

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE AGENCY IN DAVID MULWA'S PROSE
FICTION**

MORWANI, MOSIGISI KEVIN

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DECLARATION

This project report is my original work and has not been submitted for examination or the award of a degree at any other university:

Signature..... Date.....

Kevin Mosigisi Morwani

This project report is submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors:

Signature..... Date.....

Dr. Jennifer Muchiri

Signature Date.....

Dr. Kimingichi Wabende

DEDICATION

To: My siblings: Willy, Gloria, and Maryjane

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine how female agency is constructed in David Mulwa's prose-fiction, the novella *We Come in Peace* and the novel *Flee Mama Flee*. In the selected texts, Mulwa's re-imagines slavery and colonialism as systems that doubly marginalized women, yet, he deliberately portrays female characters who can acquire the power to make individual decisions against the backdrop of this marginalization. The study begins by (re)conceptualizing the notions of 'power' and 'agency' within the context of slavery by interrogating the extent to which Mulwa depicts female characters, laughter and voice as acts of agency. The study then examines characters within the binaries of white/black, colonizer/ colonized, man/ woman, and master/slave to determine how this construction leads to the 'othering' of women within the context of colonialism. Moreover, the study recognizes the author's attempt to create women capable of subverting the forces that 'Other' them. The study views this representation as the author's 'enlightened compassion' to restore agency to women. The study employs the theory of Narratology and Postcolonial theory as the interpretive grids. Narratology focuses on the structural and textual choices the author makes in the texts, and Postcolonial theory focuses on issues of marginality such as Said's notion of Orientalism to examine how marginal groups articulate agency in relation to the social contexts. Besides, the study models Spivak's approaches in representing the gendered subaltern to read the depiction of female characters in Mulwa's prose fiction. The study concludes that by constructing typical female characters and then depicting them in a manner that foregrounds their voice and agency, Mulwa's prose fiction breaks the powerlessness associated with the situation of the woman along the Kenyan coast.

Definition of Terms

Female Agency

In this study, female agency refers to the ability of the female characters to have control to make decisions over the course of their lives, economically, politically and culturally. With this power, they can question the socio-cultural norms or even establish new standards for themselves. By writing the women into a historical context in which their voice has been shadowed, Mulwa's approach is similar to that of the *Subaltern Studies* group. Led by Ranajit Guha, they attempted to reclaim the history of the Indian masses, which they argued had been either glossed over or silenced in the colonialist historiography and the nationalist narratives by the elite Indians. They espoused the idea that there may have been political dominance, but that this was not hegemonic. By tracing the voices of these ordinary individuals, they shifted the focus from the subaltern to "subaltern agency" which emphasized the power of the individual. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak developed on the work of the Subaltern Studies Project by introducing two aspects into it, namely: the position of the gendered subaltern and the representation of subaltern in literature. Regarding representation, the Subaltern Studies group provided two ways of doing this: either reading the elitist books against the grain to identify the silences and glosses or examine the representation of the subaltern agency in works that overtly attempt to give agency to the ordinary people. In "Can the Subaltern Speak", Spivak focuses on the position of the gendered subaltern who is deeply in shadow and therefore cannot speak. Instead, she needs someone to speak for her. In this approach, the contribution and condition of the subaltern would be presented as part of the history of the nation. This study uses Spivak's approach to examine the representation of the female subaltern in David Mulwa's prose fiction.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

This study examines how in the novella *We Come in Peace* and the novel *Flee Mama Flee*, David Mulwa represents women as agents of their lives despite the notions of displacement and dispossession associated with the history of slavery and colonialism. It focuses on how Mulwa contextualizes the presence and subject position of female characters within the history of slavery and colonialism and how this influenced the construction of their identities as women.

David Mulwa was born in 1945 in Machakos County.

After graduating with a BA in Literature from the University of Nairobi, he taught Literature, Geography, and History at high school level. In 1970, he joined the University of California for a master's degree in Theatre Arts. On completion of his studies from the U.S.A, he joined Kenyatta University's Department of Literature where he is still teaching. Although he is better known as an actor, Mulwa is also an accomplished dramatist, director, and novelist. With eighteen published works, Mulwa is one of Kenya's most prolific writers. The uniqueness of his writing lies not only in his versatility to write in both Kiswahili and English languages but also in his aesthetic prowess in both the dramatic and prosaic genres.

His writings include the dramas: *Redemption* (1990), *Master and the Servant* (1979), which has been translated into Russian, *Buriani* (1983), *Ukame* (1985), *Mkimbizi* (1986), *Daraja* (1988), *Champion* (2000), *Glass Houses* (2000), *The Bull Fight* (2000), *Clean Hands* (2000), *Inheritance* (2002), *The Crocodile's Jaw* (2002) and *The Girl with a Vision* (2006). Some of them such as *Redemption*, *Inheritance*, *Glass Houses* and *Clean Hands* have received critical

attention both for their concerns and for dramatic strategies. The prose-fiction genre includes: Katende *Says No*(2007), *Love Lasts Forever* (2007), *Terrible Times* (2010) and those under study, *We Come in Peace*, (2011) and *Flee Mama Flee* (2014).

The novel, *Flee Mama Flee* is a sequel to the novella *We Come in Peace*. The narratives in the two texts are personal stories of women in the contexts of the pre-colonial, slavery and early colonial periods in the history of Kenya. Mulwa weaves stories that are articulated through female voices and centers on the experiences of Kaveni, her daughter Elizabeth Mumbe and the Irish teacher, Mary May. Although the texts engage with the history of slavery and the subsequent establishment of colonial rule, and the early stages of the anti-colonial struggle, Mulwa gives prominence to the experiences of women and how their perceptions are affected by these historical developments. It is upon this background of displacement and subjugation associated with slavery and colonialism that the female characters attempt to create space for their survival; a space that they could use freely to make decisions about their lives. Thus, Mulwa seems to suggest the possibility of women using their positions, as marginal as they may seem, to construct their 'selves' as subjects of their own narratives.

By writing the female experience into the history of slavery and colonialism in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*, Mulwa attempts to retrieve the voices of women and celebrate them as embodying the experiences of women and the communities along the Kenyan coast. It is a fact that both slavery and colonialism undermined the personal identities of the enslaved and colonized subjects, thereby occluding the oppressed and colonized from making independent choices. However, the narratives that Mulwa tells in the selected texts are stories about women who face the challenges imposed on them as slaves, colonial subjects but more

significantly as women. This study examines these acts of contestation staged by the female characters in the context of slavery and colonialism as strategies of constructing agency.

In “The Poet as Historian”, Peter Unawundijo tersely highlights how literature functions in relation to history. Unawundijo argues that although both the historian and the poet, engage in presenting human experience, the historian is drawn to the systematic and factual presentation while the poet is concerned with representing these experiences through myth, imagery, metaphor and other forms of fiction (63). He concludes that using these forms of fiction, the poet “gives these experiences a deeper, more profound and memorable dimension” (63). The history of slavery and colonialism is marked with rapid transformations in the society. Key among this is the separation of families and communities that resulted in a restructuring of the socio-cultural, economic and political structures of local communities. While being unapologetic to slavery and colonial domination, Mulwa re-imagines these contexts in *We Come in Peace and Flee Mama Flee* as ones that affected the traditional gender spheres and broadened the spaces. This study is, therefore, an examination of how Mulwa, through the genre of prose fiction, addresses the theme of gender and the representation of women within the context of slavery and colonialism.

Statement of the Problem

This study explores how in his prose fiction, Mulwa evokes the situation of the woman in the Kenyan society within the contexts of slavery and colonialism. This is premised on the assumption that, although the larger concern of Mulwa’s prose fiction is to portray the effects of slavery and colonialism on the lives of people, Mulwa does not focus on a whole community; rather, he chooses to invest meaning in the personal stories of Kaveri, Elizabeth Mumbe, and Mary May.

In telling their personal (hi)stories, the narrator-protagonists must deal with the forms of marginalization that tend to keep their voices in shadow. In reflecting on this historical fact, David Mulwa has deliberately employed individual narrative and characterization strategies in his prose fiction that portray female characters that can undermine power even when they are enslaved. The thrust of this study is to evaluate how Mulwa interweaves the three women's stories into the history of slavery and colonialism in Kenya with a focus on how he represents women as active agents of their lives.

Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- i. To examine the narrative strategies the author uses to construct female agency in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*.
- ii. To evaluate characterization as a literary strategy of foregrounding female agency in Mulwa's prose-fiction.

Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- i. The author employs various narrative strategies to construct female agency in his prose fiction.
- ii. The author uses characterization as a strategy to enhance a feminist agenda in his prose fiction.

Justification

An examination of Mulwa's works, both drama, and prose fiction demonstrates his preoccupation with women as saviors of the society, a fact which is recognizable in *We Come*

in Peace and *Flee Mama Flee*. However, there is no sustained criticism on the representation of women in his works. Moreover, in an interview with me on 9/03/2016, Mulwa expressed his empathy for women as the force behind the privileged voice that he gives to female characters in his fiction. This prompted an evaluation of the textual evidence in his prose fiction.

I selected *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*, which though published in 2011 and 2014 respectively, mainly deal with the female agency in relation to the discourse of slavery and colonialism. Slavery and colonialism provide the historical contexts for the events in these narratives. This places the two works under the category of postcolonial feminist literature. Ideologically, the prose fiction seeks to subvert the hegemonic tendencies inherent in patriarchy, slavery, and colonialism that aim to marginalize the woman. I will read the two texts together because they are a sequel.

The themes of slavery and colonialism are significant in understanding the postcolonial subjectivities of the contemporary Kenyan society. Moreover, the depiction of the female characters in these works would contribute to the debates on the role and voice of women in the periods of slavery and early colonialism in communities around the Kenyan coast. *We Come in Peace* deals with the status of women in the pre-colonial period, the capture, displacement and alienation caused by slavery and the role of the slave trade in opening the interior to colonial occupation and its impact on women. *Flee Mama Flee* examines the role of Christian missionary centers in marginalizing women, the establishment of colonialism and its effect on the African families and the role of women in the anti-colonial struggle.

In *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*, Mulwa excavates this history and centers on the experiences of women as narrated in their voices. This depiction breaks the silences perpetuated by the patriarchal discourses that portray women as victims or obliterates their contribution

during these historical contexts. This study is therefore not only an addition to the existing criticism on Mulwa's works but also an addition to the studies done on aspects of gender in particular on the position of the woman in particular historical contexts.

Literature Review

The literature review in this study begins with a discussion of critical works concerned with strategies of constructing agency by minority individuals and groups in certain historical contexts then shift focus to those that examine aspects of representation of women's experiences in literature. Finally, the study reviews the literature on Mulwa's works.

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson defines slavery as "a form of domination, where one is under the power of another or his agent...it entails the power of life and death over the slave" and the slave as "the permanent, violent domination of naturally alienated and generally dishonored persons" (42). Further, he compares the experience of slavery to a form of social death. This is because a "slave's powerlessness originated ... as a substitute for death, usually violent death". Although Patterson's observations on slavery are drawn from the Caribbean experience, the experiences are similar to ones that some local communities in Kenya faced. However, in his analysis, Patterson models the Hegelian master-slave grand narrative that presupposes absolute power and powerlessness for the master and the slave respectively. While appropriating his observations, this attempts to break this single binary approach by focusing on how Mulwa represents the disadvantaged position that the slaves occupy the creative space that the female characters use to articulate their sense of selfhood.

Safran William in "Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" thematizes on the experiences of immigrants. He views the immigrant as belonging to a minority group

that has been dispersed from its original homeland by severing physical, cultural or emotional links that exist between this group and their ancestral community (81). Although I am not studying the two texts as migrant literature, this study appropriates the features of diasporic experience that he identifies to examine Kaveni's experience. As a slave who was forcefully captured from her ancestral home and sold into slavery across the Indian Ocean, her feelings of alienation allegorize the four features observed by Safran. Firstly, the immigrants or their ancestors have been dispersed from specific original center to two or more foreign regions; secondly, they retain a collective memory vision or myth about their original home; thirdly, they believe they are not and cannot be fully accepted by their host society; hence feel partly alienated from it. Lastly, they regard their ancestral homeland as their true or ideal home. Thus, they believe they should collectively be committed to the restoration of their original homeland to its safety and prosperity (83-84). This study explores how Mulwa presents the slavery condition and how through the first person narrative voice Kaveni, he inscribes these experiences into 'herstory' that she uses to construct agency to survive through this alienation.

Walter Roland in "The Poetics and Politics at the Crossroads of Cultural Difference and Diversity" notes that in "A world characterized by disjunctive flows of objects with people from different places, origins, and diversity, cultures of people are affected by global elements through mutual exchanges or borrowing" (118). In reading *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*, the slave trade and colonialism are portrayed as experiences that influenced the lives of the local communities involved in the Indian Ocean trade and later became spheres of influence by colonial powers. Roland further argues that the exchanges and cultural diversities had an effect on the identities based on racial contact. He, therefore, sees identity as existing in the third space where we respect the Other's differences (121). While this study builds on this

approach in the analysis of the selected texts, it notes that these contacts were not always based on mutual respect: some were forceful and based on betrayals as shown in *We Come in Peace*. Since female agency forms a part of the identities of the female characters, the third space forms the best approach to study the roles of characters in any multicultural society. This is because whether the contact is forceful or not, it influences the identities of the individuals involved. Further, the study explores how Mulwa uses ‘Otherness’ as a narrative strategy to foreground the experiences of women.

Simone Kouwenhoven in “Representing Slave Agency: Agency and its Limitations in Slave Narratives and Contemporary Fiction and Film,” argues that the central factor in slave narratives is the agency shown by the narrators; the incessant struggle for freedom “through some form of rebellion against their masters, which (at some times) could lead to severe punishment or death” (6). This study models this approach to examine the ‘incessant struggle’ as an expression of agency. To this I add that this ‘incessant struggle’ is not only physical and unidirectional; it is as much psychological and sometimes indirect. For instance, the study takes note of lament and laughter in *We Come in Peace* as strategies of survival by the slaves, yet with the potent of expressing agency. Besides, this study focuses on the ability of the female characters to express their agency not only as slaves under slavery and colonialism but also under the ‘modern slavery’ of subjugation to colonial and patriarchal ideologies as in *Flee Mama Flee*.

In “A Written Song: Andrew Levy’s Neo-Slave Narrative” Helena Lima notes that in the act of re-writing slavery, authors of what she identifies as “Neo-Slave Narratives” attempt an exploration of the closely knit relations between individual history and national history, a feat that is also typical of the historical novel (135). As a way of distinguishing the two genres, she

argues that the neo-slave narratives, as opposed to the traditional historical novel, do not conform to either official historiography or bourgeois ideology; rather, they give voice to the silenced to tell their stories. She further observes that through retrospective narration, the authors of these narratives foreground the notion that “even under the most horrible conditions, agency and strength characterize Afro-Caribbean subjectivity” (135). This study models this approach to examine the depiction of female characters in *We Come in Peace* as typical of the slavery context, yet with an agency. Lima’s views of these narratives as not conforming either to official or bourgeois ideologies points to their subversive nature, a feat, which I believe Mulwa, intended to reflect in the novella. Although it is not a neo-slave narrative, the novel *Flee Mama Flee* demonstrates the transitional nature of slavery and colonial domination. Since it is also attempting to break the silences especially of women, it works like the Neo-slave narratives. Further, Mulwa demonstrates that despite the oblique conditions of slavery and colonialism, the lives of women were characterized with an agency.

Cecily Jones in “Contesting the Boundaries of Gender, Race, and Sexuality in Barbadian Plantation Society” examines the contradictory position of white women in colonial/slave societies. On the one hand, they were subject to the European male patriarchal authority, while on the other, they exercised the power of life and death over enslaved or the colonized native women and men (197). Jones argues, “Whiteness had been universalized to a level that it was considered as the ‘race’ while blacks were ‘Others.’ By extrapolating her observation to cover the slavery experience and the colonial domination, this study examines whiteness and blackness as socio-cultural constructs that are performed to influence the power relations of white and black women within the history of slavery at the coast and how this enhances or

inhibits female agency. Further, this study examines how the characterization of Mary May in *Flee Mama Flee* situates the white woman in this ambivalent position.

In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, Stuart Hall examines the portrayal of people in diasporic societies as experiencing the notion of identity as an open question. Hall sees identity as a “production” which is never complete (393). He observes that cultural identity is a process that keeps changing from state to state and given that history intervened through slavery and colonialism, Caribbeans, for my case, the Kenyan communities at the Kenyan Coast that were affected by the slavery and colonialism period, should ask themselves what they have become, instead of who they were. Hall defines cultural identities as temporary forms of identification within dialogues of history and culture (394), and concludes that “cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all lying unchanged outside history and culture... it is not once- and for- all. It is not a fixed origin, which we can make some final and absolute Return (395). Based on this observation, this study examines how by situating women in the multicultural sites associated with slavery and colonialism, Mulwa depicts female agency as a site that is inherently in a state of flux with other factors such as history, race, and class that is equally significant in exploring gender in African literature.

In “A Literary Representation of the Subaltern,” Spivak examines Mahasweta Devi’s writings and argues that Devi utilizes aspects of the historical novel in her characterization of the novels of the 1970s as opposed to the early sentimental ones. She notes that the novels of the 1970s had characters that “could have existed as subalterns in a specific historical moment and tested by orthodox assumptions” (336). This study observes that by re-imagining the experiences of slavery and colonialism, and inscribing the female narrator-protagonists in particular historical

contexts, Mulwa attempts to create typical characters. This gives insights into the human actions and interactions that give a verisimilitude of these experiences.

James Ogude in Ngugi's *Novels and African History* argues that for Ngugi, a narrative is a tool for shaping, ordering, and reinterpreting history. He further notes that Ngugi took to fiction to challenge the linear historiography that repressed the voices of the masses while privileging those of the ruling (153). This study adopts Ogude's approach to examining how in the selected texts Mulwa attempts to give a particular version of history. I contend that by inscribing the experiences of slavery and early colonialism through the voice of female characters, Mulwa significantly contributes to the history of the nation-state.

Patricia Ticineto Clough and Kate Millet in "The Hybrid Criticism of Patriarchy" perceive the feminist theory as one based on the relationship between history and fiction. They argue that the subjugation of women can be traced in the historical structures within a particular society. This study examines how Mulwa interrogates the history of slavery and colonialism as one that marginalized women and how his depiction of the female characters subverts the history that subjugates them.

In *Inside the Teaching Machine*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak thematizes on the notion of 'strategic essentialism' and argues it is a strategy that nationalities, ethnic and other minority groups can use to represent themselves. She observes that whereas considerable differences may exist amongst members of these groups, they engage in continuous debates, which make the group at some point, decide to temporarily 'essentialize' themselves and present a certain group identity in an attempt to attain set goals. Guided by these observations, the study examines how in the two texts Mulwa uses slavery and colonialism as a site of dominance that oppresses women. Then explore how he creates space for strategic essentialism by analyzing

female agency as a form of strategic essentialism that helps the female characters develop relationships that transcend racial, ethnic, religious and social class inhibitions, thus allowing the female characters to express subjectivity.

Florence Stratton in *Contemporary African Literature* argues for the study of gender as significant category in the study of African literature (16). By using gender as the reading trope in Grace Ogot's texts, she identifies inversion as the strategy that Ogot extensively uses to present the nation as a female's project (62). Although her cross-gender approach limits the gender to the male-female relationships with little regard to other aspects such as class and race, the strategy of inversion can also be identified in Mulwa's *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*. Besides, I observe that by representing the female characters as he does, Mulwa attempts to "transcend the Manichean allegory of gender and therefore heralds "a new moment in African literature, one that looks at forward to the (re)emergence of more sexually egalitarian societies" (176). This manner of depiction will ultimately collapse the gap between African male and female writers.

Molara Leslie Ogunjipe in "African Women, Culture, and Another Development" outlines the six factors that have hindered the African woman from full realization of her 'self.' She identifies the mountains as:

The first mountain oppression from outside neo (colonialism and neo-colonialism), the second is from traditional structures, feudal, slave-based; that third is her backwardness; the fourth is man, the fifth is her color, her race; and the sixth is herself (107).

Although this study mainly examines on how the 'foreign intrusions' influenced the relations between men and women we take note that in the contexts of slavery and colonialism narrated in the two texts, all the six mountains affected the woman as a complex process. According to

Ogundipe, for the woman to voice her agency, she needed to “fight for their fundamental and economic rights, without waiting for the happy day when men will willingly share power and privilege with them—a day that will never come” (114). This study interrogates how Mulwa represents the heterogeneity of the female experience and the how through narrative strategies, and female characterization portrays women capable overcoming these mountains, and in the process projecting their agency.

In “The Truth of Fiction”, Chinua Achebe argues that writers of what he identifies as ‘beneficent fiction,’ a category that I place Mulwa’s prose fiction, use fiction to help to help readers imaginatively identify with the experiences that they read in the text. He further notes that this identification is “the opposite of indifference; it is human connectedness at its most intimate” (151). This study identifies narrative and characterization choices that Mulwa makes in his prose fiction as strategies through which readers can identify with the experiences of the protagonists.

Jennifer Muchiri in *Women’s Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* foregrounds the female autobiographical voice as one that articulates social concerns from a domestic and personalized perspective. She further observes that the female autobiographical voice functions as a tool for women’s ‘self-exploration and self-definition.’ Although Muchiri’s observation is made in her contribution to the study of women’s autobiography, it is relevant to this study as I look at the first person narrative voice by female protagonists. I observe that the use of first person narrative voice and the corresponding aspects of retrospection and the immediacy in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee* mirrors the autobiographical writings that Muchiri examines. Therefore, just like in autobiography, fictional forms with the first person narrative

voices and women narrators, voice functions as a strategy for enhancing control of the narrative and agency.

In “Beyond Auto/Biography: Power, Politics and Gender in Kenyan Asian Women’s Writing”, Godwin Siundu adopts a gender/race model to argue that auto/biography gives women the power to re-insert their experiences into the history of the nation-state. He further notes that these writings signal the emergence of women’s voices to contest the existing narratives (135). Although his observation is based on autobiography as opposed to fiction, this study appropriates his view on the female voices to read the selected texts as containing personal narratives of women across racial boundaries in the first person narrative voice. It is through these narrative voices(s) that the female protagonists define their ‘selves’ in relation to the historical context of slavery and colonialism. Further, the study examines the self-representation by the female narrator-protagonists as a strategy that Mulwa employs to contest existing narratives on either gender or race.

In an insightful analysis of Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* as a rewriting of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Christopher Ouma in “Journeying out of Silenced Familial Spaces in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*” argues that by privileging Kambili, a young girl to narrate the story, Adichie gives the voice that was missing in Okonkwo’s home. He further observes that in this position, Kambili gains power and agency to consume the third space and provide the possibility for both hybridity and resistance, especially at the national level. Ouma seems to suggest that through the voice of Kambili, Adichie critiques the excesses at the domestic and state spaces. While modeling Ouma’s approach, this study seeks to examine how through the female voice and characterization, Mulwa attempts to break the limitations that slavery and colonialism placed on women. Further, this study explores the strategies that Mulwa uses to

give power and agency to women to transcend what Violet Barasa in her review of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* calls the "fetters of socio-cultural structures and attain self-realization as free agents" (20).

In "Representing the Gendered Subaltern in Postcolonial Kenyan Literature", Alex Wanjala explicates Gayatri Spivak's theorization of the subaltern, to explore aspects of representing the gendered subaltern in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*. His study demonstrates the applicability of Spivak's idea that "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in the shadow" (32). This study builds on Wanjala's study in that it examines the representation of women characters within the context of slavery and colonialism in Kenya. The point of departure is that in addition to the representational aspects of the novel that Wanjala studies, this study examines the use of female narrators and first person narrative voice as 'acts of speaking' where each character and /or narrator articulates the 'difference' that informs the heterogeneity of the experiences of the slavery and colonial contact.

Siundu in "Transcending Racial/Cultural Spaces: The Power of the Woman in Yusuf K. Dawood's Works", examined the portrayal of women characters within historical, racial and cultural dynamics of the contact. He argues that in Dawood's works, female characters are portrayed as facilitators of racial/cultural unions. He further examines the intersection of race, culture, and history as spaces where women negotiate their place to forge and celebrate new identities (47). This study adopts Siundu's observation to explore how the female characters in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee* negotiate their cultural and racial positions within the historical juncture of slavery and colonialism. Further, the study evaluates and how these

negotiations and unions influence the racial and gender relations as the women pursue their aspirations.

In “Interrogating History and Restoring Agency to Women in *The River and the Source* by Margret Ogola,” Odhiambo explores how through female characterization Ogola projects female agency within the Kenyan historiography. He identifies appropriation of the epic, stereotype and a deliberate effort to give prominence to the women characters as the strategies the women use to survive. This study examines how Mulwa uses characterization and narrative strategies to contest the marginalization of women by creating spaces through which women can express their agency within the context of slavery and colonialism.

Sara Mirza and Margaret Strobel in *Three Swahili Women: Life Histories* from Mombasa, Kenya narrate the life histories and personal experiences of three Swahili women. A study of these life histories reveals “the roles of women and the relationship between an individual and her society (x). They further observe that the lives of the three women studied “illustrate a range of influence from the European institutions and a variety of struggles that women face” (9). Their study reveals the heterogeneity of the experience of the different individuals at the Kenyan coast in relation to the history of slavery. Further, their study manifests an attempt by the writers to reconstruct the depiction of the women and the larger slave society through archival research and oral history. This study examines how through narrative voices of the three narrator-protagonists, Mulwa represents the heterogeneity of female agency in the selected texts. Besides, this study interrogates the effectiveness of the author’s use of archival research notes to ‘fictionalize’ the experiences of slavery and colonialism. Interestingly, the two narratives are set in the same place as Mirza and Strobel’s text.

In the “(Un) popularity of Popular Literature,” Odhiambo uses David Maillu’s *Broken Drums* as a case study to examine the impact and consequences of the slave trade on the native populations is silenced in the national histories (174). His study highlights Maillu’s approach not only as an excavation of the experiences of slavery but also as a retrieval of those unheard voices across gender, cultural and gender differences. Besides, he recommends the need to excavate more stories that assess the impact of slavery on the inhabitants around the coast. Whereas a similar observation can be made on Mulwa’s depiction of slavery and colonialism in his prose fiction, this study focuses on his portrayal of the female characters.

In his autobiography, *Dash before Dusk: A Slave’s Descendant*, Joe Khamisi details the experiences of the captured slaves and their experience as freed slaves. He acknowledges the experiences to the stories that he was told by his grandparents that were slaves at Rabai in the 1880s, the same period and place that Mulwa’s prose-fiction is set. Whereas the autobiography and fiction are governed by different conventions, Khamisi’s accounts illuminate the experiences that Mulwa fictionalizes in the prose fiction. For instance, Mulwa uses the first person narratives through Kaveni, who lived at the same period as Khamisi’s grandparents to embody the experiences of slavery.

Kimaru Hugholin and Chacha Nyaigoti Chacha analyzed the Kiswahili play *Buriani* based on the stylistic devices, thematic concerns, and characterization. Similarly, Ezekiel Alembi in *Appreciating Drama* uses Mulwa’s *Redemption* as the springboard to discuss the features of drama. However, these analyses were prepared as study guides to introduce secondary students to the genre of drama. Consequently, they do not offer critical analyses of the author’s concerns or artistry.

Wahu Karanja has examined dramatic techniques in David Mulwa's plays, namely: *Redemption*, *Clean Hands*, and *Glass House*. Her focus is on how Mulwa interweaves the tragicomic elements in the selected plays to give an illusion of hope, despite the challenges of life. However, her study is restricted to drama. By examining the narrative and characterization strategies he employs to depict female agency in his prose fiction, this study hopes to extend studies on Mulwa's works.

In "Comparative Analysis of Representation of Social and Political Realities in Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and Mulwa's *Redemption*", Pomak Tengya notes that the socio-political changes envisioned in *Redemption* are championed by female characters who can rise from their marginal positions to be the voices of reason in their families and societies. This study takes a similar approach to examine how through the narrative voice(s) and female characterization in the selected texts, Mulwa interrogates the history of slavery and colonialism. The point of departure is that whereas Tengya's study examines the role of women as part of the agents of socio-political change in Mulwa's drama, this study centers on the construction of women as active agents of their lives and that of the society in the genre of prose fiction.

In "The Performance and Manifestation of the Metaphors of Power in Mulwa's *Inheritance* and Dennis Kyallo's *The Hunter is Back*", Christine Namayi examines the stylistic devices that Mulwa uses to dramatize power. She argues that the characterization of Princess Songari who vows to "get the country back on the right track" (59) heralds a new order to replace the old order of colonial masters and their collaborators. This study is partially a development on her recommendation on the need to study Mulwa's other works especially prose as an evaluation of his social vision. This study observes that the characterization in his earlier works such as

Inheritance, especially the choice of the young female narrators and other female characters has been extended to *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*.

In reviewing *We Come in Peace*, Muchiri notes that history, as presented in the novella, does not conform to the discourse of history being taught in schools today. She singled out the voice of a child narrator as a strategy that Mulwa employs to critique the betrayal amongst the Africans that led to their enslavement. This study examines how the female characters through their personal stories inscribe themselves into the history of slavery and colonialism. Since the narrators/characters are Mulwa's creation, the study also attempts to explore Mulwa's contribution to the intersection of gender, fiction and history in the study of African literature.

The literature review reveals that there are studies done on the female agency in literature. Critics have examined how female characters are depicted as having the ability to construct their agency within certain historical contexts across different locations. By interrogating the history of slavery and colonialism in the Kenyan respectively, attempt to recreate the history of slavery and early colonialism with a focus on how it treats women, this study hopes to complement these studies. The review also reveals that there is a deliberate effort by Mulwa to give prominence to women in his works. However, much critical attention has been on his drama as opposed to his prose-fiction. Moreover, there is no sustained criticism on the female figures in his works. Therefore, there is a dearth of a comprehensive study on Mulwa's prose-fiction. This study seeks to fill this gap by researching on how the female characters in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee* attempt to construct their agency within the context of slavery and early colonialism.

Scope and Limitation

The study is limited to the examination of the construction of female agency in David Mulwa's *We Come in Peace* and *Flee MamaFlee*. To achieve this, the study explored the various narrative strategies the author has employed in the texts. Further, the study interrogated the representation of characters and their associated symbolisms within the context of slavery and colonialism in Kenya. Although there are many areas that could be studied in the selected texts, this study focuses on female agency because of the prominence the writer gives to the female voices.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Narratology and Postcolonial theories form the interpretive grid of this study. As a theory of the narrative, Narratology posits that the narrative is divided into two parts: the story, an account of the events, which include the narrative voice, characters, setting, plot and themes, and discourse, the process through which the story is told. Peter Barry in *Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* defines narratology as the study of "how narratives make meaning and what basic mechanisms and procedures are common to all acts of story-telling" (222).

Mieke Bal in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* perceives the narrative as comprising of two parts that she identifies as "story" and "fabula." She defines story as "a fabula that is presented in a certain manner," and a fabula as "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (5). Bal singles out the narrator who is "an agent that tells a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof" (5) as the most important aspect of the narrative. This is because "the identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that

identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the texts its specific character” (18). By focusing on the selection of the narrator, regarding age, race and socio-cultural background, this study examines the portrayal of slavery and colonialism through the female perspective.

Susan Lanser developed what she identified as a feminist narratology through which she explored the aspect of gender in narratology. Lanser argued that the gender of the narrator influences how the story is told. This strand of narratology is significant in the exploration of the choice of narrative voice(s) in the two texts in telling the histories of slavery and colonialism. Mulwa, a male writer, creates female narrators in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*. Feminist Narratology therefore, will guide the study in examining how the gender of the narrator influences the presentation of slavery and colonialism.

This study is also interested in postcolonial theories. Postcolonial theory emerged when the colonized started to reflect and express tension which is aimed at rejecting the universalized claims of canonical European literature. The postcolonial theorists seek to demonstrate the limitations of this literature to represent the cultural, ethnic and racial differences. According to Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back*, postcolonial theory studies the cultural, intellectual realities and tensions that occurred in many nations immediately after the colonial contact. It emerged when the colonized subjects started to reflect and express the tension that followed the disruption occasioned by the mixture of imperial culture and the native ways (1). They further note that the theory entails aspects of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation and influences to discourses to imperial Europe” (2).

In its recent definition, post-colonialism has been appropriated by individuals or groups outside the dominant groups to problematize the situations of marginality and perceived ‘Otherness’ as

spaces marginalized individual or groups can exploit to subvert the authority of those with hegemonic power. A study interrogates issues from the perspective of the marginalized woman comes under it. There are many strands of postcolonial theory, but this study gives prominence to those that highlight subaltern, Otherness, and representation.

Otherness

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that the European Orientalist scholars divided the world into a binary opposition: the occident and the orient. Through this division, the Orientalists were able to use knowledge from both literary and scientific texts to construct the West as strong, rational, humane and powerful as opposed to the East that was weak, cruel, irrational and sexually unstable (57). Armed with this knowledge, the scholars justified the 'Othering' of non-European individuals through textual representation.

By appropriating the postcolonial notion of 'Otherness,' this study examines the position of the African female as the 'other' of the slave master or mistress; as the 'other' of the colonizing white male 'self' and as the 'other' of the colonized African male 'self.' Similarly, the study uses this approach to examine the contradictions of the position of the white woman in *Flee Mama Flee*. As an immigrant in the colonial country, she forms part of the colonizing white 'self' that others the Africans; as a white woman, she is the 'other' of the white male 'self' while in her attempts to represent the subaltern, she is the 'other' of both the colonial culture that she is required to represent and the African culture that she understands little about.

Further, the study builds on the postcolonial assumption that these positions of 'Otherness' can be used to the advantage of the marginalized group to examine how the female characters attempt to dismantle structures that cause their subalternity. They then emerge as a strong 'other,' an otherness not based on superiority and inferiority but based on the difference in race,

gender, ethnicity or social class. In the selected texts, this is achieved through representation. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that:

The capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict is not easily available to just any member of just any society; moreover, the ‘what’ and ‘how’ in the representation of ‘things,’ while allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially regulated. We have become very aware in recent years of the constraints upon the cultural representation of women, and the pressures that go into the created representations of inferior classes and races...thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate, the inferior. (80)

For Said, the subaltern was the fixed entity upon which the Europeans, the dominant group reflected an image of themselves. This means that any work that disrupts this depiction, especially for the female subaltern has a dual function: first restore history to the subaltern, and then seek to restore the female voice that Spivak says, “is even more deeply in the shadow” (32).

Representation

Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” significantly contributed to debates on aspects of representation and the notion of the gendered subaltern subject in both history and literature. One of the major concerns in the essay is whether the subaltern can speak for herself in her voice, or whether to be represented and spoken for by the intellectual. In her argument, she deconstructs the poststructuralist claims by Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. The two argue that human individuals lack the power to construct their identities: We are not authors of ourselves; rather, we have it written for us. According to them, the subject cannot be represented as having control over the construction of selfhood. They further argued that since

the subject's identities are constructed from positions outside them (subjects), the intellectual became the transparent medium through which the voices of the oppressed can be represented (67-72).

Spivak emphatically concludes her essay that the subaltern can neither speak nor be heard. "The subaltern cannot speak...there is no space from which the subaltern can speak" (313). She, therefore, argues that the postcolonial female intellectual remains a medium of representing the gendered subaltern subject. Spivak argues that whereas she does not question the representation of the subaltern, she contends that usually the subject is left out. She says: It is the slippage from rendering invisible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual, both avoiding 'any analysis of (the subject) whether psychological, psychoanalytical or linguistic' that is consistently troublesome" (qt. Spivak, 1993,81).

Spivak further argues that that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous. She rejects the generalizing tendencies of western feminism. Instead, she favors coaches that look at the specificities of class, historical context and ethnic identities as some of the factors that marginalize women in addition to gender. To emphasize the significance of these aspects in representing the subaltern, she asks, "Can this difference be articulated? And if so by whom?" (79-80). She observes that for this articulation to take place, consciousness, which is associated with knowledge of the interrelationships between the different classes and groups- knowledge of the material that constitutes the society, with an understanding of change in history, precisely, change from one mode to another, has to be brought out.

Other postcolonial critics provide insights that transcend Spivak's depiction of the gendered subaltern. For instance, Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* places the identities of the

postcolonial subjects at the “Zone of occult zombification” (173). He argues that in this position, the colonized engaged with cultural imperialism through political mobilization that finally led to the liberation of the colonized countries in Africa and others parts of the world. In Fanon’s analysis then, the subaltern can appropriate the cultural resources made available to them if only to oppose the epistemic violence in all its forms. Fanon thus projects chances for the historical agency, which can also be replicated in literary representation.

In “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference,” Homi Bhabha notes that the perpetual insistence on past traditions hinders transformation. Bhabha notes that the formation of postcolonial identities is a process that is never complete, he, therefore, points towards the third space (207). If we re-examine Spivak’s gendered subaltern from this view, hers is a fixed entity that is subdued by the hegemonic discourse. He shifts the focus of the subaltern from a fixed object into a hybrid space in which the subaltern is continually reconstituting his/her identity, which simultaneously influences the dominant discourse of power. This approach is significant in examining the position of the slave or women in slavery, colonial and patriarchal context.

Similarly, Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back*, and celebrate the contribution of the marginalized groups in their liberation. They identify different strategies the post-colonial use to survive and attempt to change their condition. Therefore, this means that despite their marginalization, the ‘Othered’ individuals have some agency through which they survive in often hostile environments.

Although these other critics were not writing on the gendered subaltern, their arguments illuminate the notion of inscribing agency of the marginalized individuals in the hegemonic discourse. Therefore, while relying on her arguments in the analysis of the prose fiction, I note that Spivak focuses more on the destructive power of patriarchy and colonialism on the female

subaltern. The pessimistic conclusion portrays women as a ‘voiceless’ victim without any form of agency, and whose voice can only be mediated by the intellectual. By partly reading against Spivak’s theory, the study emphasizes the aspects that engender agency by the female characters in Mulwa’s prose fiction.

In the process of interrogating issues of agency in the prose fiction, the study evaluates the strategies through which Mulwa subverts the notion of ‘silencing’ of the gendered subaltern by the history of slavery, colonialism, and patriarchy. Moreover, the study examines the extent to which the female characters are depicted to act against these ideologies, hence be seen as ‘speaking’ both literary and figuratively. Finally, the study addresses the issue of representation of the gendered subaltern by Mulwa, a university don, who in this case forms part of the male elite. Can the post-colonial intellectual represent the voice of the subaltern? To what extent he understands the gendered subaltern’s situation to represent her in fiction? According to Spivak, this kind of representation is only possible if the writer “unlearns his/her privileges.”

The two theories complement each other. Through narratology, the study examines the narrative voice, the metaphor of laughter characterization among others as strategies that Mulwa uses to foreground women’s experiences in the selected texts. However, just like other structural theories, narratology confines the interpretation of the text. Since the postcolonial theory is contextual, the study utilizes it to examine the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts and the corresponding attitudes. For instance, the focus on characterization and narrative voice shifts from their role in developing the plots of the selected texts to examining them as character types that function in real societies.

Methodology

The study employs textual analyses of the primary texts with a focus on the experiences of female characters in the context of slavery and colonialism in *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*. The analysis in *We Come in Peace* deals with aspects of laughter, narrative voice, epilogue, and the characterization of Kaveni, her mistress Amina, master Abdulahi and Mbunu as those that contribute to the experience of slavery. In *Flee Mama Flee*, the study examines the portrayal of colonialism as an experience that seeks to marginalize women. The focus is on the characterization of Kaveni, her daughter, Elizabeth Mumbe, her husband Musyoka wa Mang'oka, the Irish teacher, Mary May, Lord Mackenzie, with a focus on the strategies of resistance and survival, especially by the female characters. The personal narrative voice empowers the marginalized women to reclaim their voices.

To realize the experience of female characters and how narrative voice empowers the marginalized woman, the study reviewed critical works on slavery, colonialism, history, narration and female agency and Mulwa's other works. It examined and integrated secondary material that provided insights and collaborative evidence to concretize my arguments. In the course of this research, I also interviewed the author, who provided information on aspects of slavery, colonialism, history, the female question and the research he carried for the writing of these texts that was insightful in the interpretation of the two texts.

The study then analyzed the information gathered from both primary and secondary texts through the two theoretical approaches proposed for this study. Narratology was relevant in explaining the structure of the narratives of the selected texts. The stories told by female characters from seemingly disadvantaged positions, yet, positions that require them to acquire

forms of agency. Hence, the study focused on the narrative voice, characterization, orality, and laughter in relation to how they tell the experience of women.

By appropriating the postcolonial theory towards a feminist perspective, the study examined how the female characters in the two texts relate to the themes of history, slavery, and colonialism. Spivak's ideas of the gendered subaltern guided my examination of the extent to which Mulwa revisits history in the two texts to depict female characters as agents of their lives. This is based on the assumption that in the two texts, Mulwa re-imagines the historical context of slavery and colonialism and therefore the characterization is typical of a particular historical period in Kenya.

Chapter Outline

The project report is presented in four chapters. The first chapter comprises of the background information, statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, literature review, theoretical framework and the methodology used in the examination. The second chapter deals with the novella, *We Come in Peace*. It interrogates aspects of narrative voice and agency on the part of the slaves. The argument in this chapter is that Mulwa recasts the victim status of the female slaves. The third chapter examines the characterization models and the use of narrative choice as the literary strategies that Mulwa employs in the novel *Flee Mama Flee* to depict the female characters as agents of subversion amidst the oppressive system of patriarchy and colonialism. Finally, the fourth chapter provides the conclusion of the study and the recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

(RE) CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FEMALE AGENCY IN THE CONTEXT OF SLAVERY IN *WE COME IN PEACE*

Introduction

The novella, *We come in Peace* (2011) was nominated for the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for literature in 2012 where it emerged the first runner's up in the children category. It explores the issues of betrayal and violent displacement associated with the slave trade in Kenya in the 19th century. Through the voice of a young girl, Kaveni wa Musyoka, Mulwa represents the history of the peaceful village life and the co-existence amongst the African communities prior to the slavery period. The eventual disruption of the orderly village life by the people from the south led to the disintegration and painful separation of families and friends. Kaveni narrates how her community members and she were captured and taken through torturous journeys to the coast. At the coast, they were separated and sold to different slave owners from different parts of the world.

Kaveni is sold to an Arab from Zanzibar with whom she stays servant. Later, she murders mistress and runs away from her pursuers. She jumps into the crocodile infested river Kilele from which she is rescued by the British missionaries who take her to mission center at Free Town. At this center, she re-unites with her long- time boyfriend Musyoka wa Mang'oka. The novella ends with the marriage between the two and the birth of a baby girl, Elizabeth Mumba.

Slavery is one of the extreme forms of power relations. The slaveholder assumes an almost absolute power on relation of the slave while the slave is portrayed powerless. In *We Come in Peace*, Mulwa returns to the site of slavery to offer a revisionist evaluation on the impact of

slavery on African societies. By focusing on the female protagonist-narrator, the narrative provides a female perspective on slavery.

This chapter focuses on the strategies through which Mulwa recasts the victim status of the female slaves. Slavery can be seen as a form of institutionalized violence inflicted on a marginalized group, but in this study, the focus is on the impact of slavery on women. However, the representation of the female subject in this novella deconstructs the master-slave power relations and struggles to construct a sense of identity. By focusing on the narrative strategies the author uses in *We Come in Peace*, the chapter examines how the literal representation of the female subject within the context of slavery to (re)conceptualize agency as a construct that can be negotiated by the female characters.

Narrative Voice and Monologism

As a literary genre, the novella lies in between the short story and the novel. It therefore combines the strategies of the novel as outlined in E. M Fosters' *Aspects of the Novel*, which include plot, characterization, and point of view and those of the short story such as economy, compression and intensity as outlined in Allan Poe's definition of a short story. The novella can thus be aptly termed as 'a long short story'. As part of the prose fiction, the choice of a narrator in the novella is very important. In *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, Edgar Roberts and Henry Jacobs observe that in a work of art, a narrator may be considered as the 'principal tool' through which the story of the narrative is not only rendered, but also "is made". The first person narrative voice in fiction is similar to that used in autobiographical writings. In the novella, Mulwa, a male writer has used a female narrator-protagonist to tell herstory and tell the story of slavery. In *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*, Susan Lanser adds the gender dimension to the narrator. She argues that "Nowhere in modern narrative theory is

there mention of the author's or narrator's gender as a significant variable... the sex of a narrator is a significant factor in literary communication as the narrator's grammatical person, the presence or absence of direct address to a reader, or a narrative temporality" (47). Lanser therefore developed feminist narratology as a gendered approach to a narrative. For this study, the female narrator's voice is viewed as mirrored on Muchiri's argument in *Women's Autobiography* as "an effort towards finding an independent voice for the women" (159). The emphasis on Mulwa's use of the first person narrative voice and a female perspective is his effort at projecting female agency and an attempt to unlearn his privileges as male elite, in order to represent the subaltern voice.

The phrase in the opening sentence of the novella "before I tell you the story of my life" invokes the autobiographical genre which she further relates by relating to aspects of honesty and truth when she says "let me spit to the ground on my left and then on the ground to my right. Now my mouth and tongue are clean and may not tell you lies about the tale you are about to read" (1). She goes on in the characteristic of the autobiographical writing to tell the story of her birth, her naming as Kavenya, which was later shortened to Kaveni to avert disaster (2). She acknowledges this information to her grandmother. This opening links Kaveni's birth to the great disaster that befell their community and demonstrates that this is a narration of Kaveni's story. She says "...was not remedy enough for the great disaster that I am about to tell you did fall upon me" (2). This opening shows that the story is told after the all the narrated events have occurred. Therefore, in *We Come in Peace*, there is a gap between the experiences and the narration. This highlights a time lapse between the protagonist and the narrator that is reminiscent of the autobiographical writings. This voice as Muchiri argues in *Women's Autobiography* has been used "to advance another agenda other than self-revelation" (160). The

invocation of the autobiographical genre and the first person narrative voice highlights Mulwa's ideological gravitation towards a feminist perspective.

In *We Come in Peace*, Mulwa employs the notion of retrospection that is usually associated with autobiographical writings to augment this illusion. James Olney in "I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographies and Literature" argues that the autobiography "may be understood as a recollective narrative act in which the writer, from a certain point in his life—the present—looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the history has led to this present state of being" (47). Olney's views highlight the aspect of retrospection associated with autobiographical writings. I contend that this retrospection is also realizable in fiction especially through the first person narrative voice and in which the narrator-protagonist tells the story of his or her experiences and maturation, both physical and psychological. For instance, structurally, *We Come in Peace* is created in the form of autobiographical writing through which Kaveni, now an adult, recollects her childhood experiences. She narrates of her experiences in the village before the capture, the capture, and sale to slavery, murder of Amina, the rescue and the final settlement at Free Town. This creates an illusion that this is the story of the protagonist-narrator and not a fictional account by Mulwa.

Writing on "Violence in Childhood Narratives", Doseline Kiguru observes that in *Half a Yellow Sun*, Adichie creates a child narrator, Ugwu to tell the story of Olanna, Kainene and Odenigbo. She further notes that as houseboy, Ugwu occupied "a position from where he can observe the happenings" (35). This is the strategy that Mulwa also employs *We Come in Peace*. Using Kaveni's voice, he positions her at places where she can observe the things happening and report to the reader. Her position gives the reader an inside account of the activities in her

community and particularly her family. From the little conversations with her parents, the visiting traders, the village dances to their capture and sale at the coast. Her misapprehensions and evaluative comments during the trader's stay at their home is a powerful critique of the adult world. The active verbs like "I heard", "I saw" are attributed to her thus sustaining the illusion that indeed this is Kaveni's account.

Besides, the choice of a first person narrative voice enables the Kaveni to embody the experience of slavery. The narrator-protagonist in the novella, Kaveni, who is a child to Mulatevia of Nzauni village, narrates the story from 'within' the Akamba, a community which was part of the long-distance trade in the pre-colonial period, a venture that later opened their land to the Arab traders. She relates her family's story, that of her father, an enterprising trader in the long-distance trade and a respected elder in their community, that of her mother and her three co-wives, a grandmother, an elderly woman who advises Kaveni and her mother and the story of the community at large from the perspective of a child.

From the beginning of the story, she is presented as a special character and hence given the autonomy to narrate the story. The first two chapters of the narrative take an epic form in which Kaveni relates the history of her people but recounts them in a way that they reflect on how they influence an exploration of herself as a girl in a typical pre-colonial African set up. Kaveni's portrayal is subversive. She is presented as one that defies dominance. Through her, Mulwa attempts to deconstruct the stereotypical gendering associated with African traditions. When she defeats Kilibi the terrible, she is marked off as a strong character. She is also remarkably beautiful and finally her birth is special since it is related to the enslavement of her community.

For instance, she beats Kilili the Terrible in a fight (4), she is the one that carries her father's stool to meetings (8), the father boasts about especially in regards to her dowry (9). Even her grandmother remarks that Kaveni should have been a boy. Her grandmother's comment confirms the traditional attitudes that considers male as better than female. Through this subversive characterization, Mulwa builds an attachment between Kaveni and her father. She is the first one to notice the restlessness in her father. Mulwa, sets the child narrator as exceptional; she has a close attachment to her father, she defies the stereotypic gendering of the society because she does not gossip.

As a personal story, her narration is partly an attempt to define herself in relation to the experience of her capture and her present condition as a rescued slave at Free Town. The narrative begins with a description of life in the village, the role of the father as the elder and leader, a trader of ivory and tusks and women as builders of homes: there was a clear distinction of the roles of women. For instance, polygamy is depicted as part of the African traditions that did not necessarily marginalize women. Kaveni's father is married to four wives. She says: "The day after the market, I heard my mother who was the third wife, call out, 'Mother aren't you coming with us?'" (6) when the first wife declines, Kaveni's mother replies "...how is the whole village to know our man has returned if you do not show your new earrings?" (6)

There are social conventions that determine gender relations in the community. On the one hand, her father, Mulatevia is a respected elder in the village and an enterprising trader. He usually travelled to the coast and engaged in the trade of ivory. Whenever he went out to the markets, he brought his wives new dresses that they showed off at the market, a feat that gives praise to the husband. On the other hand, the women's roles are related to their duties in the farm and the home. The women, especially the first wife exercised control in the family

whenever the man was away. They were also advisors to their husbands. Mulatevia discloses his fear over the entry of the people to his trade route (8). Through Kaveni, Mulwa paints the life in the African societies as relatively stable but not idyllic. The voices of the older women are silenced in regards to the issue of polygamy and their roles. They are presented as happily married and this silence is taken as their acceptance to this tradition. However, through Kaveni's voice, Mulwa's seems to break this silence. Her voice is a representative of the female voice. He further shows that although gender relations were governed by conventions that favored men, women had the potential to be happy.

While presenting the history of Kaveni's life, Mulwa subtly provides a socio-cultural commentary. For instance, although Kaveni because of her childhood does not understand the implications of her narration, the commentary is conveyed through an aspect of irony. The women are portrayed as happy in their union and relationships to each other. However, if we read this in light of the debates on polygamy such as in Mike Kuria's *Talking Gender*, the child narrator's voice, naively but truthfully observes that the Akamba traditions seemed to subordinate the women. Kaveni's narration suggests these marriages and the silence of the women is assumed to be an acceptance of the patriarchal order. This confirms what Muchiri notes in *The Child Narrator* where she argues that the irony of the child narrator's position is that the child is unaware of the weight of the narratives he is narrating (24). Thus, the reader can recognize both the child's naiveté and the socio-cultural commentary on the patriarchal ideology in the pre- colonial period.

Another aspect of this ironic representation is when the child narrator portrays the distress of her father at the prospect of the people from the South. The child describes how the visitors were welcomed with food and slogan "We come in peace" which echoes the title of the novella.

The irony is that despite the father's apprehension of these people, they were treated as well as other visitors. Later, these visitors turned foes capture and enslaved the community. This confirms David Maillu's observation that "the African of the slave trade and pre-colonial times was a simple man; he was gullible and easy to exploit owing mainly to his philosophy and religion that treated all men with respect" (qtd in Odhiambo 2004: 165). Thus, through the child's voice, Mulwa criticizes the African traditions as partly what led to their enslavement. At this juncture, I note that Kaveni as the narrator-protagonist is Mulwa's creation. Therefore, the voice is Kaveni's but the message is Mulwa's.

The use of the first person narrative voice in the novella creates an element of immediacy. The immediacy is achieved in two ways; firstly, the narrator-protagonist gives a firsthand experience of what she witnessed happen to her or the others. Secondly, the opening of the novella has the features of oral discourse. From the beginning, the reader is made to believe that Kaveni is addressing a co-speaker orally. It appears the story is oral as opposed to written. This is enhanced by the opening of the narrative when the narrator directly addresses the reader as "Stranger, who reads this story, I greet you" (1). This demonstrates the hybrid nature of African literature. As an African writer, Mulwa invokes the oral traditions to reflect on both the tribulations and the heroic struggles that the narrator-protagonist makes in her quest for a better social order.

This opening also creates a rapport between the narrator-protagonist and gives the narrator the agency to be in control of the narrative. Kaveni collapses the experiences of her childhood, her family and community and the impact of slavery on them and incorporates them to her sense of self. To construct her sense of selfhood as a woman and former slave, Kaveni assimilates the experiences of others in a manner that makes *We Come in Peace* a bildungsroman novella. She

recounts of the happy days in their family and the community. By linking the happenings of her community to her naming, Kaveni appropriates the experiences of the community to her own experience. Thus, she attempts to tell “herstory” but also inscribes the history of the Akamba community into her own.

Even the characterization of Kaveni, Mbunu, the invaders from the south, and the Arab and European traders is modeled the oral narrative; one in which the antagonists seek to exploit and destroy the weak. In the end, the weak that triumph, the evil is defeated and a new social order is established. In *We Come in Peace*, Mulwa creates characters in a recognizable historical and geographical context as opposed to the supernatural contexts found in most oral narratives. For instance, although Mbunu wa Kiunga is Kaveni’s primary antagonist, Mulwa highlights the role that the Arab and European slave traders that introduced and facilitated this trade. The use of the oral narrative model, with Kaveni, a child slave as the narrator is a strategy through which Mulwa gives an alternative view of the history of slavery from a perspective that has aspects of revolutionary change.

Mulwa uses the model of the oral narrative, where the hero goes out, fights monsters and ogres, learns new experiences and finally returns to rescue the community. However, Mulwa shifts the setting from the preternatural societies to a recognizable historical context, thus the use of slavery and colonialism as unjust institutions. This is not to praise slavery and colonialism; rather, he uses it to develop his heroes through the interactions of the characters.

There is juxtaposition between her and Mbunu wa Kiunga. It highlights the power that the ‘traitors’ wield over their community members. The relationship between Kaveni and Mbunu along the journey is based on male-female, adult-child and traitor (agent)’-victim which work to

efface Kaveni. Although at this point she could be seen to lack agency, because Mbunu, by virtue of the betrayal and subsequent relation with the Arabs, dominates over her and the community, Kaveni is not cowed, she performs different acts that disrupts the power binary. Firstly, she confronts Mbunu, spits on his face, and swears to avenge for her community:

I ...with that he was gone, glum as always, and from that day, hate and determination were born deep within me....that on the day an opportunity that arose, that was the day Mbunu wa Kiunga would be forced to swallow his threats. (49)

Although Kaveni is chained and therefore helpless before Mbunu, she spits on his face. This act is an expression of resistance and disgust of his role in the enslavement of the community. Through the character of Mbunu, Mulwa demonstrates that slave trade was not just based on the ruthless invasions on the African people: Some of the Africans were complicit in these affairs. Mbunu wa Kiunga has been Mulatevia's assistant. However, he seems to have a weird character because he neither had wife nor tilled his land. He was always on the move. His engagement with the Arabs seems to have been fueled by the quest for revenge. Although the cause of their rivalry is not indicated in the narrative, Mulwa seems to highlight the notion the Africans were also complicit in the slave trade.

In relation to narration and retrospection, there also arises the aspect of narrative time. Gerald Genette in *Narrative Discourse* notes of the significance of time in the narrative. He observes that there are temporal fluctuations regarding the position of the narrator and the story he/she is narrating. Narrators can therefore witness, recall or imagines in the past, or present or participates in the events he/she is narrating. *In We Come in Peace* that has also features of the bildungsroman and mirrors the autobiographical writings, there is a temporal fluctuation

between the time the events happened and when they are narrated. The opening is in the present tense while as from page 2 the narrative is rendered in past tense and is therefore a flashback, showing how Kaveni has constructed herself through memory to who she is now. There is a time lapse in the events that Kaveni narrates and when they happened. Thus, the time lapse creates a sense of authority in the narrative. Kaveni, just like the autobiographical 'selves' relies on the reflection to tell her story. Writing on autobiography, Olney notes that "the individual constructs as opposed to reconstructing his/ her life". Kaveni is thus able to relate her experiences.

The significance of this lapse is that the narrator is emotionally detached from the memories of a violent experience. For instance, Kaveni's narration is not clouded by the painful experience; instead, she recalls both the good and the bad events. For instance, there is a nostalgic presentation of the village, the dances in the village, her memory of her love for Musyoka (21), she also presents the episode when Mtapabora Kinyanya and Musyoka almost fought for her love. The statement: 'I am ashamed to tell you this' (35) expresses her awareness now as a narrator what she did then. These happy episodes are interspersed the violent events like their capture as slaves, the sale, the murder of Amina, her relation to the Maqua woman as 'mama' her attachment and her meeting with Musyoka.

The detailed description of Mombasa, the expansive waters of the Indian Ocean and the dhows points to the history of slave trade at the coast:

The white sails on the dhows were hoisted so that the sea looked as if it had suddenly been invaded by uncountable gigantic butterflies...the last of the butterfly wings

disappeared in the thickening shadows beneath the dark storm clouds that gathered over the horizon, far in the sea. (74)

The descriptions of the houses and buildings at the coast; the coconut, mangoes and cashew nuts that formed the paths through which the slave caravans moved are semiotic references to the fruits as cultural texts that highlight the multiple civilizations at the Kenyan coast. These references inform the historicity of the novella as it highlights the fact that Mombasa has been ruled by different powers ranging from the Portuguese, the Arabs and the British. Of significance to this study is how this diversity relates to the composition of the population at the slave market. The narrator describes the people at the port on a regular market day. Kaveni says:

There were the strangest people I had ever imagined, Most were Arabs but there were others there who were black like us but who were richly dressed and who sauntered in proudly in the courtyard. Then there were other men, some with hair the colour of our brown earth and others whose hair was red. These had intensely blue eyes that seemed to bore holes into whatever they looked at. (62)

This description demonstrates a child's perception of a people. She must have encountered Arabs before, yet the description of the richly dressed Africans and the people with blue eyes, who the reader recognizes as the whites, demonstrates Mulwa's attempt to reflect on the role of the Europeans, Arabs and Africans in the slave trade and how in turn this influenced the postcolonial subjectivities of these individuals as I will show in the analysis of *Flee Mama Flee*. The portrayal of the blacks is juxtaposed with that of the whites and Arabs. The blacks as are portrayed as objects, commodities to be sold and bought during the slave trade. The child

narrator's reflection of their capture and sell at the slave market highlights the relations of the ocean and the interior. There were white buyers, the Arab and some Africans who sold their communities and the Africans as the commodities to be sold and bought (62). Kaveni is separated from her family and community and she is sold to an Arab trader.....who goes with her to Zanzibar where she starts her life as a slave.

Amina's murder is presented in detail. She says:

I forgot that I was a slave, that I may never my hand against my master or mistress...I saw Mtapatabora Kinyanya's sharp teeth hovering above my face. I saw my friend, Kamende dead on the rocks of Mbiu Nzauni...I saw Mbunu wa Kiunga laughing at my father's plight. And Kili the Terrible, his two teeth missing...(92)

By taking the readers through her experience as a girl captured and displaced from her own people and the circumstances that led to the murder, the reader 'imaginatively identifies' with the human in her and avoid judging her harshly.

This part is narrated in past tense and therefore is a long flashback. The period in between gives the illusion that Kaveni has got time to carefully reflect on her experiences from the pre-colonial period through her experiences under slavery up to her present condition as a rescued slave in Free Town. Her narration therefore functions at an ideological level. Besides, there is a level of emotional detachment from her experience, which demonstrates that she has transcended her victim status to be an agent of her life and her story.

The end of the epilogue also shifts in time of narration from past tense to the present tense.

Kaveni says:

Everything is quiet now. My husband, the great teacher plays with our daughter Mumbe, in the other room....So what is left for me but to tell you my story? It is the first of many, many others for that is all I will do in this life time: tell the story of my people! Outside the rain is pouring. So let us plant good seeds when we still have time!

(111)

The ending shows that the narrative is Kaveni's reflection of her childhood experiences now as an adult. Besides, at this point, she has learnt the English language and the secrets of the whites, skills that are necessarily in writing and has the firsthand experience to tell her story and that of her people. Aesthetically, the by ending the novella this way, Mulwa achieves a full circle conclusion: The ending is the beginning, by the time the read gets to the last page, he/she should have read Kaveni's story that she had promised to tell the reader at the beginning. Besides, the reference that the story, which we have encountered, is the first among many, Para textually points to the story in *Flee Mama Flee* that I will examine in chapter three

Since the narrator is in a paraphrase of Robert and Jacob's definition, the story's focus or angle of vision from which things are seen, reported and judged (60), the first person narrative voice is limited and subjective in what to reveal or conceal. To make Kaveni's story collective as opposed to personal, Mulwa includes other voices into the narrative. However, it is my observation that these strategies serve to foreground Kaveni's voice. She is situated in a position that she appropriates the experiences of the community and tells of the slavery experience from two peripheral 'positions'; that of a woman and a child. It is this approach of appropriating other characters' and community's experiences into narrating her personal agency that the study identifies as monologism.

Monologism is a strategy of writing in which the author or narrator monopolizes the dialogue. Bakhtin notes that monological texts are expressions of closed off truths. Whereas there is dialogue in the monologic text, the one that exists does not deviate from narrator's voice to give a different perspective about a situation. *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin compares Leo Tolstoy's novels to those of Dostoyevsky and observes that whereas there are as many voices in Tolstoy's novels as there are in Dostoyevsky's, the characters lack the independent voice in relation to that of the author or narrator (40). Thus, to rephrase Bakhtin words, a monologic text is one in which the narrator merges the multiple voices of the characters to represent them as a single coherent whole.

Although there is dialogue in the novel, it is presented from the perspective of Kaveni. For instance the dialogue between her father and mother regarding the impending threat by the people from the south (10). However, this dialogue is presented from Kaveni's perspective as she eavesdrops on their conversation. Another instance of dialogue is that between Kaveni and Benevolent while at the mission center, sometime after the Britons rescued Kaveni:

They are from Bombay, most of them," Benevolent volunteered.

Bombay," I asked.

"In India...very good teachers too!" Benevolent proudly explained.

Kaveni then says: "And do our people learn? I asked, for I too wanted to learn English so as to speak directly with the white people in their own language, and learn all their wisdom and secrets." (102)

This dialogue is also presented from Kaveni's perspective. She expresses her desire to learn the English language. Besides dialogue, there is an intersection of 'I' and the 'We' narrative voices

in the novella. In *The Child Narrator*, Muchiri argues that the use of dialogue and the communal narration are some of the strategies that Lamming uses to validate the child's voice. The same observation can be made in *We Come in Peace*. However, I note that as opposed to the structure of *In the Castle of My Skin* where the dialogue and 'we' narration contributed to the dialogic nature of the text, in *We Come in Peace*, they are used to enhance the ideological function of the novel; that of providing a critique of slavery from a female perspective.

The other approach that Mulwa employs to validate the child's voice is through epilogue through which her husband, Musyoka narrates his experience of slavery/ separation and the accidental help from the British abolitionists. Yet, it is true the subjective experience of Kaveni through the 'I' narration and she conflates the communal aspect. Although the epilogue attempts to bring some form of dialogism into the novella, it is Kaveni as the narrator and the fictional writer of the story that completes the narration. Through monologism, Kaveni restores both the private and communal memories. Her role as a narrator signifies her as the figural representation of the intersection between the two memories. Kaveni says, "So what is left for me to do but to tell you my story? It is the first of many, many others, for that is all I will do in this lifetime" (111). Thus, the novella ends with the restoration of the authority to tell left to the female character. Kaveni introduces and closes the epilogue. Thus, the readers get to understand of Musyoka's experiences through Kaveni's perspective. *We Come in Peace* has a monologic structure through which the story of Kaveni is narrated.

The protagonist remains the central figure upon which the story revolves. She does not change this position, even where there is minimal dialogue with other characters; she is part of the conversation. The other characters serve to position the narrator in a space that she utilizes to make sense of her life. With statements like 'I swore', I heard, 'I saw', attributed to her, Kaveni

has developed a first-hand experience upon which she tells of the displacement and dispossession of her people. Writing on experience and autobiography, Smith and Watson note that ability to own the story of her life, to tell it as “my story” is premised on the idea of experience as being authoritative (27). Further, they observe that:

The narrator’s experience is the primary kind of evidence asserted in autobiographical acts and the basis on which the readers are invited to consider the narrator as a uniquely qualified authority. (27)

Although the novella is not an autobiography, their observation shows Kaveni’s experience as the narrator that makes her exceptional. The novella presents the conditions and the experiences of the characters from the perspective of Kaveni, as the narrator, Kaveni relates her experiences as part of the community she narrates about. Somehow, Mulwa’s voice is filtered while the other voices are merged such that the reader only hears the narrator’s voice. With the assumption that the novella is monologic with Kaveni as the heroine, then *We Come in Peace*, in the Jamesonian argument in *The Political Unconscious*, “performs an ideological function” (153). In relation to my hypothesis, the ideological function in the novella is feminist.

The choice of the narrative voice and monologic structure are significant in the novella. Although Bakhtin had criticized monologic texts terming them as inferior to the polyphonic texts, the monologic structure in this novella has been significantly used to give voice to the unheard voice of a child and the female perspective. This depiction affirms that Mulwa is engaged in historical revisionism, an approach that Michael Greene in *Novel Histories* argues that it “makes the use of the past in literature that forms the main area of interest” (17). The

history of slavery is what in forms Mulwa's writing in the novella. He revises this history not only by giving it a single voice, but also by telling it from the perspective of a female child.

Moreover, in an interview with me on 09/03/2016, Mulwa had indicated that in writing of *We Come in Peace* and *Flee Mama Flee*, he was concerned with writing individual stories of women as opposed to communal stories. In this regard, the monologic structure helps him in establishing Kaveni's voice. Since this study focused on Kaveni's maturation process and the use of the first person narrative voice, the novella shares some qualities with autobiographical writings which include the duality of self-representation and the desire for acceptance in the wider society. Mulwa shows that despite of the double marginalization, the female characters can acquire voice and agency in fiction. Thus, the choice of Kaveni as the narrator-protagonist in the novella enhances the feminist ideological function and agency in the novella.

Transcending Otherness

Slavery precludes any form of agency on the slave whilst the master wields absolute power over the slave. The violent capture of the slaves, the chains and physical brutality subjects the bodies to productive interests. The categorization of the slaves in relation to their gender, age and the productivity of the muscular castrated men in their enslaved lands and also fetch a handsome profit for the slave traders. They had little regard for the old and the weak because they were economically unproductive. They were therefore left to die in the wilderness. The power over the slaves' body the use of fear, verbal threats and flogging other slaves enabled them to subdue the slaves. Although death was a painful impact of slavery, Mulwa demonstrates that even those who survived suffered from alienation and humiliation. However, the female slaves engaged in activities that did overtly express resistance, yet which inherently enabled the slaves to exercise agency over their lives.

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Patterson defines the institution of slavery as one that involves loss of honor and human dignity (42). The physical and psychological violence associated with the loss of honor is what Kelly Oliver in *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Theory of Oppression* identifies as social melancholy. He notes that social melancholy involves the loss of a positive or a loveable image of oneself and its subsequent replacement of that of a denigrated abject contained in the mainstream culture (89). The study notes that in spite of this condition of dishonor, the slaves had developed tactics of survival and which had the potential to express resistance.

One of the ways through which the slaves exercised agency was through laughter. Laughter as presented in the novella is one riddled with ambivalence. How can the slaves laugh given their abject situation? How could the master and mistress fail to afford laughter given their freedom and power? Finally, how could the master afford to laugh with a slave? The slaves occupy the lowest class; they are subalterns in the Spivikian sense. Yet, they make laughter a way of forgetting grief that could remind them of their displacement and dispossessed status.

Institutionalized slavery can be considered to speak the language of monologue; the freedom of the slaves is suppressed through the physical brutality through whipping, sexual abuse or death; and/ or the use of threats to send them to faraway lands. In this household, Kaveni undergoes a process of perpetual oppression: the reprimands, the constant feeling of entrapment. She was the surrounded by river Kilele infested with crocodiles, the soldiers, the dogs and Amina's jealousy on her. They are portrayed as the members of lowest cadre in the Foucauldian sense.

Despite of the grim descriptions associated with slavery, in the novella, the reader also identifies slavery a space of freedom, dialogue and laughter: elements that are missing in the

master and mistresses' life. The mistress, Amina, becomes envious of their laughter: "I thought them so funny and that I laughed outright! The enslaved we both laughed. She untied my hands." (78). It is laughter that establishes mutual trust between the slaves. Their laughter and sense of humour is infectious that it catches the master who shares in it. This angers the mistress who shouts at the slaves: "Are you my slaves or are you my equals...tell me are you my slaves or my co-wives?" (78).

The laughter in their small servant house makes the house a dialogic space, one that is differentiated from the suppressive silence in the master's big house. In Bakhtinian terms, the servant house is heteroglossic, "a space that involves the multiform of various ideas, languages" (263) through which they recount their experiences, their ancestry, their fears, and develop mutual trust as 'mother' and 'daughter'. Even when verbal language becomes an impediment, they sustain the heteroglossic space through signs. Kaveni says "...looking keenly at me she shook her head, made a gesture of cooking...then, waving her hands ...made a gesture as if to ask whether I would run away if she untied them" (77). Through their narrations, they retell the histories of their communities. Interestingly, they establish a common relation between the Akamba and the Maqua people of the south.

In her position as mistresses in the palace, Amina had power over the lives of Kaveni and the Maqua woman. Therefore, she could not understand their bonding and the significance of their laughter. In effect, she gets easily irritated whenever she hears their voices laughing. She even gets angrier when her husband joins in their laughter in the kitchen. Their laughter as humble as it seems nevertheless enunciates the power of the female slaves to transcend patriarchy and slavery. Mulwa does not depict the female as slaves only; rather, he situates them in situations in which they lead their normal lives, yet can express resistance through these very activities.

For instance, Kaveni and the Maqua woman's laughter as unproductive as it may seem, symbolizes the power that Amina lacks in her household: Their resistance is of a different kind, not confrontational; yet still capable of expressing resistance.

At another level, the slaves' laughter is juxtaposed with the gloom that characterizes the master and mistress. Their gloom could point to the idea that slavery destroys the enslavers too. Thus, by giving agency to the slaves, Mulwa seeks to subvert the Manichean categorization of the possession of agency. For instance, In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the figure of the character Sixo that we see defies the logic of slavery: he sings as he is taken to the fire, while he is burning, he does not mourn or break down: He laughs until they shoot him to silence him (250). Sixo's laughter subverts the idea of a slave as one without agency. His laughter amidst the violence meted on him denied his enslavers the power to 'define his body' in the Foucaudian sense. Mulwa just like Morrison uses what Valerie Mudimbe in the *Invention of Africa: Gnosis of Philosophy* calls the "spaces designated for marginality" (9) to give agency to the voiceless.

By examining Bakhtin's theorization of the power of laughter to resist, the study demonstrates that apart from being a survival tactic, the female's laughter could represent forms through which slaves exercised their agency. According to Bakhtin, this resistance is achieved through the carnivalesque. He notes:

Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. (123)

In literature, the carnivalesque functions as a literary strategy that employs laughter as a way of challenging authority. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explores the monologic rules and or

rituals of the church and the state in medieval Europe. He notes that through the metaphor of laughter, some rituals that controlled the behaviors of the society were ridiculed with a view of changing them and in consequence change the way people perceive the world. In *We Come in Peace*, laughter is a strategy that Mulwa employs to ridicule and subvert slavery by portraying that the enslavers do not possess absolute power and the enslaved do not absolutely lack agency.

Laughter draws its power from its ambivalent nature. It can be used both by those in the higher hierarchies or the subalterns to either establish or resist power relations. Besides, laughter was not a preserve of the female slaves only; the slaveholders also used it. For instance, Mbunu wa Kiunga, by betraying his community becomes the master's agent. He therefore wields considerable power over Kaveni and the other community members. He derisively laughs at Kaveni's condition" then he laughed hoarsely as he strode away" (57). His laughter demonstrates the hierarchical position of the agent and victim. Because of betraying his community, Mbunu had become an agent of the Arab traders. This gives him power over the other slaves. His derisive laughter at their condition signifies this power relation and a fulfillment of his revenge on Kaveni and her father (55). At this point of the narrative, Mbunu's act of betrayal has in Bakhtinian terms 'crowned' him above his kinsmen. According to Bakhtin:

Crowning and decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift and renewal of all structures and order, of all authority and all hierarchical position. Crowning already contains the idea of imminent decrowning. It is ambivalent from the very start. (240)

Bakhtin indicates that the crowning and decrowning work in the logic of carnival. In this sense, then, laughter is ambivalent in nature embracing both poles of change; a kind of ritual process is premised on the ideas of life and death. For Bakhtin, every crowning enunciated a decrowning. Mbunu's moment occurs when he and the three other accomplices are rounded off and sold as slaves (76). Abdulahi, who is also Kaveni's master, buys him. Later, he is castrated and taken across the sea as a slave. Although his crowning is short lived, it highlights the role of some Africans in the enslavement of fellow Africans.

The relationship between Abdulahi and Kaveni can also be examined through the metaphor of laughter. Whenever he draws her pictures, he always asks her to smile, other times "he would make a comical gesture that I should smile. Then I would laugh. He too would laugh ..." (79). Theirs is laughter riddled with ambivalence. It creates a bond between them that is not common for a slave and a master. While at first she thought he was going to sexually abuse her, he turns out to be loving and caring to her (79). This laughter bridges the gap between slave and master, and the distance between the two houses, establishing what in Bakhtinian terms we could call a dialogic relationship. The crowning/ decrowning establish a reciprocal relationship that collapses the gap between slave and master: Kaveni, a slave who was a natively alienated individual gains power to the level of laughing with the master who inadvertently also loses some power to come to this level. However, Mulwa seems to defy the full logic of the carnival as expounded by Bakhtin. Whereas for Bakhtin the crowning intimates decrowning, in *We Come in Peace*, both processes occur simultaneously to achieve equilibrium and not an upside-down hierarchy: the possibility of a slave and the enslaver to laugh together disturbs the hierarchy of slavery. I argue that in *We Come in Peace*, Mulwa uses laughter to erase the subaltern space and makes it a discursive site upon which female agency is built and voiced.

Another strategy through which Mulwa narrates otherness in the novel is through ironic acceptance of the slave status. In *Slavery and Social Death*, Patterson defines a slave as a natively alienated individual, whose existence was derived from the master's will (43). As slaves, Kaveni and the Maqua woman must endure Amina's admonitions. She usually threatens them of being sold to other lands if they did not remain subservient. The question Amina asks the Maqua woman "are we equals?" is a remark that was meant to humiliate them to make them subservient maids. However, the Maqua responds:

No Memsahib, we are not your equals; we are not your co-wives! How can we be your equals! How can we, ugly creatures that we are, Memsahib? How can we – we who can fit in your shoes? How can we be your equals when out of your kind heart, you took us under your wing and taught us how to cook, how to serve... (78)

This admission of inferiority the slave can on the one hand be seen as a demonstration of Spivak's notion of a subaltern that can neither speak nor be heard. On the hand, it can indicate a survival tactic by the Maqua woman to avoid being sold into faraway lands. The present master was kind to them. Besides, it could demonstrates had internalized the epistemic violence of the hegemony of slavery. It is our observation that it is through the multiple meanings that can be attributed to it that it derives its potential to express resistance.

For instance, when Kaveni kills Amina, the Maqua tells Kaveni:

It is death for you, my child, if they find you! Death! Run! Mama was saying, speaking in both Kiswahili and Maqua, shouting how we cannot help being what we were created to be....Run through the north forest ... lose them in the waters of Kilele River. (93)

This quote implies that the female slaves were aware of their conditions. They therefore developed strategies to survive. However, when conditions were unfavourable, the slaves could flee. The surrogate mother is later accused of being an accomplice to the murder. She is flogged to death, more as a threat to those who might dare to escape as opposed to a punishment. The significance of these acts is that they show the agency of the ability to forge enduring unions. Her sacrificial death is a reversal of the idea of infanticide and love in Morrison's *Beloved*. In *Beloved*, Sethe kills her child to save her from the experiences of slavery. In *We Come in Peace*, the surrogate mother plans for Kaveni's escape, yet she herself waits for her master knowing very well what he will do to her. Besides, the death of the Maqua woman, demonstrates the slave's power to choose death over life as agency.

The Maqua woman's response is expressed in form of rhetorical questions foregrounding the experiences of the slaves in the presence of their mistress, ironically, who was at one time a slave herself. The ability on the part of the female slaves to admit their inferior status is a resistance to the power that the slaveholder wields. It represents a tactic by the slaves to survive the brutality of slavery. For instance, after the Maqua woman's acceptance of their inferiority as slaves, Amina, their mistress says, "that flattering tongue of yours can make a genie pay full dowry to your Maqua slave-uncle (78). Although these statements are provoked by Amina's question "are we equals?"(78) and the response is rather out of a coercive treatment than outright willingness on her part, the act has potential to subvert the hegemony associated with slavery.

As a signifier of agency, the ironic acceptance in *We Come in Peace* can also be examined through Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism. In *The Teaching Machine*, Spivak notes that sometimes marginalized groups use to present a certain group identity in an attempt to attain

certain goals. In the novella, the ironic acceptance represents a strategy of protest through which slaves could resist the hegemony of slavery. In the novella, there is a realistic portrayal of the female slaves in a typical slavery context. Kaveni and the Maqua woman's situation show that agency and victimhood are not binaries. They are slaves, subjected to the authority of the slaveholder, yet at the same time, they are agents who challenge this hegemony. Laughter and ironic acceptance by the female slaves are portrayed as strategies that they have developed to enhance their individual agency as subjects and not as objects under the control of the slaveholders.

The image of Kaveni standing alone by the shores of the ocean is reminiscent of the image of a castaway that encompasses physical and psychological experience of; alienation, disillusionment and anxiety that has characterized the Caribbean experience. Kaveni says:

I would gaze far into the horizon, see a sail and my heart would jump into my throat in the futile hope that somehow my people had managed to escape and were coming home to me in that vessel. But the vessel would sail to the horizon and disappear. Then all would be calm. (87)

The setting of the shores of the ocean conjures up the relations of her past and the present situation. She is isolated from her people, she is living in fear of Amina's rage and jealousy while she is surrounded by the ocean on one side and River Kilele that is infested with crocodiles on the other, the black guards and their dogs make her feel entrapped. In this position, she fits the description of the castaway that is usually associated with the Caribbean experience. Her image at the beach reflects the loneliness caused by her predicament and highlighted by vast waters of the sea in front of her.

The ocean simultaneously provides her with the possibility of freedom and yet at the same time acts as a reminder to how lonely she is. Overwhelmed with these emotions, she could cry and luckily be comforted by the Maqua woman, whom she now identifies as ‘mama’. Kaveni says, “and putting a kindly comforting hand upon my shoulder, she would cry hoarsely, I know child, I know” (86). This narration portrays a mother-daughter relationship that the two female slaves have formed. This understanding and acceptance amidst their alienation enables them to survive slavery. Luckily, for Kaveni, one day, while on the shore, she sees a boat with fleeing slaves. This inculcates the idea of escape leading to a psychological transformation in her. She says, “From that day henceforth, I became a new being. There was hope! Up north near Mombasa there was hope!” (88).

By situating her on the shore, Mulwa draws attention to Kaveni’s situation. The description of the physical features of the sea shore and the figure of Kaveni performs two functions; one, Mulwa ideologically calls for a reconsideration of history of slavery from a female perspective. The need to identify the experiences of a female slave, they are usually ignored. Two, he demonstrates that the shore can provide space for the female slave to acquire and express agency. This aspect of the agency within the sea shore is captured by Meg Samuelson in *Amphibian Aesthetics* notes that this space offers opportunities for escape and freedom. The invocation of the littoral foregrounds an open-ended conceptualization of Kaveni’s subjectivity. Just like the authors that Samuelson argues valorizes littoral as a space that not closed but open to the world, Mulwa too transcends the Manichean aesthetics and highlights gravitation towards the amphibian aesthetics. For the feminist project, the image of Kaveni and Kaveni’s psychological transformation from feelings of captivity and resignation (87) to optimism and freedom widens the spaces upon which women agency can be exercised.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the strategies that Mulwa employed to engender agency. The use of the first person narrative voice enables Kaveni a former slave to narrate of her experience and those of her community thereby asserting voice and expressing agency that is usually silenced in history. Besides, Mulwa models the novella on the oral narrative, yet sets it within a certain historical and geographical context to revisit the history of slavery and its influence on the subjectivities of slaves especially in regards to gender relations. Finally, the chapter examined how the engagement of the female slaves through forms such as laughter and ironic acceptance disrupts their victim status. In this chapter, the study finds out that Mulwa deliberately adopts certain characterization and narrative strategies to depict women capable of transcending their otherness both as women and as slaves to define themselves as free agents.

CHAPTER THREE

RESTORING AGENCY TO WOMEN IN *FLEE MAMA FLEE*

Introduction

The novel, *Flee Mama Flee* (2014) is a sequel to the novella *We Come in Peace*. It was nominated for the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 2015 where it emerged the first runner's up in the adult fiction category. It is set at the mission center in Free Town. The first part is narrated through the voice of a young girl, Elizabeth Mumbe, Kaveni and Musyoka's daughter, the middle part by Mary May, an Irish teacher in the mission school and the last part by Elizabeth Mumbe. Through these two voices, the novel dramatizes the experiences of the rescued slaves, the anti-slavery campaigns, end of Arab slavery and the early stages of British colonialism at the Kenyan coast, which later penetrated the hinterland.

Kaveni's involvement in anti-colonial resistance, on the one hand, won Mary May's support and confidence, while on the other; it drew the wrath of Lord Mackenzie who threatens to whip her at the post. These threats eventually lead to her sickness and subsequent hospitalization. Later, Mary May, Elizabeth and Kaveni with the assistance of some locals hatch and execute a plan to help Kaveni escape from the mission centre to their native land in the Nzauni hills. The last part focuses on new beginnings: Kaveni is joined by other community members to re-establish the community in the hills; Mary May and Abdulahi shift from Mombasa to Nairobi, she starts a school while he opens a curio shop, and Elizabeth Mumbe leaves for Oxford for further studies.

This chapter examines the extent to which the hegemonic discourses of colonialism and patriarchy attempt to silence the gendered subaltern in the novel *Flee Mama Flea*. To achieve this, the study focuses on the characterization strategies and choice of narrative voice as

forming part of the process through which the agency of the woman subaltern can be represented in fiction.

Firstly, the study examines the characterization of Musyoka and Mackenzie as the representation of the colonial and patriarchal ideologies in the novel. Through their characterization, we argue, Mulwa demonstrates patriarchy and colonialism as the epistemic violence that doubly marginalises women. Secondly, the study examines the characterization of three female characters, Kaveni, Mary May and Elizabeth Mumbe within the matrix of this colonialism. However, the study does not take cross-gender analysis; rather, it is a comprehensive examination with a focus on the extent to which the female characters are depicted as agents acting against the domination of colonialism and patriarchy.

Finally, the study interrogates the use of narrative voice in relation to the representation of agency. The analysis is based on Spivak's model in the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. While the study develops on Stratton's postulation on the significance of gender as an analytic category in the study of African literature, it notes that Mulwa's choice of female as characters and narrators is a subversion of the "Mother Africa Trope" that she identified as a common feature in African male writing. Instead, he portrays the women as the cornerstones of stability and regeneration in the new community. In doing this, the study intends not to view women as incapable of exercising agency in opposition to their oppression on the one hand, while on the other safeguarding against the notions of 'scapegoating if, for instance, the study would suggest that colonialism and patriarchy weren't pervasive.

Musyoka wa Mang'oka as the Paragon of the Colonial African Man

Musyoka wa Mang'oka is Kaveni's husband. When he was young, the British missionaries from the Arab slave traders rescued him. At the mission center in Free Town, he was trained as a teacher and later appointed the head teacher of the mission school. In his capacity as a teacher, he associated closely with the European administrators and introduced to the European culture and religion. He starts to learn and perfect these mannerisms, a process that culminated in his conversion and change of name from Musyoka wa Mang'oka to James Musyoka wa Mang'oka.

This conversion gives him a sense of 'Englishness' and self-importance amongst other blacks. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon demonstrates how the colonial enterprise creates subjectivities in the colonial contexts. He asserts that man is only human to the extent that he tries to impose his existence on another man to be recognized by him. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed (216). Fanon concludes, "Colonialism is not just the economic exploitation and political domination of one of the group by another, rather, it is and significantly so, the separation of colonized peoples from their individuality and culture" (217).

Through his characterization, Mulwa portrays the missionary education and through his exposure to the European culture, Musyoka develops an ambivalence that leads to his overbearing nature on his wife. This ambivalence develops in the sense that although he has internalized his racial inferiority to the whites, His position as the privileged man, a teacher in the mission school and the head of his family, from whom he seeks obedience. For instance, Mumba says that her father had become "the community's celebrated teacher of the children" and could often get onions, vegetables or chicken from the parents (11).

At the same time, he is a subject of the colonial masters. He trembles at the arrival of the ship that had white administrators coming to inspect the school. He tells his daughter Kaveni "...am not yet ready, and you know how thorough these whites are! (9). The hype and movement in the mission create an impression in the child's mind of a "mighty ship that is issuing orders that from then henceforth, we will all be running all the days of our lives" (10). In another scene, Kaveni says that her father "stepped forward, meekly and, I must add cautiously like a wet chicken that enters a new home in the gathering dusk" (30). When he is invited to dine and drink with Mackenzie and other whites, he tells his wife and child "I am no ordinary man no more! I can say what I want to say in my house" (48). Religion is a representation of the oppressive ideology of slavery and colonialism, as one that sought to undermine the personal identities of the Africans. It is one that as Fanon argues, "Destroys the history and institutions of the indigenous people and replaces it with his knowledge and power through which place the coloniser produces people who deserve only to be ruled" (217). Musyoka is what he is because of his association with whiteness. His baptism, promotion to the position of headmaster, the recognition he gets from the governor for his role as teacher (30) and his selection to go India, "I assure you a great future awaits you" (30) forms part of the larger plan of the colonialists.

His early exit from the novel when he travels to India works within the dynamics of the narrative. He represents the power of the whites over the blacks and has been used as the of the White man's project in Africa. A project that was meant to alienate the Africans from their cultures and their people with a promise of the attainment of the White man's civilisation. His representation portrays the subjected man that colonial education has made him it has alienated him from his people. For instance, when they call him for lunch, he eats and drinks to his fill (30). After that encounter, they no longer treat him as the master that he was earlier in the

narrative; rather, he becomes a ‘boy’ to run the errands for them. “I am no longer the extraordinary man, I left Mathew’s office as their boy” (51). This one instance shows his loss of dignity and the subsequent actions can be seen as an attempt to exert this power.

His return to Kenya and failure to visit his family demonstrates alienation that colonialism had caused on African man. Musyoka is doubly alienated, from the whites he cannot be because of his skin colour and the Africans from whom his colonial education has lifted. When he arrives at Nairobi, he is employed as an administrator for the colonial government. He works with zeal and brutalizes his people more than even the whites. However, Musyoka’s ‘Englishness’ has brought disaster to himself, his family and the community. He loses touch with his daughter and wife and brutalizes his fellow Africans. As he is taken to the riverbank to be killed, his eyes meet those of his daughter. She suggests that he is probably sorry. He neither asks for forgiveness, nor they do not mourn for him, they do not talk about his death. Probably, he knows he has failed in his duty as the African elite and family man.

He has accepted the racial stereotype of the Europeans that has ‘othered’ the African. The superiority of whiteness, the European culture influences the way Musyoka behaves at home. His daughter observes, “He walked upright, nose to the heavens, holding a walking cane and swinging it exactly as Furlong Mackenzie” (398) and his behavior at meals demonstrate his attempt to mimic the Europeans in utterance, performance and mannerisms. His actions are therefore an expression of what Homi Bhabha’s identifies as mimicry. He accepts the racial stereotypes of whiteness and blackness through mimicry of the Eurocentric prejudices. He tells Kaveni:

To make a new world the old must die...So I played ‘boy’ to get where I am! Alright, so a few expendable natives fall on the wayside to make my ladder to a greater world!... So

get out of the darkness and stride with me into the light. In this, I have spoken, and you have no choice! I have spoken. (401)

Another incident that shows his mimicry is when Mary May visits his office. She observes that his feet were on the table, was reading a book "...and without taking his face off the book, he barked, 'Manners! Get out and knock again- native'" (368). Musyoka learns the thought process of the whites and rejects the perceived backwardness in the African culture. His attitudes characterize the characteristics of the colonial black man theorized by Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon argues that:

The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white men. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question. (13)

Musyoka shows the irony of the position of the colonial African man. He is one that brutalizes his own people but shrinks at the sight of whiteness. When Mary May goes to Musyoka's office, she knocks yet he does not respond. She enters his office, and he does not respond. However, the recognition of her accent and colour startles him from his stupor. She says "on hearing a different voice; he sat up...bolt upright.... He made a great fuss to draw a seat for me despite his disadvantage" (368). This demonstrates the power of whiteness, the power that Musyoka desires for, yet cannot have; he suffers from racial inferiority.

However, upon realizing that his travels to India and back and his education is significant, Musyoka uses it to exploit his other blacks. There is a shift from his the position of exploited to that of villain. In the early colonial context, James Musyoka could, in the Marxian sense belong to the bourgeoisie class that was created and sustained by the colonialist's demands for

taxes. This pushed people to work on their farms to provide labour and fueled their resentment against the colonialists. He harbors plans for the new Kenya. This perspective thus makes him the elitist nationalist voice, that seeks to represent the people politically, yet they do not 'hear' the voices for whom they intend to stand. For instance, when Mary visits him in his office, they talk about the developments in the country and their prospects for it. Mary says: "he was particularly emphatic about teaching the history of civilization, political science, science...he is slowly building a following around himself...Kilema is biding his time and waiting for his chance to be a real king" (369). He is the representation of the modern black man who is attempting to mediate for the subaltern. He says, "How will you lift this motley rabble of our people to your own level, to greater heights of civilization if you are wallowing with them in their fears, superstition and empty pettiness?" (401).

In using Musyoka, an utterly humiliated African man, whose sense of pride has been pricked because of the treatment that he is subjected by the whites both in Kenya and India lead him to develop an inferiority complex. Thus, his behaviour demonstrates marginalized masculinity; one in which the hierarchical structure is not based on gender: It is based on race. These emotions influenced his relations to the other blacks and especially his wife Kaveni from whom he demanded obedience. His behavior demonstrates his attempts to perform his masculinity.

However, he seems detached from the same woman he intends to represent, for although Kaveni is 'speaking' both literary and figuratively, he does not hear her. As an African man, husband and father, Musyoka is interested in getting his wife and daughter into the practice of the European culture. For him, baptism is a renunciation of the black 'self' as the surest way of escaping the inferiority complex associated with the colonial system. As for his daughter, he

hopes that the colonial education would transform her. He tells her, “Learn! In the days to come, never regret that you didn’t learn when you had a chance” (52).

Musyoka’s inclusion into the narrative is an allegorical trope of the rise of the colonial African man. He grew up within a tradition that privileged masculinity and now has acquired another sense of self- importance because of his colonial education and proximity to the white man. In such a scenario, the women are largely marginalized. Musyoka’s death is a metonymic representation the failure of the white civilization and its inability to bridge the gap between the two cultures.

By the end of the narrative, Musyoka is reduced to an effeminate man. He is made powerless through the racial taunts that he goes through. His sense of agency depends on the optimism he has of one day forming his own government. Musyoka’s subjectivity lies primarily in his race. To safeguard his race and subjectivity, he is to give up on things that give him an illusion of power in a patriarchal society: his entitlement to power. Musyoka’s reaction to his loss of subjectivity is contrasted to Kaveni’s. He is used to show how black men who were marginalized in relation to the white men compensated for their lack of power in a way that is often brutal. Mulwa seems to suggest that in cases of violence and constant humiliation when men are not supported by the patriarchal system, for instance because of colonialism, they are usually weaker than women are.

Although Musyoka’s characterization is a caricature of the colonial African in most anti-colonial narratives, his life, colonial education and eventual death are also failures that function at the familial space. He is portrayed as a man whose ‘Englishness’ has made a dysfunctional family man. Read within the dynamics of the narrative of *Flee Mama Flee* and the feminist

ideology that is evident in the novel; his death creates the chances for Kaveni to heal and achieve her subjectivity, by being a subject unto herself.

Lord Mackenzie as the Embodiment of Colonial Oppression

Mackenzie is the new colonial administrator in Mombasa. His attitude towards the native communities is typical of the colonizers. According to him, the natives are savages that need to be taught of the European civilization. He is portrayed early in the novel as the custodian of the European values. His role is then to convert these savages into the white man's civilization and advance the imperial interest of business venture in the hinterland. He represents the British missionaries that were in Free Town rescuing the slaves from the Arabs.

Their presence in Free Town is double edged; it is desired and loathed in equal measure. For instance, Kaveni acknowledges that they helped them from the Arab slave traders while in another instance she criticizes their mistreatment of the natives. For the rescued slaves, Free Town was a haven of peace, because the whites "had guns and could repulse any new slave trader's threat, it was not unusual for black people to disappear, never to be found" (3). However, for Mackenzie and the British Empire that he represented, the island was "the base for business ventures in a country beyond my mother's birthplace..." (3). This quote highlights the hypocrisy of the European missionary activity at the coast. They only used the crusade to end slavery as a method to advance their commercial and political interests.

Kaveni's refusal to write for them is an act of agency. Instead, she records the experiences of her people, since the times of slavery and now colonialism shows that the missionaries and the colonialism were equally other forms of slavery not different from the former slavery. The use of the letter form signals the geographical and historical connections between the colonies and the British government. He also uses it to stamp his authority as the official representative of

the queen in the colony (185). This shows an attempt to perform the power of whiteness and male superiority. He intends to have the whites maintain their position as the betters of the blacks; he is therefore angered when Mary May freely mingles with the blacks.

Thus, in the novel *Flee Mama Flee*, Mackenzie is an allegorical representation of the colonial desire to establish an empire in Africa. The construction of the railway symbolizes the achievement of the Britons to open the interior territories to their occupation. Mackenzie's attitude and role is expressed by Caroline Elkins in *Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*. She says:

For the British, imperialism was not solely about exploitation; in fact, if one were believed the official rhetoric of the time, exploitation was hardly a factor at all in motivating Britain's global conquests. With their superior race, Christian values and economic know-how, the British instead had a duty, a moral obligation to redeem the 'backward heathen' of the world. In Africa... progressive citizens ready to take their place in the modern world.(5)

Mulwa dismantles the power associated with white male masculinity by making the colonial desire undesirable. Through a caricature of Mackenzie, Mulwa portrays the colonial desire as evil and barbaric than the heathenism they wanted to route out of Africa.

Kaveni resists his power and attempts to subvert his authority both as a white man and as a representative of the empire. Intellectually, he deems the natives as savages, incapable of civilization. However, when he reads Kaveni's letters, he is amazed by the power of her intellect that he calls her "a worthy opponent". He then decides to use her to write articles for him; letters that he would send to the empire to display the power of British civilization and earn

more accolades. Her letter expresses her ability to learn their language, their ways of life, their religion and then uses it against them, making her arguments both logical and convincing that he is forced to acknowledge her as a worthy opponent.

Kaveni's attempts to resist the colonial order are met with Mackenzie's ruthlessness. When Kaveni fails to change her name, Mackenzie feels frustrated in the power of the empire. He wants to control her resistance to his leadership, the western education, religion and culture. He is determined to silence her and set an example for the rest of the natives. However, she falls sick, and her sickness works against Mackenzie's plans to discipline her by the pole. She is therefore taken to the hospital to heal in readiness for Mackenzie's punishment. What happens at the hospital scene is a tension between the white masculine power and black feminine power. At the hospital, Kaveni is at a disadvantage because her sick body is left to the control of Mackenzie. Ironically, it is when she is at a worst condition that she is able to exercise the greatest power over Mackenzie.

This study borrows Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault examines the various institutions of European modernity and notes "Prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons (228). Thus, for the whites at Free Town, the mission school, the church and the hospital were the three pillars through which western civilization was manifested to the natives. Any resistance to these three was an affront to both the authority of Mackenzie and the empire. Thus, the hospital in Free Town is an extension of the colonizer's knowledge and power over the blacks.

Mackenzie's brutality is depicted in his intent to manage the natives' bodies. The enclosure in the hospital, the loneliness and Mackenzie's gaze, through the doctor and the guard, Kaveni is depicted both as a patient and as a prisoner. By placing the watchman at the door of the

hospital, Mackenzie exerts his power and makes the place resemble more of a prison than a hospital. Her position in the hospital mirrors what Foucault identifies as the process through which authorities of Mettray prison used to discipline the prisoners. He argues that through observation and silencing, “a body of knowledge was constantly built up from the everyday behaviour of the inmates” who were always put under close observation (294). Kaveni’s position at this point as a black woman, patients in a white man’s hospital and as a ‘prisoner’ under the watchful eyes of the guard portrays her as a subaltern in the Spivikian sense.

At this point, the hospital becomes what Ngugi in “Enactments of Power” calls ‘the performance space’. By examining how the colonizers and their subjects accessed the hospital space and utilized it within the historical juncture of the 1900s. For instance, Mackenzie decrees that nobody should visit Kaveni in the hospital without his permission (137). He uses his power as a white man and his social status as the agent of the British Empire to limit access to the hospital space. He seems to have the authority to control the body of a black African woman to his gaze and hold. He represents the attitude of the colonialists who as Jahn Mohammed in “Manichean Economy” argues, “Considered the native too degraded and inhuman to be credited with any specific subjectivity” (67).

However, Kaveni with the help of Mary May organize to flee from the hospital and Free Town. This was done to flee Kaveni from the humiliation and violence that awaited her at the flogging. She would leave and settle somewhere far from the cruelty of Mackenzie. Although the ancestral home could not have been ideal for her as a woman given that no living relatives were in the highlands. It offered her chances to make her decisions. The failure of Lord Mackenzie is a dramatisation of the impossibility of fixed identities especially in situations of colonial contact. Mackenzie wanted to treat the Africans the way he had constructed them both

from his archive and his early observation of them, which was stereotypical. For Mackenzie, the Africans were as a savage people in need of civilization. His characterization is thus a questioning of his character morality and by extension the morality of British colonialism.

The characterization of Musyoka and Mackenzie portray how the subaltern agency has been subsumed by the discursive powers of patriarchy, imperialism and nationalism, which is an attempt to represent the subaltern subject. This confirms Spivak's argument in "Can the Subaltern Speak" where she notes:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third world woman" caught between tradition and modernization. (306)

Although the representation of these two characters is largely satirical, Mulwa constructs them to foreground the position of the woman within the context of colonial contact. Mulwa seems to have constructed the female characters as the social group that has been marginalized by the collusion between imperialism and nationalist patriarchy. However, through the characterization of Kaveni, Mulwa portrays a subaltern woman that speaks both literally and figuratively. Read within the context of colonialism; Kaveni indeed becomes stronger and agent of her life despite the attempts to silence her by both Mackenzie and Musyoka. Besides, the representation of Mary May as a postcolonial intellectual is also Mulwa's appropriation of the Spivak's notion of representation as a way of foregrounding a feminist perspective into the novel. Finally, the characterization of Elizabeth Mumbe shows Mulwa's portrayal of the coming of the agency of women not as a fixed notion, but one characterized by fluidity.

Kaveni as the African Matriarch

Kaveni's characterization is a subversion of Spivak's notion of the subaltern. Mulwa uses different strategies to demonstrate the possibility of representing the subaltern agency in fiction. The analysis of her characterization is a reading against the postulation in Spivak's essay. Kaveni is a rescued slave now staying at the mission center in Free Town that is under the jurisdiction of the Britons. Although she was the narrator in the novella and had indicated in the epilogue to continue telling the stories of her people, this role is by over by her daughter, Elizabeth Mumbe. At the beginning of *Flee Mama Flee*, her condition had worsened. As a sick person, Kaveni, therefore, fits into the category of the subaltern.

Kaveni is juxtaposed with her husband Musyoka who has been christened into the European culture and mannerism. Kaveni represents the struggles of African women in the colonial context. These are individuals who were doubly silenced by both the colonial narratives and the elitist historiographies. For instance, her relationship with her husband has shifted from that of mutual trust in *We Come in Peace* to a hierarchical one based on Musyoka's privileged position as an elite African man. By his position, Musyoka as the headmaster Musyoka is at a higher level compared to her. Although she learns to read and write, she is employed as a cook at the mission centre. Her work as a cook also signifies a change in the economic arrangements to what Ogunjide calls "new economic arrangements between men and women and new attitudes of male social and economic superiority" (108).

She lands into problems at the center with both her husband and the administration when she fails to accept the name Angelica that she had been christened at her baptismal. For her, the name Kaveni demonstrated her links with her grandmother and her community to which she forms a part. Although the community was separated during the slavery raid, it is a name she

retains for it is a marker of her identity as the daughter of the Nzauni clan. Her refusal is a form of resistance to the colonial heritage that denies the significance of the Arica way of life. For Mackenzie, the administrator of the colony and Musyoka, who had already been christened James, this is treated as an affront to their masculine authority.

The narratives of the texts are localized in Kamba. *We Come in Peace* starts at Nzauni hills then shifts to Mombasa and Zanzibar following the journeys that the slaves made after their capture and sell to the Arab traders. It then shifts to Free Town with the marriage of Kaveni and Musyoka. This shows that it was by sheer lucky that Musyoka was saved from both the Arab traders and the marauding whales, while it was this same lucky that Kaveni could flee the enslavement at Zanzibar and be saved from the crocodiles from river Kilele. These are the only characters who could return, the other members of their community are forgotten, and their stories are not recorded in the narrative. The narrative in *Flee Mama Flee* starts at Free Town then shifts to the Nzauni hills. By reading the narrative in the two texts as one (they are a sequel) utilizes the home-away- home motif to detail the experiences of the protagonists. Kaveni had left Nzauni as a young slave girl but returns as a hero who has amassed great knowledge through her experiences and interactions.

The author uses the journey motif through the physical travels by the protagonists. The outbound journey in *We Come in Peace* through rough terrains, across the sea through the dhows, to Mombasa, to Zanzibar, to Free Town capture aspects of the history of slavery and colonialism with geographical spaces provided opportunities for Kaveni to amass knowledge, experience about others which ultimately influenced subjectivity and agency as expressed through return journey in *Flee Mama Flee* across the ocean and the forest. In *The Epic in*

Africa, Okpewho Isidore notes that in the epic, the hero returns and helps in the transformation of his community (2).

Mulwa apportions this role to Kaveni when she re-establishes her community. Her story indicates that the hegemonic power of slavery and colonialism was not absolute: individuals had agency to make choices. What Kaveni seems to have learnt is that in other people from other cultures and races, there are sympathetic individuals as well as brutal ones. She is committed to make this a better society after the betrayal. The insistence on friendship highlights the betrayal by Mbunu wa Kiunga in *We Come in Peace*, brotherhood does not occlude chances of betrayal; Kaveni extols friendship above bloodlines in the reconstitution of the 'imagined nation'.

Kaveni is an insurrection of the active roles played by women in the anti-colonial struggle and in their families, even in the absence of their husbands. Kaveni's struggle with the colonialists is not so much about land; it is a fight against the European's disrespect for the African traditions (304). Besides, the Europeans that had taken away her husband and now they are targeting her only child. Through her, we can see how colonialism disrupted the normal functioning of families. Apart from the nationalist tendencies of most anti-colonial narratives, Mulwa situates the experience in the family space.

Judith Butler in "*Bodies that Matter: On Discursive Limits of Sex*," female subjectivity is a representation of a woman, who is also the subject and at the same an agent in a diverse reshaping power of relations that she cannot move away. She further notes:

The paradox of subjectivation is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint

does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or re-articulatory practice, immanent to power and not a relation of external opposition to power. (15)

For Kaveni, subjectivity develops through personal experiences with women such as the Maqua in *We Come in Peace* who sacrificed her life for her and Mary May who has been a close confidant and supporter. By the close of the narrative, Kaveni has developed from the slave woman in Free Town to a matriarch that restores her community. Spivak notes that the subaltern is heterogeneous in its composition. This is as a result of the uneven character of the social and economic developments (79). At Free Town, Kaveni was a cook in the centre and had the tag of a slave to her identity. Upon returning to the Nzauni hills, Kaveni is endowed with personal and social-cultural consciousness and agency. She is portrayed as occupying the positions of the mother, friend, cook, colonial subject, patient, wife, revolutionary and matriarch. Her response specific situations are influenced by the changing conditions of her position. Towards the end of the narrative, she could carve a place for herself in the Akamba oral traditions and restored a nation albeit for her community. By refusing both Musyoka and Mackenzie's definitions of her that seek to silence her along racial and gender, she demonstrates the ability to speak both literally and figuratively as well as to be heard.

In her role as a mother, she that the society has changed and is in "need men and women of good education to put our people on the path of progress and am proud of your achievement" (407), Kaveni is therefore a progressive character, who aware of the role of education in liberating the mind, extols formal education as one tool that would significantly improve the feminist cause. She however, tells Mumbe that despite her education, she needs a family and a child in order to "live a complete life" (407). Although she has developed agency and is a

subject unto herself, Mulwa presents Kaveni as occupying multiple subjective positions in which she sometimes acts contrary to her consciousness. For instance, the insistence on the significance of a child highlights Spivak's idea that "the product of a woman's body is important as it caters for the reproduction of labor-power, thus giving the mother exchange value" (336). Kaveni seems to suggest that as much as Mumbe is educated, if she would not marry and have children, she would lack the agency of the mother's value. In a sense, Kaveni advises Elizabeth to attain both lack of a mother's exchange value would override her academic achievements.

The oral rendition of proverbs, songs and constant references to the Akamba traditions and customs such as marriage, the reference to the Akamba myths and legends and even the use of the Akamba language is an attempt to situate the narratives of the texts within the Akamba community. Further, it demonstrates how the author uses the genre of novel that as Bakhtin in the *Dialogic Imagination* notes is characterized with fluidity. He says, "It is by its nature not canonic, it is plasticity itself" (39). Since the novel belongs to the corpus of postcolonial feminist literature, the infusion of orality into the novel demonstrates the postcolonial thrust in the novel especially in relation to the language of and elements of an African novel. His return to the past forms is not to romanticize the past; rather, it is in Fanonian terms to be in "step with the people". It is something the community's members engage in to understand the transformations in these societies. He reworks the legends of Syokimau and Ngeteele into a modern-day legend capable of addressing contemporary challenges with whom they can associate, albeit imaginatively.

Analyzing it from a feminist perspective, Mulwa uses this strategy to write the woman into history of the Akamba and subsequently to the history of the nation-state. Besides, this strategy allows the characterization of Mary May as the postcolonial intellectual. In a dialogue with

Kaveni, Mary May shows how much she has learnt of the Akamba community She says: “I’ve taken trouble to read every morsel about you people...Thanks to your people’s penchant for exaggeration you are now a living legend” (371). This could be read as the white woman’s desire and commitment to integrate into the cultural milieu of the African communities that they had encountered.

In the Nzauni nation that she establishes, Mulwa highlights the overlap between home and the nation. In “Interrogating History and Female Agency”, Odhiambo views the family as one of the spaces that women control and through which they indirectly influence nation-state formation. This could be attributed to the fact the female characters in the novel are apolitical. In *Flee Mama Flee*, Kaveni is depicted as a political leader, a matriarch that restores her community. Thus, Mulwa highlights that the restoration of community overlaps with the restoration of the home. Kaveni works towards the forgiveness and reconciliation of her husband. The repetition of the phrase ‘he will come’ highlights the expectancy with which she waited for him. However, the colonial education and experience had made him quote Fanon and therefore, he is eliminated from the larger picture of both the narrative and the community. To attain the restoration of a ‘happy family’, she welcomes him into the home, nurses his wounds and his need to reconcile with him. However, he fails to accept/act. Instead, he lectures her on the power of whiteness (371). He demonstrates the father figure that has internalized colonialism and is decapitated beyond restoration.

At the community level, it is the notion of tribe and clanism. Kaveni asks them “Does the rain know you are Mu-Anziu, Mu- Mutei or Kamamu? Why do you feel you are safe only among your clan? When, then will you make friends and grow? (405). These statements echo the sentiments of the contemporary Kenyan society, fraught with ethnicity in a rapidly changing

society. The assertion is an ironic reversal of what could have been done at independence of Kenya. However, the Kenyan nation-state was built along tribal and class lines to the exclusion of others. Although this novel is set in the early 1900, it was published in 2014 and therefore subtly engages the disillusionment associated with nationalism. The portrayal of Kaveni and the distribution of land is Mulwa's imaginative and gravitation to what in a personal interview with me he called a "tribe less nation". He further argued that the post independent government led to the establishment of a "tribal nation" instead of one based not on blood lines, but on our humanity (9th March 2016).

Through the restoration of agency to the members of the Nzauni, Mulwa performs what Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* sees as the construction of a people with a common past, experience and history. Besides, it is a pointer to the possibility of reconstituting the nation as a female project. Then, we can view Nzauni clan as a sub-nation within the Akamba nation in relation to the Kenyan nation state. Mulwa seems to subtly suggest that the history and the sharing of resources after independence is the way it is because of the insatiable greedy of men. Mulwa uses Kaveni's story to critique the nationalist narratives were constructed along patriarchal attitudes that marginalized women.

Elizabeth Mumba as the Possibility of Synthesis

In *Location of Culture*, Bhabha locates this synthesis "It is in the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference that intersubjective and collective experiences of nations, community interest or cultural value are negotiated," (2). At the second level, synthesis in the novel is achieved through use of childhood as a hybrid space. Writing on "Childhoods in Purple Hibiscus" Ouma notes that in *Purple Hibiscus*, childhood has been used as "a set of ideas that reflect on the child as selecting memories which are reproductive and

reconstructive and using them to create a critical space of engagement within the text” (52). Just like *Purple Hibiscus*, *Flee Mama Flee* explores adult themes presented through the eye and voice of a child.

Since synthesis involves negotiation, the hybrid is better adapted to modern world than the essentialist groups. Thus, the characterization of Elizabeth Mumbe is used to ridicule Musyoka’s alienation and mimicry. Through her portrayal, the reader notes that Musyoka’s life was just one of the effects of colonialism, yet not the only way. Bhabha observes that the hybrid being in a liminal space is in advantageous position because something new begins (2). New attitudes and value systems are formed that make the hybrid better adapted to life’s challenges than the essentialist groups.

Elizabeth Mumbe, Kaveni and Musyoka’s daughter, at the beginning introduces herself as Kaveni’s daughter, five years of age. She further explains that she will be narrating the experiences because her mother is sick. She starts the narration of the novel by telling us about herself and the condition of her mother. She identifies herself as Elizabeth Mumbe and that the events she narrates were recorded at the age of five. This is because this was her fifth birthday. This therefore means that the events in the novel are recorded from the memories of her childhood. She sees her mother’s condition as a predicament of the violent history on the African people. Thus, her mother’s sickness is juxtaposed with the onset of colonialism in East Africa, a situation through which the ills of colonialism are portrayed through the child’s receptive eye.

By linking her birthday to the arrival of the mighty ship that caused jitters in the inhabitants of the mission center, Elizabeth Mumbe attempts to inscribe the experiences at the mission into the story of life that she records through the first person narrative voice. The image of the ship

becomes a symbol of authority in the colonial set up. The movements of the people and the reactions of her father indicate the sense of authority ascribed to those in the ship. Elizabeth Mumbo describes the scene of what she sees as the “madness” associated with this ship. Her observation portrays how the children begin to associate the colonial culture as an authority to be feared.

In her narration, Elizabeth Mumbo shows her experiences at home, both with Mary May and her mother, Kaveni. From her mother, she learns about her Nzauni clan, the culture of her people, the capture and eventually enslavement of her people. Through the focalized vignettes of what she has learnt from her mother, through her dialogue with her mother, and the constant references to her mother’s people, one can draw an attempt on Mulwa’s part to fictionalize the history and culture of the Akamba people.

During her mother’s sickness and hospitalization, Mumbo lives with Mary from whom she learns a lot about the aspects of the western education. This is through the references to the many books that Mary May has and the vignettes of Mary May’s famous ‘rules’. The rules are presented in such a manner that they seem to be universal ethics. Her brilliant performance in school astonishes both the colonial administrators and her community. Although she cannot touch her ears as per the colonial education policy, she reads more fluently even than her teacher, Mabruki. Her performance in school defies the expectations and attitudes of the Mackenzie. She not only goes to school at a young age that defies the colonial education policy, but also performs extremely well in her final examinations, defeating white boys and girls.

Her brilliance in school has been used here for largely two reasons: Firstly, it subverted the colonial ideology that viewed the blacks as barbaric and unintelligent. Mackenzie says: Mulwa thus seems to suggest that it is through education that the colonized people and other

marginalized groups/ individuals can learn and appropriate the hegemonic ideology. In this novel, Mumbe achieves it both as an African and as a woman. Secondly, Mulwa uses it to point out the hypocrisy of the whites. The change of title, from Elizabeth to Miss. Elizabeth, the invitation for lunch and the preparation for her education in Oxford, shows a changed attitude toward her. Mackenzie's attitude suggests that the colonialists will only view Africans as people, if they performed like them all above them.

Her name, Elizabeth Mumbe wa Musyoka wa Mang'oka is a strategy that signifies the idea of synthesis. In *Slavery and Social Death*, Patterson writes on the significance of names. He argues that:

A man's name is, of course, more than simply a way out of calling him. It is the verbal sign that of his whole identity, his being in the world as a distinct person. It also establishes his relation to his kinsmen. (54)

Thus, the significance of Elizabeth Mumbe's name lies in the power of double invocation. On the one hand, Mumbe invokes both the ancestral heritage that links her with her grandmother after whom she is named and the Nzauni clan from whose bloodline she comes. On the other hand, Elizabeth invokes the colonial heritage that she acquired through Christianity and baptism. The use of both her names, whenever she is asked of her name, and the reference she gets when her 'civilized' father calls her Elizabeth and her 'uncivilized' mother calls her Mumbe plays into Mulwa's attempt to create a synthesis of the two ideological views in one individual. If a name is a signifier of identity, then Elizabeth Mumbe's is that of a hybrid African, intelligent and able to read Shakespeare but remains "my mother's child" (300).

The portrayal of childhood in the colonial era in the novel echoes sentiments of these experiences by other writers and critics. In “*The Education of a British Protected Child*,” Achebe argues that:

The middle ground is neither the origin of things nor the last things; it is aware of a future to head into and a past to fall back on; it is the home of doubt and indecision, of suspension of disbelief, of make-believe, of playfulness, of the unpredictable, of irony.

(6)

For Achebe, his childhood provided an opportunity through which he could learn of both worlds and can challenge playfully each. The ambivalence towards colonial education and religion on one hand and African traditions on the other provided room for cultural synthesis. Achebe views the position of the colonized child, which is like Elizabeth Mumbo's as providing the possibility of synthesis. It is upon this third space that Mumbo inserts Elizabeth Mumbo to learn from the two heritages. Through the first person narrative voice, Mumbo inscribes the experiences of the third spaces, the fears and doubts and the eventual success of combining the western education and the African traditions. For instance, the children sing the national anthem and raise their union flag as if the mission center in Free Town was part of England.

On the contrary, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ views the position of African children in post-colonial African nations as detrimental to their identities. He argues that:

Children who encountered literature in colonial schools and universities were experiencing the world defined and reflected in the European experience of history. This entire way of looking at the world, even the world of the immediate environment, was Eurocentric; Europe was the center of the scholarly praxis. The images children

encountered were reinforced by their study of history, geography and science technology where Europe was once again the center. This in turn fitted well with cultural imperatives of British Imperialism. (93)

In *Flee Mama Flee*, these are exactly the challenges that the child narrator and protagonist is facing. Elizabeth Mumbe seems to be suffering from alienation because of her exemplary performance. She diligently studies at home and in school to become the best, yet by becoming the best, she finds it difficult to relate with her people.

Bhabha writes of the hybrid as a space that is exposed to contradictions and ambiguities, which could “initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (1). As a postcolonial child, Mumbe’s childhood is mired with anxiety and ambivalence. On one hand, it seeks to collaborate attributes of the African tradition and European culture and religion. On the other hand, it a site of contestation because it involves selection and elimination of unwanted attributes. For instance, one of the choices that Elizabeth needs to make is on whether she will go to study at Oxford and the issue of her marriage. This would mark the culmination of her growth and development. She says “that night I did not sleep, I thought of all options to bring a Mutindimi, Mama’s dream warrior to our compound.

Before Kaveni leaves for Oxford, she visits Mary May at Nairobi, where she also meets Abdulahi. This visit also gets to see a portrait of what was painted/ drawn by Abdulahi. The significance of this portrait is that ignites a sense of devotion to both Mary May and Abdulahi. It represents the composition of the individuals who had decided to be Kenyan. The portrait is a representation of what has become the composition of the contemporary nation-state: the whites, the Arabs and the blacks. Each group with their own (hi) stories which would collectively represents the history of the nation-state of Kenya. The portrait marks a celebration

of the racial, gender and cultural aspects of the colonial encounter. In a sense then the portrait highlights Abdullahi's role as archiving the history of the slavery and colonialism through his drawings. It is worth noting that Abdulahi's business was initially based in Zanzibar. He then shifted to Mombasa at the helm of the declining of slave trade. He ventured into artistry and painting as means of earning a living but also as a way of recording the historical developments.

When the construction of the railway reaches Nairobi, the actions of colonialism shift to Nairobi with the occupation of the white highlands and the guerrilla warfare staged by the men. He also shifts his business to Nairobi more because of Mary May's influence but also as he tells Mumbe "Someone needs to record our country's unfolding history. I'm done with the sea and its monotony" (411).

The novel ends with her departure to start her studies at Oxford University in her late 20s. However, this is after she has decided to marry Mudhoka when she comes back. Her departure heralds a new experience for her: it creates a space for her to exercise her agency as a black woman in spaces beyond the village and the continent. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin differentiates between the epic and the novel genres. He notes that while the epic attains a closure, the novel is an incomplete genre (39). In this sense, the novel ends without attaining closure, intimating a continuous construction of female agency beyond the printed story in the text. Her promise to Mudhoka that she will "surely RETURN" (412) leaves the reader with a sense of ambivalence towards her return knowing very well that the influence of the European education, especially what it did to her father, yet rings the hope of her ability to cope and succeed.

Mary May as the Postcolonial Female Intellectual

Studies by critics such as Stratton have shown that the African male writing tradition marginalized the contribution of women. This led to the development of women writers who attempted to rectify these stereotypical representations. The thrust of feminist scholarship in African literature has also tended to essentialize the experiences of the African women and putting other women such as the whites into the periphery. It is from this peripheral position that Mulwa's draws Mary May's characterization. Her role at the mission center is bridled with the ambivalence surrounding her race, culture, gender and nationality.

As a white woman, she simultaneously exists in a position that subordinates her to the male patriarchal society and where she is subject over the black women and women. According to Wilson Kathleen in *Island Race*, white women such as Mary May had the role of reproducer of the white culture. However, her wounded Irish nationality and her studies in indigenous people compel her to stand up for the black people. Although she commits to represent them, her intent is treated with suspicion. Abdulahi's voice as he expresses his doubts about her role and the honesty of her words is representative of how she is perceived by the others. He says, "Do sharks not spawn sharks? ...oh! the hypocrisy of you, child of your democracy! Am I to sit here and believe you spurn the mother who bore and suckled you" (148)?

Mulwa appropriates Spivak's notion postcolonial feminist intellectual as a strategy to construct Mary May's agency. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak observes that since the subaltern cannot speak, she needs a postcolonial female intellectual to speak for her. In responding to the Subaltern studies' project, she argues that although the group attempted to restore the subaltern's subjectivity and agency to history, because of their privileged positions as intellectuals, they cannot have a nostalgia for the consciousness of the subalterns. Spivak then

concludes that a postcolonial intellectual can represent the subaltern, but she must first unlearn her privilege. In *The Spivak Reader*, Spivak highlights the dilemma facing the postcolonial intellectual. She notes:

Unlearning one's privilege constitutes a double recognition: To unlearn our privilege on the one hand to do our homework at gaining some knowledge of the others that occupy those spaces that most closed to our closed view. On the other hand, it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take us seriously. Most important of all, can answer back. (14)

Mary May is an Irish teacher in the mission school. She is one of the narrator-protagonist in the novel. Mary May reveals her Irish ancestry and the relationship between the Irish and the Britons. This authenticates her narration, disrupts the tendency of most African writers to homogenize the white characters in their texts and enables her to understand and forge relationships with the African women: they share the experience of domination. Her ancestry and the history of Irish colonialism, the rapture of families, dying for the British civilization is alluded to advance her resistance to colonialism.

For Spivak, the intellectual is not a transparent medium. She gives the British example who in an attempt to speak for the oppressed widows by banning Sati ended up silencing the Hindu culture. Apparently, for her, the subaltern cannot speak; therefore, the intellectual remains a medium. However, as she demonstrates, the intellectual should unlearn some privilege associated with the 'elite group'. Mary May who is informed by a consciousness of an educated white, yet by birth, experience, education and empathy she comes to understand the Kenyan subaltern and her history.

She is trained in Oxford, an elite university in Britain where she studied subaltern studies. She says “my studies have this one aim: to do something for the underdog- people whose joys and suffering tug at my heartstring” (149). Thus, her experience as a once colonized subject and her studies authenticate her desire to speak for the gendered subaltern. As a white, she has power that Musyoka, a black man lacks, at least in the eyes of the black women. According to them, she is ‘the authority’ whom they are requesting to admit their children to the mission school. This demonstrates that the African women and children lacked agency to voice their concerns to the colonial authority. They therefore need someone to speak for them. As an intellectual and a white, Mary May knows that she can only represent them if she can convince Mackenzie to understand of the cultural differences. Her attempt to admit the children to school irrespective of the colonial policy demonstrates her commitment to help the African women and children.

Unfortunately, her endeavor is thwarted by Mackenzie’s intervention. He sees this as an affront to his power both as a man and as the governor of the colony. At this point in the narrative, Mary May too lacks agency that can be attributed to her gender and her failure to be a part of colonialist’s elite group. Later, Mackenzie calls her to his office where he seeks to establish his authority in the colony. The use of the letter from Britain while bridging the physical gap, serves to position Mackenzie as the official representative of the colony. He tells her, “There are laid procedures, Miss May. Follow them or else there will be consequences. My consequences” (186). In this instance Mulwa seems to dramatize on the notions of whiteness and gender as they play out in the colonial situations. In the colonial set up, the women were to be the reproducers of the imperial culture. When she forms close relationships with the black women and especially Kaveni, Mary May failed to belong to the elite class that her whiteness

provided. Although whiteness represented racial power, Mackenzie makes use of the masculine privilege inherent in the European tradition to deny agency to Mary May.

Her romantic relationship with Abdulahi though referred to in an ellipsis is significant. Their friendship transcends racial, cultural and historical limitations: Mary May, a white missionary worker having very close ties with Abdulahi, a former slaveholder of Arab origin demonstrates a changed attitude of the past. It is worth noting Mary May initiated the relationship as an effort to save Kaveni from Mackenzie. Mary May makes several trips to his premises at Mombasa. Later, they develop a close attachment, which is almost romantic. In one of their dialogues, Abdulahi tells her the story of an Ama Yiki man who travelled into an Amazonian community, where he was integrated into their culture and customs. For instance, he married four women from this community, had fifteen children and even dressed just like the Amazon. This dialogue not only manifests the level of their friendship but also serves a didactic function. He cautions Mary May against the arrogance of the whites about superiority of their culture.

Abdulahi seems to suggest that every people have their own way of life that equally has the potential to lure members from other cultures. Thus, the European civilization was just a culture like the others; it was not the only culture. In order to teach the locals as Mary May wants, she must know what to teach them. She needs to be aware of the two extremes of cultural contact; total assimilation or cultural 'othering' of the host community. Neither of the two extremes is desirable. Instead, she needs to integrate without losing one's identity. This is the position that Mulwa seems to hold and attempts to reflect.

Mary May's ability to be a mother for Mumbe when Kaveni was in hospital, makes her the 'other mother' to her. Mumbe says "...this foreign woman became my mentor, mother, teacher and protector" and Mary May says "...". Besides, Mary May can integrate herself into the black

society that Mwanamisi tells her “your skin is not our skin, but your heart beats with ours. Perhaps in another time we and you came from the same clay” (169). This acceptance into the fold of the black women highlights her role as the postcolonial intellectual. Writing on the writings and life of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Wanjala observes that Macgoye manages to unlearn her privileges and integrates into the Luo culture that she becomes accepted as Nyarloka (daughter from abroad) (19). Moreover, he notes that this integration and acceptance enables her to understand the Kenyan situation from below, hence she qualifies as a postcolonial intellectual who can speak for the gendered subaltern (32-33). In the construction of Mary May, Mulwa appropriates this model as a strategy of insurrecting the voice of the white woman. By writing her life into the position of postcolonial intellectual, Mulwa allows the reader to hear the voice of the white woman and recognize the possibility of perceiving whiteness as a social construct that can be unlearned. This further highlights the need to unlearn some privileges and cross boundaries constructed along class, gender, race, culture or any other dichotomous categorization ‘to speak for the other’.

Mary May’s characterization is therefore Mulwa’s attempt to mediate between an oppressive white group represented in the colony by Mackenzie and an oppressed black population represented by Kaveni. Mary May, collapses the colonial boundary and gets into Kaveni’s house since dine with Kaveni in their house. Although Mary May has been convinced and even compelled her to align herself with the other whites (128), she remains steadfast in her resolve to stand by the black women and their children.

Her characterization, Mulwa creates an aesthetic distance and gives her agency to work amongst her whites to not only illuminate the racial stereotypes, but also create spaces for her to work towards the destruction of the colonial and patriarchal episteme. Mary May comes to the

Kenyan coast during the colonial establishment as part of the missionary role, yet she forms strong relationships with the blacks whom she is meant to despise, to plan for the escape of Kaveni and even develop a romantic relationship with an Arab man whom other whites consider as an infidel (146). Her actions are contrary to the expectations of the empire and its agents.

Viewed in this manner, then her own life makes her subject in the Foucauldian sense. Foucault views a subject as defined from without by “structures over which she has no control”. Spivak refutes this notion and argues that the subject has agency to define herself as subject. The characterization of Mary May shows her as one that has autonomy to define herself despite the coercion by Mackenzie and the white society’s pressure to constitute her as an elite immigrant. Instead, Mary May commits herself to unlearn these privileges. This determination makes her in the Spivakian model, a worthy representative of the gendered subaltern. Mary May transcended the limitations of what Spivak in the “Postcolonial Critic” calls “a deterministic position- since my colour is this, since my sex is this, I cannot speak” (qtd in *The Spivak Reader*, 15).

Narrative voice(s) and Representation of Agency

Mieke Bal in *Narrative Discourse*, defines Narratology as the “ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural that tell a story (3). Her focus is on the way the story is delivery. The voice that tells the story therefore becomes significant element in unraveling the story. Writing on the choice of the narrator, Bal notes: The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the way that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that lend the text its specific character” (8). Similarly, In *Resisting Novels*, Lennard Davies argues that the narrator is “an embodiment of the society’s collective knowledge that the

author uses to enhance his/her ideology through the novel” (142). Thus, the level of the narrator’s knowledge, experience and objectivity of their voice combine to help the reader understand and appreciate a work of art.

In chapter 2, the study examined the use of the first person narrative voice and related it to the autobiographical voice. The author utilizes the same narrative voice in *Flee Mama Flee*. However, he introduced another narrative-protagonist through Mary May. Besides, there is a shift in the narrative structure from a monologic one in the novella to a dialogic one in *Flee Mama Flee*. Whereas similar observations can be made on the narrative voices in the novel, there is an inclusion of other voices in the novel.

Narrative voice becomes problematic in the representation of subaltern agency. Spivak’s argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is that in their marginal positions, the subaltern subjects cannot speak and they cannot hear. Her argument implies that the voice of the subaltern is always subsumed either by the imperial and/or the nationalist powers who attempt to represent her politically or in literary texts. She says:

One can just as well say the silent, silenced center of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, and the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat. (283)

In her essay, Spivak constantly highlights the silencing of the subaltern subject by the epistemic violence of colonialism and patriarchy. For instance, her focus on the sati and the death of the widow as symbolic of the condition of the subaltern occludes focus on her death and not the act of dying as an expression of agency neither does Spivak take cognizance of the lived experience of the gendered subaltern.

By focusing on the narrative voice(s) in *Flee Mama Flee*, the study reads against Spivak's argument that the subaltern can neither speak nor be heard. To achieve this, the study focuses on the voice(s) that seek to represent the subaltern. Thus, in literature as opposed to other disciplines such as history, the multiple voices and even the silences in the narration offer avenues that writers can represent and critics can find subaltern agency.

This especially through the way the representation is structured by the narrator's race, social class, age and gender. The narrative of *Flee Mama Flee* has two narrators; a child narrator, Elizabeth Mumbé and white woman, Mary May. Since the two narrators are also the protagonists in the stories they are narrating, they are autodiegetic narrators. It is through their eyes that the events in the novel are revealed.

Through the choice of the first person narrative voice and the voice of a child, Mulwa uses aesthetic distancing as a strategy to critique the adult world. There is an illusion that the reader gets through the child narrator. What she observed others do, what she heard them say. In such a case then, Mumbé's narration becomes a kind of testimony of what she witnessed happen to her, her mother and/or her father. He is able to delve into the violent history of colonialism and slavery. Although by the time she was born, slavery had ended, the references to slavery demonstrate how it has influenced the identities of her mother and others. Her narration at the beginning of the novel makes a paratextual function that links the colonial experience to the heritage of slavery. Although slavery had officially ended and there are no slaves in the novel, Mulwa seems to point to slavery as integral to the identity formation at the mission center. The mission center that had rescued slaves had been turned into colonial settlements, where the inhabitants lived at the mercy of the white administrators.

Through Elizabeth's voice, Mulwa depicts, Musyoka as incapable of representing the subaltern (politically), because he has internalized racism. He is the authority that she missed in her growth. The image she paints of him is one that is submissive to the colonial authority, yet one who was success adorable. His return gives their home, the image and semblance of a family that she never got as a child. However, this happiness is short lived since he started behaving like Mackenzie. Elizabeth has developed a perception of who her father was, "a pretender. She is able to discern his behavior, which she links to the behavior of Mackenzie. Through her voice, she not only reports but also unknowingly passes judgment on her father. Writing in *The Child Narrator*, Muchiri notes that the "irony of a child narrator is that she/he, mostly does not realize the issues she/he registers in her narrative". This is because as "a child she does not understand the adult world, she therefore "can only report, naively but truthfully, what she observes" (Muchiri, 25). Thus, the reader understands that Musyoka had started mimicking the white colonialists. Therefore, he could represent the subaltern (politically) as he wanted because his education had alienated him from her.

Through Mary May's voice, Mulwa explains the life and experiences of May and how this motivated her actions. She is the daughter of an Irish man; her father was a soldier that died in the war with the British, her brother died in the First World War fighting for the British. She was born in Ireland but studied Subaltern studies at Oxford University. The invocation of Mary May's Irish ancestry, Mulwa highlights the history of Irish colonialism and war of liberation against the British. Besides, this information breaks the view the whites were a homogenous group. This is because her consciousness is associated with the missionaries and the British Empire that brought her to Africa, by birth her consciousness lies in the subjugation of the Irish people by the Britons. Due to her experiences, her academic endowment and, her empathy for

the black women, Mary May understands the condition and the history and experience of the gendered subaltern. Therefore, she qualifies to speak for the gendered subaltern, as she does in her narration, which as Elizabeth notes forms part of Mary May's autobiography.

By using Mary May's voice, Mulwa seems to be using her voice as a strategy of establishing dialogism with earlier writings by the likes Karen Blixen and Huxley. In these settler narratives, the land and space seemed significant and are represented in more detail than the inhabitants are. When they referred to Africans, it was usually stereotypical. This demonstrates in the construction of Mary May's account, Mulwa is aware of these works. Read in this manner, then the revisionist thrust of the novel can be appreciated.

Towards the end of the narrative, Mary May portrays the hypocrisy of British colonialism in Africa. She demonstrates the irony of the British occupation and civilization and how they drafted the African young men into the First World War to fight a war that they (Africans) did not understand. Although the war was a great historical event, it is summarily presented in the novel. Here again, its reference does not come from the magnitude of the war: it is premised on how it touches on and influences on the lives of the female characters in the novel. In her narration, Mary May makes references to the construction of the railway that had now reached Nairobi, consequently opening it and the highlands to the gaze and eventual occupancy by the white settlers. She juxtaposes these developments with the displacement of the people from their lands. Another consequence of white settlement was the introduction of the taxes, something that was punitive to the communities. This taxation is partly what led to resistance from the local communities.

The choice of the first person narrative voice, however, is beset by the challenge of subjectivity. As a child narrator, Elizabeth Mumbo's voice is limited because as Muchiri observes in *The*

Child Narrator, the child narrator is inexperienced and mostly, he/she does not understand the implications of his/her story. Further notes that in an effort to minimise this limitation, towards the end of the narrative, Lamming “splits the narrative into different but complementary narratives” (40). In *Flee Mama Flee*, Mulwa alternates her narration with that of an adult, Mary May. He splits the narrations into those by Elizabeth Mumba and Mary May, with an introductory at each split telling the reader of who is going to narrate. For instance, it is through Mary May’s voice that the reader gets to understand the colonial administrators’ construction of Kaveni in the meeting meant for whites only. It is in this meeting that apart from his hatred for Kaveni, Mackenzie was afraid of her. However, Mary May’s voice while novel in the African novel is beset with the dilemma that the white woman faces in telling the African experience. As much as Mary May shows her commitment to ‘unlearn her privileges’ as an immigrant and intellectual, her bio-geographical experiences limit her observations. Aware of this limitation, Mulwa incorporates other voices into the narration.

Abdulahi’s voice is initiated when Mary May and Elizabeth walk into his premises where he sells his drawings. He recognizes the resemblance between Elizabeth and her mother, Kaveni mother whose portrait hang on one of the walls. Kaveni was his former slave who killed his wife and ran away. She was presumed to have died in river Kilele. Thus, the portrait brings to memory master/slave relationship and the experiences of slavery in *We Come in Peace* such as the memories of the death of his wife, Amina, the public flogging of the Maqua woman, and his love for Kaveni. Abdulahi further explains that the gloom in his house was caused by Amina’s barrenness and his intention to marry Kaveni.

In the narration of his memories and the desire to revenge, Abdulahi is portrayed as suffering from trauma. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* observes that traumatic memory usually

occurs after the event. She further notes that the victims of traumatic memory do not understand the experience on the spot; rather, they are disabled to recognize that this is trauma and when they express it, they simultaneously express that of the other (8). The portrait unlocks Abdulahi's desire to revenge for his wife while simultaneously manifesting his haunted self that is linked to the Maqua's death. Before her she was flogged to death, the Maqua absolved Kaveni from the murder, arguing she did it in her self-defense. What haunted him was her act of self-sacrifice in order to save Kaveni, and how she forgives him and says, "You were kind, go now before they kill me" (140). Her voice represents power to defy the power of the master over the black female body. Though they could inflict pain on her body, they could not suppress her consciousness. Thus, his voice expresses the voice of the Maqua woman.

Although Mulwa sympathetically characterizes some of the white characters such as Father Beaumont, Mary May and Mackenzie's wife, he portrays Mackenzie as a villain and uses him to represent the irony of the British civilization that the Britons used to justify their occupation of Africa resistance to colonialism/ slavery and the patriarchal order. Besides, Mulwa uses Abdulahi's voice to demonstrate the possibility of change and acceptance of his (Arab) role in the slave trade. Abdulahi's sarcastic reference to the presence and role of the Britons in the slave trade, their colonialism as a veiled form of slavery demonstrates Mulwa's attempt to distance himself from the context to speak some truths and subtly call for historical clarification on the contributions and roles of the different groups in the slave trade.

Through the voices of Mackenzie and Musyoka, Mulwa portrays the contending voices of the imperial and elite nationalist attitudes. For instance, Mackenzie's first encounter with Kaveni is narrated through the first person narrative voice. He says of her "I have been on the high seas and all lands over which our Imperial Majesty holds dominion, but I have never met a native

specimen such as she” (27). Through his voice, reader can see Kaveni as constructed as an object opened to his Imperial control. Through his utterance, he ‘others’ her as black woman, who is racially and historically disadvantaged. Mackenzie constructs Kaveni as a subaltern.

According to the male voices, Kaveni is supposed to take the name Angelika, because for Musyoka, she is his wife and should therefore take orders from him. While for Mackenzie, this would prove assent to their masculine power and Eurocentric superiority over the natives. This is a situation that draws the wrath of the men upon her, a situation with the potential to make her victim. She is therefore a victim of colonialist and nationalist systems that have little regard for her voice. However, her agency seems to defy both Mackenzie’s and Musyoka’s construction of her.

Mulwa subverts Spivak’s argument that female subaltern cannot speak. Kaveni is represented as a female who has developed a consciousness to question the morality of Christianity and has developed the vocabulary of the elite. For instance, she tells Mackenzie: “Yes, I can speak your English very well Mr. Mackenzie! And I’m not a new addition to anyone’s Kraal, nor am I a cow or heifer to belong to one. My name is Kaveni wa Musyoka” (27). In light of Spivak’s argument, Kaveni does speak both literary and figuratively and therefore cannot be a subaltern. However, her subalterneity is caused by the inability to be heard by Mackenzie.

The silencing of Kaveni in *Flee Mama Flee* is therefore part of the narrative design of the two texts. At the beginning of the novel, Mumbe indicates that she was urged by her mother to tell the story of her mother’s people (1). This introduction is a paratextual reference to Kaveni’s story in *We Come in Peace*. By making her silent, yet the central figure of narration in the novel, Mulwa presents Kaveni as speaking through her silence. This silence is attributed to her condition of sickness. It is in through her silence as she lay in the hospital, the dirges she sang

about her people and her 'madness' that Kaveni speaks. Her condition of 'temporary madness' demonstrates a sense of silence from the normal world, she coils into a world of her own consciousness. A world in which neither Musyoka nor Mackenzie could control her.

Besides, her silence can be attributed the inability of language to express pain. Elaine Scary in *The Body in Pain* notes that for the one experiencing pain, it is real but for the one 'hearing' pain there is no pain (4). While in this condition, and since as Scary argues nobody can understand pain, the other voices talk about her, or her letters thus creating a dialogic situation, which ultimately, in my opinion, reflect on the postcolonial and feminist subjectivities, associated with slavery and colonialism. Her silence remains a cohesive strategy that echoes the title of the novel *Flee Mama Flee*. Figuratively, Kaveni is speaking through her silence. Through her traumatic seizures and hallucinations, Mulwa portrays the effects of the violence associated with slavery, colonialism and patriarchy. The narrative silence that Mulwa creates to disrupt the control and self-affirmation that Kaveni seems to express. Mulwa shows that despite her strong character and ability to 'speak' Kaveni's characterization is bridled with complexities that are not visible at first. The silence also echoes the oppressive forces that she needs to flee from. In this case, the title carries tones of agency foregrounding the ability of the woman to come out of her situation.

By using the other voices of whites and that of Abdulahi, Mulwa seems to be insurrecting the silenced voices. Abdulahi's voice highlights the Asian question that has been part of the debate in nationhood. The voices of Mary May, Father Beamont and Mackenzie's wife, Veronica This also shows that not all whites were evil towards the Africans. There were others that were sympathetic to their cause, yet their voices have been ignored in both the colonialist and nationalist narratives. By restoring these voices into Kenya's postcolonial history, Mulwa

contributes to the insurrection of subaltern agency. This is particularly significant for this study, since these voices speak against the epistemic violence of colonialism. In doing so, they challenge Mackenzie who is the official representative of colonial power. As whites, they could have remained quiet, yet they decide to speak for the gendered subaltern. He therefore disrupts the linear narratives of the colonial contact, suggesting that the colonial contact was engulfed in a complex dynamic of power distribution along racial, gendered and class divisions.

Conclusion

This chapter examined characterization and choice of narrative voice as the strategies that Mulwa employed in the novel *Flee Mama Flee*. The study explored how Mulwa appropriates the Fanonian model of the colonial encounter in his presentation of the male characters. Although the study is not strictly a cross-gender analysis, Mulwa uses their characterization, to inscribe patriarchy into the history of slavery and colonialism that women must fight. Both Mackenzie and Musyoka are caricatures of the systems that they represent. For instance, Musyoka is a caricature of the colonial African man and Lord Mackenzie as a stereotype of the European attitude towards Africa.

He models Fanon's, Bhabha's and Spivak's arguments in post-colonial studies to model his characters. He thus uses female characterization as a strategy of inversion. The female characters triumph while the male characters fail largely because of their patriarchal desire. Further, he uses dialogism to create a verisimilitude of the colonial experience. The significance of this dialogue is the way it breaks the silences surrounding the experiences of women. He insurrects the voices of a black woman Kaveni, a child Mumbe alongside that of a white woman Mary May.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The study set out to establish the extent to which Mulwa represents women as having agency within the context of slavery and colonialism. To evaluate Mulwa's re-imagining of the history of slavery and colonial domination, this study tested the hypotheses that: Mulwa employs narrative and characterization strategies to present female characters who are conscious of their condition. Although in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak paints a grim position of the female subaltern with the conclusion that she can neither speak and nor be heard, the study focuses on the way the subaltern can be rendered as having the ability to speak.

In constructing these female characters in his prose fiction, he breaks the master-slave grand narratives associated with the history of slavery and colonial domination. Instead, he constructs typical female characters and then presents them in a manner that foregrounds their agency and voice. He shows that despite their positions of marginality in the power hierarchy, the women could make decisions about the course of their lives and were actively engaged in the construction of their identities both at the individual and collective levels.

The distinctive feature in the novella and the novel is Mulwa's use of the first person narrative voice to tell the stories of women. I argued that apart from giving him the ability to tell the displacement and alienation from a woman's perspective, it is also a narrative strategy of aesthetic distancing through which Mulwa attempts to surmount his loss as a male writer and the male voices especially in the novel.

It is also significant to note that in the two narratives, Mulwa attempts to insurrect the silenced voices. To achieve this, in *We Come in Peace*, he uses the first person narrative voice and

monologism to voice the silenced story of Kaveni both as a child writing to the adult world and as a woman narrating herself into the history of the community and the nation-state. Besides, he presents ironic acceptance and laughter as strategies the female slaves engaged in as a way of survival, which however expressed resistance. Through these strategies, Mulwa inscribes agency into the female slaves demonstrating that despite of their conditions, they had ability to make choices over their lives.

In *Flee Mama Flee*, in addition to the narrative voice(s), he appropriates Fanon's, Bhabha's and Spivak's arguments in postcolonial studies to model his characters. He thus uses characterization as a strategy to portray the power dynamics in the colonial society and how this influenced the women. Further, he uses the narrative voices and dialogism to create a verisimilitude of the colonial experience. While *Flee Mama Flee* is similar to Dostoyevsky's novels, which Bakhtin argues, have "fully unmerged voices" (263), Mulwa's models ensure that the female voice is heard. The significance of dialogism in the novel is the way it breaks the silences: it insurrects the voices of black women Kaveni, Mumbe, and those of white women such as Mary May and Veronica, which are usually glossed over both in the colonialist history and nationalist historiography.

By comparing Mary May's characterization with the model of the postcolonial intellectual by Spivak, Mulwa seems to argue that the slavery and colonial experience opened Africa into the global and multicultural state of the modern world. By writing Mary May into this model, he writes about the experiences of other women. His writing thus transgresses the racial and cultural distinctions. He demonstrates the ability of women to empathize with others while also breaking the tendency to homogenize the whites by giving a voice to the white woman. His portrayal, while unapologetic to the colonial domination, attempts to portray the totality of

these experiences. He thus restores agency for Mary May and other white women whose voices have been glossed over both in the nationalist and colonialist historiographies. I examined Kaveni's characterization in relation to Spivak's model of subaltern agency. She is represented as Othered by both the white and black men. Yet, she is a woman that has developed consciousness because of her experiences of slavery in *We Come in Peace* and colonialism in *Flee Mama Flee*. I noted that her characterization is a subversion of Spivak's postulation in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In the construction of Kaveni, Mulwa subverts notions of subalternity by infusing revolutionary consciousness in her, both in speech and in her writings.

Further, Mulwa appropriates Okpewho's model of the epic and mythification to situate Kaveni within the Akamba oral traditions. He thus foregrounds her as a matriarch in whose individual experiences he invents an 'imaginary community' with her as the leader. He thus reclaims agency for her and positions her at the nexus between the family and the nation building. This is a subversive strategy on his part to envision women as active agents at both the family level and the political life of the nation-state. The significance of this subversion is that it erases the cultural socializations of gender roles. In Kaveni, there is a political matriarch whose stories echo defiance to the authority whether at family or political level that seeks to silence women.

Elizabeth Mumbe's characterization is based on Bhabha's model of hybridity. As a child of former slaves, she is a hybrid of both the European and African cultures. In this role, Mumbe is a metaphorical representation of the dual heritage that has characterized modern Africa and the world at large. At yet another level, Mumbe's narration and growth until she leaves for Oxford, she represents youth as a hybrid space through which the childhood and adult worlds can be eschewed. Her final outward journey is a representation the postcolonial migration as a motif

through which Mulwa widens the spheres of the woman from the domestic and national spaces towards the global society. By placing at the hybrid space, Mumbe develops attributes that would enable her to be 'at home in the world'.

Mary May and Kaveni are represented as foils of each other. They have undergone similar experiences of colonial subjugation, to the same colonial master: the British. They have developed a consciousness that seems to defy male supremacy and any form of subjugation. Mulwa uses their experiences to forge female bonding as a strategy of resisting patriarchy. Both Mary May and Kaveni are aware of their many differences: race, social class, culture, religion and their perspectives of life. However, they can "unlearn certain privileges" to appreciate each other and project agency for women amidst the differences.

By focusing on the two characters from diverse backgrounds, Mulwa seems to gravitate towards a multicultural and multiracial environment of the modern world. The two women are the sources of knowledge that influence the growth and development of Elizabeth Mumbe. She is thus a representation of the motif of postcolonial migration. She seems to live in the shadow of her mother. However, her mother's migration was caused by forceful experience, and hers is by choice to advance her studies. Mulwa thus highlights migration as part of the female agency. She is thus a child of two worlds having been fully grounded on the African values and the European values. Whereas Mulwa explores how the history of colonialism at the Kenyan was caused alienation on the children of postcolonial African states, he also highlights that the disruption of the African societies also opened new avenues for the 'othered' to exercise agency. For instance, education provides women with the power to become agents of their lives and to adapt to living in multicultural societies.

I noted that Mulwa is an African writer evaluating the impact caused by slavery and colonialism on the African individuals and communities. Thus, he is engaged with a postcolonial project that places him alongside writers like Ngugi, Achebe and Soyinka who inscribe agency to marginal spaces. At the same time, Mulwa privileges the experiences of women and tells the narratives from a woman's perspective. In doing so, he can be placed alongside female writers such as Macgoye, Ogot and Ogola, who as Wanjala (2012), Stratton (1994) and Odhiambo (2001) respectively argue attempt to write the woman into the national project. Thus, Mulwa's prose fiction is at the nexus of postcolonial and feminist studies. By examining the depiction of the female characters, I argue that Mulwa's prose fiction functions at the level that Elleke Bohemer in *Stories of Women* identifies as "a form of negotiated mediation between three options. Neither a rewriting of masculine myths authority alone nor the fabrication of female icons and spaces nor even gestures of universal solidarity based on shared oppression, but something of these three" (386).

Mulwa is a university don, director and prominent theatre personality, he is therefore part of the male intellectual elite. Carrying out research and writing about the lives of ordinary black and white women is part of 'unlearning his privileges' to speak for the subaltern. In addressing the young readers, by writing in a manner which Muchiri in her review observed does not conform to the discourse of history taught in schools, Mulwa performs the role of a teacher whose role Achebe explains in *Hopes and Impediments* is to 're-educate and regenerate' his society (45). By breaking the silences in the discourse of history, Mulwa is then re-educating the future leaders on the salient aspects of the African story. His contribution to the feminist project is therefore characterized with what Spivak "enlightened empathy" (qtd in Landa n.d 13).

In a personal interview (09/03/2016), Mulwa noted that he carried out archival research before the writing of the two texts. Further, he noted that the narrative in *We Come in Peace* is a true story of a young girl that escaped slavery at Mtito Andei; I would therefore recommend the use of New Historicism and other theoretical approaches to the works. Besides, there is a preoccupation with women in Mulwa's works both drama and fiction, I would therefore recommend a study on the depiction of women in across his literary oeuvre as an evaluation of his social vision.

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