# Ethics of Memory, Contested Pasts and the Poetics of Recall: The Kenyan Political Autobiography

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> "In our home, history isn't written by the winner but by whoever speaks first." (Faloyin 3)

## Introduction

Arnaud Schmitt, in the article "From Autobiographical Act to Autobiography," argues that "autobiography is increasingly seen less as a literary genre or as a means of aesthetically presenting a certain vision of one's self, and more as a narrative modality endowed with the overbearing responsibility of grappling with facts, events, lives or simply history" (471). The idea of "grappling with facts, events" is further elaborated by Mark McKenna in the article, "National Awakening, Autobiography, and the Invention of Manning Clark," where he concludes that "Clark's autobiographical writings point not only to the notorious unreliability of autobiography but also to much larger questions, such as the relationship between autobiographical truth and his invention as a national figure, and the author's right to own their life story" (207). Although the Kenyan postcolonial space has birthed and utilized the autobiographical genre as a privileged site of political practice, this genre, hinging on recall while (mis)using the ethics of memory, articulates political power. The Kenyan political leader, writing with a slant, uses the genre of autobiography to immortalize the self.

The Kenyan political autobiography, mostly written at the tail end of a political career (or when the political tide is at its peak and the leader is seeking a second chance), does not "grapple with facts," but rather erases the failures already recorded by others, amplifying the sacrifices and suppressing the benefits gained in the system within which the writer operated. This amplification and suppression are occasioned by the need not to "own their life story" (McKenna, 207) but to change their life story, sometimes using false religious piety to fan to life the dying embers of their names and legacies. The Kenyan political autobiography becomes the microphone available to the politician to immortalize the self by espousing the themes of subalterneity, betrayal, and politics of conscience. It would appear, therefore, that the Kenyan political autobiographer is not guided by

morality but rather according to his or her "power of action" (Frye, 33). Sinking further into this treachery and using autobiographical recall as a weapon, the political leader, the autobiographer, and the hero of his[1] writing, otherizes, dismisses and misrepresents. To underscore such (mis)representations in Kenyan political autobiographies, this article interrogates how autobiographical recall helps the Kenyan leader to fictionally pursue the path of spiritual greatness by merely writing down their political nemesis. Of course, as Simon Gikandi reminds us, some autobiographies are "works located in the grey zone between fiction and autobiography" (Gikandi, xxv).

This article interrogates the political autobiographies chosen here as located from a place of privilege and examines the power dynamics in them. The article used a qualitative research methodology. The preference for the qualitative approach is justifiable given the nature of autobiographical writing, which explores life and experiences from the subject's point of view. Accordingly, I used the biographical method to analyze *Not Yet Uhuru* (hereafter *Uhuru*) by Jaramogi Odinga, *The Roots of Freedom* (hereafter *Roots*) by Bildad Kaggia, *A Path Not Taken* (*Path*) by Joseph Murumbi and *The Flame of Freedom* (*Freedom*) by Raila Odinga. The choice was justified by the fact that these texts were written by individuals who are representative of particular phases of the Kenyan postcolonial era.

One significant way in which the Kenyan political autobiographer describes those he otherizes is to amplify his refusal to be yoked with postcolonial Kenyan leadership. This refusal in Jaramogi Odinga's *Uhuru*, Bildad Kaggia's *Roots,* Joseph Murumbi's *Path,* and Raila Odinga's *Freedom* is portrayed through calculated resignation from leadership. Seen from the Kenyan political perspective, the politician who leaves is different from the one who retires. Whereas retired politicians increasingly attract a large and eager readership for their revelations, the political leaders who resign hinge their actions on ethical and spiritual terrain—the hustlers, peasants' sons and subalterns. Resigning from a political office remains one of the fundamental moral resources for individuals of integrity (Dobel, 245). The option to leave should, ideally, reinforce integrity, buttress responsibility, support accountability, provide leverage and establish boundaries –individuals in the office promise to live up to the obligation of the office. The autobiographies discussed in this article were written after their authors resigned from their political positions or after a political fallout.

It is noteworthy that at the time of their resignation from the echelons of power, Jaramogi Odinga and Murumbi were Kenya's vice presidents, while Kaggia was a minister in Jomo Kenyatta's government. These leaders presented a different strand of leadership that fights for the masses. By revisiting this past and (re)writing it, these authors aim to direct public discourse in a particular direction. However, how they remember and articulate this draws attention to the

unreliable nature of memory and its relationship to ethics. How the four writers locate themselves within political liminality brings to focus partial and delusionary remembering that haunts the Kenyan political autobiography. Memory appears to offer a way of engaging with knowledge of the past as inevitably partial, subjective and local. This article, in its examination of the genre of political autobiography, draws its significance from the fact that it deconstructs the narratives of single stories in Kenya. However, even in this deconstruction, the nature of recall for the political leaders becomes a complex process of projecting selves at marked variance from their true inner core. This variance creates a dichotomy between the leaders' desires of how they want to be perceived by the masses and how they deviate from this ideal. Ultimately, they appear to be shaped by personal ambitions for power before all else. The leaders never overcome this dissonance; instead, they focus their energy and attention on concealing their ambition-deformed personalities behind the masks of the positive self-identities they aim to portray to the public. In the resultant hide-and-seek game, the opportunity for selfless leadership and genuine service to nation-building is lost, and the independence dream continues to dissipate. Thus, for the authors, the autobiographical genre becomes a way of exploring the arbitrary nature of their own lives. This article will build on the ethics of memory (or lack thereof), autobiographical recall, and the autobiography genre's problematic nature.

## Ethics of Memory: Critical Scholarship on Kenyan Autobiography

Scholars study autobiographical works to understand an author's personal experience and how this relates to the author's sense of identity. Lejeune defines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, particularly the development of his personality[2]" (1). According to Karl Weintraub, in an autobiography, the author is "intent upon reflection on this inward realm of experience" (824). In a "genuine" autobiography, the author is committed to leaving imprints of his point of view on life and history. In a false one, the author might distort history and instead present a self-explication, self-discovery, self-clarification, and self-justification (Weintraub, 823-824). In Mark Freeman's view, writings about the self are always fiction; these are "texts which … deal with recollections of experience, and this brings out countless distortions and falsifications" (9). He argues that people remember selectively and confer meanings on experiences that did not possess these meanings at

the time of their occurrence. Writing about the self is, thus, ultimately an attempt to rewrite the self (9).

Advisedly, one significant divergence among scholars of autobiography is whether an autobiography is a creative work or an accurate account of the author's life. There is an agreement in literary scholarship that the term "autobiography" covers "the many different accounts that authors make of their experiences" (Berryman, 72). As such, this article prefers to use the delimited term "autobiography" to accommodate the various accounts that can qualify under this loose grouping. It is noteworthy that some of the works under discussion were written with the help of ghostwriters—for instance, Raila Odinga's *Freedom*—while others were published posthumously, like Joseph Murumbi's *Path*. Although these works could pass as historical or political documents, this article interrogates them as political autobiographies.

Cindy Minarova-Banjac notes the creative component in autobiography, which stems from the mediations of memory (5,12). She argues that an autobiographer and his/her community collectively and deliberately forget and disremember aspects of the past, and from this derives the autobiography's claims to literariness. According to Cindy Minarova-Banjac, this also accounts for its generic complexity, as the autobiographical form claims to be factual. Here, I contend that the Kenyan political autobiography cannot exist without either factual or fictional elements, and it is this problematic coexistence of truth and falsity that Jaramogi Odinga, Kaggia, Raila Odinga and Murumbi rely on to engage their readers. This knowledge allowed me to critique Jaramogi Odinga's *Uhuru*, Kaggia's *Roots*, Raila Odinga's *Freedom* and Murumbi's *Path* as writings whose contestations with the themes of subalterneity and religious piety are frivolous. Therefore, *Uhuru, Roots, Freedom* and *Path* are not truthful self-revelations but are contaminated by the need to tell a compelling story.

The issue of memory introduces new complications in the study of political autobiography, as it implies recreating past events, experiences, and history. Memory has inherent politics of deliberate or inadvertent omissions and commissions, falsifications and reconstructions to suit present circumstances. All this means that sources in autobiographical writing are only valuable to the extent they coincide with the writer's remembering or preferred memories. The narrator is at the center of the writing and is writing the self into existence to persuade readers of his/her version of his/her knowledge of the self. As Smith and Watson (5) argue, writers of autobiographies write about their own lives and do so from externalized and internal points of view. In other words, the autobiographer writes his/her subjectivity and addresses the public self known to others –that is, the

social, historical self with its achievements, personal appearance, and social relationships. The focus on the political self in autobiography invokes heavily nuanced interpretations of the self as an identity category with its political dimension. The politics of the self involves constant negotiation for space and influence in various relationships, either at the individual or national level. I contend that by espousing and amplifying themes of subalterneity, sacrifice and betrayal, the four political autobiographies call for open rebellion or aggression against a perceived other.

In *The Ethics of Memory,* Avishai Margalit asks: "Is there an ethics of memory?". He pursues the idea that the past, connecting people, makes possible the kinds of "thick" relations we call genuinely ethical. Thick relations, he argues, are those that we have with family and friends, lovers and neighbors, our tribe and our nation –and they are all dependent on shared memories. Nevertheless, we also have "thin" relations with total strangers, with whom we have nothing in common except our shared humanity. This shared humanity is what the Kenyan political leader, embodied by J. Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi and R. Odinga, attempts to propagate through autobiographical recall.

However, J. Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi and R. Odinga's core aim is to use memory as a weapon that immortalizes the political self. I claim that these four Kenyan political actors use their autobiographies to install their names in the annals of history and the present. One's name is not just a convenient tool for preserving one's memory but is taken as intimately related to one's essence. If the name survives, the essence somehow survives as well. It is this strong desire for immortality that religion expresses so forcefully. The source of the wish for an immortal name is not mere vanity. Nor is it merely the desire to "make a name for yourself" in the sense of achieving glory. Instead, a horror of extinction and utter oblivion drives a political leader to write. The human project of memory, i.e. commemoration, is a religious project to secure some form of immortality. I want to distinguish remembering as a religious issue, which I believe to be of utmost importance to the politics of memory, from the ethical issue of remembering.

However, the unreliability of memory in autobiographical authorship in Kenya is not a very new phenomenon. Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* and Elspeth Huxley's *In the Flame Trees of Thika* opened the literary podium for autobiographical writings that, remembering and forgetting conveniently, trivialize and silence particular histories deemed insignificant. Whereas *Out of Africa* is a memoir that recounts events of the seventeen years when Blixen made her home in Kenya, then British East Africa, *The Flame Trees of Thika* is an autobiographical novel that deals with the life of Elspeth Huxley, who,

at the age of six, accompanied her parents to a recently acquired land in Kenya. The two autobiographical writings fall under the canopy of writings whose aim was to justify colonization and subjugation of Africans in the name of 'civilizing' them. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Florian Deroo, these works used the seemingly apolitical nature of the creation myth, the idea that the European settler was superior to Africans, to naturalize the history of subjugation. This kind of literature carried and assumed the importance of European civilization as the only saving agent of the otherwise primitive Africa.

In the context of the controversy surrounding the settler's exploitation of African labor and the Indian crisis of the early 1920s, the settlers had needed, more than ever, to propagate images of themselves as the "benevolent trustees" of the African "natives" (Cabañas, 2; Deroo, 135). Accordingly, they fashioned self-images that emphasized their unique ability to 'civilize' the indigenous Kenyan peoples, a power that the Indians (their main political rivals) supposedly lacked.

Interestingly, no known memoirists from Kenya tried to rewrite these imperial misrepresentations and historical falsifications. The only real works we can consider autobiographical and political were produced after independence. The onset of writing the self can be traced back to Tom Mboya's *Freedom and After* in 1963. Mboya's autobiography is the story of a nationalist and trade unionist who participated in the struggle for independence by fighting in the forest and through dialogue with the colonizers. Tom Mboya portrays his rise in politics and discusses the problems of nation-building. The title of his autobiography points to the author's interest not just in independence but also outlines the future of an independent Kenya. For instance, he warns against the suppression of the press, and emphasizes the need for universities to be politically independent and for intellectuals to be free to analyze and criticize government policies.

Of course, Mboya did not live to write an autobiography at the end of his political career because he died at thirty-nine. Nevertheless, his writings show a rare form of genuine leadership, devoid of political cunning, which matures with experience. Establishing historical truth is a prerequisite for realizing Kenya's independence dream. Berger (2012) argues that failing to recognize historical realities can threaten the ontological security of the State by calling into question the State's legitimacy while increasing resentment between groups, ultimately making reconciliation difficult. Like Mboya, J. Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi and R. Odinga were, and still are, political elites. As Minarova-Banjac contends, political elites choose what memories become part of the master narrative. Therefore, the concept of convenient remembering and forgetting in *Uhuru*, *Roots*, *Path* and

*Freedom* is a calculated move to create convenient identities that suited the political ambitions of the writers of these autobiographies. As such, J. Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi and R. Odinga revive specific memories as an exercise of power where they define past experiences and articulate values, norms, beliefs, and prejudices, determining what can and cannot be expressed.

## Contested Pasts and the Poetics of Recall: "Politics of Conscience"

Under this section, this article will now interrogate how J. Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi and R. Odinga's autobiographies problematize the past through selected autobiographical recall within three main themes, all of which fall under the politics of conscience: religion, betrayal and subalterneity. Through a complicated process of inclusion, exclusion, selection, and rejection, the four leaders portray themselves as a new breed of Kenyan leaders, the saviors who would have brought true liberation. The politics of conscience denotes a kind of political leadership that follows the dictates of one's interiority of mind or conscience, which is out of "the sight of the multitude" (Hobbes, 480). It is a political leadership based on moral or ethical ideals, guided by virtues of love and caring for one another. The foundational tenets of the politics of conscience ensue from more in-depth scrutiny of the inner convictions of a political leader. Indeed, Arnaud Schmitt believed that leadership was a product of human conscience. Thus bad leadership was a wedge that ultimately led to all the rot associated with the liberal tradition that subverted genuine social and political order in Europe.

In analyzing the phenomenon of political resignation, we can tease out an effort to establish boundaries. Resignation is a major theme in the four autobiographies this article interrogates. Although this is political practice in Kenya, I would like to see it as a way of interpellating[3] the political self in a political autobiography. Indeed, it aids Jaramogi Odinga's *Uhuru*, Kaggia's *Roots*, Raila Odinga's *Freedom* and Murumbi's *Path* to construct the identities of Moses, black Messiah, Joshua, and Prophet, respectively (Mutie 2020, 2). However, the writing of these four autobiographies is rife with religious codes, sometimes even mythologizing the identities of these leaders. Although the four political leaders examined here portray themselves as messiahs, especially to the Kenyan subaltern, in his political writings, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o devalues the notion of the political figure as a messiah. This is because this notion, when abrogated by a leader, denies agency to the subalterns and elevates a leader to the level of a deity.

Invariably, as I have argued elsewhere, the Kenyan elite has used myth to interpellate the self (Mutie 2018, 5). In the autobiographies discussed here, the reader engages these "self-revelations" in the same manner as the empty political slogans used by the Kenyan ruling elite to show concern for the masses. These autobiographers and the ruling elite they dismiss aim to reach out and woe the Kenyan subaltern. There is, therefore, a semblance of leadership provided or that would be provided by these autobiographers with that of the ruling elite whom they dismiss. I posit that the ethics of memory enables the four autobiographers to immortalize their revered statuses in the Kenyan political landscape. By reconstructing their histories, the four politicians use the ethics of memory to sanctify their political careers by using recollected "selves." Through a reconstruction of memory, the autobiographies selectively isolate certain moments of history while propping the heroic stories that idolize them.

Religion is employed in autobiographies to serve the limitations of the ethics of memory. Such a reading problematizes the nature of autobiographical recall. In the four autobiographies, religion is an ideological tool that seeks to capture the attention of the masses. The autobiographies' construction of "selves" creates identities with mystical images parallel to biblical figures, in a spirited effort to promote their political philosophies. Therefore, although J. Odinga wants to be understood as the biblical Moses, Kaggia as a black savior, R. Odinga as Joshua, and Murumbi as a prophet, cleavages are always discernible in the very art of interpellation. Thus, their autobiographies do not succeed in expunging the ghosts that always slip out of the persona in the form of Freudian slips or the very act of self-mythologizing and show their audiences who these leaders indeed are. This article problematizes the notion of liberation amidst theodicy, visibility, and poverty in Exodus 1-15. The study puts themes and concepts of liberation into literary perspective. *Uhuru* chronicles the life of a leader who, like the biblical Moses, aimed to liberate Kenyans from the bondage of neocolonialism, poverty and the Pharaonic leadership of Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Moi, and beyond.

J. Odinga's *Uhuru* first appeals to the Luo ethnic identities and loyalties, just as the biblical Moses first appealed to the Israelites. The Moses-like identity that J. Odinga aims to embrace can be deciphered from the debunking of the Luo (mis)representation. Secondly, J. Odinga's *Uhuru* appeals to the Kenyan subaltern, the oppressed. He uses the ideograph of freedom to appeal to the Kenyan subaltern and the Luo Nation. The phrase "Not Yet Uhuru" is utopian and appeals more to the oppressed. The concept of collective victimhood is embedded in this title and becomes a way of persuasion.

J. Odinga's autobiography uses the victimization motif for selfish interests, a strategy that derives its efficacy from the religious register

that he employs to articulate and mobilize. Throughout the twentieth century, and today more than ever, Christianity remains the cornerstone of the Kenyan national identity. In a context of strong ethnic polarization, this Christian identity may occasionally exceed the other political divisions. However, this takes place within narrow limits because the churches have consistently participated in the crystallization of ethnic groups, and for a decade, they have been tribalized, in that their clergy frequently slip into communitarian positions (Droz and Maupeu, 2013). Jaramogi Odinga endeavored to pentecostalize the national Christian ideology by invoking the Moses-like identity.

Similarly, one of the most endearing passages in Raila Odinga's autobiography *Freedom* reads:

> In my view, the decisive event in the Old Testament is not the creation but the exodus, through which the people of Israel are freed from Egyptian slavery. The scriptural record is found in the fifth chapter of the book of Exodus, which begins with this dialogue between pharaoh, the Egyptian king, and Moses and Aaron, the Israeli leaders: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness." (112)

While *Uhuru* constructs an image of Moses in J. Odinga, *Freedom* creates the image of Joshua in the persona of Raila Odinga. Although R. Odinga began constructing this image earlier in his political career, the public accepted Joshua's identity in the 2017 general elections. The Canaan journey signifies a break away from Egyptian slavery. It is noteworthy that his father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, started this journey. His death also echoes the death of the biblical Moses. After fighting a protracted battle with pharaoh, miraculously crossing the Red Sea, Moses could not reach Canaan, but his disciple Joshua could.

Thus, when Raila Odinga revisits this Canaan journey and dons himself with Joshua's garbs, the reader hopes for the completion of the journey that Moses began. As already stated, this ideograph had begun earlier in *Uhuru* where J. Odinga portrays Kenyatta's leadership as a semblance of the gerontocratic pharaoh who could not eliminate poverty, disease, and ignorance, thus opening the gates for an all-round development.

Moreover, Murumbi's *Path* is understandable through a prophetic lens. In the autobiography, Murumbi refashions himself as a prophet. Riding on the desire to be understood as a different breed of politician, a statesman, Murumbi uses the ideograph of "a path that was not taken," which echoes Frost's 1915 Poem, "The Road Not Taken," to prophesy the future of Kenya. Frost's poem is about individualism and the ability to make choices. The choice that Murumbi makes here is resigning from the government when his fellow leaders were running to Gatundu (Jomo Kenyatta's home district) to say, "Mzee, you must

make me a minister" (Murumbi, 256). It is thus illuminative to argue that the title reads into Frost's "a path less travelled by."

*Path* is an account of a leader's life whose knowledge of what was to come weighed him down, prompting Fernandez (28) to call him a man at war with himself. This "war with the self" was common among the Jewish prophets. Specifically, in Isaiah 53, the Bible records:

> Who has believed our message
> and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
> He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
> and like a root out of dry ground.
> He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
> Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
> He was despised and rejected by men,
> *a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*
> Like one from whom men hide their faces
> he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
> Bible, Isaiah 53: 1-4. (my italics)

Murumbi's autobiography portrays him as "a man of sorrows," a man trying to fit in a system that does not accept his ideals. His resignation after serving only for three months as Kenya's vice president is telling. In this autobiography, he says that he resigned because he found out that his contemporaries were not concerned about the welfare of the masses, and thus the road to the Promised Land had been lost.

Murumbi's autobiography *Path* echoes the choices that Kenya has or has not made since independence. As the narrative gains momentum, Murumbi's thesis echoes in the background: *we can continue running along the destructive path we have taken, and perish apart as fools.* The current status of literature shows that the country has taken the path that propels the politics of the stomach –greed and exploitation. Having presided over the wholesale dismantling of Kenyan collective hope, the political class can now set rules that revolve around money. Thus, this cycle of poverty goes round and round. In the autobiography, Murumbi seems disillusioned by this state of affairs, and his mantra is that he did not let the trappings of power as Jomo Kenyatta's vice president blind him to the fact that things were not going according to the original plan. He observes:

> You see, people enter into politics because they have some ambitions to achieve something. I did not look at politics that way. Power never interested me. I felt that I was in the struggle for independence and when I was invited to become minister, I thought there was a contribution I could make, there was a job to be done, everybody who was capable of doing a job at that time should have come forward to help. And that is what I have done. I did that even when Kenyatta was arrested […] there was a crisis […] and anybody who had love for his country, without any political promptings at all, should have come forward at that time to help […] I didn't know what I was letting myself into, but I felt that the country needed my help. (209)

Here Murumbi's words echo how God "called" his prophets. They were in their daily routines doing normal jobs but with a burning desire to help their societies. In this detailed quote, Murumbi suggests that Kenya had a particular road map to follow, which would then provide the frameworks within which Kenya would forge ahead to achieve development. If Kenya had followed this path, the political, economic, and social climate would be different. How committed Murumbi was to this path when he was the minister of Foreign Affairs is debatable, owing to his reluctance to compile his autobiography earlier. He waited for almost fifty years after this period to write his story. Could it be that he wrote his autobiography after the government betrayed him?

In this submission of the identity of a prophet in the persona of Murumbi, one observes that Murumbi's about-face of disappointment presumes an argument. The logical implications of this argument require a long stretch of the imagination if one were to interrogate the basis for it happening in the 1980s, when he had stayed out of power for over twenty-five years. Murumbi was bitter when he resigned from the government and he could do nothing but prophesy.

Selecting religion as his point of departure and a tool for his colonial onslaught, Kaggia presents yet another powerful form of authenticating skewed histories. Whether true or false, religion has been used by politicians in Kenya to weaponize memory and to train the masses to stand tall even in the face of adversity. Suffice it to add that Benedict Anderson's conception of "imagined communities" in Kenya has been formed around religious belief. By questioning the Bible and portraying it as inconsistent and fronting an Africanized form of religion as trustworthy and dependable, Kaggia is high on the academic totem pole. He is a critical nationalist who is always in the pursuit of truth. Setting records right becomes Kaggia's nationalism. Here, Kaggia dons himself with the Hebrew tunics and deconstructs the notion of social Darwinism from a religious perspective. He starts by questioning the Bible:

> The book of Genesis relates the story of Cain's sin and punishment. Adam had only two sons, Cain and Abel, it says. Cain slew his brother Abel and as a result he was cast out "from the presence of the Lord" and went to live in the land of Nod on the East of Eden. There he took a wife and bore children. I used to ask my teacher to explain to the class this paradox. If Adam was the first man on earth, then at the time of Cain's expulsion from Eden, there must have been only Adam and Eve and their two sons on the whole earth. (12)

Critiquing the Bible within civilized versus uncivilized nexus was daring for Kaggia and a way of deconstructing the obstacles inherent in the discourses of knowing. Spivak has implicitly contended that anyone who can ask the question "Who am I?" –that is, anyone with

consciousness– has a problematic self (66). Knowing becomes problematic. This would seem to be the general trajectory of what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson term a "third wave" of autobiographical criticism (13). This approach attempts to recuperate autobiography by reconciling socially constructed discourse with a self-liberationist agency or by conflating the postmodern with the postcolonial. These critics retain the poststructuralist critique of a unified subjectivity that seemingly obliterates the possibility of *auto*biography while simultaneously valorizing the liberating aspects of autobiography, particularly for those once excluded from historical discourse. For them [the "colonized"], Smith and Watson contend, "autobiographical writing has often served as a tactic of intervention in colonial repression" (45). Kaggia's interrogation of the Bible, therefore, is an attempt to portray selfhood that is distinctive and different from what the Western schools of thought have constructed about Africans. Kaggia's *Roots*, thus, is not only liberatory but constructs the author as a leader with a coherent self.

The messianic idea has long been a trope in fantasy fiction. The idea of being the Chosen One is compelling, as is the concept of a super-hero who can fix all the world's problems. In this sense, Kaggia's construction of himself as a Black messiah is utopian and fantastical, especially in the mundane post-independent Kenyan political and economic landscape. Entertaining such lofty thoughts is an act of escapism, a theme that permeates many African political autobiographies.

The theme of subalterneity also unites these four texts. However, their claim to subalterneity is a (mis)use of the ethics of memory to immortalize J. Odinga, Kaggia, R. Odinga and Murumbi. The four autobiographies amplify the theme of resignation as the primary tenet within the politics of conscience. In *Uhuru,* J. Odinga amplifies what he has done for the Kenyan nation, his roles, and his sacrifices for the State. In his autobiography, he claims he has sacrificed a lot for the sake of Kenyans and Kenya's unity. J. Odinga ignored countless attempts made by Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU[4]) technocrats (on behalf of their imperial masters) to wage a rift between him and Kenyatta once the latter assumed office, first as prime minister in 1963, then later as president in 1964, and when he could not take it anymore, like a gentleman, Jaramogi left KANU [Kenya African National Union] without *causing a scene* (Ogot, 198; Odinga, 300, my italics).

In *Uhuru*, J. Odinga pits the other leaders against the Kenyan masses. It becomes clear from the text that the other leaders were egocentric and self-seeking and that their aim was to put a wedge between Jomo Kenyatta and his vice president Jaramogi Odinga. However, his autobiography can be construed as a form of

construction. Liz Stanley sees autobiography as "an artful construction within a narrative" (128). This is because the narrative involves selecting events considered worth knowing or assigning reported speech or examples to illustrate a point and piecing them together to convey the appearance of coherence. The idea of construction reveals what Jaramogi Odinga includes in his autobiography and what he excludes, which is ultimately a conscious decision.

Likewise, in his autobiography, Murumbi registers his regret that Kenyans did not follow the path to open gates and achieve an all-around development. Murumbi's observations signal that he wants Kenyans to view him as a true prophet. What is notable, though, is his grievous tone. The diatribe that there was ethnic patronage and non-commitment from the elite to alleviate the masses from poverty, disease and ignorance aims to absolve Murumbi of blame, canonizing him to the level of the holy biblical prophets. It is not surprising when Murumbi observes later in his autobiography that "my own bosses have promoted me, or increased my salary as in the case of being a government minister, I was made minister of State, made foreign minister and made vice president, without me going to beg anybody or asking for anybody or asking for anything. So, power has not meant a thing to me in politics […] I mean to say, when I became vice president, I refused to have a motorcycle and a police escort, which the vice president is entitled to […] what interested me was to do my job and do my job honestly and to serve my country faithfully that is what was behind my policy" (210-211).

Murumbi's autobiography provides the space in which to resist what the public has consumed about Murumbi's resignation:

> The question of me resigning from the government was the whole series of events which took place. One was, my great friend, Pinto who, it was through him that I entered politics. He was a man who was genuinely an African […] then we had the sessional paper no. 10, which I didn't agree with […] I think that was not socialism at all. Now, I didn't want to be associated with this, I felt that I stood for certain principles, and I had maintained those principles (358).Thus, Kenyan independence failed to live up to its promises and marked the beginning of increasing disillusionment as it became clear to many Kenyans that hardly anything had changed.

Murumbi seems to have his idea of the Kenyan nationalist: leaders whose interests merged with the masses. These leaders, according to him, paid the ultimate prize. One of these leaders was Pio Gama Pinto, whom he calls his political father. Pio Gama Pinto's assassination greatly affected Murumbi. And taking advantage of the present, Murumbi's autobiography allows him to look back with understanding. Using this knowledge, he gives his verdict thus: "I didn't want to be associated with government which was going to let down the people […] So I left" (359).

Similarly, Kaggia's belief suggests that the real fighters for independence who offered the strongest counterinsurgency in Kenya were the subaltern classes that have not been recognized and appreciated. To him, the national bourgeoisie stole the show and continued to advance the interests of the colonial masters. Clothed in the cloak of subalterneity, Kaggia allocates himself the power to speak for self and others. Calculatingly touching on the story of Cain's sin in the book of Genesis, Kaggia dismisses right-wing postcolonial Kenyan politicians as traitors weighed down by Cain's sin: "Cain slew his brother Abel, and as a result, he was cast out 'from the presence of the Lord' and went to live in the land of Nod on the East of Eden" (12).

The last theme under the politics of conscience is the theme of betrayal. There has always been the feeling that postcolonial Kenya has been poorly imagined, favouring the history of betrayal and exclusion. The politics of exclusion began long before independence and continues to define the Kenyan nation. According to Kaggia's autobiography, the spirit of nationhood should be kept alive because it is within these frameworks that true freedom can be achieved. Even among the leaders who were jailed at Kapenguria, divisions were brought about by the kind of nationalism that informed them. For instance, Kenyatta's brand of nationalism concerning its relationship to Mau Mau is a classic case of a "war of positions." It sought to portray an anticolonialist image but was profoundly concerned with the subaltern militancy that Mau Mau stood for. Kenyatta was eager to show that he supported Mau Mau, but being from an underdeveloped national middle class, he was always careful not to lose control of the forces of change. At the same time, he was careful to appease the "enemy," that is, the British colonial authorities. Kenyatta's role in Mau Mau is relatively consistent with the character of the "national middle class" that Fanon has so eloquently described in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

At the same time, Kaggia argues that Kenyatta intentionally chose to know very "little of what went on in the Mau Mau Central Committee meetings" (113). My contention about the relationship between Kenyatta and Mau Mau is that he enjoyed the anxiety that Mau Mau was causing to the British colonial authorities, yet he was opposed to the movement on ideological grounds. This opportunistic stand is discernable in Kenyatta's speeches and the writings of the Kenyan leaders who steered the nationalist project, including the four autobiographies discussed here.

Therefore, what Kaggia's *Roots* portrays is that resistance in history is a continuous process that is part of a broader socio-political struggle between the State's sanctioned one-sided history and the alternative Kenyan history. The concept of elite historiography provides an essential tool for analyzing the colonial archive and postcolonial historiography and the afterlives of those lives that refuse

to go away, drawing attention to the unknown perspectives while questioning why and how such silence was carried out to the present time. From a sociological perspective, the issue of marginalization is conceptualized as a social process and is subjected to continuing the struggle and (re)interpretation.

By arguing that Jomo Kenyatta was neither a member of Mau Mau's central committee nor a member of the inner circle in *Roots*, Kaggia's assertions corroborate Carolyn Elkins' observations that "Kenya is still reeling from the brutal destruction of Mau Mau partly because the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, as well as the country's former British colonisers, have deliberately suppressed the history of this period" (8-12). Jomo Kenyatta's position regarding Mau Mau was therefore opportunistic. On the one hand, he was not in the inner circle of the Mau Mau decision-making process, but he approved of the worries and anxiety caused by Mau Mau activities. At the same time, he was quite vocal, and at the urging of the colonial authorities, denounced Mau Mau in clear terms. Thus, while Kenyatta's stand on Mau Mau during the emergency was ambiguous, his philosophy became quite clear after independence when, as the country's first president, he began a wholesale denunciation of it. This argument can be seen as an attempt by Kaggia to use literature to undermine the history that portrays Kenyatta and his elite leaders as genuine independent fighters. This revisionist attempt finds its expression more firmly in his autobiography's title.

Similarly, Joseph Murumbi's *Path* is an autobiography that critiques the postcolonial Kenyan elite leadership, touching on land issues, corruption, nepotism and ethnicity, themes that echo the Fanonian pitfalls of national consciousness. In presenting these themes, Murumbi's *Path* is read here as literature that assesses the African leadership's chronicling of how Kenya "lost the right path" at its inception. Reading through Murumbi's autobiography, we are confronted with temporalities of change and the need to effect the changes. Although his zeal was to change Kenya's path as a nation, Murumbi's interest clashed with that of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie, whose aim was to enrich themselves.

Murumbi's confession helps readers understand Kenyan politics: that leaders get into politics not to serve but "to achieve something." Leaders can resign or remain political marginals when they do not achieve their ambition. This reads like the confession of a leader who is a nationalist, constructing what Ranger has called "patriotic history" (220) which is always different from that of the dominant group. In this quote, Murumbi attempts to demonstrate his difference from the other ruling elites; therefore, he frames his reading of history as correct and patriotic. By pitting himself against his contemporaries, Murumbi aims to excavate the silenced, patriotic history of Kenya's forgotten heroes. Unfortunately, the official account has

misrepresented this account because it contests and threatens its legitimacy. One of the issues that the dominant discourse in the nation tried to misrepresent, according to Murumbi, was his resignation from Kenyatta's government where he was serving as vice president and where he had only served for six months.

Further on, when the past is remembered, through the eyes of Jaramogi Odinga, the Kikuyu ethnic group to which the first president belonged was seen to be disproportionately reaping the 'fruits of *Uhuru.*' As a result, the other ethnic groups are excluded from the national plate. This version of accounts isolates the narrator, absolving him from the postcolonial blame while at the same time implicating his contemporaries. This way, *Uhuru* weaponizes the past, calculatingly portraying the author and his ethnic group as victims of the system. *Uhuru*, therefore, slants towards portraying a selfless leader, a national figure whose exclusion from the nation's elite narrative should be seen as a betrayal of the masses by the State. Jaramogi Odinga avers that "I have written this book because the present generation must learn from the total experience of the *Uhuru* struggle if it is to save itself" (254). Here, he uses his autobiography to control how the past is remembered. He occupies the same rank as Kaggia who, just like him, was a champion of the Kenyan populace. In *Uhuru*, Kaggia is praised through his resignation letter which is quoted at length:

> As a representative of the people I found it very difficult to forget the people who elected me on the basis of definite pledges or to forget the freedom fighters who gave all they had, including their land, for the independence we are enjoying. I therefore decided not to give the assurance required for me, especially as there was no indication on the government side that the grievances listed in my press statements, and the lengthy correspondence I carried out with the Minister of lands and settlement, would be satisfactorily solved. I felt that to give such an assurance and to be prepared to remain muzzled I was betraying my innermost convictions for the sake of a salary or position. (267)

This is how he wants Kaggia, one of the Kapenguria detainees, to be remembered. However, the same memorialization and the supposed commodification of land issues in Kenya within such discourses may shed light on why land in postcolonial Kenya became such an emotive issue. Therefore, the autobiography by Jaramogi Odinga portrays the leader's frustration with Kenyatta's turn-about that had turned fellow Kapenguria convicts such as Bildad Kaggia into his foes. Kenyatta, like KADU politicians, had betrayed the people, and according to his autobiography, there was no way Jaramogi Odinga was going to be a part of such grand betrayal. The formation of Kenya Peoples Union (KPU) and his resigning from the Government are narrated here to highlight his patriotism.

Just like *Uhuru*, Kaggia's *Roots of Freedom* suggests that the Kenyan nation failed because self-seeking leaders took up the reins of leadership. According to *Roots*, this failure has brought about the politics of exclusion where some members feel sidelined by the State. Kaggia's autobiography gives all the credit of Kenya's liberation to the Mau Mau movement, to which most of the postcolonial elite leadership did not belong:

> Mau Mau was an organisation formed to achieve what KAU had failed to achieve through constitutional means. It was ready to achieve its objective by any means. It was a movement determined to achieve Kenya's real liberation at any cost. As to what Mau Mau achieved, only blind people could not appreciate. (194)

This assertion amplifies the centrality of the Mau Mau movement in the inception and growth of Kenya's nationhood. Following Benedict Anderson's formulation of who belongs to a nation, imagination plays a pivotal role in achieving national dreams. This imagination can be directed by the kinds of stories that people tell. Therefore, by unearthing the silenced Mau Mau's central role in Kenya's independence, Kaggia aims to rely on memory as a weapon to dethrone the wrong political edifice that has passed as national historiography. However, by relying on memory to (re)tell the past of the centrality of Mau Mau in laying the foundation of the nation, Kaggia uses his memory to elbow out the centrality of Kenya's first president, violently silencing his contributions to Kenya's independence by presenting him as an opportunistic villain.

Raila Odinga's *Freedom* is premised upon locating the supposedly lost Kenyan *Uhuru* dream: "my vision for Kenya remained the same as it had always been: finally achieving the dreams of our founding fathers" (R. Odinga, 300). Undoubtedly, *Freedom* is a continuation of Jaramogi Odinga's legacy. One of these legacies was defending the subaltern from the postcolonial elite, in the years going back as early as the 1960s, president Daniel Moi's and president Kibaki's eras. *Freedom*, therefore, completes the history of resistance; Raila Odinga chronicles the remarkable journey of one of Africa's leading politicians and statesmen. One of the public leaders he recognizes is his father, Jaramogi Odinga. He rebrands his father as a nationalist whose ideals were enviable. His father was the biblical Moses leading Kenya to true independence, who died before Kenya arrived at the metaphorical Canaan.

According to Raila Odinga, after independence, the forces operating in the country kindled ethnic conflict in Kenya, which isolated Jaramogi Odinga and the like-minded leaders from the nation's leadership. They did not consider the sacrifices that J. Odinga had made for the country. Earlier on Jaramogi Odinga could have

quickly catered to the whims of the colonialists and international capital project to take over Kenya's leadership when Kenyatta was in prison. Still, he chose the path of a broader nationalist Kenyan cause. Raila Odinga amplifies J. Odinga's sacrifices to make them look like a template of nationalism in Kenya, epically exhibited by a leader who was now being sacrificed at the altar of ethnicity. The reader is astounded to learn that the government betrayed a leader of such stature. Moreover, this betrayal becomes not that of an individual leader but of the majority of the people, the Kenyan poor.

However, from a critical interrogation of *Freedom*, Raila Odinga misrepresented several aspects of his life and political involvements. His autobiography fails to consistently demonstrate his thoughts, reflections or involvements in important events such as the 1982 coup attempt; the NDP [National Development Party]/KANU cooperation and merger; what led to the NARC[5] failure; the events surrounding the 2007 elections and the intricacies, decisions, successes or failures of the grand coalition government; what happened to the Kazi Kwa Vijana (KKV), Maise and other scandals; or how Raila Odinga acquired the Kisumu molasses plant. The autobiography glosses over these important details that would help form an objective view about Raila Odinga's leadership.

In selecting what to amplify and what to silence, the autobiography denies readers the opportunity to know how Raila Odinga made certain decisions, what and who influenced them and why. Right from the outset in the prologue, he cleverly claims that he launched his presidential candidacy within ODM (Orange Democratic Movement) in May 2007, while scholars like Miguna Miguna think otherwise. According to Miguna, at that time Raila Odinga was in ODM-Kenya. The autobiography does not explain how his political consciousness came about. The claim that he is withholding information because he fears negative reactions from the public leaves one wondering what kind of a leader he would be if he could not tell the truth. He has also suppressed or tried to undermine other people's contributions to his past successes in politics.

Raila Odinga's method of remembering and forgetting suggests that the ends always justify the means to him. Such clues can be read in his portrayal of his father:

> Jaramogi announced his resignation from the government on April 14, 1966, criticising his former colleagues for their concentration on personal gain [...] things had reached a point of no return. He said that he did not want future generations to question his sincerity or feel that he had allowed himself "to hold a sinecure post in the midst of poverty and misery in our country." With this realisation, I cannot continue to hold this position any longer, and I hereby tender my resignation. (40)

*Freedom* (re)brands Raila Odinga as the intellectual custodian of Kenya's pro-democracy struggles and the founding father of democracy. The photographs he selects, the stories he tells, the way he tells them and the stories he does not disclose (or forgets) seem to establish Raila Odinga as the authority on the making of Kenya. The text portrays how Odinga stands tall against the terror of dictatorship where flattery, fear and silence reigned supreme.

But this is understandable, because *Freedom* is dedicated to Raila Odinga's father: "This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, a brave freedom fighter" (iv). The autobiography is supposed to serve as a continuation of the legacy that his father left behind. The narrative is the same –that of the lost dream in Kenya. According to him, Kenya as a nation is a narrative that has been constructed on failure.

## Conclusion

I maintain that these four autobiographies, relying on memory, recall and autobiographical genre, write the past with a slant. The authors immortalize themselves within three major themes; subalterneity, betrayal and religion. The leaders use autobiography to cheat on death by immortalizing their names. Illustratively, just like the microphone in the hands of a politician on the podium, so is the autobiography of a Kenyan politician. What cannot be achieved now through the microphone –the lies, the false grandeur promises, misrepresentation of facts and Otherization–is fulfilled through selective autobiographical recall. Jaramogi Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi and Raila Odinga's autobiographies are weaponized political tools written through a revisionist filtered lens and are primarily involved in retelling Kenya's past with an ulterior motive. This quest is made possible through the writers writing themselves into history, cunningly underscoring the discourse of politics of conscience in their works. The autobiographies enact freedom, placing the writers at the center of the country's developmental path. Although the autobiographies are meant to remove the leader from political liminality, the act of recalling becomes a way of exploring the arbitrary nature of their own lives, a temporal (dis)continuity within which the independence dream continues to be lost. Therefore, the four autobiographies are not templating for collective progress but rather may be interpreted as the final efforts of leaders to save themselves, in an incongruous attempt to streamline a complex series of fissures. The texts share a peculiar postmodern self-reflexivity and an anachronistic nostalgia replete with

constructed identities that directly or indirectly privilege an imaginary past and place, thoughtfully penned by professional writers.

## Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the pronoun "he" and "his" are used throughout to refer to the male autobiographers the author examines in the present article. (The Editor)

2. Lejeune's non-gender-neutral definition of what constitutes an autobiography says a lot about who loses and wins in his autobiography theory. He wrote about and critiqued autobiographies by men like Gide, Michel Leiris and Sartre in his many formulations. Therefore, his definition of an autobiography only concentrated on the lives he primarily studied. Nevertheless, this definition demonstrates how Lejeune has formulated a definition of autobiography which precludes the admission of women, setting up a criterion of admissibility which continue to exclude and belittle the contribution of women writers to the genre.

The English translation of Lejeune's text mentions "he" to refer to the person when in fact *une personne* in French is always in the feminine (The Editor).

3. I follow Louis Althusser's definition of interpellation, a phenomenon that describes the process by which ideology constitutes the very nature of individual subjects' identities through the process of "hailing" them in social interactions.

4. Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) was the first principal opposition party in Kenya, which later merged with KANU, the independence party (Kenya African National Union) in 1964. KADU was created by small ethnic groupings in Kenya in the early 1960s to counter KANU's domination by the Kikuyu and Luo ethnic groups. KADU's position was that ethnic interests could best be addressed through a decentralized government.

5. NARC stands for the National Rainbow Coalition, and was an unprecedented assembly of most of the main opposition parties in Kenya, which agreed and joined together in 2002. This coalition was able to oust the Kenya African National Union (KANU) which had been into power from 1963.

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