

**NARRATING (IN)VISIBILITY IN THOMAS LETANGULE'S  
*TRAILBLAZER***

**SPOURTINAH MORAA NYAMWEYA**

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THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
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## DECLARATION

I declare that this project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any university.

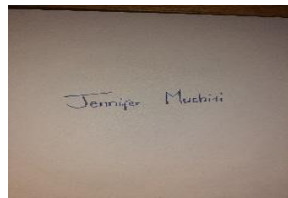
**Signed** 

**Date:** 24/09/2021

**Spourtinah Moraa Nyamweya**

This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors:

First supervisor



**Signed:**

**Date:** 08/11/2021

**Dr. Jennifer Muchiri**

Second supervisor

**Signed:** *Masumi Odari*

**Date** 08/11//2021

**Dr. Masumi Odari**

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## **DEDICATION**

**This project is dedicated to Ken my husband and partner in this journey of life**

Thank you for the invaluable support, love and guidance. Thank you for always being there for us.

**To my children:**

Paula, Mariah, Barack, Vanessa and Steve, I thank God so much for your love and support.

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## ABSTRACT

This study interrogates how Thomas Letangule narrates his story as a Kenyan public servant from a marginalized background. I analyze the autobiographical strategies that he employs in narrating the self, the Ilchamus community and Kenya as a country. Further, my study seeks to examine the autobiographical elements manifest in Letangule's autobiography, *Trailblazer*. The study objectives are: to examine the elements of the autobiography as manifest in Letangule's life narrative, to interrogate the autobiographical strategies and language choices the autobiographer employs to construct himself and his community and to analyze the personal, communal and national issues that Letangule discusses in his autobiography. The study is guided by the theory of autobiography and the theory of narratology.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One constitutes the background of the study. Chapter Two interrogates the nature and functions of the autobiography and sets the foundation for the study while Chapter Three offers a discussion on the elements of the autobiography as manifest in *Trailblazer*. Chapter Four analyses the strategies of narrating the self, the community and the nation employed by Letangule to narrate his story. Chapter Five provides the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research on the field of Kenyan autobiographies. The study concludes that Letangule tells his story in the form of a battle narrative as a way of constructing his identity as a warrior and the defender of the rights of his Ilchamus community. The study adds to the body of knowledge on life writings in Kenya by interrogating the narrative strategies employed by the marginalized to narrate their stories. The study recommends further research on Kenyan autobiographies through a comparative study of the life narratives of individuals from marginalized backgrounds and from non-marginalized backgrounds. Further studies can also be undertaken by comparing the narrative strategies employed by men and women from marginalized backgrounds.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

To write one's life story, to produce an autobiography is a very deliberate step on the part of the autobiographical subject because it is an exercise that involves embracing vulnerability. To share your story is to invite people to examine the most intimate spaces and spheres of your existence and life. Therefore, this act of baring one's life to strangers, allowing the public into what is private; to let the public interrogate and scrutinize your life at such intimate levels must have a greater inspiration, motivation or purpose. People write to inspire others because they consider themselves role models or exceptionally gifted and great achievers, one can also write to correct a perception or and to settle a score.

The current study is a critical analysis of Thomas Letangule's autobiography, *Trailblazer*. The autobiography is a literary genre that is unique for it centers on lead characters that are non-fictional. It can also be read as histories of the self, family, community, race, nation and the continent of Africa at large. Historical records and realities define the autobiographer; the autobiography stems from existing history. The autobiography is an account about oneself written by the self, the center of interest here is Letangule, but it is a fact that as an individual, he does not exist marooned and sheltered from the world; events and happenings outside his individual life have impacted on him. The external world, his community the Ilchamus and country Kenya have influenced his life. This autobiography centers on the issues of the community that the narrator comes from.

There are various forms of autobiographical writings such diaries, letters, memoirs and reminisces. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A guide for interpreting life Narratives* argue that the authors of autobiographies write to present a history of the self and not history as observed by others. They observe that the writer becomes in the act of writing, the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation (5). In the Greek language, “autos” signifies self, “bios” life and “graphe”, writing. When we put these words together, we get “self-life writing”. French theorist Phillippe Lejeune points out “we call autobiography the respective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life especially upon the story of his own personality” (1). Therefore, my understanding of the autobiography is that it is the story of an individual’s life that is written by the subject himself or herself. This is the definition I have used for the entire period of this study.

This study sought to analyze how Letangule projects the visible and invisible attributes of his life as a public servant and a member of a small marginalized community, the Ilchamus. I explored the autobiographical strategies and language choices he employs to construct the self and the Ilchamus community. Letangule was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1968 in Ng’ambo village which is on the South West of lake Baringo. In his early education, he attended Ng’ambo primary School, later went Perkerra Primary school and then proceeded to Marigat High school in 1984. He later joined Sacho High school for his O-levels which he cleared in 1989. Letangule joined the University of Nairobi where he pursued a degree in Law and graduated in 1993. After he completed his pupillage, the writer proceeded to the Kenya School of law and was later admitted to the bar as an advocate of the High court of Kenya on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1996. From then onwards, he went into private practice and formed his own Law firm; Letangule and Company Advocates in October 2004. He has written

a number of legal works and articles but *Trailblazer* is his first book. Apart from practicing law, Letangule served as a Commissioner for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the electoral body for the Republic of Kenya from November 2011 to 2016. The autobiographer is an expert in Human rights law, Constitutional law, Electoral and Commercial law. He chaired the IEBC dispute resolutions tribunal in the March 2013 General Elections where they handled over 2000 complaints from political parties' nominations. Other than being the first from this community to write his life narrative, he is also the first person so far from the Ilchamus community to occupy a high public position or straddle the Kenyan public space.

Letangule comes from the Ilchamus (also known as the Njemps) community in Kenya who are Nilotes. They are an offshoot of the Maa speaking people who live in the South and South East of Lake Baringo. Michael Odhiambo in his "Ilchamus versus the State: Vulnerability, Litigation and Resilience Building in the Baringo Lowlands of Kenya" notes that the name Ilchamus originates from the folklore of the community. The first explanation is that it comes from the word "*Amusoo*" that loosely translates into "foresight or having the gift of prophecy" thus giving the Ilchamus the identity of a community that is far-sighted and visionary (194). The other explanation according to Odhiambo is tied to the migration of the Maasai community. He observes that according to the Ilchamus, as the Maasai moved over long distances, one man got overwhelmed by hunger and was unable to continue with the journey, he was left with his family near the shores of Lake Baringo. In this brief rest, he caught fish, a new delicacy and it rejuvenated him so much that he exclaimed, "*mamus ajo aatung'ayeki*" that translates to, "I am glad I was left behind because I now have food and wont starve to death" (196). This is the person regarded as the founder of the Ilchamus community in this particular folklore.

The Ilchamus have been settled around the Lake Baringo ecosystem for centuries as is manifest in their folklore and oral history. Their economic activities have historically included foraging (hunting and gathering), fishing, ivory trading and irrigation agriculture. The climatic condition around the lake Baringo ecosystem is largely dry and arid experiencing regular droughts and disease outbreaks. This community had a form of communal irrigation agriculture before British colonial rule of Kenya; they constructed dams to create artificial reservoirs along the local river. To control the irrigation farming, they had members of their community tasked with organizing the labour and duties since the irrigation schemes were communally owned. However, colonization led to the reorganization of the Ilchamus' economic activities to focus more on pastoralism from 1930s. The British used the Ilchamus morans as part of the troops deployed to pacify the Kerio valley communities; Turkana and Pokots and as a reward for their military duty to the colonial administration, the Ilchamus received the captured livestock. David Anderson in his article "Massacre at Ribo Post: Expansion and Expediency in a Colonial Frontier in East Africa" observes:

The British misadventure at Ribo post even accelerated the decline of the Ilchamus settlements as a reliable center of food supply on the caravan route. The cattle gained from the Ilchamus involvement in the punitive raids in the Kerio valley were used to enable a shift in production away from cultivation and towards livestock husbandry. (54)

The Ilchamus had a system where all men had to undergo compulsory military training known as moranism. This was meant to bolster their troops since the community was surrounded by larger and militarily superior communities such as the Maasai, Pokot and Turkana. At any given time, the Ilchamus would have a group of young men or age set operating from the wilderness around their settlement for a prolonged period of time as part of the military training. Exit from the wilderness for the moranism into junior elders would only happen when the next set of morans

were commissioned, usually after circumcision to go to the bush. Political leadership among this community was determined by clans and strictly mapped out for men. They had several clans each with its own totem and politico-social area of specialization. Marriages are ideally polygamous among the Ilchamus community.

Letangule artistically narrates his life story as a prominent Kenyan whose extraction is on the sides and not the center of the country. Interrogating the text may likely precipitate a totally different and hitherto unheard section of Kenya's history. My thinking is that this particular text gives the reader the complete picture of Kenya thus making it possible to understand the country better. More importantly, this life narrative opens up the Ilchamus people, their cultural identity and this in my view, makes the autobiography a genre that makes individuals and communities visible or demystified. The current focus is on what Letangule as a prominent Kenyan public servant has to say about his life, his community and Kenya as a country. In doing so, I will examine the autobiographics of his life narrative to identify the specific language and autobiographical strategies he engages in to tell his story, to precipitate his visibility and invisibility as a Kenyan public servant of Ilchamus heritage.

My lead argument is that this text crystalizes the concepts of visibility and invisibility by utilizing specific language and formal choices; that in his quest for identity and a voice, Letangule becomes very selective in terms of the language he employs in this personal narrative. Letangule is involved in an exercise to showcase his life achievements as a public servant in privileged national spaces and at the same time, he uses the text to discuss the othering or exclusion of his people the Ilchamus by successive post-colonial Kenyan governments. Letangule is the first from his community, the Ilchamus to write his life story and this invitation to interrogate his life and personal history is also by extension an invitation to examine the history, cultural identity and existence of the Ilchamus

and Kenya as a country. To document his life narrative therefore could be said to be an attempt by Letangule to inscribe himself and his community into the political edifice called Kenya and its national narrative. Visibility is about the concepts of identity and recognition by the society as a valuable, equal and important member worthy of respect and dignity; it is about having your voice heard in a society that is dominated by others. Invisibility on the other hand involves the construction of political and social structures that silence a person's or community's voice. It includes the deliberate exclusion and bastardization of the existence of others thus robbing them of their dignity and recognition as equal members of the society.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

My study seeks to add to the body of knowledge on life writings in Kenya by examining how the writer constructs his identity, both private and public and how he claims his dignity and space as a Kenyan citizen of Ilchamus heritage. I interrogate the autobiographical narrative strategies the autobiographer engages in to narrate (in)visibility of the self and his community. I explore the autobiographical elements that are present and manifest in this text that make this personal story an autobiography. Lastly, my study examines the images of the Ilchamus community and the Kenyan nation that Letangule paints in his life story

### **1.3 Objectives**

1. To examine the elements of autobiography manifest in Letangule's *Trailblazer*.
2. To interrogate the autobiographical strategies and language choices that the autobiographer employs to narrate and construct himself and his community.
3. To analyze the personal, communal and national issues that Letangule discusses in his autobiography.

### **1.4 Hypotheses**

- i. Letangule employs various autobiographical elements in his life story, *Trailblazer*.
- ii. The writer employs various autobiographical strategies and language choices to narrate the self and the community.
- iii. Letangule uses his personal story as a platform to highlight and discuss personal, communal and national issues.

### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

The literary discourse on the genre of autobiography has been growing but the rate at which Kenyans who have occupied prominent positions produce life narratives is still slow. The autobiography is a unique genre that offers the reader the opportunity to access the mind and life of the non-fictional author or subject. The study of his autobiography gives us an opportunity to examine his life as a high ranking Kenyan public servant from a marginalized community. The writer served as a public servant, a Commissioner for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission from 2011 to 2016. Studying Letangule's autobiography contributes to the body of knowledge on life writings in Kenya by showing how those from marginalized backgrounds make a claim to human dignity, create and project their identity as well as negotiating for their place in the national space and narrative. As an autobiography, Letangule's *Trailblazer* helps us access the

Ilchamus community as well as the history of Kenya since the autobiography tells the story of both an individual and their community and nation. A study of his life narrative therefore could offer us a glimpse of the image of Kenya as seen from those who have largely operated from the point of marginalization. The autobiography as a genre allows the narrator to tell their life experiences in an artistic or creative way and therefore *Trailblazer* offers us insights into how those who have occupied prominent positions in public service but their roots are from marginalized backgrounds tell stories of their lives, self-worth and existence.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

In this study, I focused on the autobiographical elements and narrative strategies Letangule employs in *Trailblazer*. I sought to examine how this writer uses his life narrative to center and inscribe himself and his community into the Kenyan national narrative and public space. I also focused on the language choices the writer employs to narrate aspects of his public and private life; his visibility and invisibility. The study therefore limited itself to the critical appreciation of Letangule's life narrative. Letangule has published works on constitutionalism and law but for the purpose of this study, I limited myself to his autobiography because the central interest of my research is life narratives as a literary genre. Reference to any of his publications was for illustrative purposes only.

### **1.6 Literature Review**

My study is a text based practical criticism of a life narrative and as such, my literature review involved interrogation of critical and scholarly works on the genre of the autobiography as well as male writings in Africa.



Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* views the autobiography as a genre that is grounded on memory, the subject's memory and ability to recall their past life experiences. He notes that the autobiography involves "the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). To Abbs, the writing of an autobiography calls for a good memory on the part of the subject or author because it involves the recall or retrospection of lived experiences. Abbs further observes that "the impulse to write one's life story derives from the desire to enrich one's identity against the destructiveness of age" (16). The point Abbs is making is that the process of writing an autobiography is supported by a good memory and that it is also an attempt by the subject to construct and project their (unique) identity. Abbs' critical observations help me to examine how Letangule utilizes memory to recall and narrate his story. Abbs' views also enrich my study as I explore how this particular writer constructs and projects his identity.

Wilhelm Dilthey observes that the autobiography is a historically conscious genre because the writer's life experiences take place within a historical framework. To Dilthey, the autobiography cannot be extricated from history for it is a genre that recalls the history of the writer and their community and environment. He opines that "the autobiography occupies a central place as the key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and the very shape and essence of human culture itself" (quoted in Laura Marcus' *Auto/biographical Discourse* 137).

. The place of history in the study of autobiographies is further emphasized by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their book *Reading Autobiography* where they point out that, personal narratives are intertwined with the mainstream history. They are of the view that writing an autobiography is "a historically situated practice of self-representation" (14). The point Smith and Watson are making is that individual life experiences are shaped and influenced by the history of their environment. The observations of Dilthey, Smith and Watson about the place of history in a life

narrative benefit my research as I seek to find out how Letangule recalls and interprets the history of his community and the Kenyan nation in his autobiography.

Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* examines the place of an autobiographer's intention when it comes to writing their life narrative. She argues, "This principle of intention is what connects the author, narrator and protagonist" (2). Anderson argues that honesty on the part of the autobiographer is key in creating the concept of truth in autobiographies. The concept of intentionality on the part of the subject or narrator in autobiographies enriches my study as I examine the intention of Letangule in writing his life story.

Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to interpreting life narratives* argue that sincerity on the part of the subject is a determining factor in the creation of the principle of autobiographical truth. This points out that autobiographical truth is not a synonym of historical facts. They define autobiographical truth as, "an intersubjective exchange between the narrator and the reader aimed at producing the meaning of life" (28). Smith and Watson's views on the concept of autobiographical truth are echoed by Jennifer Muchiri in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* when she observes:

Standards of autobiographical truth appears in terms of the sincerity of the writers, evaluated through their seriousness of personality and intention of writing; subjective truth, that is the unique truth of life as it is seen and understood by the individual, historical truth is the truth that can be verified through history; fictional truth, that is artistry. Autobiographers cultivate autobiographical truth and cohesion, especially in terms of consistence of the narrative voice. (28)

Smith, Watson and Muchiri's observations on the place of autobiographical truth in life narratives benefits my research in that it will interrogate how Letangule as an autobiographer cultivates the concept of truth in *Trailblazer*.

Leigh Gilmore in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation* observes that the main reason for recording one's life narrative through the writing of an autobiography is to help the subject achieve self-actualization. Gilmore looks at the principle of self-actualization as being inspired by the need to create and project the autobiographer's identity. Gilmore's observations benefit my study as I analyze how Letangule constructs his identity as both a public servant and a private citizen.

James Olney in *Tell me Africa* focuses on the motives and functions of African Autobiographies with a specific focus on the male life narratives. His study analyses three autobiographies: Mugo Gatheru's *A Child of two Worlds*, Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*. Olney is of the view that the process of recording one's life experiences in an autobiography should be a creative endeavor, one that is immersed in artistic strategies in order for the final output to attract the interests of a varied range of audience thus making the subject's story known by many people. To Olney, writing one's story in a manner that is devoid of creativity results in a boring autobiography. Olney's study is beneficial to my study as I examine the strategies employed by Letangule in narrating himself and his community. I am also exploring and critically examining a life narrative by an African and I am interested in the specific artistic choices made in constructing their identity and that of his community.

On the place of artistry in life narratives, Henry Indangasi in "The Autobiographical Impulses in African and African-American Literature" emphasizes Olney's assertion on the intersection of the autobiography and art. Indangasi submits that in an attempt to infuse meaning to life, human beings love to tell their stories. He further notes that these stories that have characterized human societies are usually creatively packaged in order to be aesthetically appealing to the consumers, readers

and audience. To Indangasi, the power of the autobiography to affect and perhaps refine humanity is not found just in the content or ideas presented therein but also in the manner in which they are presented; the autobiography is both about the form and content; it is not just “what” but also the “how” . Indangasi’s views guide my study in examining the specific artistic strategies Letangule employs in the *Trailblazer* to tell his story and that of his community and the nation.

Makau Kitata in, “Rhetorical Strategies in the Novels of Chinua Achebe” notes that literary works tend to be inspired by cultural and historical debates and that writers engage in formal choices and strategies to respond to debates. He observes that Chinua Achebe is deliberate when it comes to the strategies he engages in to construct the narratives in the five texts: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A man of the People*, *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savanna*. Kitata observes, “The discourse elements that the author utilizes in crafting the narrator, characters, themes and setting are imperative in understanding the novels”(2). Here Kitata is underscoring the place of formal choices as the vehicle for communicating ideas in a literary work. As pioneer writer, Achebe was concerned with the othering or marginalization of Africans and their culture by the Eurocentric philosophy that was spread in Africa by European colonialists. My study is enriched by Kitata’s research in that I examine the strategies an African writer engages in to construct himself and his community in the face of historical events that have resulted in the cultural, political and economic marginalization of the Ilchamus community; to narrate the self and the community. Even though Kitata focuses on fiction, we are both interested in narrative strategies in literary output by African writers.

Jennifer Muchiri in “The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies” observes that the autobiography is a genre that works closely with history because the writer lives in a historical period and is affected by historical events and occurrences. To Muchiri, the life of a citizen is affected by the world around them; the autobiographer is part of a larger ecosystem. Muchiri’s research guides my study especially as I examine how the nation’s history is recalled in a life narrative.

Godwin Siundu in “Beyond Auto/Biography: Power, Politics, and Gender in Kenyan Asian Women’s Writings” notes that the genre of autobiography is used by the Kenyan women of Asian extraction to contest cultural and historical exclusion because they are doubly discriminated first as women in a patriarchal cultural set up and secondly as members of a marginalized community, the Indians in Kenya. To Siundu, the Kenya-Asian women engage in deliberate artistic strategies when writing their life narratives as a way of expressing rebellion and subversion against institutions and bodies that marginalize them. I find Siundu’s research beneficial to my study for I am interested in the autobiographical strategies a Kenyan autobiographer employs to narrate their life story.

Athanas Mutisya in his “Narrating Publicness in Selected Contemporary Kenyan Women’s Autobiographies” asserts that narrative structuring of life narratives or autobiographies is closely connected to the identity construction process by the autobiographical subject. Mutisya’s research is based on three Kenyan life narratives: *Run Gazelle Run*, *Mirrors of my Life* and *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks* by Ciarunji Chesaina, Rebeka Njau and Phoebe Asiyu respectively. To Mutisya, an autobiographer engages in various autobiographical narrative strategies to help them project certain identities they are proud of or celebrate. He hypothesizes, “I discovered that the structuring of life narratives was also tied to the construction of identity; especially the prominent

identity that the three autobiographers wanted to project to the reader” (204). I find Mutisya’s observations beneficial to my study for I am interested in the autobiographical strategies Kenyan autobiographers employ to construct their identities, private and public. His study also enriches mine as I explore how the Kenyan history is recalled in Kenya’s autobiographical writings.

Jennifer Nyambura Muchiri in *Women’s Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* notes that autobiographical writings are totally immersed in artistry as the autobiographical subject employs various artistic or formal strategies to help tell their story. Muchiri points out, “when studying the autobiography as a literary form, we consider aspects of art such as story, themes, narrative voice, characteristics and setting” (34). I find that Muchiri’s findings are very relevant to my study because they guide me in examining the narrative strategies employed by Kenyan autobiographers.

Jenipher Aching Otieno in, “Autobiographics in Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir* and *In the House of the Interpreter*” interrogates how Ngugi employs artistry in telling his childhood story in his two autobiographies. Otieno is of the view that the formal choices or artistic strategies are what make the stories captivating. She also proposes that it is as a result of the narrative strategies that Ngugi employs that make it possible for him to efficiently and effectively communicate his thematic concerns and ideas. Otieno notes, “His use of story, plot, characters, and the first person narrative voice as aspects of artistry results in aesthetic appeal and unity of his story in the narratives” (vii). Otieno’s research findings are helpful to me as I focus on autobiographical strategies employed by Kenyan autobiographers to tell their stories.

Beugre Zouankouan Stephane in her “Perception, Visibility, and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*” notes that years of slavery and racism towards the African-Americans conspired to

make the black community in America invisible. She notes that the systems of racial hierarchies vulgarized the humanity and existence of the black race in America reducing a whole community into statistics. She observes:

In White people's minds, "Invisible man is not a human being but a "walking zombie, a black amorphous thing, a walking personification of the negative, the mechanical man". He is only an object; visible in existence but invisible in human existence and in human society as a human being endowed by human beings' values.  
(7)

Stephane's observations benefit my study as I interrogate how Letangule who is a writer from a marginalized community makes claim to personality, character and identity as a bona fide Kenyan despite coming from a cultural background that has been largely invisible in Kenya's public sphere and national narrative.

Jairus Omuteche in "Mediated Plot in the Construct of the Theme of Struggle in Nelson Mandela's Autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*" is of the view that formal choices are central in communicating the content of a life narrative. To Omuteche, the autobiographical narrative strategies are very deliberate choices made by the writer and that it is these strategies that determine the success of a life narrative. Omuteche notes that Mandela utilizes elements of the plot to develop the theme of struggle against the oppressive South African apartheid regime. I find Omuteche's study benefits mine as I examine the life narrative of a member of a community that has been othered or silenced or marginalized by a larger political and economic edifice. The black South Africans were marginalized in their own motherland by the Boers on the basis of race and skin colour and my study analyzes the story of a community that has been pushed to the periphery by the British colonial administration and later by successive post-colonial Kenyan governments on the basis of their population size and culture.

Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* looks at the genre of autobiography as, “the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self” (7). This definition of autobiography directs our attention to the fact that the genre is dependent on memory as the subject recalls history by looking back into their past in order to understand themselves or their identity. Writing one’s autobiography thus becomes an attempt or strategy by the subject for the search for their identity. Abb’s research benefits my study as I explore the process and the narrative strategies an autobiographical subject employs in the process of creating or constructing their identity.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Homecoming* argues that although art is a creative endeavor and not history; it reflects and is informed by history in a big way. These observations by Ngugi help me as I examine how Letangule recalls Kenya’s history in his autobiography as a strategy of inscribing himself into the Kenyan nation and the national narrative, as well as to paint a certain picture of the country.

Evan Maina Mwangi in “Artistic Choices and Gender Placement in the Writings of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Grace Ogot” observes that formal strategies are a deliberate decision made by the subject and are usually born out of the need to express subversion and or resistance. To Mwangi, the expression of the narrative voice in an autobiography is dependent on the gender of the autobiographical subject. Mwangi’s study is beneficial to my research in several ways: like him, I am interested in the autobiographical strategies, because the autobiographical narrative voice is part of the formal choices in this genre. We are both interested in the specific narrative strategies an autobiographical subject settles on to craft their identity. Again, my study intersects with Mwangi’s since we are both analyzing the recall of Kenya’s history in life narratives by Kenyan writers.



June Chelule in “The convergence of the self and History in Ellen Jonson Sirleaf’s *This Child will be Great* and Joe Khamisi’s *Dash before Dusk: A Slave Descendants’ Journey in Freedom*” notes that the socially marginalized such as the descendants of slaves and women tell their life stories in very unique ways. To Chelule, these autobiographical narratives are meant to construct the identities of individuals who have been pushed to operate in the peripheral sections of the society. Chelule’s research enriches my study since I am interested in the artistic strategies individuals from marginalized communities or sections of the society engage in to narrate themselves and their community.

Tony Afejuku in “The Style of African Autobiography,” observes that when it comes to telling one’s story, there is no given or a specific style to be employed. He asserts that the autobiography is a literary output just like the novel, poetry or a play and as such, the subject can decide on whatever artistic strategies they feel suits their cause. Afejuku points out, “Every autobiographer has his or her peculiar style (perhaps we should say his or her own idiolect) with which he or she writes his or her own autobiography” (1). The point Afejuku is making is that each autobiographical subject has a choice when it comes to the particular artistic strategies they want to use to tell their story.

Marciana Nafula Were in “Negotiating Public and Private Identities: A Study of the Autobiographies of African Women Politicians” focuses on the issue of marginalization of women in political leadership in Africa. She observes that positions of leadership have been traditionally set aside for men and that women politicians find the political space very unfriendly. She then dedicates her study to the autobiographical strategies the women politicians employ to narrate their stories. This research guides my study as I explore how an Africa public servant from a marginalized background tells his story of self-worth.

Joseph Ilinga Katelo in “Autobiographical Elements in David Musila’s *Seasons of Hope*” notes that Musila begins each chapter of his life narrative with an African proverb. To Katelo, this is Musila’s strategy of celebrating his African cultural heritage as well as constructing his identity as an elder who has wisdom to dispense. The proverbs according to Katelo, are used to summarize each chapter, for instance in chapter one, Musila introduces his story by including a Sierra Leonean proverb: “If the cockroach wants to rule over the children, then it must hire the fox as a bodyguard” (31). The proverb is intended to communicate to a son that that if he wants something from the father, then he must look for his mother for help. Katelo further investigates the metaphor of hope in Musila’s autobiography and argues that Musila wanted to communicate hope to Kenyans. Katelo’s work guides my study as I examine how another Kenyan public servant, Letangule, narrates his life story and what he intends to achieve by telling his story.

The discussion on the literature review reveals a dearth in scholarship on Letangule’s autobiography and it is this gap that my study sought to fill.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

My study is principally a critical appreciation of a life narrative and I therefore anchor it on two theories: the theory of the autobiography and the theory of Narratology. The theory of the autobiography guides me in the appreciation of the unique nature and the functions of this literary branch. The discourse on the genre of autobiography has been traced to historian and philosopher Wilhem Dilthey in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dilthey argued for the place of history in the production of an autobiography. Later as the critical attention to the genre grew, other scholars added their voices. These include George Gusdorf who was Dilthey’s student. Gusdorf’s views of the autobiography was through the lens of Christianity Gusdorf looked at the process of writing an autobiography as being fueled by a human desire to connect with God. Others are Christopher Lusch, Linda

Anderson, Laura Marcus, Philippe Lejeune, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Peter Abbs, James Olney and Roy Pascal among others.

Pascal Roy emphasized the place of history in life narratives and the aesthetic or creative nature of autobiographies. To Roy, history plays a significant role in the creation of the concept of truth in autobiographical writings. Olney argues for the authority of memory as a defining feature of the autobiography. He argues that an autobiographer has to rely on the memory to re-live the past experiences that define a life. Abbs notes that history and autobiographical writings are inseparable because history helps an autobiography to define their identity.

The theory of autobiography is principally about the nature and functions of the literary field of life narratives. Key tenets of this genre include that the autobiography is a creative and representative field, which even though is a record of the individual's life experiences; it manifests artistic tendencies in that the autobiographical subject employs literary strategies to tell their story. This tenet helps me explore the specific autobiographical narrative strategies that Letangule employs in this text to tell his story. Another tenet of this theory is that the genre is immersed in history; that the autobiography is also a historical discourse. This tenet guides me to analyze how Letangule's life narrative reflects an alternative Kenya's history.

Autobiographical writings depend on memory since the subject narrator has to recall the past experiences in order to understand both the present and themselves. I will use this tenet to examine how Letangule engages in retrospection to narrate his life. Further, I seek to find what Letangule uses to aid his memory while recalling his lived experiences. Experience is a key tenet of the theory of the autobiography because the genre is principally about lived experiences. In narrating these

experiences, the subject is expected to be sincere and devoid of mercenary intentions; that the subject should be sincere while chronicling their life experiences. This will guide my study as I interrogate the writer's life experiences in the different fields he occupies. Critics like Laura Marcus in *Auto/biographical Discourse* observe that this concept or tenet of sincerity in autobiographical writings on the part of the subject should result from inner compulsion. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their book, *Reading Autobiography* point out that the tenet of autobiographical truth arising from the subject's sincerity should be. They refer to it as, "an intersubjective exchange between the narrator and the reader aimed at producing the meaning of life" (28). Autobiographical truth as a tenet is an offshoot of the autobiographical subject's integrity and honesty. This tenet of autobiographical truth guides my research as I examine the credibility of Letangule's life story and the strategies he engages in to create credibility in this text.

In addition to the above, the theory of the autobiography notes that the genre is guided by the principle or tenet of selectivity. This tenet of selectivity points out that in telling their stories, the autobiographical subjects are involved in a choice exercise; selecting what to tell and what not to. Muchiri in "The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies" argues, "The author deliberately selects what to include or leave out of the narrative, thus determining where and how the autobiography starts proceeds and ends" (32). This tenet guides me in examining what Letangule includes or excludes in his story in terms of personal information and national history.

The theory of narratology focuses on the craftsmanship of narratives or how stories are constructed. The theory is attributed to Tzvetan Todorov. Other notable narratologists include Claude Levi-Strauss, Susan Onega, Seymour Chatman, Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, Gerald Prince, Gerald Ginette and Jose Angel Garcia. Mieke Bal in her *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* defines narratology as, "a systematic account of narrative techniques,

methods, their transmission and reception” (5). Bal opines that a narrative is made up of the principle that she calls the fabula. In her view, the fabula is made up of five elements: the character, the events, time, space and focalization. Gerald Prince in *his Form and Function of Narrative* defines the narrative as, “the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence” (5). Prince’s definition of the narrative points out to the modalities of the transmission of the narrative or modes of transmission of the story from the narrator to the listener. These modes of transmission include language.

To the narratologists, the story is made up of what they call the elements of the fabula. These elements of the fabula include the actor, time, space, events and focalization or point of view. Key tenets of the theory include the fact that the coding or signs used to present a narrative are diverse and these include language among others. This helps me to analyze the formal choices used by Letangule in telling his story. I will also examine the other strategies he uses apart from language. The tenet of space helps me examine the setting of this autobiography and how the history of the space called Kenya is captured in this text. The concept of the actor in a story helps me interrogate Letangule as the character whom the story revolves around.

## **1.8 Research Methodology**

I employed close textual reading and analysis of the primary text guided by the theories of the autobiography and the narratology. Close textual reading helped me in identifying the autobiographical elements manifest in this text as well as the various autobiographical strategies employed by Letangule to narrate his life. I employed close textual reading in order to identify the specific autobiographical narrative strategies employed by the writer to narrate his life. I examined secondary materials; books as well as critical works on the genre of autobiography, Kenya’s history and the concept of marginalization. I interviewed the author to find out more about his

cultural background and also explore his reasons for writing his autobiography. The conversation I had with him was not intended to inform my reading or analysis of the text. As a reader, I just wanted to know him better and more as the author and as a person. I have included the interview in this study as an appendix.

## **1.9 Chapter breakdown**

The study is divided into five chapters:

### **Chapter one: Background to the study**

This chapter contextualizes the study in terms of the statement of the problem, the study objectives, hypotheses. It also contains the justification for the study, scope and limitation; outline the theories that anchor the study, the review of the available literature in order to point out the gap in scholarship that my study sought to fill.

### **Chapter two: The Autobiography**

This chapter focuses on the nature and functions of the genre of autobiography in general. This chapter contextualizes the study within the autobiographical genre. It is in this chapter that I define the genre “autobiography” and examine the unique properties that set it apart from other forms of writing. Consequently, the chapter forms the foundation of my study.

### **Chapter three: The Nature and functions of the Autobiography**

This chapter interrogates the nature and functions of the autobiography as manifest in the *Trailblazer*. Further, the chapter discusses some of the issues the autobiographer raises in his life narrative.

### **Chapter Four: Strategies of Narrating the Self and the Community**

This chapter discusses the various artistic strategies that Letangule employs to tell his story. The chapter is dedicated to interrogating how the story is constructed and presented. Some of the

personal, communal and national issues that the autobiographer discusses are also explored alongside the autobiographical strategies and language choices.

### **Chapter Five: Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the research findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the nature and functions of the autobiography since my study is situated within autobiographical scholarship and literary criticism. The chapter defines the term “autobiography” and examines the characteristics of the genre which distinguish it from the other literary forms. By examining the autobiography in terms of its unique properties and motives, the chapter lays the foundation for my study. This chapter comprises four subsections: the introduction, nature of the autobiography, functions of the autobiography and a conclusion. Many scholars have come up with different definitions of the autobiography. Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* looks at the genre as, “a retrospective prose narrative that someone writes, concerning his own experience, where the focus is on individual life, in particular the story of the personality. Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* defines the autobiography as, “a search backward into time to discover the evolution of the true self” (7). On the other hand, James Olney in, “I was Born: Slave Narratives, Their status as Autobiographies and as Literature” argues that the autobiography, “may be understood as a recollective narrative act in which the writer from a certain point in their lives, the present, looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the past history has led to the present state of being” (47).

From the above definitions, some attributes of the genre of autobiography are precipitated such as: that the autobiography focuses on an individual’s life experiences, relies on memory or retrospection, it is narrated in a creative way, it recalls and is anchored in history. Therefore, the autobiography comes out as a life story, a record of one’s life experiences written by the self. The author must be a real or non-fictitious character and the protagonist. Autobiography can also be



said to be an account of one's life as lived by the subject at a specific period. The subject must be the writer but one can choose to dictate it to someone else who then writes it. In the autobiography, the present is more important than the past though the autobiographer keeps referring to their past to inform their present.

Scholars and critics of this genre consider the year 397AD as the beginning of scholarship on the autobiography. It was during that year (397 AD) that St. Augustine of Hippo wrote his autobiography, *Confessions*. In his book, St. Augustine invites the reader into his intimate thoughts as he has what he considers a dialogue with God. He bares his actions and thoughts which he considers sinful. Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* argues that the confessions of French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1782) established the genre of autobiography known as the memoir. Rousseau includes historic events of his time in this memoir but the importance of his life narrative is to be found in his personal development through the retrospection. Lejeune is of the view that the narration of intimate and deeply personal reflections found in the memoirs of Rousseau and St Augustine are the forerunners of the theory of psychoanalysis.

Autobiographical writings exist in several forms such as memoirs, letters, reminiscences, diaries and autobiographies. Although memoirs and autobiographies are book length autobiographical writings, the two are not synonyms; they are slightly different especially in terms of the intensity of self-revelation. A memoir reveals more of the author's environment than the writer's life while an autobiography dedicates itself to the lived experiences of the subject's life. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* note that memoirs record particular events and memories that have occurred in a subject's life while the autobiography focuses on the writer's whole life. They observe that, "a biography or autobiography tells the story of a life while a memoir often tells a story from a life" (198). Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in*

*Autobiography* is of the view that a memoir focuses on a particular issue or experience that stands out in a subject's life while an autobiography focuses on the author's life in totality. Jennifer Muchiri in "The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies" enters the discussion on the differences between the two, the autobiography and memoir by pointing out:

The autobiography largely focuses on the self, but memoirs devote more attention to occurrences around and outside the writer. From the memoir, we learn a great deal about the society in which the writer or subject lives, but only get limited information about the writer themselves. (39)

## **2.2 The Nature of the Autobiography**

The autobiography as a literary genre has unique properties or characteristics that set it aside from other literary forms. These unique properties inform the nature of this genre. These properties can be seen in the diverse definitions of the genre brought out by various scholars. Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* defines the autobiography as "a search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). To Abbs the writing of one's life story starts at the present and they look back or retrospect and this means that the genre is founded on memory, the subject's memory. This reliance on memory is a unique property of the autobiography, in its absence; the subject has no story to narrate out of the lived experiences. As the writing of the subject involves going back to their past, it means that the subject must have a good memory to recall their life experiences in a clear and coherent manner. The subject is regarded as the ultimate authority in this genre and therefore this reliance on memory to tell or narrate the writer's story makes the autobiography a very unique literary form. Although memory or recollection is a private activity, it metamorphoses into a collective or group activity at another degree. Sources of authenticating the memory can be private such as photos and family stories. At the same time, the sources of memory can also be collective such as historical events, occurrences and public

documents. Muchiri observes that, “various communities of memory such as religious, racial, ethnic and familial develop their own occasions, practices and rituals of remembering which aid in preserving and passing memory” (29).

According to Pascal in *Design and Truth in the Autobiography*, an autobiography is “a review of a life from a particular moment in time by the author,” he further adds that “an autobiography is the shaping of the past to construct out of it a coherent story” (9). From Pascal’s definition, the autobiography can be said to be written in the subject’s adulthood as they look back (retrospect) into their past lived experiences, recalling and reorganizing them into a story. Olney in “I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographies and as Literature” notes that the autobiography is the product of recollection or retrospection in which the subject searches into their memory to understand who they are at the present. He argues that the autobiography “may be understood as a recollective narrative act in which the writer from a certain point in their lives, the present, looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the past history has led to the present state of being”(47). The point Olney is making is that the personal narrative comes alive through recall or retrospection and the reliance of memory in doing so.

Lejeune in *On Autobiography* underscores the place of memory in his definition of the genre. He points out that the autobiography is essentially centered on the life experiences of the nonfictional narrator. He opines that the lived experiences of the narrator are made alive and therefore accessible to the world/reader through narration that is highly dependent on the subject’s ability to recall. Lejeune looks at the genre as, “ a retrospective prose narrative that someone writes, concerning his own experience, where the focus is on individual life, in particular the story of personality”(22). Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* echo’s Lejeune’s views about the

place of memory in an autobiography in a personal narrative when they observe that, “the writer of an autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that of the experiential history” (16).

Therefore, in the study of autobiographies, memory becomes the ultimate authority since it is both the source as well as the authenticator of the lived experiences that make up a life narrative. Most autobiographers will write their life narratives in their adulthood and this means that they have to fully rely on the memory to recall and recount their past lives. Muchiri adds her voice on debate about the place of memory in life narratives by arguing that although the subject narrator is in charge of their life story, memory is not an entirely individual or private activity, and that to some degree, memory can be communal or collective. She opines that, “various communities of memory such as religion, racial, ethnic, and familial develop their own occasions, practices, and rituals of remembering which aid in preserving and passing on memories (29). Individual sources of memory may include family stories and photographs while communal sources may include historical events and documents. The autobiographical subject can therefore remember for the self or for the community.

Balch Marston in *Modern Short Biographies and Autobiography* notes that the autobiography heavily relies on memory and recollection in the process of narrating their lived experiences. He notes that “autobiographers recall life from the age that one acquires memory to create the impression that they can later reconsider. The autobiographer sets out to write his autobiography in a point of significance in his life that calls for looking back to discover what is significant in regards to self-revealed personality” (20).

The central focus of an autobiography is the lived experiences of the autobiographical subject thus experience becomes instrumental in this literary form. The author presents their life experiences to the reader through a retrospective narration. In narrating their life experiences to the reader, the subject is also involved in the process of getting to know themselves as they look back over their lives. This recall of the subject's life experiences also becomes a way of constructing the element of autobiographical truth. The reader is persuaded to believe that what is being narrated is the truth it is the life experiences of the writer. The author can also claim the authority of experience by imprinting their name on the cover page of the autobiographical text. Muchiri echoes Marston's arguments on the centrality of the lived experiences of subject in an autobiography. In her *The Female Autobiographical Voice in Independent Kenya*, she postulates:

An autobiography hinges on personal experience and is based on reflections. Due to this, its authors impose patterns on their lives and construct coherent stories out of them. Its underlying principle is the scrutiny of the self with outside happenings, persons encountered and observations admitted primarily as they influence the consciousness of the person on whose character and actions the writing focuses on.  
(2)

Abbs is of the view that a person's experience is the foundation of learning. He argues that, "education is not primarily concerned with the accumulation of facts and techniques but rather the expression and clarification of individual experience. The center of education resides in the individual" (5). The point Abbs is making is that interacting with an autobiography is a learning process for both the reader and the autobiographical subject.

The subjects in autobiographies also tend to recount their life experiences as if they are narrating to an audience thus giving the genre the property of an oral testimony. A subject's life experiences in a life narrative are recounted in the form of a journey since they start at some point and end in another. The journeys undertaken by the subject are physical as well as psychological. The subject

will undertake physical journeys from one geographical point to another and this comes with new experiences. As such, the physical journey can also become a metaphor for the learning process through which a subject moves from the innocence of childhood to the knowledge and experience that characterizes adulthood. The recounting of the narrator's childhood and the process of becoming an adult is also representational of growth. The psychological journey facilitates introspection for the subject as they search deep within themselves as they try to understand themselves. Jennifer Otieno in "Autobiographics in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Dreams in a Time of War: Childhood Memoirs and The House of Interpreter*" argues that,

The journey motif is an important component of narrating experiences by the narrators because through the journeys, the narrators reveal important points through their stages of growth. The journeys are also part of what molds the writers into what they become at the end of their narratives. (37)

The autobiography is a genre immersed in history for it recalls and records the history of the author as well as that of their community. George Misch in *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* puts forward the argument that autobiographies are individual stories that are immersed in history. To Misch, the personal story always intersects with history in life narratives. He goes on to point out that life narratives are reflexive of the historical time or period lived in. He argues that narratives "are bound always to be representatives of their period, within a range that will vary with intensity of the author's participation in contemporary life and with the spheres in which they moved" (qtd in Smith and Watson's *Reading Autobiography* 113). German philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey emphasizes the historicity of the genre of autobiography. He observes that the autobiography is historically conscious because the writer's experiences that make up an autobiographical text happen within a historical timeframe. Dilthey notes that the autobiography cannot be divorced from history and argues that "the autobiography occupies a central place as the key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and the very shape

and essence of human culture itself”(qtd in Laura Marcus’ *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism and Practice* 137).

Autobiographies are both products of and sources of history since the subject lives at a certain historical period and in recounting their life experiences, they document historical events, personalities and dates. The unique place of history in an autobiography is further emphasized by Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* where they note that personal narratives are intertwined with mainstream history. They are of the view that writing an autobiography is “a historically situated practice of self-representation” (14). The point Smith and Watson are making is that an individual’s life experiences are shaped by the history of their environment and society.

The autobiography may be immersed in and reflect history but is not history but a creative form that acts as a source of history. Although it reflects the historical or life facts of the subject and their society, it is not a mere chronological collection of facts (historical) but a creative work of art that manifests a wealth of artistry. The subject/author engages in creativity as they organize their life experiences into a coherent story.

Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* is of the view that “the reader does not merely take in historical facts but participates in an integrated succession of experiences” (23). The point Pascal is making here is that when a reader interacts with an autobiography, they are involved in the appreciation of a creative form because the autobiographer weaves a story from their life experiences. Pascal’s observations about artistry in the autobiography are echoed by Henry Indangasi in “The Autobiographical Impulses in African and Africa-American Literature” when he notes that the autobiographer is an artist who utilizes the strategies of storytelling to narrate their life experiences. Indangasi observes that,

The autobiography is a work of art and the writer of the autobiography being the artist he is, selects, reorganizes, and reshapes the facts of his life in order to communicate a higher truth. A photographic reproduction of these facts would indeed be unthinkable. (2)

Otieno adds her voice to the discussion on the place of artistry and creativity in life narratives when she argues that the autobiography is a creative piece. Otieno submits that; “the autobiography portrays characteristics which show its worth as a creative work” (vii). To Otieno, the autobiography is rooted in creativity because the author presents factual information by means of a creative story. While discussing the motives and functions of African autobiographies, James Olney in his book *Tell me Africa* points out the literariness of the autobiography. He argues that the aesthetics of the autobiography are as important as the content. He notes that a deliberate creativity and artistry employed by the writer of an autobiography makes the autobiography appealing to the reader.

Another unique trait of the autobiography is its insistence on the concept of truth. Truth exists in different levels and types and Muchiri identifies three types of truth: autobiographical truth, historical truth and fictional truth. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* define autobiographical truth as “an intersubjective exchange between the narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life” (13). The autobiographical truth is different from the historical truth in that it can be collaborated by cross checking historical facts. The narrator’s sincerity when narrating their story determines autobiographical truth. The writer cultivates autobiographical truth by deploying various strategies such as a consistent narrative voice, reliance on memory, intertwining the personal story with history, unrestrained narration of intimate experiences and the use of paratextual elements. Jill Ker Conway in *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* argues that one way of cultivating credibility or truth in a



life narrative is by having unrestrained narration of intimate experiences by the subject. This allows the reader to access the very private and intimate parts of a narrator's life. Conway notes:

The autobiographical tendency of inviting the reader to share the most intimate and embarrassing experiences of the author that relate to our own lives has an appeal to truth, albeit subjective, which invites us to reflect on ourselves. (14)

Laura Marcus in *Auto/biographical Discourse: Theory, Criticism and Practice* observes that autobiographical truth is not the same as historical facts. Marcus argues that an autobiographer opts for coherence in their story rather than correspondence as the criterion of truth. She notes:

Autobiographies are not to be regarded as objective narratives in general; their truth is to be sought not so much in their elements as whole works, each of which is more than the sum of its parts. Even the cleverest of liars, in his fabricated or embroidered stories of himself, will be unable to deceive us as to his characters. He will reveal it through the point of his lies. Thus in general, the spirit brooding over the collected material is the truest and most real element in an autobiography. (152)

Autobiographers also utilize paratextual elements as strategies of creating autobiographical truth in their narratives. The paratextual elements include letters, photographs, diary entries, preface and dedications. These paratextual elements help in corroborating the claims and assertions the author makes in the text. Daniel Chandler in *Semiotics for Beginners* notes that, “the various elements of the body of an autobiography are supported by other paratexts which bring out the meaning, coherence and offer autobiographical truth” (9).

The autobiography is selective in nature since the subject is the author thus enjoying the privilege of choosing what goes into their story. The writer determines where their story begins, how it develops and how it ends; the author is the ultimate authority. However, the reader of an autobiography is not a passive and they get to see and/or detect omissions, silences and gaps in the narrative. By examining the silences and gaps, the reader can make a judgment on the authenticity and credibility of the life story. Concerning the selective nature of the autobiography Pascal notes that, “in the face of the endless complexity of life, the selection of facts, distribution of emphasis, choices of expression: Everything depends on the stand point chosen” (10). The point Pascal is rising here is that the autobiographical subject has the ultimate control of their life story and they have the power to control the flow of their story. Abbs notes emphasize Pascal’s views on the selective nature of the autobiography when he points out that, “the authors deliberately select what goes into their autobiography” (7).

Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* argues for the place of intentionality as a defining feature of the autobiography. She examines the place of intention on the subject when it comes to writing their story. Anderson argues on honesty on the part of the autobiography, the autobiographer is key to the creation of the principle of autobiographical truth. The concept of intentionality makes it among the unique properties of the autobiography. Smith and Watson argue that sincerity on the

part of the autobiographer is also a determining factor in the creation of the concept of autobiographical truth.

The autobiography is also made unique by the fact that the writer is also the lead character or protagonist. The protagonist therefore is a nonfictional character and the principle focus is on the life experience of the subject (nonfictional narrator). Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* observe that there are differences between autobiography and fiction. They point out that an autobiographical subject deals with two lives: the one in public knowledge or known by people and the self that can only be felt from the inside. The nonfictional narrator is therefore availed of the opportunity to achieve self-realization and or self-discovery and they narrate their story and lived experiences. To Smith and Watson, the narrator is the life of an autobiography and that the subject's death marks the end of a life narrative. In fiction, the death of a character even if it is the protagonist does not lead to the end of the narrative since the character is different from the author.

The autobiographical narrative voice is another defining concept of the autobiographical genre. It is related to the concept of a nonfictional narrator subject in life writings. The experiences captured in a life narrative are told from the author's point of view. More often than not, the autobiography takes the first person pronoun, "I". The first person narrative point of view allows the subject to narrate their story in their own voice. Anderson in *Autobiography* notes that, "the first person point of view allows the writer to own and control the narrative so that readers get to know only what the writer tells them" (70). The narrative voice therefore helps the autobiographical subject to cultivate credibility in their story, thus the principle of autobiographical truth. William Zinsser in *On Writing Well* argues for the role and place of the narrative voice in an autobiography by noting that the choice of the first person pronoun is meant to signal to the reader that the narrator is about

to express very intimate details of their lives. Zinsser argues that, “the use of the “I”. “me”, “we” and “us” as the points of view in terms of narration signal to the reader that, “the autobiography is an intimate transaction between the reader and the writer and that should retain its humanity” (20).

The autobiography is an introspective genre for the subject has to look inwards even as they look backwards. It involves the process of self-analysis or self-examination, introspection as the narrator seeks to understand who they are. Muchiri in *Women’s Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* observes that, “the autobiography is a form of coming of age story in which the writer is initiated into adulthood (through) knowledge, experience and understanding. It is an effort to define and understand the self” (28). To understand oneself means that one has to go through the process of self-examination and analysis through introspection.

### **2.3 Functions of the Autobiography**

Related to the unique properties of the autobiography are the functions executed by the genre. Different people write their life stories for different reasons and therefore the genre of autobiography performs several functions or roles in a subject’s life and the society.

The genre can be used to speak for others or to provide a voice for the voiceless. It offers a platform for the autobiographical subject to speak for the self and on behalf of others. Indangasi in “Autobiographical Impulses in African and African-American Literature” argues that the autobiography plays an important role of providing a voice to the voiceless. Indangasi examines Camara Laye, *The African Child*, Ezekiel Mphahlele’s *Down Second Avenue* and Peter Abraham’s *Tell Freedom* as examples of personal narratives providing a society with a platform to speak up and express their social and political frustrations. Indangasi opines that “these (three) autobiographers in their narratives see themselves as members of an oppressed race championing

the cause of freedom” (116). What Indangasi is saying is that a life narrative may focus on individual’s lived experiences but it also ends up serving the community; the personal speaking for the communal. Nelson Mandela’s autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* although a personal story, gives a voice to the black South African society that had been silenced by the cruelty of the apartheid regime. In the text, Mandela narrates about being separated from those he loved one, the torture and pain of long imprisonment. He is giving a voice to the countless South Africans whose existence the bigoted Boer government sought to exterminate.

In *My Life as a Paraplegic* Esther Owuor gives a voice to a marginalized section of the Kenyan society, those living with disabilities. She narrates of the pain of having to depend on others even when it comes to private issues like dressing and grooming. She communicates the plight of those who find themselves silenced by health challenges and the society’s indifference. Writing one’s story communicates the desire to be heard and therefore can be a pursuit for a voice by the subject narrator. This voice helps shape the narrator’s identity as it offers them an opportunity to define themselves in their own terms. Through the writing of one’s autobiography, the subject can do away with racial, tribal and cultural stereotypes that tend to make a society a uniform entity. Writing one’s story is therefore a search for one’s space and place in a world occupied by billions of human beings.

Leigh Gilmore argues that the main reason for writing one’s life story through the writing of an autobiography is to achieve self-actualization. Self-actualization according to Gilmore is all about the creation and perpetuation of the subject’s identity. Mark Leary and June Price Tangney *Handbook of Self and Identity* observe that the concepts of the self and identity intersect and usually refer to the same idea. They observe that,

Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles; and social group membership that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past- what used to be true of one, the present-what is true of one now, or the future-the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obliged to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. (3)

The point Leary and Tangney are making is that as a subject, an autobiographical subject is involved in the process of creating and recreating themselves at every point of their lives and that this is fueled by the desire for humans to be unique. The subject is involved in a process of trying to understand themselves in relation to the society and the environment within which their lived experiences take place. The narrator is usually attempting to answer the questions, “who am I? “how did I become who I am today?”. To Smith and Watson, the introspection, self-analysis and the retrospection undertaken by the autobiographical subject are strategies and attempts to understand one’s identity and the process of becoming what they become in their adult life.

Abbs looks at the genre as, “a search backward into time to discover the evolution of the true self” (7). Abbs’ definition points out that the overall aim of an autobiography is to create and reveal the subject’s identity in their adulthood. The “true self” here meaning the identity at adulthood while “a search backward into time” is meant to underscore the place of memory or retrospection in the process of understanding how life experiences from childhood have combined to form the writer’s identity while “to discover the evolution” is meant to emphasize that identity creation is not an event but a process that goes on for a period of time. It is important to note that the process of writing one’s life story takes place during the subject’s adulthood and therefore the process of identity creation begins with the childhood experiences when the narrator comes into existence as a human being.

Life narratives can also be said to be attempts at therapy for the subject and the reader. It provides both the writer and the audience an opportunity to vent pent up pains and emotions in a safe way thus achieve healing. An autobiography and the process of achieving it is quite engaging as the writer or subject is forced to keep looking back in their past and also deep within themselves thus constantly confronting issues they may not have opened up about before. Those who have experienced traumatic occurrences get a platform to express the pain and begin their journey to healing and recovery. By reliving a painful past, one is able to understand their role in it and work on a strategy of mitigating the resurgence of such events in the future. Writing is also a strategy of getting back one's power that trauma robs of its victims,' writing provides opportunity to confront the pain once more, experience it and get over it. Traumatized individuals tend to narrate what is intimate and personal at a very high degree and this can be a form of confession. Rita Felski in her article, "Confessions" points out that this is, "A type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life"( Qtd in Smith and Watson, 83). Opening up one's life for scrutiny by the public takes courage and also triggers healing not just for the subject but also for their readers. Conway in *When Memory Speaks* argues that to experience a narrator's painful experiences pushes the reader to undertake self-reflection. This introspection by the reader enables them to relate with the writer and thus begin their own healing process.

An autobiography though a personal story can also be a source of history. This is because the autobiography reflects the history of the subject who lives in a community that is shaped and affected by history and historical events. Although a subject will recall history and how they get affected by the history while a historian will record historical events as an observer, they both archive historical events and issues. Reading an autobiography is accessing the past because like

historians, autobiographical subjects are involved in a process of assembling stories from the social, cultural, and economic archives that are time related or are to be found within a historical time frame. Muchiri in “The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies” notes that the autobiography is the history of both the subject and their community where they live. This intersection of the personal and history makes the autobiography a historical document. Jairus Omutече also contributes to the discussion of the autobiography being a source of history when he advances that the individual does not live in a vacuum but within a society shaped by history. In his, “Mediated Plot in the Construct of the Theme of Struggle in Nelson Mandela’s Autobiography: *Long Walk to Freedom*” Omutече notes that, “the autobiography not only records the events of a changing society at a particular time in history but also notes those events as they affect the autobiographer himself or herself” (40). From the discussion on the place of history in a personal story, it becomes evident that the autobiography performs the function of recording history.

A life narrative helps a subject to inscribe themselves in their society and human race. Abbs argues that, “the impulse to write autobiographies derives from the desire to enrich one’s identity against the destructiveness of age” (16). Autobiographers being human are aware of the uncertainties of life and the reality of death and thus they are pushed by the desire to be remembered long after they are dead. People write because they believe they have something beneficial to share with others or to offer to the world. Autobiographers see themselves as role models for their society as such, the subjects will recount their experiences, exploits and grand deeds to show how they are worthy of emulation. They may narrate how they were confronted by difficult situations and experiences and how they managed to achieve victory. Norman Denzin in, “Interpretive Biography” notes that, “the autobiographer seeks, through printed words to make a statement that



which survive him or her at the life's end" (77). Therefore, writing one's story could be said to be an attempt on the part of the autobiographer to achieve immortality since the written narrative lives on long after the subject is dead. That way, an autobiographer inscribes themselves in the society's memory. Subjects will also recall how they contributed to the wellbeing of their society as way of inscribing themselves in other people's lives and the society as a whole. By writing their story, a subject hopes to continue exerting influence over others long after they (the writer) is dead. By inspiring others to become better, the autobiography transcends into both motivational and transformational texts which are strategies of self-inscription by the subject.

Education is another motive or function performed by the genre of autobiography. This is related to the motive of self-inscription by a subject. A life narrative offers an opportunity to the society to engage in self-reflection. The opportunity to scrutinize another person's life offers the reader a chance to compare and learn, thus making the autobiography a pedagogical tool. This form of writing offers lessons to the reader on how to deal with certain problems, challenges and adversities. Those autobiographers who have experienced traumatic events will tend to include the steps they took to find healing and this is informative especially to a reader experiencing similar situations. Autobiographical subjects consider themselves exceptional people or even role models worthy of emulation and therefore, their stories are also meant to inspire and encourage others. Autobiographers will usually present themselves as role models and they tell their life stories because they are convinced that their lives can offers lessons to the society.

Life writing or autobiography offers a subject a chance to correct perceptions about themselves that the world may have. This form of writing functions as a tool of making matters straight. This is mostly by individuals in public positions or whose lives have been a subject of public scrutiny and who may feel that the world has a wrong idea about who they are. An example could be

Wangari Maathai whose divorce was a highly publicized affair. The husband accused her of marital infidelity and this touched on integrity as an individual, a mother, daughter and academician. She revisits this divorce proceeding in her autobiography, *Unbowed: One Woman's story* and points to the reader that there was never any infidelity and that it was an act of malice by her estranged husband.

Autobiographers may write their life story to unburden or make a confession. John Kiriamiti in *My Life in Crime* and John Kimani in *Life and Times of a Bank Robber* confess to their involvement in criminal enterprises specifically bank robberies. They narrate about their involvement in crime, the fast life of easy money, their encounter with the law through arrests, prosecution and imprisonment. They then narrate about their acts of penance, reformation and transformation into law abiding members of the society.

The genre of autobiography also offers a platform to the writers to talk about their connection to the society by discussing issues like culture and social philosophies in their life stories. As they tell their life story, they situate themselves within a certain society and environment by narrating how the society, its values and cultural sensibilities have shaped their life philosophy as individuals.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter interrogated the genre of autobiography as a unique literary form. It specifically focused on the properties and functions of the autobiography. The discussion on the genre of autobiography is important since it forms the foundation for my study. I note that the autobiography is a genre that is founded on the subject's life experiences which are creatively narrated, relies on the writer's memory, is immersed in history, and operates on the principles of

intentionality, truth and sincerity. It is also highly selective, allowing the subject narrator to determine what goes into the story. The autobiography focuses on a non-fictional narrator who is the author or protagonist. The autobiography involves the process of introspection or self-analysis on the part of the subject and that it relies on the first person narrative voice. The autobiography has functions it performs such as the recall and recording of history, provision of therapy, self-inscription, provision of a voice, helping the subject formulate their identity, correcting perceptions and underscoring the relationship between the autobiographical subject and their community. The next chapter will focus on the elements of the autobiography as manifest in Letangule's life narrative. It will situate the discussion in the autobiographical studies by exploring the nature and functions of the autobiography as manifest in the *Trailblazer*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ELEMENTS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *TRAILBLAZER*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the foundation for the study by interrogating how the nature and functions of the genre of the autobiography are manifest in *Trailblazer*. I will examine the elements of the autobiography as manifest in Letangule's story. Further, I will discuss the issues the writer addresses in his autobiography.

#### 3.2 The Autobiographics in *Trailblazer*

The autobiography as a distinct genre of literature has been defined differently by several scholars but what cuts across the different definitions are the unique properties. Pioneer scholarship on the genre is associated with historian and philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey observed that the study of life stories is immersed in historicity. Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* defines the autobiography as "a search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). To Abbs the writing of one's life story starts at the present and the subject narrator or writer narrator looks back or undertakes retrospection and this means that the genre is founded on memory, the subject's memory. This reliance on memory is a unique property of the autobiography. As the writing of the subjects involves going back to their past, it means that they must have good memory to recall their life experiences in a clear and coherent manner. The writer or subject's memory is regarded as the ultimate authority in this genre and therefore this reliance on memory to tell or narrate the subject or writer's story makes the autobiography a very unique literary form.

According to Roy Pascal in his *Design and Truth in the Autobiography*, an autobiography is "a review of a life from a particular moment in time by the author," and "an autobiography is the

shaping of the past to construct out of it a coherent story” (9). From Pascal’s definition, the autobiography can be said to be written in the author or subject’s adulthood as they look back (retrospect) into their past lived experiences, recalling and reorganizing them into a story. James Olney in “I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographies and as Literature” notes that the autobiography is the product of recollection or retrospection in which the subject searches into their memory to understand who they are at the present. He argues that the autobiography “may be understood as a recollective narrative act in which the writer from a certain point in their lives-the present-looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the past history has led to the present state of being”(47). The point Olney is making is that the personal narrative comes alive through recall or retrospection and the reliance of memory in doing so.

Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* underscores the place of memory in his definition of the genre. He points out that the autobiography is essentially centered on the life experiences of the nonfictional narrator. He opines that the lived experiences of the narrator are made alive and therefore accessible to the world and the reader through narration that is highly dependent on the subject’s ability to recall their past life experiences. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* echo Lejeune’s views about the place of memory in an autobiography in a personal narrative when Lejeune observes that, “the writer of an autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that of the experiential history”(16). Therefore in the study of autobiographies, memory becomes the ultimate authority since it is both the source as well as the authenticator of the lived experiences that make up a life narrative. Most autobiographers will write their life narratives in their adulthood and this means that they have to fully rely on his or her memory to recall and recount their past lives. Muchiri

adds her voice on this debate about the place of memory in life narratives by arguing that although the subject narrator is in charge of their life story, memory is not an entirely individual or private activity, and that to some degree, memory can be communal and collective. She opines that, “various communities of memory such as religion, racial, ethnic, and familial develop their own occasions, practices, and rituals of remembering which aid in preserving and passing on memories (29). Individual sources of memory may include family stories and photographs while communal sources may include historical events and documents. The autobiographical writer subject can therefore remember for the self or for the community.

From the foregoing discussion above and the definitions of the autobiography by various critics and scholars, several issues and traits of the genre are precipitated. I note that the autobiography is a genre that is founded on the writer subject’s life experiences which are creatively narrated, relies on the writer’s memory, is immersed in history, and operates on the principles of intentionality, truth and sincerity. It is also highly selective, allowing the subject narrator to determine what goes into the story. The autobiography focuses on a non-fictional subject narrator who is the protagonist. The autobiography involves the process of introspection or self-analysis on the part of the writer subject and that it relies on the autobiographical narrative voice that usually takes the first person narrative voice.

I proceed with the discussion by exploring how the elements of the autobiography are manifest in Lengule’s *Trailblazer*. Letangule recalls the dehumanizing nature of poverty in a human society. He recalls the struggles of growing up under extreme material deprivation, he narrates, “I would then don the *shuka*, tying it across my shoulder as the only piece of clothing on my body. That was sufficient covering as I went out to play or look after cattle” (61). He had to live with relatives because his poor father could not provide for his own family. Letangule also spent most of his

childhood with his grandmother and uncle, cut off from his own mother and siblings. He recalls how poverty made him grow up away from the rest of his family because the parents could not provide for them all. Poverty denied him parental care and love for some time in his childhood.

Through retrospection, Letangule recalls:

Due to lack of resources, my mother only moved with the first two children, though my sister later passed on. I was left in Ng'ambo in the care of my maternal uncle, Lekerde, and my grandmothers. My mother feared that I was too young and would probably starve at IIng'arua with no milk to feed me if the problems persisted. I had a better chance of survival at Ng'ambo where I would be well fed before my parents settled. (37-38)

Letangule also narrates how poverty degraded his great grandfather who had to be left behind by his European explorer employer, Lord Thompson. Having been left behind by Lord Thompson's Caravan, Letangule's great grandfather (Loltagule) was integrated into the Ilchamus community by the Lemerige family as a casual laborer doing menial jobs. A poor man was looked down upon and discriminated against by the society. More often than not, such a man found it difficult to have a family of his own since he needed bride price in form of cattle. What is more, the parents and family of the prospective wife had to be convinced that their daughter would not be rendered destitute by entering into such a union. Letangule narrates, "The local people had no problem assimilating a stranger. However, it was a tricky affair for any one of them to give their daughter in marriage to a stranger- and a poor one at that" (28). Since Letangule's great grandfather was a poor man, he stayed for a long time without a wife. Material deprivation dehumanized him, making him less of a human being and robbing him of his voice and human dignity. Letangule further narrates how poverty was like his family's heirloom; present in their lives with a relentless attachment. He notes that for the longest time, the lineage of his great grandfather Loltagule was associated with poverty. He narrates of his ancestry and their material deprivation that made them totally invisible in their community:

*Akuya* (grandfather) Mpapayei, recounted how they were born and brought up in in a lot of misery. Their cup of poverty was full, and they drank it one gulp after another, to the last, bitter dreg. It seemed to be their lot in life and they somehow could not break from the vicious cycle. They had no cattle. Their name was literally dragged in the dust, and associated with scarcity and lack. They took their full share of the whips and scorns of life. (29)

To have one's name dragged in the dust is to be obliterated from existence and therefore to be made invisible. Poverty causes invisibility by taking away people's dignity, self-worth, voice character and human respect thus denying one their identity as members of a society. Letangule observes that poverty and the resultant feelings of worthlessness create fault lines that cause family disintegration. He narrates of the difficult childhood under a drunkard of father. The inability to provide for his family pushed Meeme, their father to substance abuse as a coping strategy. He recalls how life was when they lived at the Perkera irrigation scheme, "He continued to drink heavily and was in constant fight with my mother" (37). Letangule notes that although he was lucky to have a tattered wrapper or *shuka*, most children walked around with only a single string of beads around their waist. Poverty among the Ilchamus community was compounded by the constant raids by their larger and more powerful neighbours.

The only personal belongings Letangule had was a *shuka* when the father came to pick him up, thus he did not find the need to go for it from home. He just left on the father's bike, a symbol of his destitution. In a community where cows were a sign of wealth, Letangule was poor and thus invisible, his dignity, identity and character had been robbed and he did not have a source of belonging as a human being. This poverty and invisibility did not just end here with the great grandfather Letangule; Mpapayei who is Meeme's father also inherited the deprivation. He was also dehumanized by poverty. Letangule narrates:



The tale of Mpapayei's parents, their state of lack and poverty, found its continuation – in all his children, my father Meeme as the first born, together with all his siblings now had to chip in to help their parents fend for the family. (28)

In order to claim dignity and visibility, Leiro who was Meeme's brother decided to go to the farm lands in Laikipia to try and make a living. Meeme, Letangule's father on the other hand did not find himself anything meaningful to do. He was given a wife by Ririmpoti who had taken a brotherhood oath with his father (Nyikeu) without paying bride price. Poverty still robbed his dignity since he did not have a home to take his new bride upon marriage. He had to take his wife to the Lemerige's family as they struggled to find their footing.

Meeme (Letangule's father) lives in abject poverty and this robs him of his pride as a man. To marry and not be in a position to house and provide for the bride is the ultimate form of failure in this community and this makes Meeme to be ridiculed greatly. The result of this state of poverty is that it erodes one's self esteem and self-worth. At Sacho High School, life was not very smooth for Letangule as a student having come from a poor background; most of the students had come from rich backgrounds and were visited by the parents but Letangule's parents never visited. To a growing person, this hurt Letangule's confidence and self-worth.

Letangule explains about the dehumanizing nature of poverty, this robbed the family of its dignity and denied him of the basic right of growing up, in a unified harmonious family. Extreme material deprivation threw Letangule's father into an abyss of alcoholism. This could have been triggered by the indignity of having to rely on others for survival. The constant intrusion by charitable people into the private space of Meeme makes him loath himself and find solace in alcohol. Letangule narrates his life experiences as a child of poor people as a way of getting the reader's empathy and we empathize with him. Simon Makau Munyoki in a "Culture of Poverty: An Impediment to Development" observes that:

The culture of poverty is a great impediment to development in Kenya and other African societies. Thinking of development without thinking of the eradication of this culture of poverty is putting the cart before the horse. We have to remember that the culture of poverty is a way of life for the majority of our people. The only way we can pave the way for development is through eradication of the culture of poverty. Until this is done, Kenyans will continue to talk about development while in reality nothing is happening. (54-73)

Elisha Kimani and Donald Kombo “In Gender and poverty reduction: A Kenyan context” note that poverty robs people of their dignity and subjects them to extreme mental and emotional suffering. They observe that,

Poverty is dehumanizing condition for everyone. It erodes women or men. Poverty subjects an individual to a state of powerlessness, hopelessness and lack of self-esteem, confidence and integrity, leading to a situation of multi-dimensional vulnerability. Poverty has a gender dimension since women and men experience and react differently to its impact. It cuts across age, ethnicity and gender. (5)

Poverty destabilizes the human psyche and this could explain why Letangule’s father, Meeme turns to alcohol. Meeme sinks into the abyss of addiction to run away from the feelings of worthlessness. Letangule recalls, “He probably resigned himself to the fate of his family’s lineage and continued to languish in poverty. Ultimately, he turned into alcohol. Any income he got was quickly sunk into beer, perhaps in an attempt to drown his woes” (30).

Autobiographical writings focus on the writer subject’s experience. Muchiri in *The Female Autobiographical Voice in Independent Kenya* discusses about the place of the subject’s experiences in a life narrative. She notes:

An autobiography hinges on personal experience and it is based on the reflections. Due to this, its authors impose patterns on their lives and construct coherent stories out of them. Its underlying principle is the scrutiny of the self with outside happenings, persons encountered and observations admitted as they influence the consciousness of the person in whose character and actions the writing focus on. (2)

The point Muchiri is making is that the autobiography as a genre tells the story of an individual by focusing on the events and happenings that define an individual as a unique member of the human family. Using his experiences, Letangule narrates about the role and power of education in providing the poor with agency hence visibility. He recalls how it was through school that he was exposed to the world and new ideas. Education also opens individuals to new experiences. Letangule travels to Nairobi for the first time because of his exemplary performance in school, and he is picked together with a school Mate John Ekal a form one. Letangule narrates, “I became a very active member of the Young Catholic Students Association (YCSA). I also won a prize in a competition set up by the club, for writing the best essay on the need to conserve the environment” (75).

Letangule lets the reader know that it was through exposure to modern education through schooling that he gets an opportunity to make it out of the obscurity and marginalization of Baringo to claim his dignity as a Kenyan. He commits to excelling in school from an early age because he hated the invisibility and indignity that came with poverty. He recalls of his experiences in Sacho High school:

I hated the idea of being judged on the basis of factors that were beyond my control. I had read about colonialism, apartheid, racism and other forms of prejudice. The fact that my school world was so coloured with notions of class differences sowed in the need to rise up and fight for the less advantaged which I still believe in doing to date. (85)

He narrates that it is through education that he became a lawyer and earned respect from his community members and the country as a whole. Education empowered him with skills and knowledge that made it possible to occupy a public position as a commissioner of Kenya’s electoral body. The journey from the backwaters of Lake Baringo where Letangule was a village herds boy to Kenya’s premier institution of higher education, the University of Nairobi is proof of

a resilient character. The mention of the University of Nairobi is a strategy by Letangule to create credibility in his story as well as helping him inscribe himself in the university as a scholarship space in the country. When Letangule gets into active politics by contesting for the Baringo Central constituency, he becomes the voice of the marginalized Ilchamus and publicly fights for their right of representation. He narrates:

I appeared on national television for the first time in 2002 when I led a delegation of Ilchamus elders to the office of the former chairman of the now defunct Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) the late Samuel Kivuitu Nairobi. In our petition, we wanted Kivuitu to intervene and ensure that laws put in place to protect the interest of minority groups such as ours, were enforced and that we would have our own representatives in parliament. (143)

Letangule credits education for giving him, a voice with which to articulate concerns of his community. Education gives him the capacity and opportunity to pursue a political dream. He is able to fight it out with Gideon Moi, the son of Kenya's second president, Daniel Arap Moi for the Baringo constituency seat. Confronting the Moi family was aimed at ending the invisibility or political marginalization of the Ilchamus community. Even though he does not succeed in becoming the area Member of Parliament, this becomes a form of victory since it made Letangule and his community visible politically. The narration of the political confrontation with the Moi family is also meant to help him inscribe himself in the Kenyan nation. The narration of his experiences in active politics and the threats on his life because he opposed a powerful family is his way of educating the readers about Kenya as a country. The narration his experiences in politics paint the image of Kenya as a criminal institution that is run by a few powerful families.

Letangule narrates that while growing up in Baringo in the 1970s, education was not valued by the Ilchamus. He narrates that the wealthy did not see the value of education since they were already visible and dignified in the community by their abundance of material wealth in terms of cattle.

Education thus was left for the poor and this became their only way of gaining agency in their community. He admires everything about education and his headmaster one Mr. Benjamin Sogomo who relentlessly talked to the villagers and children about the importance of education. Letangule narrates of how his teacher Mr. Sogomo brought a young man named Renson Lemebiko to talk and inspire the school children. Letangule recalls of this experience in primary school:

In 1978, when I was in class three, a young man known as Renson Lemebiko visited our school. The memory of his visit stuck, even after time erased many other memories linked to school. The headmaster summoned all the children to come and listen to him Lemebiko was a young man who had just flown into the country. He was the first man from the Ilchamus community to study in Canada. (58)

In 1978, when I was in class three, a young man known as Renson Lemebiko visited our school. The memory of his visit stuck, even after time erased many other memories linked to school. The headmaster summoned all the children to come and listen to him Lemebiko was a young man who had just flown into the country. He was the first man from the Ilchamus community to study in Canada. Letangule mentions Benjamin Sogomo and Renson Lemebiko by name as a way of paying homage to them. He is acknowledging the contribution the two men played a role in making him value education and hold on to dreams. By mentioning his teacher Sogomo and the young Lemebiko by name, Letangule is creating credibility in his story. The reader can find out from other sources or verify this information to find out whether Letangule is telling the truth.

Poverty leads to family breakdown and disintegration as is evident in Meeme's family especially after drug and substance abuse gets into the equation. Letangule's mother leaves her home and goes away because the husband cannot provide for the family. Letangule is too young to understand what's happening around him by then, through memory, he can now recall what was happening.

When Letangule goes back to his past experiences and narrates about being his experience with poverty, he is narrating to us about invisibility. He is also narrates to us how they work to gain their identity and dignity as human beings. Letangule talks about his uncle Leiro who in retrospect told him about his story in poverty. He fought to see himself out of this state of extreme material deprivation through hard work. Leiro's children did not have milk which is a staple meal with the Ilchamus and was considered poor by the mother-in-law and one who did not take care of his children. He remembers a story Leiro told him of a conversation with his mother in law when he came back from work and found the kids crying, "You are just a poor man who cannot even afford to provide the most basic thing, milk, for your own children!" (34). The statement was very dehumanizing and especially bearing in mind that it came from his mother-in-law.

Letangule revisits the past recounts the story of his father who had gone to pay the local chief Nabori and how the chief's clerk, a man named Sambicha demeaned him for being illiterate. When Meeme asked whether the chief was in his office, Sambicha sneered and retorted, "What useless man; you cannot even read or write to save your life, and you dare show your face here! What exactly do you want?" (41).

Meeme was pained by the harsh words and immediately embarked on reading and doing Mathematics through adult literacy classes popularly known as *gumbaru*. Following his new found ability to read and write, Meeme's life begins to change for the better when his brother assigns him purchase and accounting duties in the beef cattle business. Letangule is trying to tell us here that education can be used to fight poverty and that education gives you status in the society, it gives you an identity and dignity and you are a respected and respectable individual, thus you become visible if you can read and write.

The insults from Sambicha were dehumanizing, demeaning and hurtful and this pushes Meeme to the decision of going back to class and learn how to read and write. Enrolling in school at his old age was the beginning of his liberation; his life changed from invisibility, he became a respectable and respected businessman. Literacy gave Meeme a character and identity as a businessman and dignity since he could now provide for his family. Letangule narrates, “He stopped drinking and his wealth now began to grow because he was not wasting his resources on drinking, even his livestock grew in numbers which was considered as wealth” (42). However, Letangule’s mother also slid into alcoholism and the problem of addiction still haunted the family. This could have been as a result of the husband influencing her to turn to alcohol as an escape mechanism for the poverty that surrounded them or it could be as a result of the problems she was undergoing in her marriage and thus found consolation in alcohol. According to Lydia Njeri in “The Impact of Alcohol Abuse on the Welfare of Rural households: A Case Study of Mbeti-North Ward Embu County”, factors that lead to excessive alcohol consumptions in rural households are issues such as poverty, peer pressure and marital problems, the impact of this alcoholism in the family is such things like domestic violence.

Letangule’s elder brother, Mahani later falls into the trap alcoholism. This could be because he learnt the drinking habit from the parents or tried the alcohol that was brewed at home and eventually got addicted. Maureen Ng’endo in a newspaper article in *The Standard* on 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2018, “How all illicit Brews are fading society’s Erosion” observes that “It is likely that the crisis of teen delinquency has been brought about by factors which include growing up in dysfunctional or broken families. Young men lack role models because their fathers and father figures are unavailable, being drunken most of the time” (15). Growing up in a dysfunctional family with parents steeped in alcoholism could be the explanation behind Mahani’s delinquency and

alcoholism. He also becomes problematic dropping out from one school to the next. One deviant child is a course of worry for the rest of the family as Mahani also made Letangule to be rejected in school the first time he was taken to Marigat High School.

Letangule narrates of his experiences in school to point out that education is a very effective strategy or tool of gaining visibility or dignity and character as a human being. The invisibility or marginalization that comes with poverty can be eradicated with education. It empowers Letangule enough for him to claim his stake thus becoming visible in the national space and gives him a voice in the national narrative. Because of this opportunity to do dignified work, education thus becomes a strategy of claiming visibility. In school, Letangule learns many things which assist him in life and takes him from his rural Ilchamus village; Letangule is no longer a herdsman. Letangule's *Trailblazer* presents education as a journey that takes the writer from obscurity to national and global recognition. The journeys from his home to primary school, from primary school to high school and to the university are crucial in forming his identity. He becomes a different person in each and every step he takes in life and one consistent thing is that Letangule becomes independent in every step he takes. He acquires skills that can make him become a reliable citizen and he is relied upon by his father, his family, his community and even the nation at large.

Education thus gives Letangule agency to liberate himself and others from economic, political and social marginalization. Letangule also narrates of his experience in the world of academia as a strategy for constructing his identity as a scholar. He recalls of his admission as the University of Nairobi for his first degree in Law and how he later furthers his education in the same university and attains a Master of Law degree. He recalls:

In October the same year, I left work to join the university. I had been admitted to the University of Nairobi to study Law. Our classes were held at the university's



Parklands campus, about two kilometers from the main campus, which was located within the city center. (93)

The narration of his experiences with education helps him project himself as a role model for the young people in Kenya. The struggles he underwent while studying and the success he attained; intellectual and material is meant to inspire others especially young people who may be struggling in life.

Letangule narrates about his experience with some women he met at a bar during the time he was campaigning for the Baringo Central Constituency in. This was an embarrassing experience where he engages strange women and welcomes them to his table for a drink. The women ended up adulterating his drink and they proceeded to steal from him while he was unconscious. Letangule self-effusiveness in narrating his weaknesses with both women and alcohol is a strategy of creating credibility to his narrative. Letangule comes out as a realistic character who accepts his weaknesses as he celebrates his strengths. The narration of this experience also helps project Letangule as a truthful and an honest person. Letangule further points out that these women who robbed him were government intelligence operatives who had been send to get his phone so that the government could establish who he had been communicating with. Narrating this experience is also a strategy of getting the reader's empathy for he is able to show that he was being hunted and fought by Gideon Moi using government resources.

Letangule's recall of his experiences at the University of Nairobi helps him project himself as a scholar and a vanguard in his community for not many from his background had attained such accomplishments. It is also a way of cultivating credibility in his story since the reader can verify if it is true that he was indeed a student in that institution. Mentioning the university by name is his way of self-inscription into an institution known for its academic excellence. He inscribes

himself in scholarship by narrating about his academic prowess and research skills; he tells the reader about his Master of Law thesis, “An Analysis of Indigenous People’s Rights under the Kenyan Law”.

Documenting one’s life in an autobiography makes the genre an attempt at discovering one’s identity. The autobiographical subject narrator is involved in trying to understand themselves in relation to the society where they live. In this literary form, the writer searches into their memory to interrogate their experiences as a way of understanding who they are. Smith and Watson looks at the autobiography as, “a self-referential practice that engages the past in order to reflect on the identity in the present” (3).

Letangule narrates about his ancestry from his great grandfather who was naturalized by the Ilchamus in the late nineteenth century. He makes it known that he descended from the porter who was originally from Kenya’s coastal strip. He narrates, “My great grandfather faithfully traversed each terrain with Thompson as others fell by the way side or gave up on the expedition all together” (4). Letangule identifies himself as an Ilchamus and does not make any reference to Kenya’s coast outside the story of his great grandfather. This is in my view Letangule’s way of making the reader know that he considers himself an Ilchamus and a Kenyan citizen. Letangule traces his family tree as a way of constructing himself as a great grandson, son, brother and a father. He uses the family as a field of identity construction. He recounts on his grandfather as having been the first born in Loltagule family. He narrates, “Their first child was a boy; they named him Mpapayei” (28). Letangule identifies himself as the son of Meeme and is proud of his family even though he accepts they had their own failures.

Letangule recalls and narrates how he took care of his father when he was sick, to project himself as a responsible son. He recalls that he took up this duty while still at the university and with very limited resources. He also recounts how he was at his father's bedside when he (the father) died. He recalls, "The sun set on Mzee Meeme's life, and he breathed his last at 10.00am on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1993, as I held him" (99). The mention of the exact date and time of his father's death is a way of aiding his memory in recalling the sad experience.

To construct his identity as a leader, Letangule narrates about his role in the public service as a commissioner for the electoral body, Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC).

He narrates:

The IEBC team in November 2011 comprised the chairman Ahmed Isaak Hassan and eight commissioners, Lillian Mahiri Zaja (Vice chairperson) Albert Bwire, Kule Galma Godana, Yusuf Abdelraham Nzibo, Eng. Abdullah Mohamed Sharawe, Joyce Muthoni Wangai, Mohamed Alawi Hassan and Myself. My work as a commissioner gave me a greater appreciation of the significant role on our shoulders as a team. (221)

Being a member of the national body tasked with making it possible for Kenyans to choose their leaders is Letangule's way of creating his identity as a leader as well as an opportunity to inscribe himself into the national narrative; this makes him visible or claim identity and dignity as a Kenyan. Letangule mentions the names of his colleagues at the electoral body as a strategy of creating the concept of truth in his narrative. He lets the reader into the electoral body's operations and makes it known that during his tenure; he was the voice of reason in the institution. He narrates of how he insisted on the elections being conducted and processed through the electronic system that would ensure integrity by minimizing mistakes. Letangule notes that despite his solid arguments about the efficiency of the electronic voting system, he was overruled. He recalls, "I had my misgivings about the manual option and did not want us to go that way at all. I made my

disapproval about the decision known. However, the Commission had to work as a team and the eventual verdict by the majority had to be accepted by all” (223).

Letangule further narrates about his own family as a way of claiming his identity as a father and a husband. He narrates about his courtship with Rebecca Lowoiya starting in 1993 and how he was overjoyed to become a father to his daughter Joan Nosokon. He recalls:

I became a father when Rebecca gave birth to our first born daughter, Joan Nosokon, in January 1994, and our union was later formalized on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1996. It was a delight for me to welcome our first child, but it also meant I now had more responsibilities, and very little resources. (98)

Here Letangule is underscoring the place of the sense of responsibility in a family setup and the fact that love is what pushes one to be responsible. Letangule narrates about the Ilchamus community’s way of life in great details as a strategy for claiming his cultural identity as well as making the Ilchamus visible as a community. He traces the history of the community from its migration outside Kenya to its settlement around Lake Baringo. He narrates:

The Ilchamus are a sub-tribe of the Maasai community. They hold their cultural ideals and traditional practices in the highest esteem. Their entire way of life revolves almost exclusively around their herds of cattle. Indeed, engaging in any other activity than looking after their cattle was demeaning; it was considered an insult to God (Enkai). Anyone without cattle was regarded as an extremely poor person and was even held in contempt in the society. (11)

He makes it known that the reason he is polygamous is because it is a practice that is deeply rooted in the Ilchamus culture. He makes it clear that he considers himself an Ilchamus first before being a Kenyan, “I am Ilchamus by origin” (ix). He narrates, “Over the years, I have come to appreciate how deeply rooted and rich my community’s culture and the way of life, an aspect that is embraced and proudly passed down every successive generation” (11). The point Letangule is making is that the cultural connection to Kenya’s coast ended with his great grandfather’s adoption by the Ilchamus.

Letangule narrates of how he has fought for the Ilchamus community as a way of constructing himself as a vanguard warrior and a savior. He confesses that all his life has revolved around getting his people a voice, respect and dignity as bona fide members of the Kenyan nation. To make his people recognized and their human rights defended has been his life time quest. He narrates:

From a young age, I have always had the desire to see my community grow into a minority group with a superior voice at the national level. I was determined early to do something definitive for my people. I pursued my law career hoping to be a brand ambassador, and a voice for the Ilchamus (ix).

Muchiri in “The intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies” notes that the autobiography is a genre immersed in history for it recalls and records the history of the author as well as that of their community. George Misch in *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* argues that autobiographies are individual stories that are immersed in history. To Misch, the personal story always intersects with history in life narratives. He goes on to point out that life narratives are reflexive of the historical time or period lived in. He argues that narratives “are bound always to be representatives of their period, within a range that will vary with intensity of the author’s participation in contemporary life and with the spheres in which they moved” (qtd in Smith and Watson’s *Reading Autobiography* 113). German philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey emphasizes the historicity of the genre of autobiography. He observes that the autobiography is historically conscious because the writer’s experiences that make up an autobiographical text happen within a historical timeframe. Dilthey notes that the autobiography cannot be divorced from history.

Autobiographies are both products of and sources of history since the subject lives at a certain historical period and in recounting their life experiences, they document historical events, personalities and dates. The unique place of history in an autobiography is supported by Smith and

Watson in *Reading Autobiography* where they note that personal narratives are intertwined with mainstream history. They are of the view that writing an autobiography is “a historically situated practice of self-representation” (14). The point Smith and Watson are making is that an individual’s life experiences are shaped by the history of their environment and society. This connection between the contents of an autobiographical text and history is further emphasized by Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Homecoming* where argues that a writer is a product of history and as such, the personal story reflects and recalls history.

Letangule’s autobiography recalls the personal, communal and national history. He narrates the history of the Ilchamus community, “The Ilchamus were among the Nilotic people who originated from outside Kenya. The great migration of the Nilotic tribes is recorded as having taken them through northern Sudan to Uganda as they headed towards the vast equatorial savannah” (2). He also narrates about his great grandfather and how he came to be among the Ilchamus people. The story of his great grandfather is intertwined with the history of the country. He left his original homeland at the Kenya’s coast to accompany a Scottish explorer called Joseph Thompson. Historically, the explorers and missionaries were the vanguards of the European colonial presence in Africa. They helped map out the continent that was to later be divided into colonies for the European nations. Kenya was to fall under the Imperial British East African Protectorate that included present day Uganda. Letangule recalls and records the history of colonial Kenya when he narrates about their presence in the country. He narrates about the Pekerra irrigation scheme established by the British. He recalls, “Pekerra irrigation scheme was initiated by the British colonial government to bring more land into use under cultivation” (34). The British colonial government empowered its settler population through alienation of the most fertile of lands and

when this was deemed not to be enough, they devised irrigation in order to make more money. Letangule is pointing out that colonization was more of an economic venture than a political one.

Letangule further recalls Kenya's history by mentioning historical figures such as resident Daniel Moi who was to become Kenya's second and long serving president. He recalls of the president visiting their high school, Sacho High School, "President Daniel Arap Moi, the school's patron, would visit us on some of the weekends. Cows would be slaughtered to give the students a proper feast whenever he came" (86). He recalls the tumultuous moments in Kenya's history when the country erupted in a post-election violence in 2008 after the 2007 contested elections and how this almost threw the country into a state of lawlessness. Letangule's recall of this ugly period of Kenya post-colonial history is his way of reminding the country about the dangers of political exclusion and tribalism that has defined the country's leadership. The recall of this historical moment is also his way of indicting the Kenyan political class who thrive on tribal politics and the engineering of ethnic animosity. This is Letangule's way of letting the country know that for it to develop, all people must be brought on board, that all voices and opinions count and that marginalization of a section of the country is a recipe for a disaster for the entire nation.

An interrogation of Kenya's history shows that the country has always marginalized or made invisible or silenced a section of its population on the basis of gender, tribe, population and race. Claire Robertson in "Beyond "Tribes": Violence and Politics in Kenya" notes that the national policy and philosophy in Kenya has never been inclusive because it reflects the outlook, worldview and needs of some sections of the country and not others. Robertson notes that this principle of marginalization was started by the British colonial administration.

Governance and political leadership in Colonial Kenya was a preserve of the Europeans although they later co-opted a few Africans from the communities that collaborated. This policy of marginalization was to be continued by post-colonial Kenyan governments thus despite independence from Britain, Kenya as a political body has not been inclusive; marginalization is still prevalent. A closer examination of the composition of the cabinet at the time of Kenya's independence illustrates that this systematic and institutionalized segregation is a reality in Kenya.

An autobiography may be a personal story but the author also uses it to pay respect, recognize people he or she thinks have been instrumental in their (subject's) life. Letangule uses his autobiography to pay homage to several individuals. He credits his tribesman, Lemebiko, for inspiring him (Letangule) to work hard in school. Lemebiko was the first member of the Ilchamus community to study in Canada for his university education. At one point when he was visiting Kenya, the headmaster in Letangule's school invited the young man to come and encourage the children to take education seriously. He recalls of the impact Lemebiko's talk had on his young mind. He narrates of the experience:

It may have been unconscious at first, but the desire to aspire to one day as be great like that young man had just found its way into my mind. His stories did much to whet the palates of my young mind, and spurred me on to pursue excellence. I never forgot the sight, the vivid memory of his exuberant face as he narrated his experiences, and how the entire idea made me feel. I began taking my studies more seriously and worked hard, with the aim of excelling in all my subjects. (50)

Here Letangule is making the point that children need role models and encouragement if they are to turn into useful members of the society. He acknowledges that success in any field is never an individual's achievement but the result of a collective activity. He also credits his cousin Julius Nyerere for his constant support and companionship in the initial stages of his education journey.



He recalls, “Julius was a great motivation to me and with time, I improved in my overall performance, though I struggled with mathematics” (65).

When he eventually decided to join politics, Letangule confesses that he found the political field in Kenya very unfriendly and that at times he would be so discouraged he would wish to give up. He makes it known that at that point in his life; friends were few but a good friend known as Betty Maina supported him morally and financially. He also acknowledges that she was well connected politically and thus constantly gave him information that made it possible to navigate the murky waters of politics. He narrates, “One of my good friends, Betty Maina, a motherly lady, whom we all fondly referred to as Aunt Betty, made frantic efforts to reach us and find out if we were okay. Aunt Betty had supported our campaign in numerous ways, both financially and in kind” (151). Letangule is paying homage and his respects to Betty Maina and at the same time underscoring the value and importance of friends as part of an individual’s support system.

Letangule further narrates of how the leadership of the United States of America, specifically its congressmen and women played a huge role in his battle for the rights of the Maasai people who had been exploited by a Swiss shoe company, Maasai Barefoot Technology. He recalls, “I looked at the audience before me and realized afresh the enormity of the opportunity we had been given to influence policymakers and powerful donors in the highest pinnacle in America-the Congress” (xvii).

The autobiography is anchored on the concept of truth. Truth exists in different levels and types and Muchiri identifies types of truth: autobiographical truth, historical truth and fictional truth. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* define autobiographical truth as “an intersubjective exchange between the narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the

meaning of a life” (13). The autobiographical truth is different from the historical truth in that historical history can be collaborated by cross checking historical facts. The narrator’s sincerity when narrating their story determines autobiographical truth. The writer cultivates autobiographical truth by employing various strategies such as a consistent narrative voice, reliance on memory, intertwining the personal story with history, unrestrained narration of intimate experiences and the use of paratextual elements. Jill Ker Conway in *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* argues that one way of cultivating credibility or truth in a life narrative is by having unrestrained narration of intimate experiences by the subject. This allows the reader to access the very private and intimate parts of a narrator’s life.

Laura Marcus in *Autobiographical and biographical Discourse: Theory, Criticism and Practice* observes that autobiographical truth is not the same as historical facts. Marcus argues that an autobiographer opts for coherence in their story rather than correspondence as the criterion of truth. Letangule employs the use of paratextual elements such as photographs, newspaper cuttings and court proceedings as strategies of cultivating autobiographical truth. There are photos of him at the University of Nairobi and in both the graduation and advocate’s attire to prove that he is a learned individual and a lawyer by profession. He has also attached photos of his children and wives to support his claims to the identity of a father and husband. To provide proof of having worked at the electoral body, IEBC, Letangule names the members of the commission as well as attach photographs of himself at work. Letangule uses photographs taken with former president; Mwai Kibaki and President Uhuru Kenyatta to make his claim to greatness. He attaches newspaper cuttings of the famous trial where he represented the Ilchamus against the Kenyan government. Letangule also uses the strategy of recalling and recording Kenya’s history as way of persuading the reader to accept that he is telling the truth since the historical events and personalities

mentioned can be verified. Further, he uses the first person narrative voice that acts as a cohesive device holding the whole narrative together and thus making it credible.

The autobiographical principle of selectivity is a unique property of the autobiographical genre. He chooses the events and people he includes in his autobiography. He mentions Gideon Moi as his competitor during his debut into politics when he (Letangule) contested the Baringo Central parliamentary seat. He narrates of how Gideon used threats and intimidation to discourage competition. Letangule also names the individuals who were being used by the Moi family to edge him out of politics. He narrates:

Early the following morning, I was called and informed that Gideon Moi was waiting for me in his office at Post Bank building. With him were Mr. Sammy Mwaita, and William Ruto, who were in KANU then. They needed my consent on the spot. I was required to assure them that I was not going ahead with my plan to remain as one of the candidates for Baringo Central. (153)

To project the idea of betrayal by his own people when he ventured into politics, Letangule narrates how two chiefs from his community treated him as an enemy for running against Gideon Moi. He recalls of his encounter with Chief Nabori whom he mentions by name in this story. Letangule wanted to become the Member of Parliament for Baringo Central constituency but his community chose to elect Gideon Moi. This form of rejection of Letangule by the Ilchamus could be read as an expression of the ironies and contradictions that have defined the educated African population, the prolonged exposure to a foreign culture through education resulting in alienation. This rejection therefore could have been a statement by the Ilchamus that they do not see any difference between him and Gideon Moi. Education resulted in a hybridized individual.

By writing his autobiography, Letangule is making an attempt at therapy especially after he mobilized resources towards becoming a political leader but the community chose to side with Gideon Moi from the Torgen community. This failure to capture the Baringo Central Constituency

left Letangule with feelings of betrayal and pain. He also narrates about the death of his wife during childbirth and how this left him in despair and emotional pain. By relieving the difficult and painful events of his life through narration, he aims at attaining emotional and psychological healing.

Autobiographers open their lives to public scrutiny because they think that they have something to pass to the world. An autobiographical subject considers him or herself a role model for others to emulate. Letangule writes his story out of the pride that comes with having overcome great odds in life; pride that he has conquered the obscurity that comes from being a member of a marginalized community to become a national leader with international connection. He narrates of his experiences with an American law firm and the American parliament. Therefore, Letangule uses the autobiography as a unique genre to document his life achievements.

Writing one's life narrative involves looking back and looking inwards and therefore, it is a process that helps the subject understand who they are and the experiences that have shaped their identity. Letangule looks inwards even as he examines his past in order to understand and therefore accept who he is. In writing his autobiography, Letangule is seeking to understand himself better as an individual.

Autobiographies tell the story of both the subject narrator and their society. Letangule uses his life narrative to talk about the Ilchamus community and their culture. By documenting the Ilchamus way of life, *Trailblazer* becomes a strategy of preserving the cultural heritage of the community. Therefore, the autobiography serves the role of a cultural archive.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to interrogate the manifestation of the unique properties of the autobiography in the text *Trailblazer*. He deploys autobiographical elements such as the reliance on memory to

recall his life experiences. I also find that the text narrates the lived experience of the writer using memory as the autobiographer examines their past experiences as a strategy to understand the present identity. Letangule recalls the history of his community as well as that of the Kenyan nation. The writer engages in intense introspection or self-analysis as he narrates his story. He uses the autobiography to address issues such as the power of education in providing visibility and agency. Letangule also develops a discussion on the dehumanizing nature of poverty in this text.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **STRATEGIES OF NARRATING THE SELF AND THE COMMUNITY IN *TRAILBLAZER***

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter interrogates the strategies of narrating the self and the community that Letangule employs in his autobiography. I analyze issues that the subject discusses in the text alongside the strategies of self-narration. This chapter forms key point of my study as it examines the strategies Letangule employs in his story and therefore it is the chapter that justifies the choice of the title of my study. I discuss how the story is constructed and presented. Strategies refers to the artistic choices that an artist deploys in order to present a story; it forms the “how” that is usually the vehicle for communicating the “what” in a literary form.

#### 4.1 Artistry in Letangule's *Trailblazer*

The autobiography is a record of the narrator subject's lived experiences and at the same time, a creative work of art for it manifests a wealth of creative or artistic strategies. Olney in *Tell me Africa* points out that the appreciation of the autobiography by the reader is largely inspired by the artistry or the aesthetic appeal therein. He argues that for a subject to succeed in communicating the story of his life, they need to immerse their work in artistry because the deliberate creativity is as important as the content. Indangasi in, "The Autobiographical Impulses in African and African-American Literature" observes that the autobiography is not a mere recall of facts about a life but a creative piece of art. To Indangasi, telling a story becomes meaningful if the narrator employs various creative or artistic devices or tools of storytelling. He points out that creativity is a defining feature of the autobiography.

Letangule narrates his story as a battle narrative defined by the intense use of martial or military language. Lidewij Van Gils, Irene de Jong and Caroline Kroom in, *Textual Strategies in Ancient War Narratives* notes that although different wars are fought for different reasons and in different parts of the world, the narratives of war have characteristics that cut across. They identify the following as the characteristics of battle narratives: the celebration of heroism, suffering, betrayal, loyalty, sacrifice, love, hatred, beliefs in luck or fate, human frailty, reasons for wanting to live or die and an all-permeating fear(1). This is a strategy to construct himself as a vanguard or lead warrior when it comes to the defense of the rights of the Ilchamus community as well as to project himself as a committed, disciplined and a dependable public servant. The story is told as a series of battles where Letangule has to find victory. He begins the story in the middle of a battle, the fight for the rights of the Maasai people defrauded and exploited by a powerful European business institution. He narrates of his sojourn to the United States of America (USA) in search of justice

and this is meant to reflect the journeys a warrior makes in an effort to protect others. He recalls of his reaction on landing at the Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Virginia:

I took in my surroundings as I stepped out of the plane. It was my first time to the United States of America. I realised that the end of our journey marked a significant beginning for me. I soaked in all sights and sounds around me with awe. With a sweeping gaze, I attempted to absorb the massive airport with one slow, fluid motion. (xviii)

Here Letangule gives the reader the image of a warrior or soldier taking time to understand the surrounding, a soldier's trait; being aware of the environment as the first step before waging a battle. This coming in the initial pages of the autobiography, the preface, is a strong indication or foreshadowing of the militancy that will define the rest of the narrative a signal to the reader that this is a battle narrative. Letangule goes on to narrate why he had gone to the United States of America, taking the risk of leaving the confines of his home, Kenya, to communicate his willingness to fight for others and provide them with a voice. He aligns himself with like-minded modern warriors in the world. He narrates of the law firm that had approached him to right the wrong of economic exploitation and marginalization:

Ron Lyton, the CEO of Light Years IP, had founded this organization with an aim of helping indigenous peoples to earn royalties from their traditional knowledge. His organization was dedicated to assisting smallholder producers in developing countries gain ownership over their intellectual property rights. He worked towards enlightening the producers on the value of their agricultural and cultural products, thus increasing and improving the security of export income for them. (xiv)

Letangule narrates how working together with Lyton's company, they were able to afford redress for the Maasai people of Kenya who had been defrauded of their intellectual property right, the traditional tyre sandals. A Swiss company called the Maasai Barefoot Technology had leveraged on the traditional footwear of the Maasai community yet when the company manufactured shoes, it never shared the monetary benefits with the community. He narrates of this experience:

The Company went to the drawing board and came up with a range of footwear designed with concepts they had picked from their studies. However, no benefits were accruing for the Maasai community that had provided the footwear solutions for the millions of Europeans who were using the end product. (xv)

By narrating about his and Mr. Ron's contribution to the ending of the exploitation of the Maasai community by powerful business conglomerates, Letangule constructs himself as the savior of the downtrodden and the voice for the voiceless. The recall of this instance is also meant to celebrate heroism, which is a characteristic of battle or war narratives. The great deeds and unmatched exploits of legendary warriors are recounted and celebrated and in this way, the warrior hero inscribes themselves into their community. Letangule paints world commerce as a battlefield where modern monsters come in the form of multinational business conglomerates. The modern Ogres suck the blood and life out of the local people through the infringing of the communities' intellectual property rights, theft of raw materials and exploitation of cheap labour. Letangule is saying that modern commerce is largely founded on criminal tendencies and philosophies; that it thrives on dehumanization of communities. These business empires take away people's dignity through the violation of their human rights.

To succeed as a warrior, one needs war resources and arsenal and Letangule emphasizes about this aspect of battle narratives when he narrates about the fundraising he had to do in the United States of America. He works with the Arnold and Porter law firm to help build a war chest in preparation for the battle with the multinational corporations that were exploiting the Maasai community. Letangule recalls the event, "More funding was needed for the work Ron was initiating in Kenya, and I was required to hold talks with American donors to articulate and affirm Ron's work. I had been preparing myself for the speech and I looked forward to making good my case" (xvi) Here Letangule demonstrates how proactive he is as a fighter, he does not wait for the resources to be presented to him by those he is fighting for, but goes out to forage for them. He is communicating



to the reader about his selfless nature and creating the image of a hero whose quest is inspired by love for his people.

By narrating his cultural background that celebrates warrior hood, Letangule lets the reader know that they are interacting with a war narrative. He further shifts to narrating about his legal profession as his way of communicating that modern battles are fought in different spaces and grounds and that war arsenal has changed from the traditional military gear to modern forms like the use of the law or constitutionalism and education. He is also making it known that war or battles are strategies used not for the glory of the warrior but as a means for protecting the weak, providing a voice to the voiceless and warding off all forms of human innovations and practices that marginalize or make invisible a society. He narrates:

As a young child and eventually as a *moran*, I was always taught to defend everything entrusted to my care with my life, especially the livestock, and to keep them from harm. I ensured that I did it with my father's herds. As an advocate, I have had the privilege of defending the lives and rights of the defenseless, as I continue to do so to date. My role as a Commissioner in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), allowed me to continue defending the law with regard to electoral matters, and I have dispensed my duties with excellence, serving the nation to the best of my ability. (xx)

Letangule reveals that he is of warrior heritage by narrating about his daring great grandfather Loltagule. His great grandfather came to be part of the Ilchamus after he traveled to the interior from Kenya's coast as Joseph Thomson's porter. Letangule narrates of the porters where his ancestor belonged, "They had to be tall enough to tower above the thicket. Above all else, they had to be resolute men with tenacious will-power, a trait I suspect I inherited from him" (8). The reader can see that Letangule is describing the image of a soldier in terms of their physique. Letangule is saying that a warrior has to physically fit in order to be in a position to execute the difficult undertakings that forms part of his quest in life. He invites the reader to the Ilchamus

culture and community as a way of ensuring that his people and their culture will no longer be invisible or unknown. By narrating about his people, he is acting as the community's chief protector, the vanguard or lead warrior. His pride in his cultural roots is evident from the choice of adjectives used to describe his people:

The Ilchamus community kept to the plains where their herds could find sufficient pastures and water. They were well known for their brave warriors whose mere mention in the past bred terror and trepidation among the neighbouring communities. They braved the untamed terrains, fighting off wild animals and hostile communities on their way towards the Kenyan plains, until they settled down. (2)

Letangule makes each of the chapters in his autobiography to reflect a different battle and the concept of heroism comes out at the conclusion of each chapter. Letangule gives the first chapter of his autobiography the title, "Porter from the Coast". The chapter is dedicated to narrating the battles his great grandfather fought as a daring and adventurous porter under the employment of Scottish explorer, Joseph Thomson from March 1883. He narrates of the harsh conditions his great grandfather had to endure, "Month after month, the porters braved the sweltering heat and the torrential rains that beat upon them, surviving the harshness of the barren terrains that teemed with wild animals. The men defied the untamed courses of the land to follow after Thomson in his dangerous mission, having left all they knew as home and family behind" (3).

What Letangule is doing through the description of the terrain and the task is to bring out the image of a fearless warrior who happens to be his ancestor. Letangule's great grandfather, Loltagule, has to fight in several battles both as a porter and an outsider when he is left with the Ilchamus community in Baringo by Thomson after falling seriously sick. Loltagule wins the war against an illness only to be confronted by another war, the lack of identity and source of livelihood. The deep poverty he finds himself in after losing his job as a porter makes him invisible among the

Ilchamus, having to live with the indignity of having to depend on others for survival. Letangule concludes the first chapter by telling the reader about the origin of his name, Letangule. He narrates that it came from the name the Ilchamus gave his great grandfather. He narrates, “The locals began to refer to him as, “Loltagule” which in the Ilchamus language means, “the one with strong, muscled arms. The name stuck”(8). Here Letangule is underscoring the place of physical strength in the life of a warrior. He is saying that physical attributes like body size and strength are celebrated by the Ilchamus because they give an individual an edge over others.

Letangule further narrates about his grandfather, father and their battle with poverty and deprivation and how they eventually emerge victorious. His father fights poverty, illiteracy and alcoholism and the mark of warriors that defines the family is seen when his father, Meeme becomes a rich cattle trader who has overcome alcohol addiction and the indignity that comes with being illiterate. Meeme’s fighting spirit is seen when he courageously accepts to enroll for adult education classes after an altercation with the local chief’s secretary.

To emphasize that his story is a battle narrative, Letangule narrates of the military background that defined the Ilchamus community. Surrounded by enemy communities who constantly raided them for cattle, the community had to adopt a military state strategy to address the existential threat posed by their neighbours. Letangule narrates that from the earliest point in life, the Ilchamus boys would be made to admire and aspire to be great fighters and protectors of the community. The traditional warriors called *morans* are venerated and held in high regard among the Ilchamus. The *moran* age group consisted of young men who had already undergone circumcision and were tasked with duty of protecting the community from attacks by its enemies. He narrates:

Traditionally, young men were kept in the bush for long periods of time before being initiated, as they learned the ways of the people. Soon after initiation, they

were required to stay away from the rest of the community as *morans* while being trained to become warriors. (12)

This kind of social order practiced by the Ilchamus community has similarities with that of the ancient Greek city state of Sparta. Paul Cartledge in *The Spartans: The World of the Warrior. Heroes of Ancient Greece* notes that in ancient Sparta, all aspects of life revolved around the military culture and discipline. The description of the Ilchamus culture brings the images of Sparta to the readers' minds. The constant praise of courage, perseverance and a willingness to face pain are a strategy to turn the community into soldiers. Letangule recalls of the attention to detail that was given to circumcision among the Ilchamus:

Circumcision was a major rite of passage where the entire community celebrated together. The basic idea beyond just having the cut was stoicism. At every stage of a boy's life, the need to be brave and fearless was relentlessly drilled into him until it became part and parcel of his daily creed. (16)

Circumcision among the Ilchamus is a highly venerated rite of passage. It marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. During the ceremony, the initiate is also tested for bravery as there is no anesthesia used during the operation. This ceremony also accorded the society an opportunity to come together and celebrate their cultural identities. The Ilchamus used to circumcise both boys and girls. After circumcision, the initiates would be isolated and taught about the responsibilities of adulthood. No one was allowed to marry or serve as a warrior unless they had undergone circumcision.

A battle narrative involves instances where the heroic warrior encounters hardships and they have to change tact or strategy in order to stand a fighting chance. Letangule narrates that at some point in the search for a political voice and visibility of his marginalized community, he was opposed by a powerful individual, Gideon Moi, the son of Kenya's second president, Daniel Arap Moi.

Letangule narrates that despite the Baringo Central Constituency being represented by president Daniel Moi as its member of parliament, development was skewed in favour of the areas occupied by Moi's Tugen community. He narrates:

From the time Kenya became independent in 1963, and even after Baringo Central constituency was established in 1966, the area inhabited by the Ilchamus remained under-developed, further marginalizing the community. We noted that social infrastructure and other facilities had been put up in various parts of the constituency especially those inhabited by the Tugen community. The government seemed oblivious to our rights and plight, and we felt time had come to take action. (141)

Letangule narrates that his community had been systematically sidelined and his efforts to have this addressed by offering his candidature for the constituency had him threatened by the president and his handlers because the president's son, Gideon had been groomed to inherit the seat from his father. The point Letangule is making is that, Kenya as a country has not been inclusive, that the country was founded on and run on a policy of marginalization.

Looking at the history of the country, Kenya as a state is a recent creation, having attained internal self-rule from Britain on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1963. Kenya as a political edifice began as a colony of the British Empire. The foundation of this country was set on the wrong footing; marginalization or othering of the communities that straddled this geographical edifice before the Berlin conference of 1884. The colonial powers did not look at the Africans as human beings or equals who needed to be consulted; European racist tendencies therefore made the African communities largely invisible in the running of the colonies. The Berlin conference was a meeting called by the then powerful European nations to share out African into real estate pieces that at first were referred to as colonial protectorates that later got to be colonies. Colonization of the country was more of an economic endeavor and a source of political or nationalistic pride for the colonizing powers. The guiding philosophy of the colonial administration was marginalization of the natives in all sectors; economic, political and social.

Governance and political leadership in Kenya during the colonial period was a preserve of the Europeans although they later co-opted a few Africans from the communities that collaborated. This policy of marginalization was to be continued by post-colonial Kenyan governments thus despite independence from Britain, Kenya as a political body has not been inclusive; marginalization is still prevalent. Visibility is about making a claim to personality, character and identity as a bona fide member of a society. Invisibility is about the silencing of individuals or

marginalization of people on the basis of their racial, ethnic-cultural, religious and political-economic background. Invisibility is about marginalization. Beugne Zouankouan Stephane in “Perceptions, Visibility and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*” observes that years of slavery and racism dehumanized the African-American community, making an entire race invisible in the American social fabric. Systematic and institutionalized racism and racial hierarchies reduced a community to mere statistics, robbing them of their human identity and dignity. The black people or community lacked representation and a voice because for the longest time the leadership of the United States of America never thought of African-Americans as that which needed to be heard. She posits that,

In the white people’s minds, Invisible man” is not a human being but a “walking zombie, a black amorphous thing, a walking personification of negative, the mechanical man”. He is only an object; visible in existence but invisible in human existence and in human society as a being endowed by human beings’ values. (7)

Stephane is saying that marginalization is never accidental and that it is usually part of a large political-economic agenda by dominant sections of a community.

Letangule narrates that although the Ilchamus are part of the Baringo political ecosystem, their presence was reduced to voting for the dominant Tugen community when it came to political leadership. His attempt at capturing the Baringo Central Constituency in order to provide a political voice and representation of his people was interpreted as disrespect to the Moi family and the Tugen community. He is harassed by individuals close to President Moi and the government through the police and later through robberies. There are thinly veiled threats on his life in an attempt to force him to drop out of the race. At some point during his political journeys, he is confronted by the then ruling party’s politicians in KANU (Kenya African National Union) government who dehumanize him by criminalizing his political ambitions. He narrates of how a

powerful individual in the Ministry of Lands threatened him. Letangule quotes the very words the ministry official used to intimidate him:

You know that politics in Baringo is now becoming volatile. Your political activities are sparking tribal animosity in the area. You already know that the region has been under Moi's able leadership all these years. He will be retiring and should do so without commotion or any embarrassment. (152)

The unnamed government representative addressing Letangule makes it clear that some spheres of the Kenyan nation such as political leadership are mapped out for some people and not open to the rest of the country. Letangule utilizes the concept of selectivity by choosing not to name the individual who was threatening him. It could be because he (Letangule) wants to avoid being sued or just that he is using the said individual as a symbol of the rot that defines Kenya's political space. Kenyan political leadership is depicted as a criminal enterprise whose standard operation procedure is founded on the marginalization and silencing of part of the country's population. Letangule quotes the exact words as a way of creating credibility in his story. The reader is also able to feel the threat because of the immediacy of the direct quote. Letangule is also seeking the reader's empathy by narrating about the confrontation with a powerful individual. The warrior hero in his quest to protect their people will always meet with stronger adversaries in order to demonstrate his courage and resilience. Glory comes from having the courage to confront powerful enemies. Letangule constructs himself as a fighter willing to sacrifice for his people when he narrates of how he responded to the threats. He recalls, "I let them know that I was simply looking out for, and fighting for my community" (152).

In most war narratives, the legendary war hero gets betrayed by those he cares for and this results in character development, the hero attains a new world view from the shock caused by the betrayal. Despite working hard to give the Ilchamus a voice and taking a great risk on his life by confronting



the family of President Moi in a political duel, Letangule realizes that his own people do not have faith in his leadership capabilities and they side with his enemies. He recalls:

I was informed that Gideon was waiting for me in Kabarnet to surrender my candidacy so that he could submit his papers as the only unopposed candidate for Baringo Central. My plan was to be in the company of my supporters as we headed for the ECK office to submit my papers. However, no one from my community was willing to stand by me, so I gathered a few supporters from the Turkana community who joined me and we proceeded to Kabarnet. (146)

Despite the betrayal by his people, Letangule still went on to fight for them through the courts and eventually, the Ilchamus were granted their own constituency to facilitate their political representation in the national parliament. He also narrates of his other great battles that aimed at correcting the injustices meted on his people by the Kenyan government and its development partners. He paints himself as the slayer of ogres and monsters that threaten to swallow his people. He mentions about his role as a lead advocate in the case filed by the Ilchamus people against the government of Kenya in the year 2006. The government had introduced a plant species whose botanical name is *Prosopis Juliflora* but the local Ilchamus community named it *mathenge* after the agricultural officer who was in charge of the government project that introduced the plant in the locality. The plant turned out to be poisonous to the livestock and this threatened the existence of the community. The animals lost their teeth, were unable to feed and died a slow agonizing death due to starvation. He narrates. “Needless to say, a toothless animal was eventually going to die from hunger since it could not chew anything. The pastoralist community was therefore losing its livelihood at a very high rate to the *mathenge* menace” (177).

A successful warrior is one who employs strategy in the battlefield and Letangule employs this concept in his legal battle. To convince the judge about the existential threat posed by the *mathenge* weed to the Ilchamus community, Letangule had a goat brought from Baringo to Nairobi. He recalls,

As I presented the case, it occurred to me during the court sessions that anyone who was not familiar with the harmful effects caused by the plant could not figure out what I meant without a visible specimen. I therefore arranged for a goat from the village in Baringo to be brought to Nairobi. On 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2006, I presented a live, toothless goat in court as evidence that the damage being caused was indeed severe. It was a peculiar exhibit that morning; a goat making an appearance as a witness in court, yet it made the point loud and clear. (177)

This strategy helped Letangule win this particular battles and the government was ordered to uproot it and compensate the community. Letangule comes out as a defender of the Ilchamus, a vanguard in their battle for existence. It is important to note that as a pastoral community, the livelihood of the Ilchamus is tied to their livestock. A toothless goat is a metaphor for economic sabotage that would in turn threaten an entire community with extinction. Here Letangule is accusing the Kenyan government of perpetrating a silent holocaust towards a minority community. He is saying that to destroy someone's source of livelihood is to sentence them to death. Having the *mathenge* weed in the backyard of the Ilchamus community was a serious error on the part of the Kenyan government. Here Letangule is also questioning the place of local solutions to local problems. He narrates that the problematic weed had been introduced from South America to combat desertification in Baringo but ended up causing more problems than solutions. He narrates, "As part of the side effects, the sharp thorns of the plant caused paralysis to animals and humans if stepped on" (176). Letangule is questioning the wisdom of importing solutions instead of thinking of homegrown ones in matters development. He is arguing that context of a problem

determines what will work and what will not in terms of the possible solutions. He argues for the indigenization of the solutions to local problems.

Battle or hero narratives tend to celebrate the place of family and love in the warrior's life. Letangule narrates of his family and love life too. He makes it known that he celebrates family as his source of inspiration. He narrates of his wives, children and parents with great pride as a husband, father and son. Even though he was not the first born son, he lets the reader know that he was the one who stood at his father's death bed and held him as he died. He narrates of having been deeply pained by both his father and wife's deaths because he loved them greatly. He lets the world know that his children have excelled in education and some have even followed him into legal practice.

A warrior may conquer and win many battles, some of which are epic in nature but the human part becomes evident in their weaknesses. Although Letangule constructs himself as a warrior of great valor and courage, his story has embarrassing weaknesses that depict him as a human being with personal challenges. He acknowledges that at some point in his life, he fell deep in alcoholism and this messed up his finances. He recalls, "To the best of my memory, I cannot account substantially for the money I made from the law firm during this time. We drank it all up, one gulp of a beer after another" (132). Although narrating this part of his life may have been embarrassing, Letangule comes out as a warrior because it takes a lot of courage to accept a weakness in one's personality. The courage to undress himself in public; to open up his life for public scrutiny is also a strategy of creating credibility for his narrative. The reader sees a realistic character with both strengths and weaknesses. Letangule also comes out as a reliable, truthful and honest individual who has nothing to hide.

The autobiography as a genre of literature is rich in creative strategies. Apart from structuring his life story as a battle narrative, Letangule employs other narrative strategies such as symbolism, allusion, the first person narrative voice, journey motif and paratexts. By narrating the story of the Maasai people being exploited by a Swiss shoe company, Letangule alludes to Walter Rodney's book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. In that text, Rodney makes a case about the exploitation of the African people and their resources by European imperialists. To Rodney, European strong material base is the proceeds of crime against the continent of Africa. By raising this issue in his life narrative, Letangule is calling for a re-examination of the relationships between African nations and the rest of the world.

To construct himself as a great warrior, Letangule parallels his life with that of Alexander the Great of Macedonia. He makes allusion to the story of Alexander the Great and the Gordian knot that had tied a war chariot to a tree for many years. A prophecy had been given that whoever would untie the knot and release the chariot would become a great warrior king. Many people in Macedonia tried their luck with the Gordian knot but no one came near succeeding; it was an intricate knot. Philip Freeman in *Alexander the Great* notes that Alexander was a great military tactician because he was immersed in both the martial and the academia spaces; he was a soldier and a thinker. As a radical thinker, man of tact and strategy, Alexander the Great never wasted time with the knot, he sliced through it with his sword and took possession of the fabled chariot.

Alexander the Great was a military man who was also into scholarship and his success was attributed to this fact. He grew up under the tutelage of Aristotle, something that made him very inquisitive. He conquered Asia and inscribed his name in the history of classical Greece. Letangule realized that livestock wealth would never be the perfect answer to his family's material deprivation, and consequently invested all his energies in furthering his education. Through

education, he becomes a lawyer whose source of earning is not affected by changes in the physical environment. He rides the chariot of education to attain glory as a defender of the Ilchamus community and their human rights. Alexander the Great achieved glory by serving Macedonia and Letangule inscribes himself in the Ilchamus community by serving them. Letangule becomes a modern warrior king of the Ilchamus who fights his battles in the courtrooms aided by his deep knowledge of the law. Letangule's efforts to defend the rights of the Ilchamus end up making the community visible or known. Alexander the great is credited with spreading the influences of Greece and the Greek language in the ancient world through his military incursions.

Alexander the Great was known for his inability to accept defeat in anything he focused on and never shied away from tactical retreats in order to achieve a victory. This trait is seen in Letangule when he narrates about his inability to accept failure during his bar examination. He recalls, "I also received the same disheartening results. We had failed in Accounts, the most intimidating paper for most law students. We had to re-sit the paper if we were to ever move beyond the level" (103). To fail at the bar examinations and not do anything about it would mean the end of his dream of becoming an advocate. Failure to be admitted to the bar and get a license to practice law would mean that Letangule would not be able to fight for his people. He executed a tactical retreat and went back for victory. He recalls, "As 1995 came to close, I finally managed to re-sit and excel in the Accounting paper" (113).

Letangule narrates about his betrayal by his community. The Ilchamus chose to vote for Gideon Moi, a Turgen instead of Letangule, their son yet he (Letangule) was risking so much in their defense in the face of a possible extinction. Letangule is drawing a parallel or making allusion to the story of Jesus Christ. Letangule here is using biblical allusion to the story of Jesus Christ being condemned by his people even though he was blameless. It is a strategy of constructing himself as

a savior to his people and to draw attention to the tremendous sacrifice he committed on behalf of others. This allusion gives him the moral authority to comment on social, political, cultural and economic issues in the country because he has already painted himself as beyond reproach in matters of the law.

Letangule uses the first person narrative voice to narrate his story and comment on issues like environmental conservation and political leadership. The story is told in the first person narrative voice as a strategy of making Letangule own his story as the representation of his lived experiences. Muchiri in “The Child Narrator in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin*” observes that the narrative voice helps demonstrate the subject’s growth as they narrate their lived experiences using memory. She further notes that,

The narrator plays a crucial role in forming a link between a work of art and a reader. His or her perspective determines who and what readers look at in a story, how long they look; what details they focus on and for how long they look. It is the narrator who directs and organizes the readers’ view and opinion of issues by being the voice at the center of the narrative-controlling, shaping and guiding the action therein. (3)

Using the first person narrative voice, Letangule narrates about the importance of taking care of the environment. He makes it clear that conserving the environment is not a favour human beings are doing to nature but that the survival of human life is intricately connected with a protected environment. He narrates about the encroachment of human settlements around Lake Baringo and how nature later reclaimed all its territory leaving many people homeless. The waters of the lake swallowed Letangule’s home; buried his houses under water forcing him to look for alternative housing. He recalls:

I had built my permanent home in 2000 on a piece of land in Ng’ambo village, about one kilometer from the lake shore. I normally stayed there with my family whenever we travelled upcountry during holidays. No other homestead stood between me and

the lake, so I enjoyed the scenic unblocked view of the vast waters, and the beautiful flora and fauna right from my home. Unfortunately, my home and those of other villagers stood in Mother Nature's way, but not for long. (187)

Letangule accepts culpability when it comes to environmental degradation by confessing that he had encroached on the lake's reserve land so that he could have a holiday home next to the lake. Although nature has the capacity to make human life meaningful, its rules and principles must be observed. For failing to understand that the lake needs allowance in terms of land whenever it has taken in excess water load, Letangule and his neighbours pay a heavy price; nature renders them destitute. He narrates of the negative ramifications of his disregard of nature's laws. People made fun of his fate when he became homeless. He narrates of the experience:

It may have been a joke then but the inescapable happened. The area around the lake became a swamp, and with time, the lake shore and nearby land permanently became part of the lake. My neighbours and I had to give in and let Mother Nature have her way. It is a story that sounds too strange to be true, but as we speak, my cherished home lies buried under its watery grave in Lake Baringo. (187)

Using the first person narrative voice, Letangule creates awareness of the changing world environments. Human activities such as industrialization and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources have resulted into global warming. Human disregard of the rules of nature that maintain a balance has resulted into disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, *Tsunamis* (giant sea waves), loss of both and plant and animal species as their habitats are destroyed. Letangule is warning that very soon, the human species may be pushed to extinction as the environment becomes unfriendly and unable to sustain life. A house represents security and preservation of life and by having it swallowed and submerged by the lake is a statement that unless human beings take care of the environment, the imbalance caused by their activities may kick them out of the earth's security into extinction. He narrates about his childhood and how the physical environment made life enjoyable. He reminisces of his childhood:

What fascinated me most was how our livelihood, entertainment and the natural environment were so intricately woven. Our vast playing field, the food we ate, the games we played and even our religious beliefs seamlessly blended into self-sufficient cosmos. Our contribution was simply to be present and appreciate all.  
(45)

The point Letangule is making is that a conserved environment gives back to the human society by sustaining human life.

Letangule also uses symbolism as an artistic strategy in his personal narrative. There are events, people and objects that represent ideas he wants to communicate to his audience. The explorer Joseph Thomson and his sojourn into the interior of East Africa is representative of the intrusion of European culture into the African way of life. Letangule's journeys are also symbolic of a warrior's movement in search of his quest. The journeys equip Letangule with skills, knowledge, experiences as well as getting him the support of like-minded individuals to help in his battles for justice to be served to the Ilchamus people. His cherished wrapper, *shuka* that he holds so dear is representative of the love and connection he has with his Ilchamus' culture.

The title of the text, *Trailblazer*, is a cohesive strategy linking all the chapters together and a strategy for letting the reader know that this is a battle narrative. A trailblazer is a pioneer or a vanguard who makes a way for others to follow; a role model for others to emulate. It helps him project his identity as the vanguard of the Ilchamus army that sought to get justice for the community by having them recognized as part of Kenya. The title brings to the readers' minds the idea of strategy, conquest and victory as well as communicating the idea that Letangule sees himself as a role model for people to emulate him. The fact that he considers himself a role model for the Ilchamus also underscores the idea of marginalization and invisibility, that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenya, there are still some communities that operate from the periphery. The title also helps in creating the image of Letangule as an unrivaled fighter among the Ilchamus community.



Letangule celebrates his achievements and demonstrates that his life is worthy to be emulated and this expression of conceit is a defining property of the autobiographical genre. To invite people into your life is inspired partly by the desire to show off one's achievements. The *morán* or warrior motif runs throughout the text. I found out that this is a strategy by Letangule to claim and celebrate his cultural identity as an Ilchamus as well as a signal to the reader that he considers himself a defender and protector of his people and their cultural heritage

Letangule structures his story to ensure that each chapter deals with a micro narrative or a story within his story. I noted that he does this as a way of providing different people whom he considers important in his life with a platform to achieve visibility. By using this structure where a topic deals with an episode, an event or the lives and contributions of other characters to his identity and success, Letangule is signaling to the reader that he is using his autobiography to provide a voice for others. The chapter titles act as pithy summaries of each micro narrative. For instance, the story of his great grandfather is given the title, "Porter from the Coast", when he wants to delve deep into the culture of the Ilchamus, he organizes the information under the chapter titled, "Tapestry of the Ilchamus ways". By employing this structure, Letangule makes his life story a coherent narrative that is easier for the reader to follow by organizing it in the structure of a play. As he narrates about his life; his family, schooling, professional accomplishments, political and family life, he also allows his parents, grandparents, great grandfather and friends to tell their stories.

Letangule employs an element of orality, the "I" narrator, to tell his story. He takes the role of an oral narrator in an oral narrative who controls the pace of the narration. This helps him control the narrative and engage in selectivity; to decide what to tell and what to leave out of his story. The use of the first person narrative voice, 'I' narrator signals to the reader that he is the authority in the process of narrating his life story. Muchiri in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from*

*Independent Kenya* augments the argument about the role of the “I” narrator as a strategy in an autobiography. She posits, “The autobiography is a story in the first person point of view where the narrator owns and controls the narrative so that readers get to know only what the narrator tells them” (57)

Letangule employs analepsis as a narrative strategy. The nature of a life narrative is that the subject narrates their life story while already an adult and therefore analepsis or flashback becomes a major narrative strategy. Letangule engages in retrospection or recall of the events of his childhood. Looking back into the past helps the subject understand how they have become who they are in their adulthood.

Selectivity as a nature of the autobiography may in most cases give rise to silences and gaps. A reader can notice when a subject leaves out some information and go on to make conclusions about the missing information. Letangule’s story has silences and gaps. For instance, he does not talk about his second wife only telling the reader that his second wife left their matrimonial home and never came back. Letangule does not reveal the reason his wife left him neither does he pay homage to her like he does to his other wives. The reader can read a micro-narrative from this silence and gap; that what happened between Letangule and the second wife caused him great pain. Further, the reader can see that Letangule has never forgiven the second wife and he regrets entering into a union with her hence the reason he leaves her out of his life story.

Muchiri in *Women’s Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* looks at the genre of autobiography as a journey that takes the subject from the innocence and inexperience of childhood to the experience and knowledge of adulthood. To Muchiri, the autobiographical subject is involved in a journey to understand their environment and themselves through retrospection and

introspection. Letangule uses the journey motif as a strategy of self-narration. Letangule's experiences take the form of a journey motif in his life narrative *Trailblazer*. The journeys undertaken by the subject are at the physical, mental, and psychological levels. The narrator's physical journeys take two forms, his growth from childhood to adulthood and in the second growth, he moves from one geographical location to another which gives him different experiences thus making a stage of growth depending on the stage of growth the narrator is. Letangule makes the mental journey from innocence to experience, from a young boy herding cattle and sheep to a school going child where he is introduced to things that he finds strange to him. This journey ends when the narrator has acquired knowledge. As an adult, Letangule is able to interpret his childhood experiences which as a child he was not able to understand.

Letangule's journey from home to school teaches him about the world beyond his home. He makes friends with boys from different backgrounds and this opens his eyes to the world beyond Baringo. In Sacho High school for instance, he learns that social hierarchies are usually informed by economic foundations. He could only experience camaraderie with those who came from humble backgrounds like him. Psychological journeys help the narrator to understand themselves emotionally. Letangule has grown older and he is able to accept the stereo typical name *Washamba* that renders him invisible that has been given to him as a boy straight from the village; he accepts his place and does not let this deter him from working hard in school. He recalls:

Sacho High School also opened my eyes to a subtle boundary line that became clearer with time, though I had been oblivious of it from my earlier days there. We, the village boys (washamba) gradually began to understand that we were in a different category of students. The rich and affluent class did not spare us the truth of this reality. Our stark difference grew as the school term progressed and the distinctive clanism widened, at least in our perspective. I learnt that a large percentage of the students in the school came from very wealthy backgrounds. (84)

When he is chosen to represent his school at Lenana School in Nairobi, Letangule undertakes a journey that takes him to Nairobi for the first time. The naivety shown by the boys makes them a target of city conmen who relieve them of their transport money. This journey opens Letangule's eyes to the mercenary nature of urban centers. His first journey to the city of Nairobi makes him realize that social values and structures in the city are practically nonexistent and that the city is a space where the animal instincts are dominant over the human ones. He gets conned and exploited by adults in Nairobi because he was too naïve to think that adults with grey hair would instinctively come to the rescue of stranded school children. Tom Odhiambo in "The City as a Marker of Modernity in Post-Colonial Kenyan Popular Literature Fiction" notes that the city as used in Kenyan popular fiction is a metaphor of modernity. Odhiambo points out that the cohesive social structures found in rural Kenya are conspicuously absent in the city space because the scarcity of material things pushes the urban population to operate as predators. Odhiambo argues, "The allure of Nairobi seems to draw most individuals into a cycle of material deprivation, social and cultural alienation and general moral degeneration" (3).

Being conned in the streets of Nairobi was a humiliating experience but it taught Letangule a vital life lesson about trust; he learned to be careful with his trust and also prepared him for the time he would live in Nairobi later in his life. The journey taught him that modernity which is represented by the city is characterized by individualism unlike the village set up where life was largely approached as a communal journey. Letangule also acknowledges that if it was not for Sister Maureen, a Catholic nun and a teacher who had given him the chance, he would never have been part of the group that came to Lenana School in Nairobi. By mentioning the nun by name, he is paying homage to her for nurturing his leadership capabilities. This journey is also marks

Letangule's move to cultural hybridity; that he is moving from being an Ilchamus to a Kenyan because the city is a cultural melting pot; the space where cultural synthesis happens.

At some point while working on a court case for the Maasai against the Swiss shoe company, Letangule has to travel to the United States of America on the invitation by American lawyers from the Light Years IP law firm he was working with. This journey helps him to understand and appreciate the place of social capital in human life. He realizes that an American law firm is committed to addressing the needs of an African community that has been violated by European company. Without the American lawyers, the Maasai would never have won the case. By mentioning the law firm by name is a strategy of creating credibility to his story and also paying homage to the American friends for their help to him and the Maasai community.

Letangule also narrates of his journey from home to his Uncle's place where he was to live for some years. This move was necessitated by the fact that Letangule's parents were unable to provide for all their children due to extreme material deprivation. This journey helps him to realize that the concept of parenthood is not necessarily tied to blood relations but is about love. It also teaches him to become progressively independent and to navigate the world without necessarily having to rely on his parents. He was later in life to travel to Nairobi to work before he joined the University of Nairobi for his studies in Law. The journey to the University of Nairobi was to inspire him to create a new identity as a Kenyan when he got to make friends with students from diverse backgrounds. His fellow students and friends include Peter Munya, a cabinet secretary and a former governor for Meru County, Charles Koech, Kigotho Mwangi and Okong'o Omogeni. Mentioning his university friends who are currently prominent individuals in Kenya is a strategy for creating autobiographical truth as well as paying homage to his friends. The mention of the

University of Nairobi is Letangule's strategy of inscribing himself to the institution and claiming his identity as a scholar.

Through the narrator's experiences, important turning points in various stages of growth are revealed; therefore the journey motif is an important component in narrating experiences. These journeys mold the narrators into what they become at the end of their life narratives. Letangule has now grown to be an important public figure and he is now visible to the world, on his growth and acquisition of a voice, characters and dignity.

#### **4.2 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to explore how Letangule narrates the self, the community and the country. I specifically examined the various narrative strategies he employs to tell his story. In this chapter, I found that Letangule tells his story as if he is narrating a battle narrative and he is the lead warrior. He makes allusion to the ancient Greek city state of Sparta as a way of making the Ilchamus community gain respect and dignity. He also alludes to the story of Alexander the Great as a way of projecting his identity as a scholar warrior. My conclusion is that this is a deliberate effort on his part to project himself as the protector or guardian of the Ilchamus community whom he feels have been marginalized by the Kenyan government. He champions for the rights of his community as a way of having them recognized, respected and accepted as part of the Kenyan community. I also find that Letangule considers poverty, illiteracy, violation of human rights and discrimination as the main factors that contribute to an individual or a community losing its voice, identity and dignity. He looks at Kenya as a nation that is founded on the basis of exclusion, that there is no equality and equity when it comes to participation in national matters. He feels that the smaller communities in terms of their population get pushed away from the national decision making table.

I note that Letangule uses the family, community, educational institutions and the legal profession as his main fields of identity formation. He feels that fathers occupy a sensitive position in a society and that if a man provides a secure and peaceful home environment, the children grow up with minimal social issues. He strongly advocates for men to provide mentorship and be their children's role model. Letangule considers himself a great father because his children have sought to emulate him by following him into academia and the legal practice. This chapter also finds that Letangule considers himself a successful Kenyan whose life is worth sharing and emulating; by writing his autobiography, he is making a statement that he wants others to emulate him hence the title *Trailblazer* which can be interpreted to mean a role model. Letangule inscribes himself into the Ilchamus community by championing for their rights and well as upholding their culture. He narrates, "As a long-serving lawyer, the highlight of my legal career was when I was called upon to champion the rights of indigenous people, specifically the Ilchamus community" (ix). He also inscribes himself in the Kenyan nation by narrating about his contribution to nation building through the electoral body, IEBC (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission). The next chapter will focus on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the entire study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Conclusion

The study aimed at studying how the invisible or the marginalized in the society narrate their story to visibility. The focus of this study was Thomas Letangule's *Trailblazer*. The autobiographical subject in this text is a public figure from the minority Ilchamus community. The study purposed to analyze how he narrates his story, and that of his community, how he claims his dignity, respect and character; his visibility.

The objectives of the study were: to examine the elements of autobiography manifest in Letangule's life narrative, to integrate how the autobiographer employs autobiographical strategies and language choices to narrate and construct himself and his community. I also sought to analyze the personal, communal and national issues that Letangule discusses in his autobiography. The study hypotheses were: Letangule employs various autobiographical elements in his life story, *Trailblazer*; the autobiographer employs various autobiographical strategies and language choices to narrate and construct himself and his community and that the autobiographer uses his personal story as a platform to highlight and discuss personal, communal and national issues.

The study was guided by two theories: the theory of autobiography and theory of narratology. This theory of the autobiography makes reference to the nature and functions of the autobiography genre as a unique form of writing. In addition to the theory of the autobiography, I also used the theory of narratology to examine how stories are constructed.



The study concludes that *Trailblazer* takes the form of a battle narrative. Lidewij Van Gils, Irene de Jong and Caroline Kroom in, *Textual Strategies in Ancient War Narratives* note that although different wars are fought for different reasons and in different parts of the world, the narratives of war have characteristics that cut across. They identify the following as the characteristics of battle narratives: the celebration of heroism, suffering, betrayal, loyalty, sacrifice, love, hatred, beliefs in luck or fate, human frailty, reasons for wanting to live or die and an all-permeating fear (1).

The autobiographer uses his training as a lawyer to fight for the rights of his community in the courtroom. He assumes the duty and responsibilities of the lead warrior or vanguard in the battle to help the Ilchamus claim their identity, space, dignity and respect as bona fide members of the Kenyan nation. The autobiography employs a language that has a military connotation to it as strategy of informing the reader that Letangule considers himself a warrior and that his life has been a series of battles against marginalization brought about by poverty and state neglect. The study finds that Letangule considers himself the voice for his community. The study discovers that structuring his life narrative as a battle narrative as a strategy by the Letangule to project his identity as a warrior, hero and a defender of his community.

I discovered that Letangule looks at education as a weapon against poverty and marginalization. It is through education that Letangule manages to move from the invisibility and obscurity of backwaters of Lake Baringo to the Kenyan public service space. Education helps Letangule become a lawyer and a commissioner for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. I conclude that Letangule considers education a modern arsenal for the contemporary warrior. I noted that Letangule structures his life narrative in the form of a battle narrative as a strategy of indicting both the colonial government and successive post-colonial Kenyan governments for using marginalization as a governance policy. Letangule is saying that denying some sections of

the Kenyan populace the dignity of a voice is not an accident of history but a deliberate process instituted by those in the leadership of the country. Letangule is saying that individuals and communities have to fight for their space and the human dignity that comes with the respect and granting of human rights. The use of the battle narrative structure is also meant to make Letangule appear fearless, selfless, decisive, committed and a focused individual who is worthy to be emulated by the world. The structure is also a strategy to signal to the reader that Letangule is firmly immersed in the culture of his people the Ilchamus who venerate the warrior *morani* in the social structure. This narrative structure also greatly contributes to perpetuation of Letangule's identity; he wants the reader to know that he has worked for all he has, his education, wealth, dignity, voice and space. Letangule employs allusion, making reference to the character of Alexander the Great, the Macedonian King who is credited with spreading the Greek culture and influence to the world through military conquest. This allusion is made to reinforce Letangule's identity as a modern day warrior who is credited with making the Ilchamus people and culture visible on the world stage.

I also noted that the *morani* or warrior motif runs throughout the text. I found out that this is a strategy by Letangule to claim and celebrate his cultural identity as an Ilchamus as well as a signal to the reader that he considers himself a defender and protector of his people and their cultural heritage. As a lead warrior for the Ilchamus, Letangule having sacrificed so much for his community hoped that the Ilchamus would vote him in numbers, only to discover that no one is even willing to escort him to hand in his nomination papers, he had to get people from the neighbouring Pokot community. Letangule comes across as a loyal person who does not leave his people at any given time. He defends them consistently to the end in the hope that they will get a voice. Letangule believes that he will win all the cases irrespective of the weight they carry. He

believes he has what it takes as a lawyer to stand a just ruling. He is also human and has his weak points. Letangule turns alcoholic and spends all his money drinking which is a setback in his upward mobility. He notes that he would defend his community with his life and claim the space that has been denied of them.

The study also noted that Letangule employs a cyclic plot in his autobiography, *Trailblazer*. This is a typical type of plot for a battle narrative as war keeps shifting base every now and then and the state of war or when or where the enemy may attack is not defined. Letangule thus starts us off on his autobiography as he lands in Washington, he vividly describes the new ground and the fact that it is an environment that is totally new to him and he takes time to familiarize himself with his new surroundings, it is from here that he later explains to us the readers the purpose of his journey and later he begins his story on his mission to the United States of America.

I discovered that Letangule structures his story such that each chapter presents a micro narrative. I noted that he does this as a way of providing different people whom he considers important in his life with a platform to achieve visibility. By using this structure where a chapter deals with an episode, an event or the lives and contributions of other characters to his identity and success, Letangule is signaling to the reader that he is using his autobiography to provide a voice for others. The chapter titles act as pithy summaries of each micro narrative. For instance, the story of his great grandfather is given the title, “Porter from the Coast”, when he wants to delve deep into the cultural of the Ilchamus, he organizes the information under the chapter titled, “Tapestry of the Ilchamus ways”. By organizing his story in the structure, Letangule makes his life story a coherent narrative that is easier for the reader to follow. As he narrates about his life; his family, schooling, professional accomplishments, political and family life, he also allows his parents, grandparents, great grandfather and friends to tell their stories or their stories to get known by the world.

The study discovered that Letangule employs the journey motif as a central autobiographical strategy in his story. Letangule employs journey motif as a metaphor for the learning process. He undertakes many physical journeys that result in him learning and perfecting new life lessons and skills. His first journey to the city of Nairobi makes him realize that social values and structures in the city are practically nonexistent and that the city is a space where the animal instincts are dominant over the human ones. He gets conned and exploited by adults in Nairobi because he was too naïve to think that adults with grey hair would instinctively come to the rescue of stranded school children. Tom Odhiambo in “The City as a Marker of Modernity in Post-Colonial Kenyan Popular Literature Fiction” posits that the city as used in Kenyan popular fiction is a metaphor of modernity. Odhiambo points out that the cohesive social structures found in rural Kenya are conspicuously absent in the city space because the scarcity of material things pushes the urban population to operate as predators. Odhiambo argues, “The allure of Nairobi seems to draw most individuals into a cycle of material deprivation, social and cultural alienation and general moral degeneration” (3).

The first person narrative voice is used as a cohesive device in the autobiography, this helps in creating autobiographical truth. He utilizes this first person narrative voice to comment on the interconnection and intersection of the environment and human survival. He narrates about his involvement in the Ilchamus community’s efforts towards environmental conservation by arguing a case about the *Mathenge* plant which caused siltation in Lake Baringo thus the frequent flooding. He narrates how his house is immersed in Lake Baringo because he had encroached on the lake. This recall is meant to support his argument that nature hits back and destroys those who have no regard for the environment.

Letangule uses his personal narrative to recall and record the country's history. He tells us about the origin of his people and his great grandfather Loutagule and he alludes to colonization where his great grandfather had to carry Lord Joseph Thompson shoulder high in the vast Savanna. He recalls about the violent period in Kenya's history, the 2007 post-election violence as a way of underscoring the importance of unity. He points that post-election violence came as a result of feelings of marginalization of some sections of the country. The recall of the history of Kenya is a strategy of inscribing himself in the national narrative. The recall of history therefore helps disseminate crucial lessons for the country. I noted that Letangule also writes himself into the Kenyan nation by narrating about his contribution to building the nation as a civil servant. He narrates of his role as a commissioner for the electoral body, Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). Letangule was a commissioner who was mandated to oversee the elections and he is made overall in charge of the conflict handling resolutions committee which was a respectable position and he handles the cases in a diplomatic way.

My study is not conclusive on the topic of Kenyan life narratives and further research into this area is recommended. Further studies can be done on how women in public spaces from marginalized communities narrate their life stories. Further, a comparative study can be carried out between the life narratives of Kenyans from both the smaller and bigger communities to explore how they tell their stories.

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## APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE

**INTERVIEW WITH LAWYER THOMAS LETANGULE HELD ON JUNE 30<sup>TH</sup> 2021,  
TIME 1100HRS TO 1300HRS**

**VENUE, 4<sup>TH</sup> NGONG AVENUE TOWER, 15<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR**

Although my study of Thomas Letangule's autobiography, *Trailblazer* took close textual reading and analysis, I thought I should have an interview with the author. The interview took the form of a discussion and I had specific questions to guide it:

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Thank you very much counsel for granting me the chance to interview you, I do not wish to take so much of your time for I know you are a busy man so I will go straight to my questions if you allow me to

**Thomas Letangule:** That is very fine with me, I am elated too, I did not think someone would consider my story worthy of a post-graduate degree research; I will try my best to answer your questions

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Counsel, what motivated you to write your life story at such a young age?

**Thomas Letangule:** Well, I just wanted to tell my story and I did not think age should be an impediment to that. We all have our stories and I thought I had something to share. As a matter of fact, I intend to write another one in the near future because things are happening in my life I would wish to share. I came from a much marginalized background and I feel that my life can inspire others. I am one person who admires former USA president Barack Obama greatly and I have read all his books. Obama wrote his autobiography in his forties and I thought, why not? Like Obama, my journey to the point I am at presently has been a difficult one

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Thank you sir for that, so if I heard you well, you will write another autobiography?

**Thomas Letangule:** Yes! Spourtinah, I will definitely do. I have been documenting my life on a daily basis and I will compile another book, my personal assistant Noor Abdi will tell you that is something in the pipeline

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Speaking of inspiring others, do you consider yourself an accomplished individual, a role model?

**Thomas Letangule:** Yes, you see, the Ilchamus is a very small community in the backwaters of Baringo, very few of my community members have gone on to experience life outside Baringo. I thought I could inspire young people not just from my community but from other marginalized societies to realize that nothing is difficult.

**Moraa Spourtinah:** counsel, allow me to ask you about the language use in your book, was it deliberate and if so, what was it meant to achieve?

**Thomas Letangule:** Well, I really do not know what to say about that. You see, I am not a professional writer; neither do I have formal training in creative writing. What I did was to tell my story in a simple language; you will realize that my book does not have legal jargon and unnecessary difficult words. I was just telling the story of my life

**Moraa Spourtinah:** My thinking was the story borrows heavily the language of battle

**Thomas Letangule:** Really? Wow! I never thought of it that way

**Moraa Sourtinah:** I noticed that your chapters are organized as a series of battles where a victory has to be attained

**Thomas Letangule:** battles you say? Really, I had no idea, you see, like I told you, I just tell my story in the simplest language possible. And yes, come to think of it, I have actually been involved in battles all my life. Spourtinah, when you come from where I have come from and have to struggle all your life to be visible, you turn into a fighter but honestly, I did not realize my book takes that form of a battle narrative

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Sir, what is your view of the family in nation building?

**Thomas Letangule:** Family you say? Well, I am one person who loves my family and I believe that family is everything. When we raise stable families, we end up with reliable people who are in charge of their lives. I get disturbed when I see people neglect their families. Back in my village, I see that the loudest men in the public *barazas*(meetings) and I get amused. Where do such people get the moral authority to speak in a gathering from?

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Counsel, there is something I noticed about your text, you reveal so much about your personal life, does it worry you?

**Thomas Letangule:** No No No! I am a very honest person, if I chose to tell my story, then why should I censor it? That would not make sense that is in my view fraudulent. I told my story as truthfully as possible. There is only one part my publisher said we had to delete some details, it involved my exit from a law firm and the publisher thought we could be sued by the said law firm so we held back some details. You realize I even include an episode where I was drugged by some ladies I met in bar and they stole my phone! I find no shame in letting people know that I have had my low moments and weaknesses, I am human too. But those ladies had been sent to me by KANU operatives because they wanted the phone to know the people I had been calling. I had been accused by KANU of associating with the oppositions and yes, I had spoken to honourable Raila

Odinga that day. Technology was not as it is today where you can get someone's phone data without having to take their gadget

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Speaking of the openness in your story, the reader gets a feeling that you are saying that your first marriage was a union of convenience

**Thomas Letangule:** You are right on that and I wanted it known, in fact, I said in the text that I was not looking for a wife at that point in my life, I was still a student but (insert the name of his first wife) was looking for a husband and I felt obliged to accept her proposal. I did it out of politeness not love. The woman I loved was the lady who left me for another man who was better off financially. That is one time I felt lost and in that period of hopelessness, I managed to get involved with my late wife in an unplanned phone called as they say, the rest is history. I loved my late wife (\*insert name) so much but she died during childbirth. I am an ordinary person who loves the things of this world.

**Moraa Spourtinah:** What informed your choice of the title, *Trailblazer*?

**Thomas Letangule:** Actually this was not the initial title, what happened is that as we were celebrating the successful completion of the text, we got into a photo session and it was the photographer who jokingly asked me, “ by the way, why don't you gave the book the title *Trailblazer*? You have been a trailblazer all your life” and that is how we ended up with the title becoming the *Trailblazer*

**Moraa Spourtinah:** Thank you so much sir, I am grateful for the opportunity to interview you, our discussion has been illuminating