning the mapping of popular discourses on Kenya’s nationhood. Bhabha’s (1990) concept of ‘dissemination’ is important here. The concept refers to a text’s ability to diffuse the issues that converge to form moments of tension in the nation and how this process constitutes national culture. Bhabha (1990: 313) notes that the process of dissemination involves “the challenge of reading, into the present of a specific cultural performance, the traces of all those diverse disciplinary discourses and institutions of knowledge that constitute the condition and contexts of culture.” For instance, Gathara’s (2008) cartoons titled ‘Gathara’s World’ published in *Kwani? 05 Twin Edition Part-2* seem to play the role of subversive cultural performance. Gathara’s (2008) cartoons debase President Kibaki, Raila Odinga, Martha Karua, and Kalonzo Musyoka as greedy wild animals, who took advantage of Kenyan voters in the 2007 elections. The politicians’ faces appear indifferent to the suffering of Kenyans who died in the 2007/2008 election violence. The chapter considers Kenya’s elections as aspects of cultural performance, and therefore examines how *Kwani?* Journal’s paratexts use carnivalesque humour in the case of cartoons, to turn the elections into a national ritual that brings together all of Kenya’s varied ethnicities. Bakhtin’s (1984) concept of carnival refers to the way festive, universal, and ambivalent laughter functions as both humour and satire to debase and uncrown its target. The study examines how *Kwani?*’s cartoons employ festive laughter to uncrown political leaders during the two elections as shown in ‘Gathara’s World’ (2008) referred to above. This links with Barber’s (2018) views, reviewed in Chapter 1, on how popular culture acts as a space where the nation’s ordinary people engage with national leadership. The chapter is specifically interested in unpacking whether the ethnicity of the leader influences this act of festive uncrowning.

It should also be noted here that this analysis follows Anderson's (1983: 7) notions underscored in Chapter 1 as guiding this study that, the nation "[i]s imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." Examined here is the way the journal's paratexts, through depiction and characterisation, narrate Kenya's divisive moments in a way that encourages a sense of ethnic comradeship that enhances the formation of a Kenyan nationhood. Gathara's (2008) cartoons play this role by situating the four politicians in a contextually neutral space, and does not make any reference to their Kikuyu, Luo, and Kamba ethnicities. However, I observed in Chapter Four, that Gathara's works published in *Kwani?* stand out for their exceptional political neutrality. Therefore, this chapter finds out whether other paratexts subvert or reinforce the ruling elite's view (Barber, 2018) in regard to Kenya's 2007 and 2013 electoral violence. Barber (2018: 122) observes in her analysis of the relationship between Tanzanian music and the State that both are often locked in a "[t]wo-way process, often compromised and partial, often hesitant." Thus, I examine the extent of *Kwani?* Journal's subversion or appropriation of the Kenyan State ideology, and how this impacts discourses on the construction of Kenya's nationhood. Also determined here is the ability of *Kwani?* Journal's paratexts to influence the reader into adopting a given narrative angle during Kenya's divisive moments and the encountered pain thereof. This brings in Renan's (1990) views, which have already been established as key to this study, particularly his observation that the recognition of past collective pain, as evidenced in German history, brings a nation together. The chapter recognises the prevalence of electoral violence in Kenya and investigates how *Kwani?* Journal's paratexts narrate electoral violence in a way that lessens ethnic division and enhances the building of the nation.

Cartooning has a long history in the wider East African region. Gathara (2004) associates the origins of cartooning in Kenya with the history of East African rock caricatures, which go back to twelve thousand years ago. However, Gathara observes that editorial cartoons began with the introduction of colonial newspapers in Kenya, which used propaganda to depict Germans during the war years and also stereotyped Africans. This observation points to the possible misuse of the cartoon paratext as a tool for State or ethnic propaganda in discourses on nationhood. Kenya's earliest cartoonist was E.G. Gitau, who began drawing a comic strip (Juha Kalulu) for local newspapers in 1950. William Agutu joined him until the 1970s, when Terry Hirst co-founded and drew political cartoons for *Joe Magazine*. Gathara (2004: 21) writes that "[U]nlike Juha Kalulu which never cared for social issues or politics, Joe [Magazine] did not

shy away from the political.” This fact is important in that *Kwani?* Journal was once seen as a contemporary version of *Joe Magazine* in the way it tackled political topics. Some cartoons in *Kwani? 03* (2003) are actual reprints of Terry Hirst’s and Hilary Ng’weno’s *Joe Magazine*. One such cartoon is titled ‘Peaceful Solution’ and is contained in *Kwani? 03*. It depicts Terry Hirst’s imagination of the 1980s’ Zimbabwe where the British Prime Minister uses a long stick to poke Ian Smith’s buttocks so that the latter may jump into the swimming pool and negotiate with Robert Mugabe and other chimurenga war comrades. The Zimbabwean war of independence is similar to Kenya’s Mau Mau war. The chapter therefore investigates how *Kwani?* Journal’s selected cartoon paratexts grapple with Mau Mau memory, ethnicity, and nationhood in its publications.

There is a sense of transnationalism (Gilroy, 1993) in the growth of cartoon culture in Kenya. Frank Odoi (Ghanaian), James Tumisiime (Ugandan), and Philip Ndunguru (Tanzanian) were the three foreign cartoonists who followed Hirst’s tradition while drawing for Kenyan newspapers. Local cartoonists Koskei Kirui, James Kamawira (Kham), Godfrey ‘Gaddo’ Mwampembwa (Tanzanian), and Paul Kelemba (Madd) supported them. Gathara (2004: 25) writes that “[W]ith the agitation for political change in the late 1980s and early 1990s, cartoonists became bolder and Madd is credited with being the first to caricature the then President Daniel Arap Moi”. *Kwani?* contains many of Gaddo’s cartoons with the journal echoing editorial cartoon commentary carried in Kenya’s main newspapers. For instance, Gaddo’s ‘Public Notice’ (2002) cartoon appears in *Kwani? 01*. It depicts a frightened, angry, and bald-headed image of the just-retired President Moi with the caption: “THE PERSON WHOSE PHOTOGRAPH APPEARS HERE ABOVE CEASED TO BE PRESIDENT OF KENYA ON 30th DECEMBER 2002. HE IS NO LONGER AUTHORISED TO TRANSACT ANY BUSINESS ON BEHALF OF THE REPUBLIC.” This alludes to the journal’s potential to lampoon political leadership in Kenya, hence the need to find out how *Kwani?* performs the same role in regard to other Kenyan regimes.

Studies trace the origin of cartoons to Italy (Gathara, 2004) before the popular art form spread to other parts of Europe and the Americas. The use of caricature and cartooning relies on rhetorical strategies, which communicate potent political messages that influence the way we view the target of the cartoon or comic strip (Medhurst and Desousa, 1981; Ingutia and Matu, 2016). This point is particularly important when we situate it in contexts that revolve around race, ethnicity, class, gender, and the roles these categories play in the daily construction of nationhood and national identity. Anderson (1983: 22) notes, in his observations on European

visual culture that the visual realm of literary art plays a role in imagining the nation as “[o]ne can profitably turn to the visual representations of the sacred communities, such as the reliefs and stained-glass windows of medieval churches.” In the case of Kenya, Mararo (2014) focuses on the way cartoons in the country’s main newspapers contain gender stereotypes, which affect women’s performance in politics. Mararo (2014: 285) suggests that “There is a need to have concerted efforts in controlling the media contents because as a powerful tool, it serves different ethnicities, religions, genders”. Thus, ethnicity, religion and gender are some of the important issues that come to bear when we discuss nationhood and national identity (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990; Renan, 1990).

In addition, Prendergast (2019: 63) writes that political cartoons “[e]mploy an array of communicative devices [...] to express criticisms of the social and political status quo as well as the weaknesses of key social actors and institutions.” Prendergast observes that cartoonists achieve this objective by employing satire in subtle ways that even the most dictatorial regimes might not detect, as was the case with Argentina’s *Humor Registrado* magazine. In Kenya, intense dictatorship is often associated with the Daniel Arap Moi regime. Ogola (2007) shows how Wahome Mutahi’s ‘Whispers’ cartoon column in Kenya’s *Daily Nation* newspaper used popular church and biblical allegory to lampoon the oppressive tendencies of Moi’s regime without state scrutiny, as was the case during Argentina’s 1976-1983 junta rule. This fact underlies the concern in this chapter with *Kwani?* Journal’s sense of balance in its use of caricature to influence the reader’s understanding of Kenya’s 2007 and 2013 electoral violence, and how this impacts popular discourses on nationhood.

Ethnic myths and stereotypes relating to leadership partly informed violence during Kenya’s two elections considered here. There have been popular contestations on the strengths and weaknesses of Kenya’s different regimes, and it is important to examine how the popular media such as *Kwani?* Journal’s cartoons capture these stereotypes and myths. For instance, popular media constructs the Kikuyu as thieves and characterises Kikuyu presidents as corrupt. Similarly, the Akamba community are stereotyped as too submissive to lead. Therefore, there is a sense in which representations of ethnic stereotypes and myths in Kenyan popular media inflame discourses on national cohesion (Mulanda and Khasandi-Telewa, 2014). Mulanda and Khasandi-Telewa (2014: 42) suggest that “[t]here should be policies and regulations that govern the use of these cartoons to avert polarization of the society through use of perceived unfriendly cartoons.” These stereotypes construct Kenya’s different regimes in terms of what tribe is/was better or worse. There is also the question of how such comparative performances

relating to ethnic grouping are a window through which communities view and define themselves in relation to Kenya's nationhood and identity (Ogude, 2003; Nyairo, 2004; Odhiambo, 2005; Siundu, 2007). Regime comparisons in turn lend themselves to the idea of group "otherness" (Said, 1978) and form the ideological basis for communal myths in the Kenyan political space (Ligaga, 2009). Such popular exchanges about the presidency might inform the way *Kwani?* Journal's paratextual media depict electoral violence in Kenya in so far as Fabian (1997) observes that context impacts popular culture texts. Thus, the discussion analyses how *Kwani?* cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays and SMS possibly influence ordinary Kenyan readers' understanding of the nature of violence in the 2007 and 2013 elections.

The use of cartoons has been particularly important to the way Kenyans imagine their nationhood across time. Kenyan cartoonists employed satire to ridicule authoritarianism in ways that the state could not counter. This is observable in Gaddo's satirical 'Public Notice' (2002) cartoon considered above. Musila (2007: 98) defines satire as "[t]he literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation." Musila further observes that a cartoonist uses satire to set moral and socio-political standards that critique society through the concept of incongruity. Musila writes that

[I]ncongruity as a comic device, works within the scope of satire as an art of unmasking; one which unveils social infelicities and mockingly draws our attention to these fallible practices, which are either well concealed, or which we have chosen to ignore in cynical resignation. (Musila, 2007: 106)

Joseph Oduro-Frimpong (2014) upholds the same argument and sees the blurring of social class boundaries in his study of political cartoons in Ghana. He observes that "[t]he cartoon, at least, democratizes and thus makes accessible critical political issues to Ghanaian nonelites" (2014: 131). The foregoing speaks to the role of cartoonists as balanced social critics. Press (1981) noted that cartoonists are important actors in the opinion-formation process of a working democracy. However, this is rarely the case, as Press (1981: 14-15) writes that "[M]ost political cartoons are a form of journalistic comment designed to influence viewers with regard to specific political events of the day." This chapter treats specific Kenyan elections as events of the day, and assesses how *Kwani?* Journal uses cartoons and other paratextual media to

influence readers' understanding of the Kenyan political situation as Genette (1997) suggests paratexts do.

Different scholars have expanded on Genette's (1997) concept of the paratext. Desrochers and Tomaszek (2014: 161) explain that paratexts are "a series of elements ranging from cover pages to prefaces and notes that envelop the narrative in order to form the book and present the text to the reader." They outline paratexts as "a repository and archive of information" (2014: 161). The current chapter is interested in how *Kwani?* Journal's 'peritexts', specifically cartoons, photo essays, blogposts, emails, and SMS present a particular narrative of Kenya's nationhood, as outlined in preceding chapters, but more importantly, how the narrative acts as an ideological archive for the contested nationhood. This is especially because Desrochers and Tomaszek (2014: 180) note that "the functionality of these paratextual elements [become] devices applied to achieve effects that serve the narrative." The 'narrative' in this case refers to the Kenyan State metanarrative (Boehmer, 2010).

Popular culture is a repository of the political debates that nations grapple with. Ogot (1995) recognises this role of Kenyan popular culture as an archive of Kenyan history. This view links with Gray's (2010: 26) later view that paratexts are "the very stuff upon which much popular interpretation is based." Gray (2010: 26) further situates paratexts within popular culture by explaining that a paratext "[p]romises to tell us how a text creates meaning in popular culture and society more generally." Thus, there is a sense in which *Kwani?* Journal's cartoons, photo essays, blogposts, emails, and SMS reflect how the Kenyan nation confronts the problem of ethnicity and its challenge to national identity formation (Ogot, 1995; Ochieng, 2008; Kanyinga, 2013). The paratexts are sites of constant socio-political contestation in a nation where, as is the case worldwide, history is always in dispute. The chapter considers these paratexts as important markers of *Kwani?* Journal's overarching ideological position on Kenya's nationhood, as indeed Genette (1997: 351) observes that paratexts are "a system of "leaks" organised at the source and maintained through unofficial means." Fair (2001: 260) observes in her study of a Zanzibari musician, that "[L]ocal agents continue to use Siti's songs as metaphors, as tools with which they recall and construct their own versions of Zanzibar's past [...] as mnemonics of memory, triggers that allow them to see and hear the struggles and debates of the time." The cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays, and SMS in *Kwani?* Journal serve the same purposes in the popular imagination of the Kenyan nation (Anderson, 1983). Hence, the chapter investigates the sense of neutrality (Bhabha, 1990) that these paratexts adopt in their depiction of Kenya's contested national memory.

5.3 Cartoons and ethnic ideology in *Kwani?* Publications

Kwani? 06 (2010) runs commentaries on Kenya's 2007/2008 Post Election Violence and has the anonymous 'Comic 2' (2010) that is a 32-panel cartoon strip, which uses visual metaphor and allusion to refer to the inter-communal violence that occurred in Kibera after the contested 2007 elections. The first two panels of the strip depict shaggily dressed men, possibly Luo, celebrating as they burn down Kikuyu businesses. The figures have big eyes and smiling lips, which, in the context of the red colour of the fire, depicts the Luo characters as lovers of violence. A red magic wand can be seen in the next panel and the fire suddenly dies out in the third and fourth panels, where surprise is written on the faces of the Luo characters. One of them asks, "Why is it suddenly cold?" (2010: 514). The fifth panel captures a dreadlocked male human force flying in the air so he can reach the scene of violence. There are happy soldiers who also ride on the back of the male force. The fact that panel five of the strip contains only this single figure possibly suggests how the cartoonist associates the dreadlocked figure with mystical power. The superhuman force, which in this case probably alludes to members of the Mungiki cult, arrives on time to observe the violent Luo gang's action on perceived members of the Kikuyu community as contained in panels six and seven. In panel 8, again, the dreadlocked force motions his left arm, representing the 'vector', like Jesus calming the sea as his muscular soldiers arrive with machetes to take on the Luo gang. This panel depicts scared Luo faces, which represent the 'goal', dropping their weapons in the same way Jesus calmed the storm in the biblical sea. Panels nine to nineteen capture the powerful force's soldiers cutting up members of the Luo gang, some of whom abandon the fight and run away. The leader of the Luo gang begs, "Mungu wangu!" (Swahili for 'My God!') (2010: 515). Others plead in varied ways, including "Woi please! Noooo! It wasn't me! Please bwana" (2010: 515). The expression 'Please bwana' (Swahili for 'Please Sir') is particularly important since it represents a phrase that is associated with many Dholuo speakers in Kenya, while 'It wasn't me' might be a syncretic (Gilroy, 1993) reference to the famous song by the Jamaican-American singer, Shaggy. Still, the title of the song functions as a humorous way of showing the carnivalesque irony where those who began the fight now plead for mercy. This might be an aspect of festive laughter as defined by Bakhtin (1984). In the end, the Luo gang surrenders, and the remaining panels depict Nairobi City the following morning. *The Daily Star* newspaper reports the Mungiki violence and specifically uses the phrase 'Slum Saver' to refer to the

Mungiki. A female radio presenter is hosting a call-in session where she asks her listeners whether what ‘Slum Saver’ (reference to the Mungiki cult) did in Kibera was right or wrong. She asks, “What’s your take on the slum saving stranger?” But as the callers search for appropriate answers, the presenter enters an authorial intrusion where she declares that “They [the Luo] deserved it [the Mungiki violence]. Burning people’s houses and all” (2010: 517). This authorial voice is reinforced when another character who is in the studio with the presenter says that “[i]t takes a murderer to kill one.” This means that the Luo of Kibera deserved the Mungiki violence because they too had been violent to the few Kikuyu who live in Kibera. The comic strip ends on a heroic note as the radio presenter expresses her faith in the Mungiki cult in the observation that “If he [the mystical, dreadlocked force] managed to do that to a bunch of merciless thugs, we can only imagine what else he can do” (2010: 517).

The above-described cartoon strip shows *Kwani?* Journal as a popular platform that plays an important role in forging a sense of nationhood by memorialising the past. Renan (1990: 19) stresses this by pointing out that the nation consists of two principles, one of which “[i]s the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories.” The journal employs a comic strip to reenact what actually happened in Kibera Slum during the 2007/2008 elections, where the Mungiki killed many Luo. However, it is debatable whether the insertion of carnivalesque laughter (Bakhtin, 1984) in the representation of the Mungiki violence in Kibera helps forge a sense of nationhood. *The Waki Report* (2008) notes that the Luo slum was one of the major flashpoints of electoral violence, since the Mungiki cult waged revenge attacks mainly on Luo women and children. The report further reveals that there were “[f]orced circumcisions reportedly on Luo victims and attributed to members of the Mungiki Sect” (2008: 63). It is important to note that the International Criminal Court indicted President Uhuru Kenyatta on allegations that he helped fund the Mungiki during the 2007/2008 PEV. In this case, the comic strip relates to the overall idea in this chapter that the producers of paratextual texts usually aim at transmitting a specific ideology. Genette refers to the relationship between ideology and popular media influence in his explanation that paratexts are

[a]n influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (Genette, 1997: 2)

Echoing Genette, Gray (2010: 25) notes that paratexts are also texts in their own right, since they “create and manage our faith, and we consume them on our way to consuming” the text. Both views are particularly important here, since they assist in establishing that the journal’s portrayal of the Mungiki in the foregoing strip reflects an ethnic ideological interpretation. *Kwani?* Journal’s use of a comic strip to depict the Mungiki seems to suggest that the journal celebrates ethnic violence through the creation of comic laughter, rather than diffuse it as Bhabha’s (1990) idea of narrative dissemination requires. This further comes out in the preemptive use of the term ‘slum saver’ to refer to the Mungiki cult in the strip. Timmons (2015) discovered, in her study on the use of paratextual devices in broadcast media that, paratexts are invaluable tools in the promotion of television viewership on Facebook. She found that people prefer visual to text-based paratexts such as blogposts, emails, and SMS. This means that *Kwani?* Journal’s freezing concretisation of the Mungiki through the cartoon medium advertises the cult. Timmons’ (2015) findings concur with Gray’s (2010: 26) observation that “paratexts tell us what to expect, and in doing so, they shape the reading strategies that we will take with us ‘into’ the text, and they provide the all-important early frames through which we will examine, react to, and evaluate textual consumption.” In the journal’s opinion, then, the cult ‘saved’ Kibera by killing Luo women and children during the electoral violence. Therefore, *Kwani?*’s portrayal of Kibera violence, as depicted in the comic strip, aligns itself with the then possible state ideology (Barber, 2018) in regard to the Mungiki violence.⁴

The above-referred cartoon strip also carries performative significance. Desrochers and Tomaszek (2014: 162) observe that Genette’s (1997) notion of the “illocutionary force” of paratextual media implies that these texts have the ability and commitment to perform what they mean. In this context, the cartoon strip actually performs the act of alienation in that it divides the Luo community (who mourn) from the Kikuyu (who celebrate). It does this by contrasting frightened faces of Luo occupants of Kibera Slum with triumphant faces of the Kikuyu Mungiki Cult. This possibly confirms Barber’s (2018: 159) assertion that Kenyan popular culture was used for “promoting ethnic exclusion and violence sparked by political and social competition” in the 2007 elections and therefore hindered the process of nation formation in Kenya (Bhabha, 1990). In addition, the strip creates a “public mythology” (Gray, 2010: 27) that enhances an ethnic “stereotype” (Gray, 2010: 28) of the Kikuyu as more dominant than the Luo in Kenya’s political space. The cartoon particularly paints the Mungiki as a redemptive force as shown through the superhuman-saviour image depicted in the strip. The image resonates with Gray’s (2010: 36) view that “some paratexts work as critical intertexts, actively

trying either to deflect readers from certain texts or to infect their reading when it occurs.” Thus, the comic strip seems to enhance violence in the Kenyan political space by creating an intertext that stereotypes the Luo as naturally violent, as well as by silencing the pre-existing political issues that informed the 2008 electoral violence.

The above depiction of the Mungiki in the cartoon resonates with the view that the illocutionary force of paratexts has the power to influence the public. Genette (1997: 10-11) defines “illocutionary force” as the ability of a paratextual element “[t]o communicate a piece of sheer information.” Genette (1997) notes further that a paratext influences public opinion through conscious intention, interpretation, decision, commitment, advice and command, which are attributes which the comic strip reflects. In addition, Gray (2010: 23) differentiates between two types of paratexts, namely, those “[t]hat grab the viewer before he or she reaches the text and try to control the viewer’s entrance to the text (“entryway paratexts”), and paratexts that flow between the gaps of textual exhibition, or that come to us “during” or “after” viewing, working to police certain reading strategies in medias res (“in medias res paratexts”).” This points to the ordinary reader’s vulnerability to the seductive power of the paratext and classifies the comic strip as an “in medias res paratext” (Gray, 2010: 23). Here, the Mungiki cartoon tempts the reader to view the cult as a benevolent force that means well for the Kenyan nation. Interestingly, Barber (1997) observes that the ordinary reader is the main consumer of popular culture. This then shows how the Mungiki cartoon might act as a force for political influence in Kenya. Fabian (1997) shows that this quality in popular texts made it possible for the ruling elite in Zaire to co-opt the producers of popular culture and in that way furthered dictatorship. Finally, Cheeseman (2009) notes that Kenya has had such moments of authoritarian rule, and therefore there is a sense in which the depiction of the Mungiki in the strip affects nationhood by entrenching ethnic violence.

The second anonymous comic strip, considered in this chapter, was published in *Kwani? 07* (2012). It resonates with the concept of ‘deterritorialisation’ as an aspect of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984). The term refers to “[t]he communicative act of taking human beings out of their familiar ‘territories’ for purposes of ethical critique” (Jimoh, 2010: 25). The strip is titled ‘ICC suspects no longer at ease’, which echoes a transnational allusion to the title of Chinua Achebe’s novel. The strip comprises five panels, which capture the historical moment in Kenya when the international court confirmed crimes against humanity charges on Uhuru Kenyatta, William Ruto, and four other senior government officials⁵ prior to Kenya’s 2013 elections. The charges related to the planning and financing of the 2007/2008 election violence, in which the

six were alleged to have played important roles. The cartoon strip's six panels use animal metaphors to represent the six suspects who are about to board a Royal Dutch Airplane to the Hague, where the International Criminal Court is situated. Three of the suspects have the head of a pig, while the other three are represented by a leopard's head. One of the suspects with a leopard's head carries a basket labelled 'evidence' to show that there is enough proof that he financed and organised the 2007/2008 electoral violence. Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the material bodily lower stratum as an important aspect of the carnivalesque can be deduced from the fact that all the suspects have large, rounded bellies, which perhaps suggests their greed. All the six suspects have their hands shackled as they march to board the Hague-bound plane. It is important to note that the rounded face of the leopard seems to denote William Ruto's⁶ equally rounded face. The Kenyan popular media uses the expression 'Mpigs' to refer to the piggish greed that Kenyan Members of Parliament (MPs) are assumed to have. While it can be said that the leopard's head represents the three suspects that came from Raila Odinga's opposition Orange Democratic Party (ODM) as represented by William Ruto, it would be interesting to find out why the comic strip uses the neutral Kenyan image of the politician as a greedy pig to identify suspects from President Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU). This, however, does not imply that the image and symbolism of the pig is a positive one. It only seems to suggest that the paratext appropriates an image that is already neutral in the Kenyan political imaginary when it refers to politicians who side with the State. On the other hand, the paratext's use of the leopard to represent the opposition might be interpreted to assign specific blame to the opposition within the context of the 2007/2008 PEV. It is possible that the strip guides the reader to associate the opposition with the mystery and cunning character which most African societies assign to the leopard. Thus, the opposition represents an evil force, a dangerous animal that hunts mainly at night. This strategy shows Genette's (1997) view that the strip compels the reader to view the opposition as guilty of the 2007 violence, while painting Kibaki's party as innocent.

The 'ICC suspects no longer at ease' comic strip highlights a moment in Kenya's history in which politicians used violence to debase themselves. This visual depiction symbolically uncrowns (Bakhtin, 1984) the six officials and invites carnivalesque laughter directed at the suspects, from whom some change in behaviour is sought. The strip does this by depicting the politicians in shackles while their faces look worried and helpless. Here too, *Kwani?* Journal seems to align itself with the then Kenyan ruling elite's position (Barber, 2018), which wholly attributed Kenya's 2007/2008 electoral violence to the opposition. This comes out in the comic

strip's identification of the rounded leopard's head that carries weapons used in the violence with William Ruto, who was alleged to have organised the Kalenjin Warriors gang to attack the Kikuyu in Rift Valley Province. President Mwai Kibaki's government adopted the official narrative that it had deployed the Mungiki Cult to mete out revenge attacks on the Luo against the accusation. Thus, the journal's attribution of the electoral violence to only the opposition section of the Kenyan state infers the comic strip's projection of a warped view of the violence. The attribution also alludes to Mbembe's (2001) identification of the postcolony with ubiquitous brutality. This is because *The Waki Report* (2008) acknowledges the role that the opposition played in the violence but attributes three quarters of electoral violence deaths to guns and these guns were solely in the hands of the Kenya Police. The strip alludes to Gray's (2010) notion of paratexts as mere advertisements in that stereotyping the nature of political violence in Kenya inserts the assumption that only the Luo, Kalenjin, and Luhya communities were violent while the Kikuyu people were not. This depiction, therefore, runs contrary to Bhabha's (1990) view about narrating the nation by hardening sub-national stereotypes that enhance ethnic differences and render them insoluble.

The last anonymous strip considered here, titled 'Googlepedia', was published in *Kwani? 04* (2007). It comprises two Kikuyu siblings, possibly a brother and a sister, represented by two Irish potatoes. This comic strip appears syncretic (Gilroy, 1993) because the cartoonist appropriates the Irish potato to represent Kikuyu culture. This is because most colonial settlers, who grew Irish potatoes, occupied Kenya's Central Province where the Kikuyu lived. The crop is today associated with the Kikuyu community. The first panel suggests that the daughter is fed up with her long-time Kikuyu boyfriend when she tells her brother that, "Mike is such a wonderful guy but I wonder whether I should try seeing a guy from another tribe" (2007: 54). The next panel depicts the siblings in a space where the Kikuyu girl has already found herself a Luo boyfriend. This is suggested in her statement that "If my mum finds out that I'm dating a *kihii* -- there will be fireworks" (2007: 59). '*Kihii*' is an offensive Kikuyu term for an uncircumcised little boy, but the Kikuyu use the term in the political context to refer to the Luo, who do not practise male circumcision for cultural reasons. The statement invites festive laughter in the sense that Kikuyu civil culture (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003) associates being uncircumcised with cowardice and being circumcised with strong leadership qualities. The girl's brother responds by saying, "I love my Nyokabi" (2007: 59). Nyokabi is a female Kikuyu name, and therefore there is a sense in which the comic strip tries to influence Kikuyu youth not to find themselves Luo partners. Even though the girl's statement subverts the popular

Kikuyu socio-political notion that Luo men are untouchable because they are uncircumcised, it still warns the girls that their mothers would not like the idea of dating a Luo. The brother's statement that he loves his Kikuyu girlfriend further expresses a conservative stance that a Kikuyu man must date only a Kikuyu girlfriend. The strip resonates with Genette's (1997) idea that paratexts condition our understanding of their objects of reference, in this case the exaggerated cultural difference between the Kikuyu and the Luo. The strip alienates (Anderson, 1983) the Kikuyu from the Luo by referring to the ideological battle that has defined the two communities since 1969, when President Jomo Kenyatta spread the myth that the Luo are unfit to lead because they do not practise male circumcision. This aspect of ethnic 'Othering' in regard to political leadership qualities (Fanon, 1961) also forms the context of the 2007/2008 electoral violence where the Mungiki Cult forcibly circumcised and mutilated the genitals of Luo men. It is therefore possible that the comic strip supports the elite Kikuyu view (Barber, 2018) that the Luo should not rise to positions of national leadership because they do not practise circumcision. This has certain implications on Kenya's nationhood, since it limits national leadership to only those communities that practise male circumcision.

This section examined the way selected cartoon strips in *Kwani?* Journal depict certain aspects of Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV, and how this fictional representation impacts the narration of Kenya's nationhood. The above-discussed three strips appear fairly nuanced in their representation of the above violence. Still, they show that *Kwani?* Journal subscribes to the then Kenya's ruling elite ideology (Barber, 2018), which silenced national violence and also adopted historical and socio-political myths (Fanon, 1961) that ascribed leadership qualities to only the Kikuyu. Gray (2010: 30) notes that "the images and qualities assigned and attached to [texts] by their paratexts stick to them, becoming an inseparable part [...]. In this way, paratexts help to make texts." This therefore possibly problematises the process of narrating Kenya's nationhood and national belonging, in the sense that it associates electoral violence with the opposition, and gives an ethnic interpretation to political leadership. This confirms Bhabha's (1990) view that narratives that reinforce ethnic differences militate against the formation of sustainable nationhood.

The next section analyses selected blogposts published in *Kwani?* Journal. It discusses these media's significance in mediating the divisive issues that Kenyans grapple with in their discourses on nationhood.

5.4 Ethnic stereotypes in *Kwani?* Journal's blogposts and emails

Blogposts and emails play a significant role in mediating notions on nationhood in Kenya. Determining the authenticity of texts is one of the difficulties of dealing with blogposts and emails as forms of paratextual media. Desrochers and Tomaszek (2014) observe, in their study of paratexts in the American novel *The Unknown* (1997) that, these particular paratexts are often replete with missing information. The missing details usually include “[t]he sender’s signature, making the document appear more like a traditional letter than an e-mail. From a paratextual perspective, these findings create a doubt as to whether the reader should perceive these e-mails as fiction, rather than authentic correspondence” (Desrochers and Tomaszek, 2014: 172). The foregoing difficulty complicates my discussion, in that there is a lot of missing information in the two paratextual forms considered here. This problematises claims about the authenticity (or lack thereof) of emails and blogposts in narrating Kenya’s nationhood in the context of the 2007 and 2013 elections, and presents an analytical challenge, given Gray’s (2010) assertion that most popular paratexts are mere ideological adverts.

The more contemporary paratextual forms, such as blogposts, emails, and SMS, constitute an active socio-political space due to their immediacy and scope. This is particularly true for blogposts. Schmidt (2007: 1409) defines blogs as “frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc.) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order.” This definition of maps weblogs as popular culture since contributors write about the issues of the day, and thus their comments form part of the discourses that create a sense of social and national identity (Newell and Okome, 2014). However, Schmidt (2007: 1416) shows the political use of the blog in the statement that “[s]everal studies have shown that differences in affiliation with ideological camps manifest in distinct sub-clusters within the blogosphere.” Schmidt’s Analytical Framework holds that the blogosphere comprises three forces, which are rules, relations and the code. Schmidt (2007: 1411) explains further that rules are “generalizable procedures and routines which act as schemas for action, guiding situational performance by providing shared expectations based on both previous actions and generalized knowledge.” Thus, there are hypertextual and social relations. Schmidt (2007: 1415) explains that “[w]hile hypertextual relations result from blogging episodes, social relations can in addition be maintained by other means of communication and interaction that lie outside blogging practices.” Code refers to “the blogging software and its underlying architecture” (Schmidt, 2007: 1417). The concept of code is important here in the way it helps us understand the underlying political reasons behind the architecture of *Kwani?* Journal’s

selected blogs, a three-dimensional framework which Schmidt recognises as being susceptible to emotional and political manipulation.

Most blogposts and emails that *Kwani?* Journal published in its issues are of a political nature. The paratexts combine humour with direct commentary on the day-to-day political debates that circulated within the Kenyan national space during the two electoral periods. Ligaga's (2009) study indicates that the Kenyan blogosphere is usually most active during the election years, as were political cyber communities Kumekucha, Jukwaa, Mashada.com, and RC Bowen in Kenya's 2007 and 2013 elections. It is at such times that ordinary Kenyans form transnational (Odhiambo, 2005) blogging communities for self-entertainment, and to express their thoughts and feelings on different political leaders. *Kwani?* Journal's publication of such blogposts and emails contributes to the narration and negotiation of nationhood in Kenya, because it constitutes a form of cultural performance. Ordinary Kenyans can therefore coalesce around these blogposts and emails as a subversive process of spontaneous identity formation (Barber, 2018). In addition, Bhabha (1990: 292) terms this the "cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation". However, Ligaga (2009) also observes that there is need for caution in any objective analysis of the Kenyan blogosphere. This is because the popular blog also recycles and circulates ethnic stereotypes, myths, and tribal ideology that historically hinder the process of nation formation in Kenya.

We can understand the meanings of blogposts and emails by considering the contexts within which the popular media circulated them. Gray (2010: 30) refers to this phenomenon when he writes that "all of us bring to bear an entire reading and life history to any act of textual consumption." Thus, the chosen blogpost and email carry with them the volatile context of electoral violence, and the historical potency of contestations for political power between Kenya's Kikuyu and Luo communities. In addition, the selected paratexts speak more directly to the construction and narration of Kenya's nationhood and national belonging (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 2010; Renan, 2010) than do many other mild and humorous blogposts and emails published in the *Kwani?* Journal. As Schmidt (2007: 1420) observes, the blog is a scene "guided by rules of selection, publication, and networking and are employed in strategies of information management, identity management, and relationship management." I therefore analyse how the selected blog imagines Kenya's nationhood by negotiating the information, identity and relationship between the Kenyan communities that it refers to.

Kwani? 07 (2012) contains a long blogpost titled “On Visas: Go Sheng.” The blogpost is, like nearly all of the journal’s blogposts and emails, written in the Kenyan urban slang, Sheng. This characteristic of the blogpost enhances the sense of collective youth identity, as (Barber, 2018: 159) suggests that “Hybrid urban youth languages avoid ethnic compartmentalisation.” The blogpost uses a dynamic language that the Kenyan youth identifies with in their everyday discussions about the Kenyan nation. However, Rinkanya (2010) observes that Nairobi’s urban youth also rely on Sheng as a medium for conducting and circulating socio-political gossip. This suggests the unintended possibility that the use of Sheng in this particular blogpost also makes the popular medium vulnerable to ethnic and spatial gossip. The urban, linguistic youth identity so formed in the blogpost relates to the wider realm of Kenya’s national identity by Othering (Said, 1978) the Kenyan countryside constituency that neither understands the language, nor lives in cities such as Nairobi.

“On Visas” reflects the ethnically emotive political context evident immediately after the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya, which pitted Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu) against Raila Odinga (Luo). The perceived ethnic politics of the visa followed America’s decision to deny visas to prominent hard-line Kikuyu politicians who did not want President Mwai Kibaki to share power with Raila Odinga after the allegedly rigged 2007 Kenyan elections. The American component of the visa politics also related to the Luo identity of Barack Obama’s father, which was rumoured to inform the Kikuyu view that America was denying visas to their politicians because a Kikuyu had purportedly stolen the election from a Luo. Rumours circulated that the Kikuyu were unhappy with Obama’s subsequent presidency. In addition, the Luo joked that they were no longer interested in the Kenyan presidency, since one of them was now the president of America. These rumours and jokes later played a part in cementing Kenya’s sense of nationhood by lightening up the volatile political atmosphere that the 2007/2008 PEV had created.

The blogpost, “On Visas” also uses humour and irony to offer important commentaries on what it means to be a patriotic Kenyan. It depicts six bloggers who exchange views on how America compares with Kenya and whether one should emigrate. Browngal, Oti, Jossey, Mutindani, Phoeby, and Dunkie all agree that the United States is a great place but affirm that there is no substitute for the country one was born in. This profound philosophy is contained in Mutindani’s statement that “[n]orth, east, south, west home is best so usitoroke kwenyu ati juu uko stato. stato ni place poa hatukatai lakini don’t compare it with ur motherland” (2012: 50). This translates to “north, east, south, west home is best so don’t leave your homeland because

you are in the United States. States is a good place we don't deny but don't compare it with you're your motherland". The ironic twist in the blogpost is that Jossey pretends to be writing from the United States, while in actual fact he lives in one of Nairobi's slums. Mutindani sarcastically refers to Jossey thus: "[m]imi niko stato yangu ya ghorofa sita, its [sic] only that kuna chali alikuwa anatuheat yuko stato nayeye anaishi D, yaani dandora" (2012:51) which translates to, "I am in my six-storey United States, it's only that there is a man who was cheating us that he is in the united states [sic] while he lives in D, that is Dandora [a Nairobi slum]." The blogpost therefore alludes to Genette's (1997) persuasive role of paratexts by influencing the reader to love being Kenyan. It aligns with Anderson's (1983) view of popular culture as strengthening a sense of nationhood by inculcating a sense of national pride.

In the blogpost, Browngal relies on a rhetorical question to cast aspersions on the importance of an American visa and suggests that the document is irrelevant. The dismissive tone of "On Visas" expresses impatience with the then US diplomatic decision to ban mainly Kikuyu politicians from travelling to America. The topic author of the blog calls herself "browngal",⁷ a tag that is itself ethnically suggestive. This shows the way some of *Kwani?* Journal's texts tend to insert bodily features and skin pigmentation (Fanon, 1961) to categorise different ethnicities as observed earlier on in Chapter 3. Browngal's sentiment that "*mbona hawa wasee huringa na visa zao kwanu [sic] ni nini iko uko ati mtu ka mimi nikiishia ntachukua ama haribu???*" is loaded. It roughly translates to "why do these people [Americans] always boast about their visa what is in their country that when someone like me visits will take or destroy???" (2012: 48) This is a valid decolonial statement (Mbembe, 2001) that seeks to strengthen Kenya's national identity by guarding against Western representations of Africa. Mbembe (2001: 11) refers to these Western acts as "conceptual structures and fictional representations used precisely to deny African societies any historical depth." However, the fact that the blogpost centres only on the visa incident while eliding the precedent of a contested election is instructive. The paratext appears to influence the reader to sympathise with only the Kikuyu political view. The popular medium fulfils an ethnically biased agenda that privileges one section of the nation (Anderson, 1983) and therefore complicates the narration of nationhood.

The use of skin pigmentation and naming to differentiate the possibly Kikuyu topic author of the blogpost from other Kenyan ethnicities can be observed in the naming of the reply authors to the blog's thread. Mbembe (2001) explains that naming is not an innocent act. It is an intentional and categorising process, which involves assigning either superior or inferior traits

to the object of the naming. Thus, the reply authors in the blogpost thread include Oti, Dunkie, Kingjamc, Jossey, Mutindani, and Phoeby. Here, Dunkie, Kingjamc, Jossey, and Phoeby are neutral pseudonyms in the Kenyan context and yet, Oti and Mutindani are not as Oti is a short form of the Luo name, Otieno (male born at night). Moreover, Mutindani is possibly a pejorative form of the Kamba name, Mutinda, which means ‘the undecided one.’ The name Mutindani is interesting because the Kenyan media accused then Vice President, Kalonzo Musyoka, who is Kamba, of being undecided when Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga were campaigning for Kenya’s 2010 Constitution. The use of Mutindani as a blog name therefore functions as a metonymic device (Mbembe, 1997) which uses one politician’s behaviour to refer to the entire Kamba community from the national collective through the process of Othering (Said, 1978). Its deployment in the blogpost might also stereotype all Kamba people as being innately undecided and influence other Kenyans to view the Kamba as inferior members of the nation. The symbolic association of Oti (born at night) with darkness suggests a negative trope and its attachment to Mutindani (the undecided one) is interesting because the Luo and Kamba communities both voted for Raila Odinga in the 2013 elections. Therefore, “On Visas” acts as a paratextual tool that influences the reader (Genette, 1997) to view the opposition in strictly ethnic terms and to devalue the opposition’s importance in discourses on Kenya’s nationhood.

Oti’s case speaks further to how various *Kwani?* Journal paratexts refer back to the imaginary ethnic binary that differentiates the Kikuyu from the Luo. This is depicted in the taglines that the respective blog characters use to sign off their comments. Brownngal signs off as “hands off me!”, Dunkie as “Debunk the theory”, and Kingjamc as “Lovers’ Teacher.” Mutindani’s tagline is “Waipa” (a popular corruption of ‘Wiper’⁸, the 2007 Kamba political party), while Phoeby’s is “Don b” a ‘player hater’ or a ‘wannabe’ it aint gonna get u far, stay tru 2 ur game ‘n’ b on top of ur game”. Interestingly, Oti’s tagline reads, “ehe... Oti Mapanga kwenye bez!” is Sheng for “Oti machetes in the neighbourhood.” This tagline is open to multiple interpretations, as its meaning shifts in the immediate context of the 2007/2008 Kenyan electoral violence. Here, Oti’s tagline of a machete-carrying character possibly seduces the reader to stereotype the Luo community as being innately violent people. Schmidt (2007: 1412) notes that “blogs are more dynamic because content is updated more often, and other users can add comments.” Many readers can therefore access this stereotypical depiction of characters because “[t]he power law distribution of incoming links exists on various levels of the blogosphere, with consequences for the epidemic-like diffusion of information” (Schmidt,

2007: 1416). It is possible that the paratextual potency contained in such ethnic stereotyping outweighs *Kwani?* Journal's use of the blogosphere as a popular space for the formation of subversive youth identity (Barber, 2018). Rather, it functions to divide the nation along imaginary fixities of ethnic Otherness (Said, 1978).

Kwani? Journal's use of popular blogs to comment on the socio-political issues that faced Kenya is linked to the journal's appropriation of the electronic mail (email) as a medium for discussion. The popular nature of the email can be seen in its use as an archive of national stories. Various reports confirm this as noted in the observation that "[e]mail documents the personal and public stories of the day. From family gossip to friendly chatter to institutional business decisions to government actions, all are now frequently documented in email accounts across the globe" (Taskforce on Technical Approaches for Email Archives, 2018: 5). Perhaps this also points to the widespread use of the email medium in Kenya. Kooti *et al* (2015: 2) view the email as "an essential tool for social interactions and a popular platform for computer-mediated communication." This explains *Kwani?* Journal's appropriation of the email paratext in its publications. "Vain Jango" is one such controversial email contained in *Kwani? 01* (2003) that offers commentary on the socio-political contestations between the Kikuyu and the Luo communities. "Vain Jango" is an email in two parts. Its circulators, the *Kwani?* Journal founder, Binyavanga Wainaina, and another *Kwani?* writer, Muthoni Garland, claim that an anonymous person wrote the first part of the email. Binyavanga Wainaina (2003: 103) writes thus, while he introduces the first part of the email: "A year or so ago, I received this forward, a story in "Engsh" by an anonymous Kenyan. I sent it around; it was very funny but annoying – written by a major wanabbe, so Muthoni Garland and I decided to respond." In his introduction to the email, Wainaina (2003: 103) assumes it was a Luo who wrote the first part of the email letter when he writes that a "vain Jango" (Sheng for "proud Luo") wrote the letter. The *Kwani?* founder further qualifies his belief in the ethnic identity of the sender of the email in his description of the author as "an anonymous vain Jango who wrote a piece that was circulated around the net" (Binyavanga 2003: 103). Based on the assumed ethnic identity of the email writer, the second part of the email is curious in that it was Binyavanga and Muthoni Garland who "composed a suitable reply" (Binyavanga, 2003: 103). It is interesting to note that both writers are members of Kenya's Kikuyu community. Therefore, the context of the two-part email suggests an ethnic contestation between Kenya's Luo and Kikuyu communities rather than being popular entertainment. Gray's (2010: 31) notion of context captures this in the statement that "[T]exts make sense because of our past textual experiences, literacy, and

knowledge.” We can therefore only understand the meaning of the email paratext if we are aware of the nuances of political contestation between the Kikuyu and the Luo. Tartarchevskiy (2011: 308) suggests that the internet acts as a space where users hide behind anonymity to further specific political agenda in contexts where “[e]ven contentious messages do not have a particular addressee; their sender is irrelevant [...] their main purpose is not to elicit action but to add to the existing circulation of messages.” I interpret this statement to mean that Binyavanga and Garland were interested in only circulating the email as a paratext to further exacerbate the division between the Kikuyu and the Luo. It is thus further curious that the email paratext does not show the sender of the letter. However, it gives the details of the recipients as @Binyavanga@bin.com and @Muthoni@G.com, including a subject line. It is therefore valid to suggest that *Kwani?* hid the identity of the sender because the two authors were aware of the inflammatory nature of the email. Anderson (1983) observes that inflammatory literature divides rather than unite the nation.

The first letter in “Vain Jango” captures a male Luo called Onyango, who patronises a Nairobi pub and predate on unsuspecting girls. The character’s name and Luo identity are politically loaded since Gray (2010: 32) notes that “[C]haracter names, in particular, often offer intertextual “guides” on how to read a text.” The protagonist has a bombastic tone like most Luo speakers of English do.⁹ The narrator’s ambivalent tone suggests that Onyango’s elevated academic air and heavy vocabulary point to his own pseudo-intellectual pretensions. The narrator refers to sexual predation in fishing terms and thus alluding to the traditional Luo practice of fishing in Lake Victoria. The narrator presents the scene by dissecting the Luo character’s feelings when a Kikuyu girl enters the pub:

Well, she pandad [climbed onto] the barstool as gracefully as a mbuta¹⁰
[...] she was wearing a thong [...]. Yanii [That is] you could see the
whole damn sexy thing peeping proudly above her jeans waistline I
almost fell of [sic] my stool and sobered up in a rush. (Vain Jango, 2003: 104)

There is a sense of literary hyperbole in the description of the protagonist almost falling off his stool. The narrator captures the Kikuyu socio-political construction of the Luo by describing a flashy and intellectual young man who pretends to be rich. The narrative tone also achieves this effect through the use of the phrase, “I mean, but do I say!” It was the late Luo singer, Poxi Presha, who popularised this Luo popular expression in his 1998 hip-hop song, ‘*Dhako*’

(Woman). The song reprimands a woman who is initially respectful but soon starts exchanging words with her husband after she started drinking *chang'aa*, a local Kenyan brew. There is a sense in which the above expression narrates Kenya's nationhood by echoing the popular Kenyan liquor, *chang'aa*, as well as Tusker, Kenya's national beer. Anderson (1983: 10) notes that "[W]e are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage [...] our mother-tongue, so forth." Therefore, the two popular drinks represent the Kenyan nation's claim to authenticity by making the reader imagine a Kenyan public space where people enjoy without ethnic or political affiliations. However, this narrative agency is subordinate to the ethnic delineations that the story projects. It might be said that the email paratext impedes nationhood by stereotyping the Luo protagonist as lacking sexual probity.

The Luo character in the email letter refers to the national space when he asks the Kikuyu girl whether she knows Prof. Yash Pal Ghai, the then Chair of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission. Former President Moi appointed Prof. Ghai and tasked him with looking for ways to change the Kenyan Constitution before the 2002 elections. Indeed, the text uses the expression "change the number of sufurias of ugali that you eat" (2003: 106) to refer to the time in Kenya when former President Moi told Kenyans that his appointing a Vice President was not going to increase the amount of ugali (the Kenyan staple) on their plates. Moi's mocking statement came at a time of economic collapse in Kenya and confirmed Mbembe's (2001) concept of the aesthetics of vulgarity. Mbembe (2001: 102) considers 'banality' as an aspect of the aesthetics of vulgarity and writes that "banality implies the predictability of routine, if only because routine is made up of repeated daily actions and gestures." This relates to the whimsical way in which autocrat Moi hired and fired his ministers. Even so, the email's Luo protagonist is horrified that the apparently rural Kikuyu girl is not sophisticated enough for him. He realises that she did not complete high school, is unaware of current affairs such as the September 11 events in America nor does she know popular international public figures such as Condoleezza Rice, the Sudanese model Alek Wek, and the African-American singer Alicia Keys. It is after this realisation of the Kikuyu girl's ignorance that the Luo man leaves Cactus Pub and drives his car to Kengeles Pub to look for more girls whom he may seduce. The first email letter ends with the protagonist still on the hunt and speaks to the Kikuyu socio-political association of the Luo with prostitution and sex. It is instructive that electoral disagreements between the two Kenyan communities have often revolved around sex and sexuality (Said, 1978). The email's entrenchment of a supposedly pure Luo ethnic identity onto the Kenyan one complicates discussions on nationhood because, as Anderson (1983: 12)

observes, it exhibits an ethnic, “[s]elf-consciously held political ideologies.” In addition, the negative predatory traits that the email uses to profile the Luo character stereotypes and alienates (Genette, 1997) the Luo community from the Kenyan nation.

Various points should be underscored here before focusing on the second part of the email. ‘Jang’o’ is the Sheng and Engsh (a mixture of English and Kiswahili) word for a Luo man, and as such, the email draws from the Kenyan popular construction of the Luo community as proud people, hence the meaning, ‘Proud Luo’. In addition, this paratext, which circulated in the Kenyan webmail during the early parts of President Kibaki’s rule in 2002, was divisive in that it trod the thin line between humour and ethnic stereotyping. This is one instant in which the *Kwani?* Journal exhibits its adaptive character (Barber, 2018) by employing ‘Engsh’ to creatively tell the story of a proud Luo man. The email acts as a source of entertainment to the ordinary reader, although its socio-political interpretation within the Kenyan context is problematic. Different studies give credence to Schmidt’s (2007) approach in analysing the blogosphere, including the email. Pinjamaa (2016: 4) writes that “bloggers incorporate various social media channels into their blogging behaviors and communication strategies.” This speaks to how the email can be an effective means of sharing good or bad information, especially within volatile political contexts. Alsamadani (2017: 44), in his study of the use of the blog in teaching writing skills among students in Saudi Arabia, shows that the blog space enhances faster learning and general literacy because it “is more participatory and interactive.” Unlike Alsamadani (2017), Krapic (2017) recognises the corporate community’s use of the blog as a marketing strategy specifically in Kosovo. He observes the distinction between personal and corporate blogs, and explains that “personal blogs are usually maintained by an individual who expresses his/her own opinions, personal beliefs or simply personal views regarding a certain topic.” Thus, Schmidt’s (2007: 1411) view that half of all “bloggers also give reasons such as influencing other people or meeting new people” is relevant to this particular email in that it has the potential to influence ordinary readers’ political opinions.

The second part of the email paratext is titled “Reply to Vain Jango.” It is transnational, just as the first one, (Odhiambo, 2005) as noted through references to the Colombian-American singer, Shakira, and to the Kabaka’s wife in Uganda. Both Wainaina and Garland use a Kikuyu girl protagonist to rebut the views of the supposed Luo writer depicted in the first section of the email. If the first part of the email exalts a Luo cultural identity, then the second worships Kikuyu cultural ethos. The text contests the Luo admiration of education and a flashy lifestyle captured in the first part of the email as noted in the Kikuyu girl’s statement that, “I had to

show them. That stupid old shit of a father – who used to say I was his good gero [girl], ati [that] how I would go to Oxford! Yaani [That is] be a doctor. But after uprooting his coffee, didn't he become an over-aged Mungiki?¹¹ Said the girls had to leave school” (Wainaina and Garland, 2003: 109). Here, the act of uprooting coffee suggests a revolutionary attitude that goes against the grain of Kenya's Kikuyu people as renowned coffee farmers. Nonetheless, the protagonist is later portrayed detesting her father's plans for her, although she appears to agree with him when he becomes a member of the Mungiki Cult. Both start holding the traditional Mungiki view that girls should remain uneducated and servile. Consequently, the email paratext equates the Mungiki Cult with an authentic Kikuyu identity, and sells the Mungiki product to the reader (Gray, 2010). This militant superimposition of a Kikuyu ethnic identity onto the Kenyan as represented by the image of the Mungiki problematises the formation of national identity by centring one community (Bhabha, 1990) while decentering other Kenyan communities.

The second part of the email letter also alludes to the cunning character of Mungiki texts that I examined in Chapter 2. The email portrays the Kikuyu girl as being wiler than the Luo protagonist. Murray (2013) observes that paratexts are a rhetorical strategy that writers use to influence their readers by joining into their sense of community, or vice versa. Thus, the email invites the reader to identify with the Kikuyu girl since she is the trickster in the email narrative. She abandons her education before matriculating, offers her body for prostitution to a *matatu*¹² driver called Mwangi, who in turn steals his employer's money and gives her to start a clothes and ties business. The convenient nature of *quid pro quo* between the female protagonist and the Kikuyu driver seems to reinforce the popular Kenyan view that members of the Kikuyu community are money-greedy (Ligaga, 2009). Other Kenyan communities usually utter this assertion whenever Kikuyu politicians engage in corrupt practices. Even though it might be true that many of Kenya's big corruption scandals, such as the Anglo-Leasing Scandal, mostly involved members of the Kikuyu, the above assumption is short-sighted as it silences perpetrators of public corruption from other Kenyan communities as noted in the Goldenberg Scandal that mainly involved the Kalenjin during the late President Moi's tenure. Thus, the paratext's construction of the Kikuyu as worshippers of money also inscribes a negative stereotype that undermines nation formation in Kenya.

It is while the female Kikuyu protagonist sells these second-hand clothes that she goes to Cactus to entice the Luo character. The Kikuyu girl says that she intentionally dressed seductively to trick the Luo man. She confesses that:

“Lakini [But], si [don't] I know men? Ati [that] me, shy mwiritu [girl] – I wore tights, but no lipstick. You know, to seem like a virgin from shags [the village] ripe for plucking, yaani [that is] you've got a chance if you keep her happy by buying her little ties. They bought and bought and bought”. (Wainaina and Garland, 2003: 109)

The Kenyan Luo are stereotyped as exceptionally neat lovers of suits and ties, and there is therefore a sense in which buying the Kikuyu girl's ties is a commentary on the totality of Luohood. The repetition of “they bought and bought and bought” seems to intensify the fact that the Luo buyers fell for the Kikuyu girl's trick and entices the reader to stereotype the Luo community as naïve people. This suggests that the Luo are small-minded, and are therefore inferior members of the Kenyan nation.

The Kikuyu protagonist further emphasises her comparative superiority by alluding to how the Luo man in *Cactus* ogled at her when she entered the pub. The Kikuyu protagonist states that “How was I to know that even maendeleo-d [been-to] guys act stupid when they see ‘meat’! I saw him sneaking looks here, there, where? Jango's eyes criss-crossed up, down, round until dripping saliva burned a hole in his blue shirt!” (Wainaina and Garland, 2003: 110). The ‘meat’ here refers to the Luo man's carnal desire for the Kikuyu girl. The textual description uses exaggeration and hyperbole to “Other” (Said, 1978) and transforms the Luo character into an object of sexual opprobrium and immorality. However, the end of the email is instructive, for the female protagonist notes that “But you boy [...] While you are doing your sniff sniff [...] I'll be making cash money. Come sniff sniff in my office when you are looking for a job. In five years. And I'll be twenty. Laughing at you, laughing at my father. I won't be ‘fat’. I'll be rough and lady” (Wainaina and Garland, 2003: 112). The Kikuyu girl's views are interesting in that the Kikuyu community derogatorily refers to uncircumcised men as ‘boys’. The paratext lays down the ideological line that the Kikuyu socio-political space often describes the Luo as lazy, uncircumcised people and the Kikuyu as circumcised, hardworking businessmen (Ligaga, 2009). The girl's comments can therefore be said to denigrate (Said, 1978) the Luo in regard to political leadership in Kenya by inviting the reader (Genette, 1997) to share in the act of valorising the Kikuyu community's political perception of the Luo.

The extract portrays the Luo protagonist's insincerity because he owns only a virtual BMW. He is also depicted as a lazy male character that spends his time in search of girls with “serious bootie” (Wainaina and Garland, 2003: 104). On the contrary, the female Kikuyu protagonist is

a hard worker who knows how to make money. Thus, the text alludes to the need for the building of Kenya's nationhood based on a culture of diligence. However, the state of diligent nation building might be possible only within a neutral context, which Kenya is not. Kanyinga (2013) shows that the Kenyan political space historically deploys discourses on laziness and hard work when it is ethnically convenient to do so.

One might convincingly argue, as Musila (2010) does, that the above inclusion of email paratexts in *Kwani?* points to the journal's dynamic character. These new media, in this case typified by the above-referred emails, are an entertaining space where Kenyans form communities by joking about their respective accents and making meaning (Barber, 2018). Further recognised here by Barber (2018: 14), is the role of language in African popular culture whereby, "[p]eople play with language, make up new expressions to name new experiences, comment humorously and sarcastically on everyday life." However, one might still question how genuine the communities so formed might be, given the potent ethnic binaries that such paratextual media insert into discourses on nationhood in Kenya. The above speaks to the observation that

[w]hile the new media and new forms of distribution facilitate greater access to content production and the dissemination of cultural content [...] the very multiplicity of choices and the cultural challenges they embody can result in cultural isolation as well as a proliferation of stereotypes.

(UNESCO World Report, 2009: 129)

This is specifically so in the case of the considered *Kwani?* email, since the paratext does not resolve the historical ethnic divide that antagonises the Kikuyu and the Luo in politics. It instead reignites the Cold War political division in which the Kikuyu are assumed to be "hardworking" capitalists since Jomo Kenyatta sided with the US, while the Luo are associated with Communist "laziness" because Oginga Odinga identified with the USSR. These stereotypical ethnic associations that define the Kikuyu and Luo communities connect well to Gray's (2010: 33) view that "context of interpretation will often be shared by others, readings will tend not to be random and wholly individualistic." This political context is therefore well understood by all Kenyans, but by mainly the Kikuyu and the Luo. *Kwani?* Journal's dynamism is seen here in the text's appropriation of a divisive ideological schism between Kenya's two

communities and in using the same to entertain as well as influence the reader's understanding of the Kikuyu and the Luo in the Kenyan nation's political context.

It might be right to say that the tenor of the literary depiction in the current email paratext problematises Kenya's nationhood and national identity. The author refers to the word 'boy', which reinserts the old circumcision and leadership debate between the Luo and the Kikuyu. Tavares (2017) notes that paratexts are subversive in that they constitute a mode of communication that does not adhere to our traditional understanding of the printed book. This includes their use of epitext (outside the text) and peritext (inside the text) materials, which all have a bearing on the final meaning of the actual text. Subversion aside, Tavares (2017: 19) notes how paratexts are anchored on the "phenomenon that media messages would actually be shaped continuously, through some sort of mediating tunnel, subjected to a number of influences and interpretations." Gray (2010: 25) underlines this characteristic by observing that "paratexts condition our entrance to texts, telling us what to expect, and setting the terms of our "faith" in subsequent transubstantiation." The email acts as a peritext that guides the reader's consumption of discourses on the ethnically divisive political relationship between the Luo and the Kikuyu. Thus, the email manages our understanding of the Kenyan political context by using a contemporary medium of communication to reinvent old ethno-political myths that traditionally divide the Luo and the Kikuyu.

The next section examines the way photo essays published in *Kwani?* Journal engage with varied ethno-political issues in the context of Kenya's 2013 elections.

5.5 Photo essays as electoral national memory in the *Kwani?* Journal

Photo essays, like cartoons, play a critical role in the socio-political imagination of the nation. For instance, photo essays of Kenya's historic moments such as national elections act as an archive of political documents that Kenyans consult to memorialise the nation (Anderson, 1983; Renan 1990). Thus, reflecting on photo essays, Harper (2002: 13) observes that "images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words." Furthermore, photo essays may be used to shape public opinion towards or against specific socio-political causes (Holbrook and Kuwahara, 1998). In so doing, photography and photo essays in *Kwani?* Journal also act as a means of self-reflection and self-expression of Kenyan national culture. As Linnebuhr (1997: 138) observes in the case of traditional kanga clothing in Tanzania, "Kanga reflect [...] the habits and conceptions of the culture from which they originate or for which

they have been produced.” By extension, *Kwani?* Journal’s photo essays reflect Kenyan national culture. However, this would depend on how well the journal’s photo essay paratexts influence the reader to imagine the larger national space. Similarly, Jewsiewicki (1997: 101) shows that Zairean paintings, like photo essays, “[a]re as much chronicles of social and political life as they are materializations of imagination and social memory.” Following on Jewsiewicki (1997), Linnebuhr (1997), and Holbrook and Kuwahara (1998), the section investigates the moments of Kenyan history and image of the nation that *Kwani?* Journal’s photo essay paratexts project.

Kwani? Journal makes use of photo essays as paratexts to influence readers’ understanding of Kenya’s nationhood and national identity. Fast (2017: 5) defines a photo essay as “a series of images that are intended to tell a story or evoke a series of emotions in the viewer.” On the same note, photographs have often been used to communicate important socio-political issues. Harper (2002: 13) writes that human beings like to remember the past using photographs because photos constitute “[i]mages that depict events that were part of collective or institutional pasts [...] institutional experiences, or images depicting events that occurred earlier in the lifetimes of the subjects.” The task in this part of the chapter is to find out the specific aspects of Kenya’s electoral past that *Kwani?* Journal’s photo essays memorialise and determine how these influence readers’ construction of Kenya’s national identity. The section mainly centres on Kenya’s 2013 elections, and marginally alludes to photo essays that *Kwani?* published on the 2007/2008 PEV for reasons of objective balance. This is because Chapter 2 of this study deals with the emotive context of Kenya’s 2007 elections, and the violence that accompanied that election. The section therefore considers the 2013 elections for purposes of analytical variety, as well as for comparison with the journal’s coverage of the 2007 elections. The section also examines how the journal’s coverage of the said elections mediates the ethnic contestations that characterised the Kenyan electoral process of the time.

It is however important to note that Kenya’s 2007 electoral violence informed the context of the 2013 elections. The issues that arose from the 2007 vote such as ethnicity and age were at the centre of the 2013 elections. Kanyinga (2014: 34) notes that “[t]he International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted the two leaders [Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto] for crimes committed during the [2007/2008] violence.” Moreover, the then Prime Minister Raila Odinga (Luo) was contesting for political power against Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu), who was then a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance in the Government of National Unity that Kofi Annan had brokered to end the 2007 electoral dispute between Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu)

and Raila Odinga. Therefore, both elections involved competition for power between a Luo and a Kikuyu. Most importantly, Kanyinga (2013) observes that Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate, William Ruto, used the 2013 elections to capture power and defeat the course of justice at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Kenyan state created a false narrative of total peace in its reference to the 2013 elections to rally and influence the international community for diplomatic acceptance (Gathara, 2015).

Kwani? 08 (2015) contains three photo essays that speak to Kenya's nationhood and transnational identity during the 2013 elections. Jennifer Huxta's (2015) photo essay captures the Tunisian elections of 2011 within the context of the Jasmine Revolution, which sparked off the Arab Spring. The photo essay begins with the statement that "On October 23rd, 2011, ninety per cent of registered Tunisian voters stained their fingers in black ink to vote in the first free elections in Tunisia's history. Many waited in line for hours" (Huxta, 2015: 586). A photo of proud looking voters standing in a queue follows the opening comment in this photo essay comprising eleven photos. While the second photo shows many Tunisians going about their daily businesses in one of the streets, the third captures a male voter in the actual act of voting. The fourth, fifth, and sixth photos show the happy faces of a man, a young woman and a granny who have just voted. The black-stained index finger in the seventh photo stresses and summarises the fact that the people had voted in their first ever free and fair election. The eighth photo shows four Tunisian activists in a small room and Huxta (2015: 591) writes that "At the headquarters of Nawaat – a centre for cyberactivists, artists, and bloggers – young men and women wounded in the Jasmine Revolution coloured their fingers with red paint." The third last photo shows more Tunisian activists on a hunger strike to force the government to hold elections while the last two show two young men posing proudly thus implying that the Tunisians have at last realised their dream. Huxta (2015: 592) captures this mood when she writes that "The activists had been among the first to respond to Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010, launching Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution in which more than 2000 were injured. The Jasmine Revolution sparked a series of revolutions across North Africa, and what would come to be called the Arab Spring." This photo essay, then, comes out as a timely commentary on the series of pain (Renan, 2010) that Tunisia went through in her fight for her own sense of nationhood. The fact that *Kwani? 08* contains this particular photo essay speaks to how the journal acts as a transnational space (Odhiambo, 2009).

Furthermore, the reason for the journal's inclusion of the photo essay here might be *Kwani?* Journal's attempt to equate the largely peaceful Tunisian 2011 context with the Kenyan elections of 2013. This idea is evident in Holbrook and Kuwahara's (1998: 3) observation that "[p]hotography contributes not only as a means for gathering data but also as a potential mode for presenting the findings from a marketing" point of view. However, as I showed in Chapter 4, Gathara (2015) observes in the same *Kwani?* 08 issue that the Kenyan media curiously adopted the position that the 2013 ballot was peaceful, even though the elections were marred by widespread rigging and malpractices in the opposition areas. One might argue that *Kwani?* Journal was an unconscious part of the government propaganda that sought to project the 2013 elections as a peaceful youthful revolution against the old guard. Mbembe (2001: 111) identifies this as the fetishistic character of the postcolony where power is invested both in the autocrat, and "also in the persons of the *commandement* and of its agents—the party, policemen, soldiers, administrators and officials, middlemen, and dealers." Here, then, *Kwani?* Journal's adoption of the state narrative (Barber, 2018) on the election makes it a part of the middlemen constituency that unconsciously does the postcolony's bidding by silencing oppositional narratives. Thus, *Kwani?* Journal's association of the 2011 Tunisian Revolution with Kenya's 2013 elections misinterpreted Kenyan politics and nationhood in fundamental ways. It failed to recognise the hybrid nature of the nuances and liminal spaces that Bhabha (1990) argues for in forming the nation. Bhabha (1990: 292) writes that such strategies should be "more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications [...] than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism."

The second photo essay relates to the first in that it is an actual snapshot of the 2013 Kenyan electoral process captured in 25 different photos. The first has the faces of five women patiently waiting for their turns to vote while 11 other photos also contain women. There are two photos that depict young mothers carrying their babies to the voting booths. A further three photos depict Muslim women waiting to take part in the vote. A total of 10 photographs contain both men and women waiting to vote while five show policemen gently guarding the peace during the electoral process. The general impression that the essay creates is that Kenya's 2013 elections were completely peaceful, which is the connection between the second and the first photo essays. Photographs of elderly women and young mothers carrying their babies to the booths push the narrative of electoral peace. The presence of calm and responsible policemen also suggests that there was no police violence during the elections. However, the narrative of the photo essay elides the reality that there was widespread pre-emptive police presence in

opposition areas. There were also electoral irregularities, which saw the opposition CORD unsuccessfully challenge the election results at Kenya's Supreme Court. *Kwani?* Journal's failure to capture the contested aspects of the 2013 election in photo essays indicate the way the journal used paratextual silence (Genette, 1997) to influence the reader into believing that the elections were peaceful. The strategy identified with the state narrative and drawing on Barber's (1997: 3) views, it can be argued that the photo essay is "contaminated by hegemonic ideological infiltrations from above." The photo essay indeed shows bias and problematises Kenya's nationhood by masking its ugly aspects.

It can still be argued that the photo essay reinforces a sense of nationhood and national belonging in several ways by grappling with the chaotic sense of place and electoral space that is Kenya. *Kwani?* Journal flaunts an imaginary atmosphere of total electoral peace during the 2013 elections in Kenya and this can be interpreted as the editor's longing for such a space in the face of the nation's traumatic confrontations with electoral violence. This is alluded to in a study of street youth in Vancouver, Canada, where Fast (2017) notes that photo essays capture the intentional choices that their creators made and speak to what their creators long for. Fast (2017: 11) shows this in his comment that the "images young people created in the context of this photo essay project evoke embodied, sensory, and affective experiences in particular places – those they inhabited, but also those they longed to inhabit or return to." Furthermore, the photo essay captures a neutral gender space where both women and men, and the young and the old participate in a national process. The presence of Muslim women participating in the electoral process also mediates the historical problem of the relationship between the Kenyan state and its Muslim population. The problematic debate between Christianity and Islam in Kenya began in the colonial times and continues to this day, especially in relation to the fight against Islamic fundamentalism (*Daily Nation*, March 19, 2020). As Anderson (1983) suggests, the visual inclusion of Islam within the Kenyan electoral space as contained in the photo essay shows Muslims that they are part of the Kenyan national collective. This act effectively reinforces a sense of nationhood and national belonging in Kenya.

The third photo essay shows the two main candidates of Kenya's 2013 elections side by side. This act is important for Kenya's nationhood in that it freezes together the competing candidates in a neutral visual space where Uhuru Kenyatta's and Raila Odinga's political differences dissolve (Bhabha, 1990). The selection and arrangement of the photo essay comprises 32 photos. It begins with the two-page photograph of a man writing on the black tarmac: "Give peace a chance." There are two policemen with guns in the background with the

other three pictures depicting the police at work. One photograph captures two Muslim women and a Muslim man going to cast their votes. There are 13 large and spacious photographs of both the TNA Party and Uhuru Kenyatta himself. Interestingly, there is no photograph of Raila Odinga's CORD Party. There are only four squeezed photos of Raila Odinga. Out of these, two photos depict the opposition leader as a sad and bitter man after losing the 2013 elections. Conversely, there are happy and ebullient photos of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto placed above Raila Odinga, where the former pair can be seen celebrating Uhuru's electoral victory. The visual paratext ends with a group of people, supposedly members of the opposition, protesting after their loss with the Kenyan police force arriving on time to disperse disgruntled members of the opposition.

The presence of Muslims in one of the photographs inserts a sense of religious inclusion in Kenya. Anderson (1983: 10) writes that nationalism partly relies on "a strong affinity with religious imaginings" because mankind is obsessed with the double issues of death and immortality. In addition, Mbembe (2001: 10) recognises the role of religious freedom as an integral part of national consciousness in the observation that "modernity is also seen as characterized by the liberation of the sentient subject and his/her sovereignty from the unifying power of religion and the authority of faith and tradition." Therefore, the photographs of the Muslim voters stand out as the paratexts that perform the liberating force of religious freedom to which Mbembe (2001) refers, and play a part in forging Kenya's nationhood.

The above-noted photo essay also uses contrast to show *Kwani?* Journal's ideological bias. The photo essay projects the impression that Uhuru Kenyatta's and William Ruto's TNA Party had more voters than the opposition did. This can be seen in the large number of TNA supporters captured in most of the pictures while there are barely any photographs of the opposition CORD supporters. The presence of the police also masks the pre-emptively violent character of the Kenya police as witnessed in the 2013 election. The large sizes of Uhuru Kenyatta's photos are contrasted with the small sizes of Raila Odinga's. This depiction reflects an ideological difference that favours (Gray, 2010) Uhuru Kenyatta's candidature in the 2013 election. Murray (2013: 54) observes that one of the functions of the preface, as a paratext in Lady Anne Barnard's writings, was for invitation as well as "an exercise in steering readers towards answers" to questions that her text asked. Thus, *Kwani?* Journal's photo essay seems to achieve this objective by denigrating one photo while exalting the other. Most photographs of Uhuru Kenyatta are clearer than those that depict Raila Odinga. Moreover, the photo essay puts Uhuru's photos above Raila's in a spatial context that symbolises the former's superiority and

the latter's inferiority. Lastly, the essay depicts Uhuru's happy and lively face as the deserving victor while Raila's bitter face projects the opposition leader as the perennial loser of elections. This denigrated depiction of the opposition leader can be said to overlap onto Raila Odinga's Luo community, which the reader might assume to be political losers. By implication, the superior image of Uhuru Kenyatta connects with the reader's view of the valorised Kikuyu community as natural winners of Kenyan elections. This strategy of contrasting the two communities reinforces the myth that the Kikuyu are natural rulers over the Luo, Kamba, and other Kenyan communities that supported the opposition. We also note that the Kenyan media similarly adopted this narrative of Raila as the eternal loser after the 2013 elections. The fact that Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga belong to different ethnicities shows that *Kwani?* Journal's narrative process entrenches ethnic differences and exclusion within Kenya's national space. This then relates to the issue of credibility as an aspect of popular paratextual media. Genette (1997) attributes this to the fact that paratexts tied to modern technology are prone to misuse since some are intended to dupe readers. Genette (1997: 12) observes further that "[t]he paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its *raison d'etre*." This suggests that the photo essay discussed here exists to sustain the ethno-ideological narrative (Barber, 1997) that the Kikuyu community is superior to other communities.

5.6 Short Message Services (SMS) and national elections in *Kwani?* Journal

A major issue surrounding the popular use of the SMS is its ease of adoption by other social media sites such as the Email, Twitter, and Facebook. Its popularity is because "[t]ext messaging [...] is ubiquitously available [...] the cost of text messaging is also decreasing, which makes it a more viable candidate for adoption" (Battestini, Seltur, and Sohn, 2010: 9). This combination of enabling factors influence O'Brien's (2010: 2) observation that the "[m]obile phone provides a significant site for the expression and enactment of young people's everyday cultural practices". Its use "[b]oth establishes its own unique sets of cultural practices and resides within broader forms of social and culture life" (O'Brien, 2010: 2). Goggin (2005) points out further that the political potency of SMSes was partly responsible for the overthrow of the former President Estrada of Philippines in 2000. This necessitates the need for the current chapter to analyse the political impact of *Kwani?* Journal's publishing of SMSes. This is

especially so, given the fact that Kenyan elections have invariably seen the use of hate SMS (*The Waki Report*, 2008).

The widespread use of mobile phones in Kenya has certain implications for discourses on nationhood and national identity. This is mainly due to the popular activity of texting, which Horstmanshof and Power (2005: 33) define as “using mobile-phone technology to access the Short-Message Service (SMS), whereby messages of fewer than 160 characters are exchanged directly.” Texting has a political potential to influence opinion for or against those in power (Goggin, 2005). The view by O’Brien (2010: 15) that “what is required is an understanding of the mobile phone as a cultural object, rather than as purely a piece of technology, and a consideration of the central role it plays in everyday life” is important here. This is especially true, given the fact that *Kwani?* Journal publications contain many of the SMS texts that Kenyans sent to one another during both the 2007 and 2013 elections. Thus, this section considers SMS texts documented in *Kwani? 08* (2015), and unpacks their significance in mapping the journal’s construction of Kenya’s nationhood. This is in regard to the only one series of SMS in *Kwani? 08* (2015). The series adds to 19 panels, most of them showing the time, date and location of the sender but do not show the phone number of the sender. As a popular mode, the SMSes are useful in forming a community of people who hold particular feelings about the progress of the 2013 elections. The texts are brief and convey the senders’ thoughts. *Kwani?* Journal’s text messages are not playful or informal as most conventional messages. This characteristic could be explained within the serious political context of the 2013 election. The journal’s messages also avoid the contracted form of words that we usually associate with text messaging worldwide.

That *Kwani?* Journal published text messages that reflect various Kenyans’ discussion on the nation’s 2013 vote and presents the dynamism of the popular journal as a site for the formation of nationhood and national identity. Goggin (2005: 7) notes that texting is a popular youth activity because it constitutes “text communications that could be read at leisure, or more often, immediately.” This confirms Barber’s (2018) assertion that the popular form in Africa functions as a way for people to make meaning out of their experiences, which in this case are regular elections. Here, Kenyans produce their own meaning based on the context of the elections in a way that resonates with Barber’s (2018: 14) observation that the African popular audiences “[o]ften take responsibility for finding the significance of a work for themselves, including by bringing extraneous knowledge to bear on it or attaching a meaning that resonates with their own experience.” National elections are part of the cyclical experiences that define

the idea of belonging in the nation and the popular mode of text messaging is a way of engaging with this national experience. Renan (1990) observes that nations form when people decide to discuss, agree and even disagree on the events that divide and cause them pain. Elections have always divided the Kenyan nation along ethnic lines and therefore, one might interpret holding popular conversations as a way of diffusing the ethnic tensions that result from such divisions. As Bhabha (1990) suggests, popular conversation is one way of dissolving national differences by forging new forms of connections, which in this case connects the Kenyan nation. These characteristics of national popular discourses are observable in the text messages that *Kwani? 08* published. It is therefore important to examine the national rhetoric that these discourses produced in relation to the two main ethnicities and political parties that contested the 2013 elections in Kenya.

There are 19 text message panels in the “Revelation and Conversation” section of *Kwani? 08* (2015). All reflect their senders’ eye-witness experiences of the 2013 elections. Out of these, only two text messages give a negative view of the elections. The first says, “kwa supermarket huku hakuna stock ya foodstuff yeyote” (Sheng for ‘here in the supermarket there is no foodstuff at all’) (2015: 312). Even though the journal does not give the sender’s location, the message reflects the tension that characterised the 2013 elections, which interrupted the normal chain of flow for goods and services. The second negative view of the elections reads, “the *matatu* [Nairobi’s passengers’ service vehicles] people are saying there are no rules at the moment laws will be followed maybe today or once the winners are finalized” (2015: 513). In this case, too, *Kwani?* does not indicate the location of the sender. Nevertheless, the message captures lawlessness and thuggery that characterise Kenyan elections. The implied paratextual suggestion here is that this needs to change if Kenya aspires for a stable nationhood.

Kwani? Journal’s publication of four neutral text messages in the 19-panel text dilutes the effects of the two negative SMSes above. The first neutral message reads, “The shops are open but they lack [sic] most of the commodities...” (2015: 312). The text shows that its sender is in Umoja, which is one of Nairobi’s eastern suburbs with mainly Luo and Akamba dwellers. It is important to remember that Raila Odinga’s running mate (Kalonzo Musyoka) in the 2013 election was a member of the Akamba community. This text also shows that there was tension in Nairobi. It is linked to the second neutral SMS which says, “In some parts of congo [sic] business is ongoing [sic] but not as usual” (2015: 313). The sender of the message is in Kawangware, which the Luhya community dominates. The Luhya tribe scattered their votes between two main politicians, Wycliffe Mudavadi (who was a presidential candidate) and

Moses Wetangula (who was in Raila Odinga's CORD party) in the 2013 elections. A majority of them voted for Raila Odinga as they have often done traditionally.¹³ Another set of neutral SMSes use humour to narrate the 2013 elections. One reads "People here don't want to talk much of the various alliances they are supporting since they don [sic] want defeat" (2015: 312). The sender's location is not revealed. Desrochers and Tomaszek (2014: 178) observe that "providing paratextual information on dates of creation, places of writing, context" forms part of the elements that work to affirm the credibility of a paratext. That the SMS does not reveal the sender's location casts doubt on its authenticity. But its mocking tone seems to pre-empt that the reason people do not want to engage in any electoral discussions is because they fear being laughed at, should their candidate lose. The last neutral SMS continues the narrative of ironic humour by observing that "*watu wamejifungia wako glued kwa tv*" (2015: 313) in that opposition television viewers stick to the tv while they anticipate an unlikely outcome. This is Sheng for 'people are locked indoors they are glued onto the TV'. The sender's location is indicated as Kasarani, which is one of Nairobi's northern suburbs that the Kikuyu community dominates. The act of being 'glued' to the TV suggests the enthusiasm with which the Kikuyu people wait for their candidate to win.

One identifiable characteristic of the two types of *Kwani?* SMSes analysed above is their marginality in relation to the total number contained in the panel (6 out of 15). Secondly, the journal in most cases does not mention the location of the sender. Their third feature is a sense of brevity, which might be a paratextual device (Genette, 1997) to silence Raila Odinga's opposition party's narrative, while selling Uhuru Kenyatta's. This speaks to the question of ethnicity in the Kenyan political space. Goggin's (2005: 4) Actor-Network Theory argues that "society and technology [...] are mutually implicated and constituted", and therefore sees *Kwani?* Journal's publishing of the 2013 election SMS messages as a replication of the political role of mobile phone technology. Cho and Hung's (2011) Model of Attitude Towards SMS shows how the journal's SMS plays a creative role that relates to nation formation in this particular case (Anderson, 1990; Bhabha, 1990; Renan, 1990). The model holds that a reader's attitude towards an SMS depends on Perceived Effectiveness of SMS for Communications, Conflict Avoidance, Privacy Protection, Perceived Ease of Use, and Subjective Norm. Cho and Hung (2011) note that Subjective Norm refers to the ability of a text message to influence others towards one's own viewpoint. In this case, and as Gray (2010) shows, the SMS paratextually implies that the Kenyan opposition were predetermined losers. This

representation of politics seems to create the myth that only specific Kenyan communities are entitled to leadership and hinders the process of nation formation.

This leads to the third type of SMSes that capture the 2013 elections in the panel. It is intriguing that more than half of the SMS (nine) project a generally positive image of the 2013 elections in Kenya. The first positive SMS reads, “Business’ [sic] are operating normally as people are hopeful that peace will prevail! The jua kali [artisans] sector are advocating for peace for they say that voting is a one day affair but life is forever” (2015: 312). The location of the sender is Bama in Nakuru East, which is a constituency of the Kikuyu community. Another SMS message that seems to capture an imaginary atmosphere of peace during Kenya’s 2013 elections reads, “Iebc¹⁴ official say security was superb, and police even hav [sic] been assisting to carry ballots. Tallying going on for Embakasi north pri [primary] dandora2” (2015: 312). Dandora Phase 2 in Nairobi is one of the havens of the Kikuyu Mungiki Cult. In most cases, *Kwani?* gives the Kikuyu locations of the senders of the text messages. These messages are also much longer than the negative and neutral ones analysed above. The intention to persuade and sway opinion (Genette, 1997) seems to be the motivation behind the long text messages in *Kwani?* Journal’s case. In their study of text messaging amongst college students in the US, Battestini, Setlur, and Sohn (2010: 9) observe the significance of the length of a text in the comment “[W]e are not sure what compelled the participants to send such long messages over SMS, but believe a lot of the motivation may be due to the immediate nature of text messaging.” It is therefore possible that the sense of electoral peace that the text captures might have been as a result of other communities’ fears of possible Mungiki violence against them as had happened in the 2007 elections. The projection of peace in this case acts as a paratext that influences the reader to conclude that Kenya held successful elections in 2013 and helps build a positive image of the government in power.

The last positive SMS I consider here reads, “Notably, one general good & commendable practice by voters in all polling stations in Nakuru east & west constituencies, voters did not hang around the polling stations at all” (2015: 313). The reader notes a certain sense of intentional persuasion in the punctuation and tone of the SMS. Here, the text message overdramatises the good qualities of the Kikuyu community, and resonates with Gray’s (2010: 38) explanation that “paratexts can amplify and/or clarify many of a text’s meanings and uses.” It is important to note two things. One, both Nakuru West and Nakuru East are Kikuyu constituencies. Two, the practice of ‘hanging around the polling stations’ was one of the strategies that Raila Odinga’s Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) used to confront vote

rigging in the preceding 2007 elections. Therefore, in this context, the SMS creates a narrative that draws an ethnic line between Luo and Kikuyu electoral behaviour. Here, *Kwani?* Journal seems to replicate the postcolonial orientation of the state. Mbembe (2001: 103) writes that vocabularies and narratives “[a]re officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge.” While the positive SMS characterise the Kikuyu as peaceful voters, they stereotype the Luo as violent people. The positive SMS ignore the pre-emptive police violence that characterised the 2013 vote in opposition areas such as Kisumu and Kakamega. This confirms Goggins’s (2005: 11) view that “mobile phone culture is deeply implicated in debates over contemporary media culture and its relationship to political culture and the public sphere.” It is possible to argue, as Barber (2018) does, that popular texts communicate best within specific contexts. Barber (2018: 178) observes that this is because texts “are made to be ‘out there’, awaiting response, interpretation and recontextualisation which cannot be controlled by the enunciator.” Thus, the reader has a marginal ability to disrupt the representational bias in the SMS under consideration, which inserts behavioural contrast between those who voted for the winning party and the people who supported the losing side in Kenya’s 2013 elections.

The fluidity of SMSes changes depending on the political circumstances that prevailed during Kenya’s 2013 elections. Fabian (1997) stresses this phenomenon and shows that context is central to understanding a popular text. He notes that the meaning of a text may occasionally shift from subverting, to supporting elite ideology. Horstmanshof and Power (2005) observe that as much as this popular form is an important marker of youth solidarity, the SMS is also prone to misuse such as when it is employed to organise gang rapes in Australia. The SMS has the potential to reach a wide audience even though much of its use revolves around the idea of friendship communities (Battestini, Setlur, and Sohn, 2010). Genette (1997: 4) agrees with this view and argues that “[d]efining a paratextual element consists of determining [...] the characteristics of its situation of communication” [...] its sender and addressee (*from whom? to whom?*); and the functions that its message aims to fulfil (*to do what?*)” [emphasis in original] (Genette, 1997: 4). In effect, the text messages discussed in this section seem to entrench ethnic division rather than mediate them in Kenya’s national space.

5.7 Conclusion

The chapter examined how *Kwani?* Journal uses the paratextual form to narrate nationhood and national identity in Kenya. As a result, the chapter focused on cartoons, blogposts, emails, photo essays and mobile phone SMS texts to investigate the journal's sense of neutrality in its coverage of Kenya's 2007 and 2013 elections. It was noted that ethnic myths and stereotypes that have historically divided Kenyans penetrate all the paratextual media that *Kwani?* Journal includes in its narration of Kenya's nationhood and national belonging. These paratexts influence the reader to adopt State ideology. The chapter therefore calls for a different kind of rhetoric in narrating the nation through the journal's paratextual media. The journal should have offered a deeper engagement with different perspectives and meanings of Kenya's nationhood, rather than the superficial obsession with supporting a particular group of ideology.

Endnotes

¹ The Kikuyu community retains the myth that those who are uncircumcised are unfit to become presidents. The myth was popularised in 1969 by President Jomo Kenyatta (Kikuyu) when he and Vice President Oginga Odinga (Luo) fell out due to Cold War politics.

² October 20 was Kenyatta Day in Kenya but the 2010 Constitution changed to Mashujaa Day to celebrate all Kenyan heroes.

³ These regimes include Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), Daniel Moi (1978-2002), Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013), and Uhuru Kenyatta (current).

⁴ *The Waki Report* (2008) alleges that the decision to use the Mungiki Cult against opposition areas was arranged at a secret State security meeting in Kenya's State House.

⁵ The others were then Police Commissioner Hussein Ali, Secretary to the cabinet Francis Muthaura, radio journalist Paul Sang', and opposition politician Henry Kosgey.

⁶ Ruto, who is Kenya's current Deputy President is from the Kalenjin community, though he was then aligned to Raila Odinga's opposition Orange Democratic Movement.

⁷ The Kenyan social space stereotypes Kikuyu women as light-skinned.

⁸ The Kamba politician Kalonzo Musyoka used the party to jostle for a place as Kibaki's Vice President in Kenya's Government of National Unity from 2008 to 2013.

⁹ Most Kenyans construct the Luo as flashy, educated, and bombastic, the best example being the disgraced former Director of the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority, Prof. Patrice Lumumba Otieno.

¹⁰ Lake Victoria's Nile perch species of fish.

¹¹ A Kikuyu cult that was blamed for violence against the Luo during Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV.

¹² Slang for passengers' service vehicles in Kenya.

¹³ The Luhya community border the Luo in Western Kenya and have historically voted together since the days of Masinde Muliro (Luhya) and Oginga Odinga (Luo).

¹⁴ The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission that oversaw the elections.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The central focus in this study was to investigate how selected *Kwani?* Journal texts represent the idea of nationhood and national belonging (Anderson, 1983) in the context of Kenya's ethnicised political realities. The assumption behind the study was that much research on the journal tended to glorify its achievements as a significant space for expressing subversive youth identity based more on the age of the writers and less on other major categories such as ethnicity and the relationship between the State and the people. The study felt that youth identity was not in any way unimportant, yet there was also a need to determine the journal's depictions of ethnicity and other important political moments in the evolution of the Kenyan nation. This is mainly because my study considered *Kwani?* Journal as a popular space (Barber, 1987) where ordinary Kenyans engage in practices of imagining the nation. As a result, my discussion on the journal's centrality in popular discourses on the imagination of the nation noted that the journal devoted two successive issues to the coverage of Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV and the significance thereof. The period between 2002 and 2015 was particularly important to the investigation because it covers the life-span of the Journal. Kwani Trust published the first *Kwani?* Journal issue in 2002 and the last in 2015. Additionally, this was the time warp within which Kenya experienced its most tumultuous political moments as represented by the 2002 elections and the 2007 electoral violence. Thus, the study was anchored on the ideas of Anderson (1983), Bhabha (1990), and Renan (1990) in its examination of the relevance of *Kwani?* texts in the depiction of ethnicity and other contested moments in Kenya between 2002 and 2015. I unpacked how these representations influenced popular political discourse around nationhood and national belonging.

The study selected *Kwani?* Journal texts based on the citizenship and ethnicity of their authors as expressed in the by-line of each literary text. My guiding argument was that the disparity between how Kenyan and foreign *Kwani?* writers represented ethnicity and nationhood would reveal editorial influence or lack thereof in the contents of the texts. Furthermore, I argued that most writers would rarely write against their own communities in the Kenyan ethnicised context. Thus, the study examined how the concurrence or disparity between the two points of view influenced the ordinary person's understanding of Kenya's nationhood and national identity. This was specifically in relation to the varied ethnic contestations that characterise Kenya's political and electoral history.

The major finding in the study was that *Kwani?* Journal's texts generally align with the trajectory of State ideologies on ethnicity and the nature of political leadership in Kenya (Barber, 1997; Fabian, 1997). Here, I confirmed that the journal supports State metanarratives on ethnicity and political violence. The study also noted that foreign authors adopt these metanarratives when they write about ethnicity and nationhood in Kenya. The study also found that some non-Kikuyu writers glorify Kikuyu political ideology while denigrating their own communities'. This suggested that the journal's editors influenced the image of the Kenyan nation that their texts projected in regard to ethnicity and general governance, especially given the fact that nearly half of all *Kwani?* issues were sourced through literary workshops that Kwani Trust held in Nairobi. I therefore argued that *Kwani?* Journal circulated and entrenched an ethnicised sense of national belonging, which divided rather than united Kenyans. Ogude (2007) had earlier on stated this position in his analysis of the late Kenyan musician, D.O. Misiani, in the observation that Misiani's political songs alienated the Luo community from their own nation. As such, Ogude argued that it was dangerous to assume that all popular texts subvert elite ideology. Siundu (2007) also adopted the same view in regard to selected Kenyan-Asian writing. My study noted that *Kwani?* Journal's fixed ethnic ideology inclined to national metanarratives although a few texts such as Gathara's "Moving on to What?" (2015) appeared to subvert the State ideology.

I posited that all the eight *Kwani?* Journal issues reflected the socio-political realities that defined Kenya from 2002 to 2015, which was the duration of the journal's existence. I then argued that these texts were popular responses to ethno-political events in the country. I submitted that although some *Kwani?* texts engaged in selective and nuanced acts of subversion, these texts colluded with State ideology in regard to gender, ethnicity, national violence, the presidency, and political leadership. This was visible in Andia Kisia's "Kenya and its Discontents" (2003), which valorised the role of the Kenyan opposition, but did so only when the opposition was agitating against a non-Kikuyu presidency. I also observed how Billy Kahora's "The Gorilla's Apprentice" (2008) stereotyped the Luo as atavistic in the context of Kenya's 2007/2008 electoral violence. The subversive role of Kenyan popular culture has been observed by Nyairo (2004) in her analysis of popular texts around the end of the Moi regime in the late 1990s and the beginning of the Kibaki era in the early 2000s. However, the study remained aware of the varied State ideologies that existed in the Kenyan national space during the period of *Kwani?* production, and that subverting one did not mean subverting all of them. Hence, the study adopted a multi-faceted approach that examined individual themes in specific

chapters. For instance, Chapter Two dealt with the journal's depiction of the Mungiki Cult violence during the 2007/2008 Kenyan PEV while Chapter Three analysed the journal's characterisation of different Kenyan ethnicities. I thus concluded that the similarity in pattern of these varied themes and depictions pointed to an editorial influence that sought to project Kenya's nationhood through a specific trajectory.

The study observed that all the considered texts tend to assign peripheral agency to other Kenyan peoples while centring the Kikuyu community. Here, I relied on Said's (1978) concept of "Othering" which refers to how socio-political narratives glorify specific cultural, racial, and ethnic categories while denigrating others for reasons of domination. I argued that Othering is an act with specific political aims, specifically the sense in which this practice emphasises the perception that certain Kenyan communities are less important to the imagination of the nation than others. I also showed that the foregoing perception occasionally influences how the Kenyan State allocates public resources and positions. The study found that the strategy of Othering is reflected in the way these texts portray other Kenyan communities as violent, unclean, and undeserving of leadership positions. I argued that the journal's Othering of certain Kenyan communities implies silencing such communities from national discourse focusing on leadership. Based on Said's (1978) concept of Othering, the study noted that *Kwani?* texts collude with the State and act as a propaganda tool against the opposition. For example, Kahora's story titled "The Gorilla's Apprentice" (2008) uses a mixture of contrast and hyperbole to attribute Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV to the opposition. The short story absolves the State of all forms of violence by relying on a hyperbole that suggests that the opposition was less civilised than a gorilla. In other cases, these texts employ humour to mock and stereotype communities that are associated with opposition politics in Kenya. Thus, the analysis revealed the varied ways in which *Kwani?* Journal's texts employ narrative strategies that entrench ethnic differences as a marker of political acceptability. This sense of accessibility was viewed through the perspective and political aspirations of the Kenyan Kikuyu community.

In summary, Chapter One presented a detailed background to the study, reviewed literature related to the study and established the theoretical framework used in the analysis of selected *Kwani?* texts. The reviewed literature focused on varied contestations about the history of Kenya's nationhood and national belonging. The chapter also briefly outlined the history of the *Kwani?* and the journal's space in contemporary Kenyan discourse on nationhood and national identity formation. I noted here that the founding of *Kwani?* Journal in 2002 energised the notion of popular youth identities in Kenya mainly in reference to the perceived role of the then

youthful Raila Odinga in supporting Mwai Kibaki in the 2002 elections, which coincided with the opposition's defeat of the Moi regime.

Chapter One also noted the main concepts in the formation of nationhood and national belonging as theorised by Bhabha (1990), Renan (1990), and Anderson (1983). The aim here was to establish how these notions related to *Kwani?*'s role in furthering popular discourse in the Kenyan space. I centred on Bhabha's notion of dissemination as important to the study in the way narratives that create nationhood ought to vacillate without fixed margins. This was particularly important in investigating whether *Kwani?* depictions of Kenyan ethnicities happened in a fluid space where the writers treated all the ethnicities equally. I drew the conclusion that the depiction of Kenyan communities in *Kwani?* Journal occurred within a space of stereotyped fixities that assigned political power to specific communities. I explained that this kind of depiction may have been informed by the ethnic context of the Kenyan political space as observed by Fabian (1997).

Hence, Chapter One noted how various Kenyan scholars and historians (Kanyinga, 2014; Ogot, 1997; Ochieng, 1997; Atieno-Odhiambo, 1997) show that contestations about Kenya's nationhood often revolve around which Kenyan community sacrificed more than the others in the struggle for Kenya's independence. I also noted that the main point of political contestation in Kenya revolved around the Kikuyu and the Luo, based on the 1966 Cold War disagreement that divided President Jomo Kenyatta (Luo) and Vice President Oginga Odinga (Luo). As a result, my analysis of *Kwani?* Journal's texts intended to unpack how the journal negotiated Kikuyu-Luo binaries that occurred between 2002 and 2015. Here, I relied on the views of Renan (1990) who theorised on the power of past pain in the formation of nationhood to determine how *Kwani?* viewed past disagreements between the Kikuyu and the Luo as moments of historical pain which Kenyans could rally around to realise their sense of nationhood and national identity. I showed that the journal's texts generally took advantage of these historical occurrences to weave myths and stereotypes that divide the two communities and therefore stymied the dream for nationhood.

My literature review considered *Kwani?* Journal's writings as popular texts that related to their own contexts in three main ways. Firstly, they were capable of either subverting or aligning with State ideology (Barber, 2018). Secondly, they were susceptible to socio-political influence by the ruling Kenyan political elite (Fabian, 1997). Thirdly, these texts constituted ways of copying and making do with the peripheral existence that elite ideology had imposed on them

(De Certeau, 1984). Thus, I read the texts as subversive counter-narratives, ideological texts, and as modes of copying with State ideology on ethnicity, political leadership, and nationhood. I noted in the literature review that *Kwani?* texts tended to support State ideology in their narration of national violence specifically in regard to the 2007/2008 PEV. Ultimately, I advanced the argument that these texts masked the way in which the State deployed the police and the Mungiki Cult on the opposition during the PEV. Thus, the texts confirmed Mbembe's (2010) and Primorac's (2010) views that some popular texts adopt State narratives and collude with the State in propagating violence.

Chapter Two examined how selected *Kwani?* texts depict the Mungiki Cult and the cult's violence during the 2007/2008 PEV. The texts I analysed included Wainaina's "Kalamashaka", Gikunda's "Game Plan V 2.3", Matathia's "Kikuyu Dialogues", Partington's "Mindfuck", and Goldsmith's "Return of The Tribe". I considered these texts as narratives revealing a textual relationship between the *Kwani?* Journal and the Mungiki Cult and how this relationship spoke to discourses on nationhood in regard to the Kenyan PEV. I argued that the above texts glorify the Mungiki Cult's violence against opposition communities in the 2007 elections. I chose the writers due to their eclectic nature in terms of ethnicity and race. Some of the authors such as Arno Kopecky who is Canadian and Paul Goldsmith who is American were foreigners and therefore, I expected their views of the cult to be different from how Kenyans saw the Mungiki in the context of the electoral violence. The texts affirmed Fabian's (1997) view that political context influences popular texts. Thus, the texts were read as supplementing the Kenyan State's position that the Mungiki was a peaceful cult.

The chapter analysed Wainaina's "Kalamashaka" as an important interview because the author was also the founder of the *Kwani?* Journal. I analysed the interview based on Renan's (1990) view that past pain enhances a sense of nationhood. The analysis therefore sought to examine the text's projection of the cult's violence as moments of pain. I argued that the text glorified the Mungiki violence and also painted a positive image of the cult to the reader. The interviewees seem to agree that the cult was ordained by God. The interview specifically views the Mungiki as more important to the security of the Kenyan nation than the police force. The story also projects the Mungiki as a cult that recognises and promotes women's rights, which is not the case as Wamue (2001) observed. Thus, I noted that this projection of the cult supported the State's view on the role played by the Mungiki during the 2007 electoral violence. The story entrenched violence in the political space as Mbembe (2010) observes.

Further, the chapter's examination of Gikunda's short story titled "Game Plan V 2.3" noted that the story's depiction of a triumphant Mungiki character asserted and valorised a cultic identity. This then alluded to the way in which some *Kwani?* Journal texts employ subtle strategies that glorify and support the ethnic violence of the Mungiki cult in the context of Kenya's 2007/2008 PEV. I examined the story in relation to Fanon's (1961) theorisations on the "pitfalls of national consciousness", which sees post-independent literary artists as voices of conscience in mediating divisive ethnic differences in the national space. In this case, Gikunda's depiction of a triumphant Mungiki protagonist who wins a national lottery suggested that the story affirms its support of the cult's activities. Similarly, Partington's "Mindfuck" elevated the image of the cult to the level of the prominent Kenyan palaeontologist, Dr. Richard Leakey by comparing the two as protagonists of similar stature in Kenyan nationhood.

Moreover, I analysed Matathia's "Kikuyu Dialogues" and found that the story used symbolism to refer to the Mungiki Cult in ways that glorified the militia cult. I examined this story in view of Anderson's (1983) position that religion plays a central role in coalescing people into one national identity. I found that the story's symbolic references to bhang, tobacco, banana leaves, and animal sacrifice, which are forms of traditional Kikuyu religion, inserted a sense of "Otherness" between the Kikuyu and other Kenyan peoples. This is also the ethnic context in which I read Goldsmith's "Return of The Tribe", which explained and justified the re-emergence of ethnic cults all over the world. In a way, Goldsmith's story seemed to rally members of the Kikuyu community to join the Mungiki cult. Therefore, I argued that the above four texts present themselves as conniving narratives that supported the official State narrative of the Mungiki (Barber, 1997) in relation to the 2007/2008 PEV.

Chapter Three examined the place of characterisation and ethnic stereotypes in selected *Kwani?* Journal texts. I relied on Weststeijn's (2004) observation that characters represent real people in the national space. I therefore argued that the journal's depiction of ethnic character names and communal stereotypes stigmatised and denigrated these communities in the Kenyan political space. The chapter analysed stories by Kikuyu writers such as Garland's "Obituary Man", Matathia's "Some Gikuyu Words", Kimani's "Blood and 100% Human Hair", and Kahora's "The Gorilla's Apprentice". It also analysed stories written by non-Kikuyu and non-Kenyan writers such as Adan's "The Somalification of James Karangi", Kimutai's "The Gentle Man from Iten", Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast", and Cooper's "Dirt People". The analysis here was based on ethnicity and nationality.

In the first scenario where I examined characterisation as viewed from the perspective of Kikuyu writers, I argued that all the Kikuyu writers entrench ethno-political stereotypes that depict Kikuyu characters as superior to Luo ones. This was seen in Kimani's "Blood and 100% Human Hair" where three female Kikuyu saloonists come together to defeat an inherently emotional and violent female Luo saloonist. Further, Garland's "Obituary Man" exploits the Kikuyu stereotype of the Luo as uncircumcised and prone to HIV-AIDS to depict the character Wacha Dev as an uncircumcised Luo victim of the disease. Matathia's "Some Gikuyu Words" narrates the story of two Kikuyu brothers who take part in a ritual sacrifice where an elderly man advises them to trick those who do not "belong" to the community, and to control them politically. Lastly, Kahora's "The Gorilla's Apprentice" depicts a Kikuyu child-character, Gikonyo, as being more mature than all the Luo who live in Nairobi's Kibera Slums. I analysed these stories using Said's (1978) concepts of Orientalism and Otherness to show how the texts politically situated the Kikuyu in the centre of political and cultural discourse while putting the Luo at the periphery. I also noted that this binary depiction went against Anderson's (1983) notion of the pairing of diverse characters to make it possible for them to occupy the same national space.

In the second scenario where I considered non-Kikuyu writers, I noted that Adan's "The Somalification of James Karangi", Kimutai's "The Gentle Man from Iten", Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast", and Cooper's "Dirt People" continued the same binary depiction as seen in the case of Kikuyu writers above. Kimutai is a Kalenjin writer and his story depicts a psychologically-disturbed female Kikuyu character who is superior to Kalenjin characters. Adan's story depicts an authoritative Kikuyu character, Karangi, whom a Somali girl admires for marriage, and also refers to the Luo character, Odhis, as uncircumcised and unclean. Akpan is a Nigerian writer and his story revolves around a homeless Luo family that survives in Nairobi's streets through prostitution. In the end, the Luo father steals a purse from a Kikuyu character. Cooper is an American and his story relates how a promiscuous Luo girl successfully makes a Kikuyu man murder his own brother because of her. The fact that these writers are either non-Kikuyu or non-Kenyan made me note that the stories point to possible editorial influence in the way Kenyan ethnicities are depicted in *Kwani?* writing, as the writers would be generally less interested in the political contestations between the Kikuyu and the Luo. I relied on Said's (1978) theorising to conclude that these stories entrench ethno-political stereotypes and therefore alienate the Kikuyu and Luo communities.

Chapter Four of the study analysed *Kwani?* Journal's depictions of Kenya's four different regimes. The examined stories include Kantai's "The Cock Thief", Jaoko's "President Moi, My Dad, and I", Kahora's "The Cape Cod Bicycle War", Wainaina's "The Life of Mzee Ondego", Ngugi's "When You Arrive at the Far End of a Continent", Oloo's "Up North", and Kisia's "Kenya and its Discontents". Here, I relied on Bhabha's (1990) concept of dissemination to investigate the extent to which *Kwani?*'s depictions of the four regimes avoided fixities related to the tribe of the president. I noted that Kantai's story used the protagonist, Naiguran, to mock the administrative and sexual weaknesses of the Moi regime. Jaoko's blogpost captured the suffering of Kenyan exiles who had to leave their families behind during the Moi regime. Oloo's story also narrates the life of the author as a Kenyan exile in Canada during the Moi rule. Similarly, I found that Kahora's tale narrated the life of the author in America after he fled Kenya's economic collapse under the Moi leadership. Wainaina's "The Life of Mzee Ondego" explored the life of a Kenyan singer who used to perform for President Jomo Kenyatta. Ngugi's narrative also tells the story of the narrator who leaves Kenya during the Moi rule and goes to work in Southern Africa. Lastly, Kisia's narrative is a tribute to the Kenyan opposition radicals called "Mwakenya", who endured the complex brutalities of the Moi regime. Relying on Bhabha (1990), I noted that five of the six stories revolved around the weaknesses of the Kalenjin Moi regime and therefore elided similar flaws of Kenya's other three regimes. I particularly noted that the stories generally silenced corruption cases that happened under Kikuyu leaderships. I relied on the ideas of Mbembe (1997) and noted that the sexual improprieties of the Moi regime were a general concern in the stories. These stories avoided similar practices among Kikuyu leaders. I therefore drew the conclusion that the ethnicity of a president determined whether *Kwani?* Journal critiqued its leadership weaknesses or not. I also noted that this strategy of literary depiction went against the grain of Bhabha's (1990) notion of dissemination. It indeed impacted negatively on nationhood by stereotyping Kikuyu leadership as superior to Kalenjin leadership and by extension leadership by other Kenyan communities.

Chapter Five of the study examined *Kwani?* Journal's use of paratexts to critique State ideology and therefore shape discourses on nationhood and national identity. I focussed on cartoons, photo essays, Short Message Service (SMS), blogposts, and emails. I relied on Bakhtin's (1983) concept of carnivalesque to analyse the way that these paratexts employed satire to mock State ideology. Bakhtin's theory was anchored on the views of paratexts by Genette (1997) and Gray (2010) on how these media influence the reader to understand issues at hand.

I analysed the comic strips “Comic 2”, “ICC Suspects No Longer at Ease”, and “Googlepedia”. Further, I examined the blogpost “On Visa: Go Sheng” and Wainaina and Garland’s email, “Vain Jang’o”. I analysed Jennifer Huxta’s photo essay on the Tunisian elections as well as two anonymous photo essays contained in *Kwani?* Journal. I also analysed the 19-panel SMS text titled “Revelation and Conversation”. My analysis of the cartoon strip “Comic 2” revealed that the text celebrated the Kikuyu Mungiki Cult violence on the Luo of Kibera Slums in Nairobi during the 2007/2008 Kenyan PEV. I relied on Renan’s (1990) view that past pain can be narrated in a remorseful way to create a sense of nationhood but found that the cartoon strip inserted a divisive narrative between the Kikuyu and the Luo. The comic strip “ICC Suspects No Longer at Ease”, wholly blamed the 2007 electoral violence on the opposition ODM Party and assumed that the State was innocent. Referring to Genette (1997) I concluded that the text influenced the reader to believe that the government did not share any blame for the violence.

My analysis of the comic strip “Googlepedia” showed that the text used the issue of male circumcision to drive a wedge between the Kikuyu and Luo communities. I showed that the Kikuyu girl tacitly warned fellow Kikuyu girls not to date uncircumcised Luo men. Similarly, the Kikuyu boy stressed the point that he was only comfortable dating Kikuyu girls. Using Said (1978), I showed that this use of negative ethno-political stereotypes echoed the 1966 Cold War political disagreement that antagonised President Jomo Kenyatta and Vice President Oginga Odinga. I showed that the comic strip acted as paratexts that “Othered” the Luo from Kenya’s political space. It further concretised Kikuyu ideology of entitlement to Kenya’s political leadership. Using Anderson (1983) I argued that this strategy of narration created a sense of political animosity between the Luo and the Kikuyu.

I analysed the blogpost “On Visa: Go Sheng” and showed that the blogpost constituted a community where characters from Kenya’s varied communities co-existed. However, my analysis revealed that the blogpost used ethnic stereotypes to differentiate the tribes. I noted that the Kikuyu character, Brownngal, was domineering towards the Kamba and Luo characters. The Kamba character was depicted as submissive and politically undecided. I inferred that this depiction echoed the indecisive behaviour of the Kamba politician, Kalonzo Musyoka, during the 2010 Kenyan Constitutional Referendum. Further, the text used the tag “machetes in the neighbourhood” to imply that the Luo character, Oti, had a name that associated him with violence. I argued that this alluded to the 2007/2008 electoral violence where the State depicted the largely Luo opposition as the instigators of the violence. Using Bhabha (1990), I argued

that this ethnic representation entrenched ethno-political stereotypes in ways that divided Kenya's sense of nationhood.

I noted that Wainaina's and Garland's "Vain Jango" email played on the ethno-political differences that have historically divided the Luo and the Kikuyu. These stereotypes depicted the Luo as sexually loose and wasteful. They also portrayed the Kikuyu as intelligent and entrepreneurial. Therefore, the Luo and Kikuyu characters in the email represented ethnic archetypes, which defied dissolution (Bhabha, 1990). I also noted that the email paratext spoke to Kenyan politics in the way the supposedly foolish Luo man loses to the intelligent Kikuyu girl. Using Said (1978) I argued that this sense of literary Othering acted as a paratext that reinforced ethnic differences in the Kenyan political space. I further submitted that the email paratext impacted negatively on Kenya's nationhood by inflaming political relationships between the Kikuyu and the Luo.

My analysis of Huxta's photo essay on the Tunisian elections considered it as a transnational paratext that spoke to a continental identity. This paratext yearned for the same sense of calm that voters witnessed during the peaceful Tunisian elections to extend to Kenya. Conversely, the two anonymous photo essays about the 2013 Kenyan elections acted as paratexts that preached peace during the elections. I particularly noted that the photo essays barely referred to the pre-emptive violence that the State deployed to opposition areas. Hence, I drew on Barber's (2018) idea that popular texts occasionally support State narratives to argue that the *Kwani?* Journal aligned with State ideology on the Kenyan 2013 elections.

My unpacking of SMSes in "Conversation and Revelation" was also instructive. It revealed that the messages were of two categories. The first category was neutral in that it comprised messages that spoke to Kenya's nationhood in the way they objectively memorialised the 2013 Kenyan election as a national moment that Kenyans identified with (Renan, 1990). The second category, which formed the bulk of the messages, mocked the opposition NASA party. Further, the messages drew a binary (Said, 1978) between Kenyans who voted for the opposition, and Kikuyu voters. The messages sent from Kenyan constituencies inhabited by the Kikuyu praised the voters' peaceful behaviour. As a result, this linear and exclusivist depiction contrasts with the supposedly violent behaviour of opposition communities. The major finding in Chapter Five was that *Kwani?* Journal's paratextual forms considered above compelled the reader to adopt State ideology on ethnicity and electoral violence. This means that the journal sustained a warped and defective narrative on the imagination of the Kenyan nation, whereby *Kwani?*

considered it permissible for the Kenyan State to wage war on communities that it perceived as its 'enemies'. I found that the paratexts disparaged the Kenyan opposition as more outdated and conservative than the status quo parties. They also celebrated State and cultic violence in cases where such acts of violence were directed at the opposition, whose communities were perceived as State 'enemies'. Using Mbembe (2010) and Primorac (2010) I concluded that the paratexts problematised the imagination of nationhood by reinforcing a public mentality of ethnic and State violence.

Overall, the study found out that *Kwani?* Journal texts generally align with State narratives on ethnicity, violence, political leadership, and national history. This agrees with Barber's (1987) and Fabian's (1997) views on the occasionally conniving nature of popular texts. This observation adds to knowledge on the nature of Kenyan popular culture in general and to *Kwani?* Journal specifically. This view contradicts the popular assumption that the journal was a revolutionary space for the realisation of youth expression. I acknowledge that this finding might be because the study considered all the *Kwani?* Journal issues as opposed to the way past scholars selectively examined *Kwani?* texts. Thus, I submitted that *Kwani?* Journal's narration of ethnic contestations and Kenya's nationhood and national identity entrenches political divisions in the national space (Bhabha, 1990). It freezes ethnic stereotypes (Said, 1978) that the Kenyan political elite have in the past used to hold onto power. Following Anderson (1983) I noted that the narration does not create convivial feelings amongst Kenyans of different ethnic orientations. Thus, generally, the study found that *Kwani?*'s depiction of ethnicity and national belonging is riddled with representational flaws. The journal's selective approach to engagement with contestable national issues, and its stereotypical construction of different Kenyan communities inscribes the notion that it is desirable for the Kenyan nation to proceed into the future as an ethnic State. The journal's depiction stresses ethnic difference rather than the importance of the concept of a larger Kenyan nation. However, my reading of *Kwani?* texts seemed to suggest that the trope of gender forms a central pillar in the journal's discourses. I suggest further research in this area, to examine how representations of gender relate to formulations on nationhood in Kenya.

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