

**PUBLISHING OUTPOSTS ON THE KENYAN LITERARY
LANDSCAPE: A CRITIQUE OF *BUSARA*, *MŪTIIRI* AND *KWANI*?**

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted for examination or award of a degree in another university:

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I
dedicate this work
to
Hannah Nyarũirũ,
for her unwavering support;
to
Michelle Mũirũ and Sharleen Wanja,
who cheered me up
along the way;
and
to
the memory of Peter Mwangi,
my dad
who passed the baton before he
passed on.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* as magazines that are representative of some defining moments in Kenya's literary history. Using a historical approach, I have related literary production in Kenya to its socio-political contexts from the 1960s to 2014. I have discussed how early Kenyan literary magazines such as *Busara* participated in the establishment of foundational literary traditions in the country and examined the roles that pioneer creative writers and critics played in setting the pace for later writers and critics. Further, I have evaluated the founding of *Mũtiiri* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in America in 1994 and demonstrated how the circumstances that gave birth to *Mũtiiri* also precipitated the founding of *Kwani?* in 2003. Closely reading specific texts from selected issues of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*, I have interrogated the points of convergence and divergence across the three periodicals to illuminate their pivotal position in the growth and development of Kenyan literature to date. This study not only illustrates how literary journals and magazines are brooding nests for creative writers and literary critics, but it also shows how they nurture literary cultures, build bridges between generations of writers and between traditions, and even generate space, time and tempo for (new) literary trends. The study therefore positions literary journals and magazines as publishing outposts that have made a significant contribution to the evolution and development of Kenyan literature over time.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it. (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 166)

1.1 Introduction

Fanon's argument on the generational consciousness and self-appraisal is quite relevant to this study as the study is an examination of the growth and development of Kenyan literature from the experimentations of the first generation of writers to the present as represented in literary journals and magazines. Fanon underscored the important role that the preceding generations in underdeveloped countries played or should play in "resisting the work of erosion carried on by colonialism" and in helping "the maturing of the struggles of today" (166) and urged the subsequent generations to appreciate the role their predecessors played in the making of the histories of their countries' struggles for emancipation. Focusing on selected journals and magazines published in the period from the mid-1960s to 2014, this study demonstrates how new writers have built on the traditions of their predecessors and at the same time introduced new trends in Kenyan literature. Literary journals and magazines have helped create literary communities that have been instrumental in not only building bridges between different generations of writers but also in shaping trends in literary production in the country. The study therefore sees literary journals and magazines as publishing outposts whose contribution to the growth and development of Kenyan literature merits an exhaustive study.

The pivotal role of periodicals in the rise of literary traditions elsewhere in the world has been widely acknowledged. Albert Gerard, for instance, attributes the rise of Anglophone African literature to the literary magazine when he asserts that:

The immediate occasion for the growth of English writing throughout British Africa was provided in 1957 when two Germans, Ulli Beier and Janheinz Jahn, founded a literary review named *Black Orpheus* in the University of Ibadan . . . The experiment was highly successful in providing would be writers from British West Africa with a stimulus and a challenge. (55)

Gerard also sees the genesis of East African literature in English as the 1958 launching of *Penpoint* at Makerere University College, and the emergence of *Transition* (a journal founded by Rajat Neogy in Kampala, Uganda) in 1961 (98). Similarly, Milton Krieger has illustrated the role of “the formative journals and institutions” in Africa as “the continent’s literary and cultural arbiters” (403). Peter Benson on the other hand notes that *Black Orpheus* and *Transition* “were at the centre of much that happened intellectually and culturally in Anglophone black Africa during the period from the late fifties to the late seventies” (ix). He further refers to the South African magazine, *Drum*, as having been “a breeding ground for young black writers in white ruled and increasingly white-repressed South Africa” (x).

A host of other scholars have corroborated these observations. Tyler Fleming and Toyin Falola credit *Drum* with not only being a source of history but also a forum where such gifted South African writers as Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Arthur Maimane developed their craft (137). Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe observe that in East Africa,

literary magazines contributed significantly to the unfolding of regional critical activity. They mention *Transition*, as well as university-supported magazines such as *Busara* (Nairobi), *Umma* (Dar es Salaam), and *Dhana* (Kampala) as some of the publications that nurtured creative writing in the region (140). It is in the light of the above scholars' observations that this study undertakes a comparative analysis and evaluation of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri and Kwani?* as publishing outposts that have played an important role in promoting creative writing and literary criticism in Kenya.

I use the term 'publishing outposts' to refer to institutions whose publications are not as widely circulated or as widely read by the general public unlike those of the well established publishing houses. The 'outposts' usually specialize in periodicals or booklets targeting a specific audience and may not have elaborate publishing structures like those of mainstream publishers. Like military outposts that exist away from the main barracks, these magazines are not considered as part of the mainstream publications and, like trading outposts that conduct their businesses at the frontiers, often operate at the margins of the publishing industry. The magazines therefore readily embrace new writers and give room for experimentation in form and content. Though they may not feature in the syllabi of academic institutions and are often not given much academic attention, literary magazines are integral to the discursive infrastructure of (a nation's) literary, cultural and political discourses.

The establishment of Kenya as a republic in 1964 coincided with the emergence of a literary tradition that was spearheaded by literary practitioners whose writing first found expression in periodicals. Since the 1960s, Kenya has had the rise of creative writers and literary critics whose practice has evolved over the years to embrace diversity in form and

content in an increasingly changing literary landscape. Most studies on written Kenyan literature have focused on works published by mainstream publishing houses such as the East African Educational Publishers, Longhorn Publishers, the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation and Kenya Literature Bureau. In addition, literary scholarship in the country has mostly paid attention to full-length books including novels, plays, biographies and anthologies of either poetry or short stories. This study is a critical appraisal of literary magazines as alternative sites for literary and cultural production in Kenya. The study contributes to Kenya's literary critical tradition by taking *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* as representative journals that have not only published new literary works but also nurtured new writers. This study also interrogates the role of these magazines as part of the discursive structures that constitute the Kenyan cultural and literary history in the postcolonial period.

Busara, which means 'wisdom' in Kiswahili, was a students' literary magazine started at the University College of Nairobi in 1967 as *Nexus* before changing its name to *Busara* in 1969. Published until 1975, the magazine was one of the literary reviews that, as Gerard puts it, "sprung up in newly founded universities in Tanzania and Kenya starting from 1965" (98). Leonard Kibera and Amin Kassam, then students in the college and who later became accomplished writers, were its founding editors. In an apparent response to the politics of cultural production in East Africa at the time, the magazine only published four issues 1967 and 1968 using the name *Nexus*. According to Awori wa Kataka and Richard Gacheche, the first editors of *Busara* after this change of name, the choice of the new name was in step with other publications which had adopted Kiswahili names around the same time. They observe that then, people were "deeply involved with

the question of a national language for Kenya” (2) and the writers of *Busara* were bent on reaching a wider readership:

Our decision to re-christen ourselves was out of the realization that for people involved in our kind of business, a name that is at once mystical, enticing and, above all, symbolic was necessary. We were convinced that we were filling a crying need in East Africa and that we therefore needed to reach as many people as possible. (2)

As they have further stated in the same editorial, there was also a change in policy as *Nexus* dealt mainly in creative writing and book reviews while *Busara* would not only do the same, but would move a stride further and “go for more critical factual articles regarding our cultural or social scene” (2).

Busara was following the tradition of *Penpoint* at Makerere University, in Uganda, and *Darlit* in the University College of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which had preceded it as publications founded by the English Departments of the respective universities and run by students. The two magazines had also changed their names to *Dhana* and *Umma* respectively. Around the same time, Oxford University Press founded *Zuka: A Journal of East African Creative Writing* in 1967, edited by James Ngũgĩ (wa Thiong’o) while the *East African Journal* inaugurated an annual special issue devoted to literature under the title *Ghala* (Gerard 98). These magazines created a forum for the flowering of diverse literary talents by bringing together established and upcoming creative writers and literary critics including Taban lo Liyong, Grace Ogot, Adrian Roscoe, James Stewart, Angus Calder, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o as well as students such as Leonard Kibera, Jared

Angira, Chris Wanjala and Peter Amuka who, at one time or another, participated in the activities of *Busara* either as editorial advisors or contributors.

The journal was initially conceived as a quarterly magazine and was at first published by the East African Publishing House. However, as Wanjala notes in *Busara* 4.1, the magazine “ended up in the hands of the East African Literature Bureau in the Students’ Book Writing scheme during the academic year 1970/1971 when the East African Publishing House said that they had too much in their hands already, to publish it” (59). By 1975, the literary fervour at the university seems to have slackened and the journal only managed two issues. The fall of the East African Community in 1977 and the subsequent demise of East African Literature Bureau led to the folding up of *Busara*.

Mũtiiri: Njaranda ya Mũkarĩre is a journal of literature and culture that is published in Gĩkũyũ. It was founded in 1994 by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o at the New York University. It later moved along with Ngũgĩ to the University of California, Irvine, where he was employed in 2003. In English, *Mũtiiri: Njaranda ya Mũkarĩre* means ‘The Mentor: A Journal of Culture’. Three issues were published in 1994 but subsequent issues have been sporadic. The latest issue, at the time of writing in 2014, is its eighth and was published in 2007. So far, the journal has published poetry, short fiction, literary and expository essays and memoirs.

The journal has had regular contributions from writers and scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o himself, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, Gĩtahi Gĩtĩĩ, Maina wa Kĩnyatti, Kĩmani Njogu, Bantu Mwaũra, Mbũgua wa Mũngai, Gatua wa Mbũgua, Waithĩra wa Mbuthia, Cege wa Gĩthiora, Njeeri wa Ngũgĩ and Gĩcingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ. It has also published works translated

from other languages into Gĩkũyũ such as Kiswahili poetry (mashairi) of Abdilatif Abdalla.

Kwani? is a journal of literature and culture published by Kwani Trust, an organization that “was started with the aim of nurturing and developing Kenya’s and Africa’s intellectual, creative and imaginative resources through strategic literary interventions” (www.kwani.org). Its first issue was published in 2003 with the financial backing of the Ford Foundation, and though it had aspired to be an annual publication, it has since then only published seven volumes (by the end of 2014) with *Kwani? 07* being published in 2012. “*Kwani?*” is a commonly used Kiswahili interrogative expression in Kenya which could translate into “so what?” or “why not?” in English. It can be an expression of defiance, bold self-assertion, determination and an invitation to a conversation. As stated on its website, Kwani Trust’s major tasks include editing and publishing the *Kwani?* magazine as an annual publication, locating and nurturing literary talents through writing workshops and expanding the reading and contemporary story culture through such events as monthly open mic poetry sessions and prose reading Sunday salons held in various venues such as Kifaru Gardens, the Louis Leakey Auditorium at the National Museums of Kenya and the Phoenix Players Theatre in Nairobi. It also establishes regional and global literary linkage with writers, publishers and editors (www.kwani.org).

Kwani? is a collage of creative and non-creative genres including fiction, creative non-fictional narratives, biographical works, essays, interviews, poetry, cartoons, and photographs. The magazine is not exclusively literary as it also carries articles on history, culture and politics. Other than the annual magazine, Kwani Trust also publishes some of the longer short stories in a booklet series known as *Kwanini?* Binyavanga Wainaina is

Kwani?'s founding editor while Billy Kahora has been its managing editor since *Kwani?* 03 (2005) to the time of writing this thesis (2014). Other better known writers who have contributed to the journal include Yvonne Owuor, Parselelo Kantai, Andia Kisia, Wambui Mwangi, Muthoni Garland, Tony Mochama and Doreen Baingana.

This study examines the three journals to determine their contribution to Kenyan literature and as undeniable indices in evaluating the trajectory of Kenya's literary history. I have studied *Busara* in the larger context of pioneer East African periodicals which thrived in the 1960s and 1970s. These were university based journals which were fertile grounds on which the first generation of East African writers and literary critics cast their maiden creative seeds. Though they did not last beyond the 1970s, *Nexus/Busara*, *Penpoint/Dhana* and *Darlit/Umma* contributed significantly to the growth and development of a literary culture in the East African region at the time.

On its part, *Mũtiiri* opened a window to a creative and critical space that brought into focus matters pertinent to postcolonial discourses in Kenya – the neo-colonial socio-political realities in the country, the question of exile and the vexed question of the language of African literature. *Kwani?* has distinguished itself as a journal that has extended the frontiers of contemporary literary and cultural production in Kenya and beyond. The three journals represent different moments in Kenya's literary history. The study is therefore a contribution to research on the role and impact of these publications which it considers crucial publishing outposts away from the mainstream publishing houses where critical issues that inform Kenyan literature and culture proliferated and continue to be discussed.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There have been numerous literary and cultural journals and magazines in Kenya since the 1960s that have provided writers with avenues for publishing their works and therefore created readily accessible spaces for the representation and interrogation of Kenyan social, cultural and political histories through creative writing and literary criticism. The journals and magazines have played an important role in the constitution of Kenya's literary and cultural history. Despite their significant role in the growth and development of Kenyan literature, the journals and magazines have not received enough scholarly attention. Though there are some brief scholarly essays by critics like Chris Wanjala, Tom Odhiambo, Simon Gikandi, Garnette Oluoch-Olunya and Ann Biersteker, there has not been a sustained and extensive study on literary journals and magazines in Kenya. This situation has created the impression that literature is mainly a preserve of conventional literary categories which include the novel, book-length plays, and anthologies of either poetry or short stories, which are usually associated with mainstream publishing companies. This thesis addresses the question whether literary journals and magazines are important publishing outposts that complement the mainstream publications. What parts have literary journals and magazines played in the shaping of evolving trends in Kenya's literary and cultural history? The study uses a historical approach to explore this question by focusing on three representative magazines in Kenya's literary history: *Busara*, *Mũtiiri*, and *Kwani?*. The research satisfies the need for a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the contribution of these journals magazines to the fields of creative writing, literary criticism and cultural production in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives

This study pursues the following objectives:

- (i) To analyze and evaluate *Busara* by placing it in the context of the literary and cultural production of the late 1960s and the early 1970s in Kenya;
- (ii) To critically examine *Mũtiiri* as a journal written in Gĩkũyũ, mostly by writers in the diasporas, and published in the United States of America;
- (iii) To investigate *Kwani?* as a contemporary journal of literature and culture;
- (iv) To appraise *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* comparatively on their contribution to the growth and development of literature in Kenya.

1.4 Hypotheses

This study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- (i) *Busara* is a reflection of the emergent literary tradition in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s;
- (ii) *Mũtiiri* has contributed to literary discourse in Kenya with a significantly postcolonial sensibility;
- (iii) *Kwani?* has provided an important platform for contemporary literary production in Kenya;
- (iv) *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* represent evolving trends in creative writing, literary criticism, cultural production and identity formation in Kenya.

1.5 Justification

I undertook to study the contribution of literary magazines to the growth and development of literature in Kenya for a number of reasons. To begin with, literary

magazines are not conventionally considered part of mainstream literature and they receive little academic attention yet they offer valuable space for literary discourse by nurturing new writers and offering, in one space, an array of literary and cultural productions.

Secondly, since the magazines represent different social and historical circumstances, this study highlights the evolution of literary and cultural perspectives over time and across social contexts and therefore shed light on the social, economic and political situations of their respective periods of production. *Busara* is associated with the first generation of Kenyan writers; *Mũtiiri* is a journal publishing essays and poetry in Gĩkũyũ and is based in the USA, while *Kwani?* is a contemporary Kenyan publication launched in the 21st Century. These different historical periods in which these periodicals appeared form a good basis for a comparative study of the growth of Kenyan literature from the 1960s into the 21st Century.

Mainstream publishers are usually cautious about publishing new authors and even more reluctant to publish on new subjects than magazines. Magazines are therefore spaces for experimentation in style, language and themes. This study focuses on both the established writers and the upcoming voices in Kenya's literary and cultural production as they appear in the respective magazines studied.

The study of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* is also an evaluation of the role of literature as one form of the discursive practices on culture and identity formation in Kenya and beyond this country's borders. I examine each of the journals individually to try and capture the different historical and social contexts they represent and appraise them

comparatively in the final chapter. I also examine the impact of group synergy that literary magazines create and the way this helps to stimulate literary production. In the same light, I evaluate the significance of national and transnational networking as a factor influencing the literary enterprise.

As an interrogation of the significance of literary magazines in the growth and development of Kenyan literature, this study contributes to Kenya's literary history by highlighting some of the dynamics in the production of modern Kenyan literature. The study highlights the need for scholars to give attention to alternative sites of literary and cultural production which exist outside the established publishing houses.

1.6 Literature Review

Generally, as of my writing, there is scarcity of studies on literary magazines and other periodicals in Kenya and little sustained study of *Busara* and *Mũtiiri*. However, *Kwani?* has generated significant scholarly interest though there is still need for more intensive studies on the journal than has been done so far. This section is a review of the available theoretical and critical discussions on the three magazines that identifies the points of departure for my study.

One of the most detailed studies of literary magazines in Africa is Peter Benson's *Black Orpheus, Transition and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* in which he has documented the editorial history of the *Black Orpheus* of Nigeria and *Transition* initially based in Uganda and later relocated to Nigeria, now published in America. Benson looks at the initial objectives of these magazines, the evolution of their editorial philosophies, their publishing arrangements, their relations with readers and contributors and their

influence on the creative and intellectual lives of their time. He notes that the journals came at “a time of cultural revival and artistic and literary experimentation” (2) and that the two magazines “concentrated the energies, the aspirations . . . of a whole literary and intellectual generation . . . were for a time its chief vehicles for interchange, self-definition, communication and dispute” (10). Benson’s study provides insights on the historical approach to the analysis of literary magazines in a postcolonial context. Like Benson, I have identified the editorial practices of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* and traced their historical setting and development in Kenya and abroad. My study therefore creates the opportunity for a comparative appraisal of the journals studied by Benson and the ones I have studied in order to compare and contrast the role they played in the evolution of literary trends in their respective regions. In addition, my study analyses the content of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* through a close reading of the texts in these journals.

This study also takes into consideration Chris Wanjala’s critique of literary magazines in the East African region. In *The Season of Harvest* (1978), Wanjala acknowledges the role of *Busara* in nurturing aspiring writers at the University of Nairobi in the 1970s. He notes that the magazine offered a good forum for students to publish the works they had produced from the Writers’ Workshop, a regular event at the university at the time (43). Wanjala was indeed one of the students, and later one of the lecturers, who contributed critical essays to *Busara*, and was a member of its editorial board in 1972. In an untitled article published in *Busara* 4.3, Wanjala highlights the magazine’s engagement with modern forms of the short story and poetry. He notes that the works selected for publication “represent[ed] the creative climate in the university and the city of Nairobi” (59). My study, which makes a similar observation on *Busara*, moves beyond this

observation and makes a detailed analysis of selected short stories, poems and critical essays from the journal to illustrate the kind of literary works that were produced by young Kenyan writers in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In “The Style of the Short Story in Kenya,” Helen Mwanzi refers to the pioneer African periodicals including *Transition*, *Black Orpheus*, *Zuka*, *Umma* and *Dhana* in her study and notes that “periodicals form the short stories favourite venue” (iv). She also acknowledges that periodicals were the “points of departure for pioneer native Kenyan authors” (iv). Mwanzi limits herself to a stylistic analysis of a few short stories from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Secret Lives*, Leonard Kibera and Samuel Kahiga’s *Potent Ash* and Grace Ogot’s *Land Without Thunder*, while I analyse stories selected from *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* in relation to the concerns and contexts that informed creative writing at the time of their publication.

In *Contexts of African Literature* (1990), Albert Gerard notes that *Penpoint* played the role of a trail-blazer in East Africa in the domain of literary magazines (98). He argues that the magazine published quality works which made Heinemann Publishers compile short stories and poems from its first sixteen issues in *Origin East Africa*, an anthology edited by David Cook in 1965. This argument is of relevance to my study as it is a vindication of the richness in form and content of the articles selected from the magazines under study, especially *Busara* which was a descendant of *Penpoint*.

In *The Companion to African Literature* (2000), Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe also observe that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, “a cluster of literary magazines flourished and quickly faded in the shadow of *Transition*” (140). They mention *Busara* as one of

these magazines and explain that the magazines ceased publication with the collapse of the East African Community. This is an observation that relates to the politics of literary production in the region at that time. My study pursues this line of thought and explores such dynamics as the pan-East African spirit that fostered co-operation between departments of English/Literature in the region and the aesthetic trends in Kenya that informed the content of *Busara*.

Killam and Rowe also note that *Mũtiiri* had “taken up the task of generating and expanding political, technical/scientific, literary and academic vocabularies to accommodate and integrate knowledge in the various fields of Kenyan and world cultures” (104). My study does a close reading of the journal to investigate the extent to which the journal contributes to the expansion of the Gĩkũyũ lexicon through coinage of new words and borrowing from other languages and how the language is therefore effectively used to express modern ideas especially in science and technology.

A study of *Mũtiiri* inevitably gravitates toward the debate on the question of the appropriate language for African literary expression considering that it is fully published in Gĩkũyũ. The dilemma over whether African literature should be written in the languages of the former colonial masters such as Portuguese, French, German and English or the African languages has often arisen in discussions about the identity of African literature. In addition, having been founded by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the journal is intricately tied to Ngũgĩ’s position on the language of African literature. In a 1983 interview with Jacqueline Bardolph and Jean-Pierre Durix, Ngũgĩ argues that it was wrong for the English language “being used as a carrier of our own [African] culture” (165). This argument is a reiteration of his 1986 declaration titled “A Statement” in

Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (xiii) in which he gives the reason why he decided to do all his creative writing in Gĩkũyũ starting with the play *Ngahiika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*, which he co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ. This study establishes that this is the same spirit that informed his founding of *Mũtiiri* in the United States of America.

In *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, Simon Gĩkandi notes that Ngũgĩ turned to writing in Gĩkũyũ in order to address an audience of workers and peasants who had served as central subjects in his novels and plays but for whom his writing remained inaccessible as long as he continued to produce it in English (264). While this could be true of his novels and plays in Gĩkũyũ, this study expresses reservations about the possibility of such an achievement by the journal. *Mũtiiri* is poorly distributed locally and most of the contributors of its writing live abroad. This lack of wide distribution largely undermines the editor's desire to reach the readership of the Gĩkũyũ workers and peasants since they live in Kenya and cannot afford to import the journal. Thus my study establishes that the journal is more of an intellectual and polemical undertaking than Ngũgĩ's earlier projects in Gĩkũyũ such as the play *Ngahiika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*, and the novel *Caaitani Mũtharaba-inĩ (Devil on the Cross)*.

Gĩkandi's also observes that Ngũgĩ tried to keep Gĩkũyũ as an important part of his intellectual and literary work through *Mũtiiri* (275) and that it was a "forum for representing the disenchantment of a Gĩkũyũ émigré intelligentsia struggling to recover a 'national' culture for metropolitan Gĩkũyũ readers distanced from Kenyan concerns" (276). My study, unlike Gĩkandi's, goes ahead to illustrate the above conclusions with texts from *Mũtiiri* by undertaking an analysis of specific texts in the journal to show that

a number of articles in various issues of *Mũtiiri* are accounts of some of the authors' personal suffering instigated by the Kenyan government that pushed the writers into exile, especially in the 1980s. My argument is that this was one of the ways in which some of these writers sought to rationalize their condition of exile and to reconnect with their Kenyan roots.

Unlike *Mũtiiri*, *Kwani?* has attracted a good deal of critical responses. In *Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya*, Kĩmani Njogu observes that:

Kwani? captures new and emergent forms of speech among the youth and a greater appreciation of style that is almost globally generational. Hitherto unpublished short story writers are discovering their talent and winning international awards such as the Caine Prize. (3)

This study analyses specific texts in *Kwani?* to evaluate how the journal is fostering trans-generational and transnational conversations through its activities and publications. Many newspaper reviews of *Kwani?* highlight its achievements as a contemporary magazine in Kenya. Mwenda Micheni's article, "Caine Prize Sways African Writing" notes that *Kwani?* is "pushing a cultural revolution in Kenya"(i). William Oeri has also hailed *Kwani?* for the way it has ushered in "new thinking in the country" and the way it is reshaping African identities (18). Writing in the *Business Daily*, Tom Odhiambo argues that the subject of identity underlies *Kwani?* 05, and further notes that *Kwani?*'s varied texts "invite all our senses to not just the act of reading. The reader is invited to search for various possibilities of a new self and nation" (30). This study interrogates these

observations by analyzing specific texts and drawing conclusions on how *Kwani?* has participated in shaping contemporary culture and identity in Kenya.

Another socio-cultural function that has been associated with *Kwani?* writers is the phenomenon of urban youth culture. In *Culture, Performance and Identity* Njogu writes:

[r]eading through *Kwani?* literary journal, I have become convinced that a Kenyan identity driven principally by youth culture has been emerging. This identity pays little attention to ethno-linguistic considerations . . . and manifests in a vibrant popular culture that draws from the richness of our diversity. (ix)

Njogu does not however illustrate his argument through a systematic analysis of texts in *Kwani?* This study fills this gap by examining contemporary trends in urban youth culture such as the preference of Sheng as the language of urban youth and the phenomenon of hip-hop culture. My study examines how these aspects of urban youth culture are expressed through, for instance, the hip-hop music of Kalamashaka, poetry and narratives in Sheng, as well as artworks and photographs published in *Kwani?*

Roger Kurtz's *Urban Obsessions Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel* explores urban culture as portrayed in the novels of the 1970s and the 1980s in Kenya and identifies dispossession as an overriding reality. For Kurtz, Meja Mwangi's novels *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1975) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979), for instance, are accounts of young people who come to the city of Nairobi with high hopes of securing employment but end up languishing in abject poverty, alienated and utterly despondent. This study demonstrates that urban dispossession continues to be a relevant

thematic subject in the contemporary moment in Kenyan literature as some stories in *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* attest.

Kwani?'s editorial policies are also a subject of interest for my study. Billy Kahora, the editor of *Kwani?*, in an interview with Kristina Palitza of *Business Daily*, notes that *Kwani?* 05's agenda is to "open additional cultural spaces", to initiate "a more direct interaction with the public", and to "develop a literary community that isn't afraid to question the status quo" (19). His assertions suggest *Kwani?*'s resolve to influence the way its content is rendered as well as the way it is read. This study does a close-reading of the editorial articles of the journal to determine the immanent editorial policies that have shaped the journal as one of the discursive structures in the Kenyan literary and cultural landscape.

In *The Ordeal of the African Writer*, Charles Larson examines the challenges of publishing in Africa. He notes that:

[m]ost publishers avoid creative works and concentrate on technical works or non-fiction for the educational market while the few that publish fiction, poetry and drama are unscrupulous and incapable of nurturing creative writers, dishonest in their accounting method and marginal enough that many writers still look abroad. (28)

He illustrates how the Onitsha market pamphleteers (a group of writers that thrived in the 1950s and 1960s in Nigeria's Onitsha Market, publishing simple stories, novels and self-help books) beat some of the challenges by publishing inexpensively produced books for their local market. This study addresses the question of how the selected magazines have

coped with the rigours of publishing and marketing creative and critical works in Kenya. My study notes that institutions such as the East African Literature Bureau and the Ford Foundation were instrumental to the successful publication of *Busara* and *Kwani?* respectively. I also note the challenges of marketing these journals and magazines where *Busara*, for instance, was mostly read by the university fraternity at the University of Nairobi while hard copies of *Mũtiiri* have not effectively reached the bulk of its ideal readers in Kenya. In order to cope with the challenges of marketing the journals, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* have created websites that have made them reach more readers.

Doreen Strauhs has done an extensive study of the politics of production of literary magazines in Kenya and Uganda in her book *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics and Participation* (2013). Strauhs defines literary NGOs as non-governmental organizations with a focus on production and promotion of literary talents, events and publication that is situated in the non-profit making sector (22). Her study has many points of convergence with mine though she lays emphasis on the role of ‘transnational funding’ as a factor in literary production in Africa. She uses Kwani Trust and FEMRITE as NGOs in Kenya and Uganda respectively to illustrate her argument. My study emphasizes the historical contingencies that have influenced the production of literary magazines in Kenya and also places *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* in the context of the publishing industry in Kenya.

In his discussion of stylistics, Henry Indangasi notes that the foregrounding of linguistic elements in a literary text achieves aesthetic effects (6). Writers achieve these effects by “expanding the possibilities of language, by using language in ways that are unconventional, innovative, fresh and original” (8). H.G. Widdowson sees the task of the

literary critic as being to “decipher a message encoded in an unfamiliar way, to explore its meaning in familiar and communal terms” (14). Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short also argue that literary critics need to “explore for pattern and system below the surface forms of language; to search for the principle of meaning and language use which activate and control the code” (5). In view of these propositions, I interrogate some of the formal choices in specific texts and analyse the layers of meanings that are inherent in specific artistic choices and combinations in order to draw conclusions about the literary significance of the journals under this study.

My study undertakes a historical perspective in a comparative appraisal of the selected magazines. As Raman Selden argues, the historical approach to the study of literature is a way of “[r]e-situating texts in the complex discursive frame of their originating period by way of detailed allusive reading of them in their inter-textual relations with other contemporary political, cultural and ‘popular’ discourses” (184). With this understanding, I have analysed texts in *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* in the context of their respective historical periods by scrutinizing the socio-political dynamics that inform their content.

As the literature review above indicates, there is need for a sustained and extensive study of the role of literary magazines in the growth and development of Kenyan literature. The present study aims at bridging this gap by subjecting *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* to a detailed analysis and evaluation focusing on their origins, development, and contribution to Kenyan literature

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study undertakes an extensive textual analysis of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* using a historical approach that is guided by the ideas of T.S. Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1921) and David Perkins’ (1992) arguments about literary history. The study also benefits from insights of postcolonial theorists on colonialism and its effects on colonial subjects, resistance to colonialism and its legacies, the pathological conditions in the post-colonies after independence as well as the development of trans-cultural and trans-national identities in the era of urbanization and globalization.

Eliot advanced an aesthetic theory of literary history in which he proposed that a writer must have a “historical sense . . . a perception of not only the pastness of the past, but of its present” (431). Further, he noted that “[t]he historical sense compels a man (sic) to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with the feeling that the whole of . . . the literature of his own country has simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (431). Eliot further argued that there is no artist who has a complete meaning alone and as such poets need to be valued in contrast and in comparison with the dead poets and artists (431). For Eliot, there is always conformity existing between the old and the new orders whereby “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (432). Eliot’s arguments point to the need for us to do comparative studies of works of art produced in different generations to establish the historical sense that informs their respective aesthetic achievement. These ideas guide my study of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* in the exploration of the literary tradition into which the writers of the respective journals made their contribution in creative and critical writing.

There is evidence of the affinity of the contributors in the three journals to the tradition into which they were initiated. While in *Busara* some of the poets like Amin Kassam and Jared Angira appear indebted to the trends in European poetry that they encountered in their studies at university, others seem to follow the anticolonial tradition that heavily informed pioneer modern Kenyan literature as can be seen, for instance, in Ngũgĩ's early works. Others use materials and forms from the oral traditions as seen extensively in the works of pioneer writers like Ogot in *Land Without Thunder* and Okot p'Bitek in *Song of Lawino*. The same observation is true of both *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* where issues addressed by early writers are revisited in different contexts. A good example is the narrative of the Mau Mau uprising in which Africans waged an armed struggle against British colonialism leading to the declaration of a state of emergency in Kenya in 1952. The effect of the war that followed has remained a major leitmotif in Kenyan literature by writers of all generations.

Eliot also observed that poets/artists should be aware that the mind of their own country develops, taking everything enroute, and brings a change that is “perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery” (433). The validity of this argument is clear when we do a comparative study of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* as it becomes evident that the writers refer to the same historical contexts with slight variations in the respective historical periods. The anxiety brought about by political disillusionment and dispossession in post-independent Kenya is evident in stories written in *Busara* in 1960s, in *Mũtiiri* written in the 1990s and in *Kwani?* published in the 21st Century. However, there are some variations where *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*, for instance,

take advantage of development in Information Technology to market their publications through a website.

David Perkins is another theorist who has generated some ideas about literary history by formulating some fundamental assumptions of literary history. Firstly, Perkins notes that literary works are informed by their historical context. He further opines that change in literature takes place developmentally; and that this change is the unfolding of an idea, principle or a suprapersonal entity (such as poetry or the spirit of an age such as ‘Romanticism’) (1-2). Secondly, Perkins argues that such classifications as various genres, periods, schools, traditions can have objective and valid grounds in the literature of the past and, thirdly, that the history of literature exhibits the development of the “national conscience” (4). As such, Perkins sees one of the major tasks of literary history as that of interpreting literary works and accounting for their character and development by relating them to their historical contexts and therefore making the literary past to bear on the present, with consequences for both the literature and the society of the future (12-13). Perkins’ insights, like those of Eliot cited above, have been relevant to my investigation of Kenya’s literary history in establishing some of the trends that shaped the evolution of modern Kenyan literature from its roots in oral tradition to contemporary influences that we find in *Kwani?* such as globalization.

Modern Kenyan literature has continuously been engaged in the discursive practices of postcolonialism which, as Helen Tiffin observes, are the “resistance to colonialism, colonialist ideologies and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies” (vii). The works under study have derived their content from the colonial and postcolonial/neo-colonial social and political experiences in Kenya. The Mau Mau war, for instance, gave

birth to a literature of resistance to colonialism in Kenya, examples of which we find in a number of short stories in *Busara* and in the prison memoirs of Maina wa Kĩnyatti in *Mũtiiri*. This literature, as Julie Mullaney observes about postcolonial literatures, “revisit[s] a range of historical events . . . [that] delineate the forms of interruption that colonialism represents in the lives, histories and experiences of the colonized” (40). Kĩnyatti’s memoirs give a detailed account of the colonial experience in Kenya.

In “Reading the Referent,” Gĩkandi urges postcolonial theorists to historicize the postcolonial moment by addressing the politics of everyday life in the post-colony itself (88). He reiterates that the appreciation of the postcolonial literary history has to “take inter-textual referents and their historical effects as important elements of the postcolonial text” (93). This study examines the major concerns in *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* to illustrate how literary journals and magazines have published works that represent the historical experiences of people in Kenya and abroad.

Further, Neil Lazarus has argued that the postcolonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those social pathologies such as “loss of meaning, conditions of anomie, that . . . break up into widely scattered historical contingencies” (3). Similarly, Abiola Irele has talked about “a new discourse of dissidence (in the African novel) aimed at the uncovering of pathologies of governance that have contributed to the tragic unfolding of the postcolonial condition in Africa” (10). Phyllis Taona also identifies “the postcolonial condition” (209) which is characterised by realities such as political dictatorship, corruption, corruption, disappointments of dispossession and betrayal and therefore “the unfinished business of achieving meaningful freedom for the people” (225). A close-reading of some short stories, poetry

and essays in *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* reveal deeply entrenched postcolonial conditions in Kenya.

Gareth Griffiths has also argued that, “such concerns as linguistic displacement, physical exile, cross-culturality and authenticity and inauthenticity of experience are among the features that one might identify as characteristically postcolonial” (154). This argument applies to several works in this study. The study, for instance, concludes that *Mũtiiri* is a Kenyan journal in exile. The journal is filled with narratives of the writers’ Kenyan experiences that accentuate the feeling of dislocation and nostalgia that some of the writers living abroad experience. Some of the writers were forced into exile. Besides, *Mũtiiri*’s engagement in the politics of language in African literature places it in the discourse resistance to the colonial legacy of linguistic displacement alluded to by Griffiths above. *Kwani?* has also published works about the experiences of Kenyans living abroad.

In view of experiences abroad and the influences of globalization, this study also takes cue from Homi Bhabha’s concept of “cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformations” (2). Bhabha asserts that “[t]he interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed and imposed hierarchy” (4). *Kwani?*’s representation of urban, diasporic and cosmopolitan cultures can be appreciated in the context of Bhabha’s “cultural hybridity” in that they portray hybrid societies that have emerged as a result of multi-ethnic, multicultural and transnational interactions that we find in the urban setting in Kenya and among the communities in the diasporas.

In conclusion, this study finds credence in Mullaney's statement that "Postcolonial writing commonly addresses colonial and postcolonial historiography, the structures, ways of seeing and critical practices that pertain to the production of history across time and in space" (39-39). The bulk of the works in *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* are representations of specific historical junctures and interrogations of certain historical structures that have played a significant role in the constitution of Kenya's postcolonial identity.

1.8 Methodology

My study uses qualitative research strategies to gather and collate information on the selected literary magazines. I have done purposeful sampling of primary texts and settled on *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*. Through a survey of magazines in Kenya from the 1960s to 2014, I found these three to be the most well-established literary magazines in Kenya's literary history that would effectively represent the respective periods in which they were published.

My study starts with a broad overview on literary magazines and then focuses on the primary texts selected from *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*. In the background to the study, I have reviewed some of the other journals that emerged in the East African region such as *Penpoint* and *East African Journal*. I have also done an extensive background review of the historical contexts of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* in the archives at the University of Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, the Kenya National Archives and Kenyatta University's Postmodern Library. I have texts and used the internet to access on-line journal articles and books. I also have conducted face-to-face interviews with Chris Wanjala and Billy Kahora, and had an e-mail conversation with Ngũgĩ.

I have analysed four issues of *Nexus*, twenty one issues of *Busara*, six issues of *Mũtiiri* and seven issues of *Kwani?*. I first sorted out the articles and categorized them according to their genres and identified the short stories, creative nonfiction, autobiographies, biographies, essays, poems, interviews, reports, cartoons as well as photographs. Through further purposeful sampling, I have selected representative texts for each genre and from all the selected primary texts according to their major themes. I have also translated the texts cited from *Mũtiiri* from Gĩkũyũ to English. All the translations in this study are mine unless otherwise stated.

I have analysed the texts through close reading of the core texts to enable a comprehensive appreciation of the specific writings in *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*. This method of reading combines an appreciation of a literary text as an aesthetic construct with a sense of the value of its content. The approach involves seeking to know how specific tropes and images are used to illuminate the central ideas in these texts. I have isolated and analysed specific words, sentences and paragraphs to establish how they contribute to the construction of meaning in the text. Textual analysis has helped me to confine the study to textual evidence so that any extraneous information referred to may not override but complement the literary value of the texts under study. I have nevertheless made reference to historical events and developments to contextualise the works of art in this study.

1.9 Scope and Limitation

This study limits itself to the analysis of literary magazines in Kenya and focuses on selected texts of available volumes of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*. Reference to *Busara* in this study stands for both *Busara* and *Nexus*. I have studied all the issues of *Busara*

from *Nexus* 1 published in 1967 to *Busara* 6 Number 2 published in 1975. There were only four issues of *Nexus* after which the magazine changed its name to *Busara* in 1969. I have studied *Mũtiiri* Volume 1 up to Volume 5 and then Volume 8. Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 are available in hard copy while I downloaded Volume 5 from the journal's online website. There are two volumes (6 and 7) which I could not study as their hard copies were not available and the *Mũtiiri* management had not yet placed them on its website. I have also studied all the volumes of *Kwani?* from *Kwani?* 01 to *Kwani?* 07.

The samples of works studied are mainly by writers of Kenyan origin living in Kenya and abroad. I have also studied works by foreigners who have written about Kenya, especially on matters of culture and identity. The works studied include fictional short stories, creative non-fiction, poems, editorials, autobiographical and biographical writings, critical essays, cartoons and photographs.

1.10 Chapter Breakdown

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter gives a background to the study and identifies the need for an extensive study of literary magazines as one of the significant discursive formations in the discourses of literature and culture in Kenya. The chapter outlines the objectives, the hypotheses, the theoretical approaches and methodology of this study. It makes a review of earlier discussions on this topic and establishes the gaps in previous studies that it seeks to fill. It also indicates the scope of this study.

Chapter Two is a detailed study of *Busara* that locates it in the context of the early days of modern Kenyan literature in the 1960s. It examines the dynamics of literary production

at the time and relates *Busara* to its contemporary literary magazines such as the *East African Journal*, *Dhana*, *Umma*, *Ghala*, *Joliso* and *Zuka*. The influence of Kenya's colonial history and the transition from a traditional African society to European-modernism are seen to be major factors that informed creative writing at the time. The University of Nairobi's departments of literature played a central role in nurturing new creative writers and literary critics in the East African region.

Chapter Three takes a leap into the 1990s when *Mũtiiri* was founded by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o at the New York University in America. I interrogate the conditions of production, apparent intentions and relevance of *Mũtiiri* as a journal of literature and culture by analysing specific texts in the magazines. I examine the use of Gĩkũyũ in a journal published in the United States of America and the journal's dependence on writers who live in the diasporas. In spite of its location in America, *Mũtiiri* is generally involved in the politics of postcolonial/neo-colonial Kenya as much as it engages in the politics of language in African literature.

Chapter Four is a critique of *Kwani?* as a journal that right from its inception in 2003 adopted the spirit of subversion of what its founders saw as the old conservative order in Kenya's literary and cultural production. The magazine claimed to create a forum where a new generation of Kenyan writers would be nurtured and has been involved in publishing and promoting new contemporary literary voices in Kenya and beyond. The journal has received regular criticism from both the general reading public and seasoned literary critics and has been involved in a continuous search for its identity as a contemporary journal of literature and culture.

Chapter Five is a summary of the study. It relates the appraisal of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* based on the analyses of the previous chapters. I have drawn conclusions on the milestones that each of the magazines has made by revisiting the dynamics of literary and cultural production in Kenya from the 1960s to the present. I have emphasized the role that these three literary magazines have played as publishing outposts in Kenya.

CHAPTER TWO

BUSARA AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN KENYAN LITERATURE

Poor Muses. You chose the wrong mountains. Ours seem not to be Parnassus. Is it time which is not yet in joint? Are you uncomfortable in your new abodes? Or do you receive no sacrifices Dwellers of the mountains spare our babblers. Give them time. They will learn the language. They will come in procession. They are coming; Homer in Khaki shorts, Virgil in monkey toga; Dante in witch-doctors garb; Shakespeare who speaks a little Karamajong, less Akikuyu, Swahili and Runyankole; a Milton without the eye handicap; a T. S. Eliot who knows Etesot. Wait. Let me see how far away they now are approaching. I mean the black orpheuses. (Taban lo Liyong, “Can We Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa?” 9)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the role played by *Nexus/Busara* in literary production in Kenya in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which was a watershed period for modern literature in English in Kenya. The discussion begins by establishing the environment in which the magazine emerged. Taban lo Liyong’s lament about East African literary barrenness provides a good starting point for a discussion to contextualise *Busara* in the tradition in which it was produced. The statement is from Taban’s essay “Can We Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa?” which was first published in the *East African Journal* in 1968. Since its publication, this article has elicited varied reactions among scholars of East African literature. In *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature*, Gikandi describes it as a “seminal essay” that “urged writers in the region to

meet the challenge of new African renaissance in culture and letters . . . it had set the terms in which literary production would be carried out for most of the 1960s and 1970s” (8). As Gĩkandi further notes, the statement may indeed have aptly described the region’s literary production:

At its very beginning, then, East African literature in English was overshadowed by the manifest successes of African writing elsewhere and haunted by what was seen as cultural inferiority complex. Though not expressed openly, this inferiority complex was widely shared by writers from the region and was to provide one of the most obvious motivations for the production of a distinctly East African literature in English. (8)

Taban’s statement has also been judged as misplaced by a majority of literary practitioners in the region and beyond. When he made the statement, Taban was at Howard University in Washington, D.C. where he was undertaking a Master’s degree in Creative Writing. The idealism of youth and his, then, apparent scholarly success may have made him to unreasonably expect an instant sprouting of writers of monumental stature in the East African region. Thus he wondered, “When will the Nile Basin find a Dickens? Or a Conrad? Or a Mark Twain? Or a Joyce Cary? Is Rudyard Kipling coming to Mowgli our national parks?” (7). Taban’s lament ignored the fact that though a little behind West Africa and South Africa, which caused his disenchantment, East Africa already had trailblazing writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Grace Ogot and Okot p’Bitek. Besides, the lament was obviously made with disregard to the region’s literary heritage from the African oral traditions.

Furthermore, Taban seems to have failed to appreciate the fact that East African states were just about five years old since political independence and had only recently evolved into full-fledged modern nation-states whose levels of literacy were still relatively low. It was a transitional moment for East African literature, ushered into the region at around 1962 at the Makerere University African Writers' of English Expression summit and by an aptly named Kampala based journal, *Transition*, as well as the university students' magazines like *Penpoint/Dhana*, *Nexus/Busara*, *Darlit/Umma*, and the Government sponsored *East African Journal*.

The entry of Kenyan literature into the community of modern world literatures came hot on the heels of the decline and eventual end of British rule in the country in December, 1963. Before the arrival of the British in Kenya towards the end of the nineteenth century, Kenyan literature was largely oral. Though written Swahili dates much earlier than 1896 (the year that the British started building the Kenya-Uganda railway and thus in effect launched the colonial project in Kenya) what came to be regarded as the mainstream modern Kenya literature in English emerged in the wake of what Adrian Roscoe has called "Uhuru's Fire" in his book *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*. These were works mainly written in English which, as Jacqueline Bardolph notes, can be said to start with Jomo Kenyatta's 1938 anthropological masterpiece, *Facing Mount Kenya* (36). Gikandi, in "The Growth of the East African Novel," has noted that some of the early writers in Kenya were writer-politicians who were actively involved in the liberation politics and later came to occupy political offices after independence. These included Kenyatta, Tom Mboya and J.M. Kariuki. However, as Bardolph further asserts,

The literature of Kenya can be said to have truly started, if a date must be given, in 1964, with what were to be its two most important features for some years to come: the collected works of young writers, mostly from Makerere University, and the writings of Ngũgĩ. At first as is the case with new writers only short works were produced – poems, short stories suitable for publication in literary or student magazines, one-act plays for radio or amateur performances. (37)

The East African literary scene was at this time buoyed by the literary successes of its pioneer writers including Ngũgĩ, Ogot and p'Bitek as well as ardent critics and scholars who included Taban, Pio Zirimu and Owuor Anyumba. Their efforts were augmented by expatriate scholars such as David Cook, David Rubadiri, James Stewart, Adrian Roscoe and Angus Calder who were teaching literature at Makerere University and the University College of Nairobi, respectively, and were involved in literary activities in the region.

In its wake, colonialism left increased literacy and a widespread transition from African (traditional) to European (modern) lifestyles among the East African population. Starting from Makerere and spreading later to the University of Nairobi and the University of Dar es Salaam, universities played a major role in shaping the literary trends of the day. Gĩkandi notes that the identity of East African literature was determined in university departments and literary journals and thus reflected the interests and anxieties of a small elite which is what shaped the literary culture in East Africa (*The Columbia Guide* 9). Wanjala also argues that “[f]or a long time, what held sway was the Great Tradition. The literary culture that evolved was based on English letters,” (“The Growth” vii). In spite of this Eurocentric orientation, East African writers appropriated material from African oral

traditions both in form and content even in their early works especially in the short story and poetry. Indeed, as Gĩkandi further puts it, “[t]he central motif in early (Makerere) literature . . . was the struggle between the subjective desire promoted by the ideologies and forms of high modernism and the communal norms that were supposed to be characteristic of traditional African society” (*The Columbia Guide* 10).

In Kenya, the 1960s had several pace-setting publications coming out. Mugo Gatheru’s *Child of Two Worlds* and Ngũgĩ’s *Weep Not, Child* were both published in 1964. In 1965, Ngũgĩ published his second novel, *The River Between*, while Rebecca Njau published a novel, *The Scar*. David Cook also published *Origin East Africa*, a collection of writings from Makerere University. In 1967, Ngũgĩ published *A Grain of Wheat*; Ogot published *The Promised Land* while Khadambi Asalache published *A Calabash of Life*. In the same year, Leonard Okola published a collection of East African poems in the anthology, *Drum Beat*. 1968 was the year of the East African short story as Ogot published her anthology, *Land Without Thunder*, and Samuel Kahiga and Leonard Kibera published *Potent Ash*. In the same year Godwin Wachira published a novel, *Ordeal in the Forest*, while Cook and Miles Lees edited and published a collection of short plays in the anthology, *Short East African Plays in English*. 1969 had Charity Waciuma publish a novel, *Daughter of Mumbi*, while John Mbiti publishes *Poems of Nature and Faith*. The peak of this pioneering decade was the publication of three novels in 1970: Stephen Ngubiah’s *A Curse from God*, John Karoki’s *The Land is Ours* and Kibera’s *Voices in the Dark*. Jared Angira also made his début in publishing with his first anthology of poems, *Juices* (1970).

In a paper presented at the 2nd International Janheinz Jahn symposium in 1977, Wanjala noted that,

[t]he convulsions of the Mau Mau experiences sparked off a literary fire that has kept burning since the early fifties to date The East African Publishing House, under the directorship of John Nottingham, has rekindled the fire, now and again, by publishing most of the titles on the emergency. (5)

Bardolph also attests to the pre-dominance of works of fiction on the “hard times of the emergency It is as if the writers of Kenya all had to come to terms on paper with this traumatic experience before they could move on to other areas” (39). These observations are true of the contributors to *Busara* as a host of stories in the journal are based on the Mau Mau resistance movement in the 1950s in Kenya.

Yet, themes of anti-colonialism and cultural nationalism were not the only concerns of this generation. As noted earlier, there are those, like Ogot, who delved further into the past of the pre-colonial society and re-imagined the social and cultural landscape of the Kenyan ancestry, tackling such themes as migration and settlement, the pre-colonial African family, superstition and witchcraft as she has done in her novel, *The Promised Land*, and short story anthology, *Land Without Thunder*.

The first decade of modern Kenya’s creative writing attracted both acclaim and admonition from equally nascent and vibrant literary critics in the region. The 1962 African Writers’ Summit organized by the Mbari Club of Nigeria under the sponsorship of the American-based Congress of Cultural Freedom established a critical threshold for literary production in East Africa. For Simon Gĩkandi, this conference “was a source of

doubt and anxiety, an occasion to reflect on what appeared to be literary impoverishment of the very region that was holding the conference” (8). This is the same anxiety that a few years later filled Taban lo Liyong with dismay when a group of students at Howard University met to discuss literary works from their native countries. Whereas students from the other regions had established writers to brag about, Taban could hardly cite a handful of publications from East Africa. Embarrassed, he walked away for “contributing nothing” (*East African Journal* 6). It is this dismay that led him to declare East Africa a literary desert.

By the time of the 1962 Conference, there were no world renowned writers from East Africa writing in English while Anglophone West Africa had Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and Cyprian Ekwensi; Francophone West Africa had Sembene Ousmane, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Mongo Beti and Camara Laye; and South Africa had Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi. Ngũgĩ, then a student at Makerere, met Achebe who was the founding editor of African Writers Series, an agency for the London-based Heinemann Publishing Company charged with the responsibility of scouting for African talent in creative writing. This was a defining moment not only for Ngũgĩ but also for East African writers at large. Ngũgĩ submitted the manuscript for *Weep Not, Child* which was published two years later. In Wanjala’s words, “the interaction of East African writers with other writers made the event historical and the political conditions against which the Kenyan writer was to operate, more lucid” (16). The Makerere conference has been the generally acknowledged starting point of debate on the beginnings of modern East African literature in English.

A second major conference was held in 1965 in Nairobi. This was a conference on African culture and new East African writings organized by the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs – a non-for-profit organization established by Tom Mboya in 1963 and run by Bethwell Ogot. According to John Nottingham, the organisation “had links to “CIA-type foundations in the US” (sic) (201) and was dedicated to the discussion of public affairs in the region. It had a pan-East African inter-governmental support and Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere and Milton Obote, the then presidents of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda respectively, were its patrons.

The 1965 conference examined the role of government in funding literary activities and recommended the creation of outlets for writers in East Africa, assistance – both financial and otherwise – by governments and other bodies for publication and distribution of magazines, and direct financial support for writers whose talents had been recognized and that merited development. Besides, publishers were called upon to set aside a significant percentage of their annual profits for the active encouragement of the local literary magazines and writing competitions. These recommendations led to the establishment of the *East African Journal* which would be published by the East African Institute. The journal offered a crucial forum for young writers. Its role in shaping the East African literary landscape can be testified to by the fact that it is the forum where Taban first published his “East African Literary Barrenness” article in 1968.

The 1970s was the decade that, as Roscoe has put it, put to rest “the treasured holy image” of Taban lo Liyong in his apartment at Howard University, “head in hands, wondering how to solve the problem of East African literary barrenness” (31). Roscoe elaborates on this point in *Uhuru’s Fire*:

There has been a squeezing and pouring ever since, and whether in answer to the call of Taban or the conference [1962 writers' summit], the number of writers offering their wares in East Africa has grown very swiftly indeed Through the daily press and a variety of journals such as *Zuka*, *Darlit*, *Penpoint*, *Ghala* and *East African Journal*, through such publishing houses as Oxford, EAPH, EALB, and Heinemann The scene has changed so fast that those who still believe West Africa makes the running might dwell with profit with James Currey's claim in *The Guardian* (October 1974) that Nairobi now has more writers, artists, and critics than any other city on the continent. (31)

In addition to the pioneers like Ngũgĩ, Taban, Okot and Ogot, there were other writers like Jared Angira, Richard C. Nturu, John Mbiti, Edwin Waiyaki, Amin Kassam, Leonard Okola, Eneriko Seruma, Robert Serumaga, Evarret Standa, Kĩmani Gecaũ, David Mulwa, Sam Mbure, Leonard Kibera, Sam Kahiga, Charity Waciuma, Okello Oculi, Joseph Buruga, Austin Bukunya, Magaga Alot, Mwangi Ruheni, Albert Ojuka, Meja Mwangi, David Maillu, Godwin Wachira, and Charles Mangua among others who published novels, short stories and poetry in English.

Notably there were more writers from outside the university fraternity that had dominated the earlier decade and their creative writing displayed more experimentation with form and content than that of the earlier decade. The classical realist mode of Ngũgĩ's earlier works, for instance, met its match in the popular novels such as Charles Mangua's *Son of a Woman* (1971), Maillu's *After 4.30* (1974) and Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973). The popular novels were fashioned along Western thrillers and romances which made them appealing to the mass readers. Calder is quoted in Wanjala's "Popular Literature in East

Africa” as having credited *Son of a Woman* as “a solid beginning for an authentically popular application of the novel in East Africa” (233). In *Home and Freedom*, Wanjala also cites Taban lo Liyong’s endorsement of *Son of a Woman* as a novel that represented “the new culture . . . not that of Lawino but that of Dodge Kiunyu, and the new educated elite like Dodge Kiunyu” (207). The reading public was also expanding and more journals and popular magazines were on offer. Wanjala explains this growth:

A study of the circulation of the East African journals such as *Busara*, *The African Review*, *Dhana*, *Ghala* and *The East African Journal*, *Mawazo*, *Taamuli*, *Umma*, *Zuka* in the 1970s showed how the reading culture was spreading in East Africa. The low-brow of our society consumed *Drum*, *True Love*, *Flamingo*, *Baraza*, *Afrika ya Kesho* . . . and creative writers variously contributed to these popular magazines. (40)

This expansion of the reading public led to diversity and increased production of literary works in the country.

Another significant event was the East African Writers’ Conference held at the University of Nairobi in 1970 which again brought together the players in literary production in the region. However, as Wanjala observes, this conference seemed to have “sounded a death-knell to pan-East African literary consciousness as people started thinking as Kenyans, Tanzanians and Ugandans” (“Imaginative” 35). The coming to power in Uganda of Idi Amin through a military coup in 1971 and the subsequent political dictatorship precipitated an exodus of Ugandan writers and scholars who fled the country to avoid persecution. In addition, literature in Kiswahili, which was the forte of

Tanzanian writers, was given little attention by readers and critics in the region. These realities, together with the fact that Kenya was enjoying a relatively stronger economy compared to the other countries in the region, made Nairobi assume the position of the cultural and literary capital of East Africa. The University of Nairobi's Department of Literature became the home of the region's literary giants led by Ngũgĩ who was the Chairman of the Department between 1968 and 1969. The Ugandan exodus brought Okot p'Bitek, Taban lo Liyong, John Ruganda and Austin Bukenya to the department.

It is in this environment that *Nexus*, later named *Busara*, emerged. The first volume of *Nexus* was published in 1967. It was a magazine produced by the students of English/literature in the then English Department of the University College, Nairobi. This was then a constituent college of Makerere University, which was also a constituent college of the University of London. *Nexus* was following the tradition of the other journals and magazines that had sprung up in this decade. Its editorial board and contributors constituted established as well as upcoming writers and critics. For example, the founding editors of *Nexus* were Kibera and Kassam who later became accomplished writers.

The editorial board of the early issues of *Busara* was constituted by James Stewart, the then Head of English Department at the University College, Nairobi as well as Roscoe, Calder and Ogot. Ngũgĩ also came to be its editorial advisor when he became the Chairman of the Department for the second time in 1974. Angira, Standa, Kahiga, Gacheche and Wanjala are some of the other students, then, who used *Busara* to improve their writing skills. Initially published by the East African Publishing House, and later adopted by the Kenya Literature Bureau and publishing four volumes per year from 1967

to 1975, *Nexus/Busara* remains one of the most consistent and influential forums for literary activity in Kenya and the East African region at large at the time. What follows below is an analysis of Busara's concerns which represent the emerging trends in creative writing in this period in Kenya.

2.2 Insights from the Oral Tradition

Modern Kenyan literature in English by African writers emerged in the early 1960s, a period defined by the dynamics of social, economic and political transition that came with the end of British rule. Kenya was undergoing a transition from a predominantly oral to a more literate society as European modernism took root in the country. Whereas a majority of Kenyan writers, especially from Central Kenya such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kibera and Waciuma were pre-occupied with anti-colonialism and cultural nationalism that informed the Mau Mau anti-imperialist struggle, there were a few like Grace Ogot who produced works that heavily appropriated material and form from the oral traditional African setting. The interface between oral and written literature was a major feature of the emerging modern African literature which is evident in *Nexus/Busara*.

Some of Ogot's short stories in the anthology *Land Without Thunder* (1968) are good examples of works that are informed by the socio-cultural practices and morality of the traditional society. "The Rain Came", for instance, is a story about some of the spiritual aspects of the traditional Luo community. In the story, a beautiful maiden called Oganda, the only daughter of a chief called Labongo, has to be sacrificed in the lake so that the monster of the lake can be appeased to send rain to her village that has suffered from a prolonged drought. As explained at *galegroup.com*, "Ogot first learned the traditional version of this tale (about a chief's daughter whom a medicine man claims must be

sacrificed in order to bring rain) from her grandmother in evening family storytelling sessions in the elder's hut ("Overview: 'The Rain Came'"). Ogot had presented this story as "The Year of Sacrifice" at the 1962 Writers' Conference at Makerere. It was later reworked and published as "The Rain Came" in 1963 in *Black Orpheus*. Other stories in the same anthology that fall in the same tradition include "The Bamboo Hut," "Green Leaves" and "Land Without Thunder."

Another story that falls in this category is Magaga Alot's "The Demoniatic" (*Busara* Vol. 2.3, 27-30) which is an account of two brothers – Onyango and Otieno – who were great friends. Central Nyanza, where the story is set is said to be a land that abounded with many creatures such as cobras, hyenas, lions and leopards, which made live in great fear. "The Demoniatic" gives an account of paths in this region that crossed through lions' dens and of a schoolboy who was found killed by a lion in the bush. As a result of the incident, parents strongly warned their children against following these paths.

Trouble in the story happens when Onyango falls sick and Otieno decides to go and see his sick friend in spite of the perils and warnings from his mother. Otieno's action is portrayed as a boy's masculine bravado. Apparently, men in this society did not take women seriously, a fact that is evident when Otieno's father tells his son, "Take care you are not misled by women . . . not even your mother" (28). The mother's warning however comes to make sense when Otieno embarks on the journey. Otieno even ignores the age-old superstition that the hooting of the owl is a bad omen and that it would require one to postpone a journey. On the way he is confronted by a buck that bounces from a nearby bush. The ultimate test of his bravado happens when he encounters a naked Owuor – an evil man who delighted in strangling people at night. Owuor's nudity drives Otieno to the

limits of his fear. The story ends with the moral observation that “children of today don’t listen to the advice of us old people” (30).

“The Demoniatic” can thus be read as a story that repudiates hegemonic patriarchal tendencies in the traditional African society in which boys were brought up to regard women as weaker and less knowledgeable than men as Otieno’s father makes his son believe. It is also a moralistic tale that admonishes disobedience and disrespect of parents. Using fantasy and a simple linear plot, Alot demonstrates how the oral narrative form was effectively deployed to invoke an oral tradition setting in written literature.

The short story has also been used to diagnose the distorted and gender insensitive sense of morality and social justice that characterized the traditional African society. “Kemitare” by Hanny Ruyendo (*Nexus* 4, 29-32) narrates the story of the eponymous girl-protagonist who becomes a victim of an authoritarian patriarchal traditional juridical system. Her outstanding beauty is expected to bring her father wealth. The narrator tells us that Kemitare “had intended to be a good girl, for whom any suitor would be willing to pay a reasonable dowry to make her father rich. The neighbours had started adding six cows and fifteen goats to Kainga’s present wealth” (29). Unfortunately, when Kemitare meets Kato during the night of a tribal dance, a relationship develops and she gets pregnant.

In the tribal moral code, premarital pregnancy is an offence against the gods and is punished by having the culprit thrown down a waterfall. The village chief personally sees to Kemitare’s execution. The horror of the scene is evident as many members of the “wildly excited” spectators “had fearfully fallen down burying their faces in the ground,

as Kemitare went down the falls, taking the innocent, unborn child with her” (32). The story reveals the injustices of the traditional society in which it is based. Girls were regarded as a source of wealth for their fathers and were expected to refrain from pre-marital sex in order to be good for marriage. The punishment attributed to the gods that Kimitare is said to have offended in the story appears more as a conspiracy by men in that society to maintain their control over women.

Anxieties arising from youth sexuality in the traditional society are further demonstrated in Duncan Gichangi’s short story “Nyakiemo” (*Nexus* 4, 10-12). The story presents the plight of a young man who has made a girl (Wairimu) pregnant and is now living in mortal fear of being discovered. The story’s association with the traditional African setting can be derived more from its allusion to Gĩkũyũ mythology than its context (the story is based in the colonial period, around 1956). In a story within the main story, a girl called Nyakiemo follows a handsome man who turns out to be an ogre and is eventually condemned to the underworld of ogres. The perils of pre-marital sex are symbolised by the orge which a mythical villain that preys on human beings. The allusion to the handsome ogre in the story-within-the-story portrays Mugo, the story’s protagonist, as the villain that has sexually exploited Nyakiemo and led to her ruin. Mugo is worried that Wairimu will soon expose him and this will make him to be condemned by his society as it frowns at pre-marital sex. The story has strong overtones of the moral sanctions on youth sexuality that echoes the story, “Kemitare,” discussed above. The strict moral code of the traditional society has made pre-marital sex a taboo and culprits such as Mugo and Wairimu are strongly condemned.

Gichangi's story is similar to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's short story "A Meeting in the Dark" published in *Secret Lives* (1972). In Ngũgĩ's story, a boy called Njoroge has made Wamuhu pregnant and is worried that if discovered, his chance of joining Makerere University would be thwarted. Both are set in the colonial period. In "Nyakiemo," Mugo's father has joined the Mau Mau war for freedom and his family is thus condemned to struggle in abject poverty. The plots of the two stories are similar as they involve cases of pre-marital sex that leads to pregnancy and the subsequent anxiety of culprits. The similarity between the two stories could be an indication of Ngũgĩ's influence in some of the early writings in Kenya which is more evident in his penchant for narratives of anti-colonialism and cultural nationalism. There are many works in *Busara* that suggest this influence as we note in the next section.

2.3 Mau Mau and the Sour Fruits of Independence

Bruce King has described post-colonial literatures that emerged during the period of decolonization and the changed cultural terrain that followed the Second World War as "new national literatures" (4). For him, these literatures were new because they were "not known or much studied abroad" (4). This phrase aptly describes the literature that was produced in the 1960s in Kenya. King further notes that while the large body of writing that appeared at the time of decolonization resulted as much from increased educational, social and economic opportunities as from political concerns, the critical reception was usually informed by the politics of nationalism. He avers that discussions of the new literatures were still being shaped by themes of the long period of cultural assertion and opposition that was part of the context of political independence (7).

In “The Growth of the East African Novel,” Gĩkandi makes a similar argument, asserting that the literature that emerged in this region at the dawn of independence was one that responded to the colonial experience. It was anti-colonial and addressed questions of land alienation by the colonialists and the subjugation of African cultures by the imperial Western culture. As Gikandi elsewhere observes, Ngugi’s works in particular can be read as a response to the “specific commentaries on the African experience as it emerges from colonial domination and moves into the theatre of independence and postcoloniality” (*Ngugi wa Thiong’o* 1). In a similar vein, Wanjala notes that this preponderance of the themes of colonialism and the Mau Mau resistance movement that are invoked in Kenya’s new post-colonial literature emanate from the “convulsions of the Mau Mau experience [which] sparked off a literary fire that has kept burning since the early fifties, to date”(“Imaginative” 5). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the foremost creative writer in the region at the time, set the tone for addressing what were seen to be historical injustices against Kenyans by the brutish colonial machine and its local allies. His first three novels are an example of this anticolonial spirit. The publication of *A Grain of Wheat*, his third novel, coincided with that of the first issue of *Nexus* in 1967.

A number of short stories in *Busara* have addressed similar concerns in ways that bring new insights into the history of the struggle for land and freedom by the Mau Mau movement in the 1950s in Kenya. Three stories in the debut issue of *Nexus* have this subject as the central focus. In one of the stories, “The Oat”, Benard Mbui and Kahiga represent the experiences of a young man who dropped out of school and fathered several children in his teens before joining the freedom fighters in the forest. We are told that the young man could not keep off women, an amorous practice which went against one of the

ethical code of the Mau mau fighters. The basic principal of the fighters demanded that only generals could keep spouses while the rest of the freedom fighters were “supposed to direct all our energies to war” (6). The young man tries to have a relationship with one of the wives of the generals who, incidentally, had two wives. This transgressive act attracts the wrath of the general and puts the young man’s life in jeopardy. He is compelled to escape from the forest to save his life. Once out of the forest, the man finds nothing meaningful too and resorts to crime. He joins a gang of robbers that steals and smuggles coffee out of the country and this lands him in jail. Told from a first person point-of-view, the story gives us insight into some of the unspoken truths about the Mau Mau war. The generals were selfish and cruel even to their own soldiers. Besides, the war disrupted the lives of the individuals who joined the movement and made it hard for them to raise stable families. Eventually, the young man does not bring up a family and only comes out of prison to fight over a girl with one of the sons he had sired in his teenage escapades.

James Gecaũ’s story “The Ridge” (*Nexus* 1, 8-14) also addresses experiences associated with the Mau Mau war. It is a portrait of the precocity of life in the ridges of Central Kenya during the period of the ‘Emergency’. The narrator’s father was one of the casualties in the ‘mysterious disappearances’ that characterized life here. A person who ‘disappeared’ was bound to be either in detention, in the forest or dead. The story highlights the cold-bloodedness of the home guards who were collaborators with the colonial government and who were used as security officers against the Mau Mau fighters. At the behest of Mr. Brown, the British District Officer, the guards would whip the people and force women to go and labour in the fields as a punishment for their

husbands' membership of Mau Mau. When the narrator falls sick and his widowed mother fails to go to the field, a home guard called Njogu summons her and threatens her asking her with contempt:

Do you know what they do to naughty people like you? They take them to the home guard post and do things to them. Most ask for death – a lot among them get it – after a long time. Those that come out wish that they had been as lucky as to die in there. (12)

The narrator recounts how his father's early death emanated from his broken heart after he came home from detention. The ultimate tragedy of the story is when the narrator's mother succumbs to the blackmail from Njogu after she is summoned to the home guard post. The narrator reveals to his younger brother that Njogu ended up being a regular visitor to their home as a result of which the narrator was born. The story reveals the wickedness of the home guards who blackmailed and sexually exploited widows and other women left behind by the Mau Mau fighters.

One of the ways in which the Mau Mau recruited members and solidified its support was through the administration of oaths of loyalty to the movement. In the short story "The Night of Woman" (*Busara* 2.1 46-51) Benard Wagacha recounts how a man called Ngobe was tricked into joining the struggle by a friend who led him into the oathing den at Majengo, a slum village in the heart of Nairobi. The story castigates Africans who were complacent and conformist to the master-servant social order that the colonial system had established. Ngobe was a servant at Norfolk Hotel where he served rich white patrons. Just like other Africans who worked for the white up-country farmers and

the white community in the city, Ngobe had to eat leftovers. He would have to have food and clothes passed to him by regular patrons at the hotel. In the city, the whites would live in the “quiet suburban Nairobi where African servants switched on the lights in the houses and busied themselves cooking dinner for the predominantly white population” (49-50). Some Africans, like Ngobe in the story, felt privileged to associate with Europeans even if merely as servants. Though it could have been Ngobe’s pragmatic choice, the readiness to work for the whites was deemed as short-sighted subservience that would entrench the injustices of the colonialists towards Africans. Maitha, the lady administering the oath in the story, asks Ngobe: “Will you be a servant to the Europeans all your life? And leave your children to the same life of servitude?” (50). Living in the apparent comfort of their masters’ houses, the black servants did not see the need to join the struggle.

The story also reveals the operations of the Mau Mau movement which, inspite of its operational base in the forest, was able to penetrate the outside public both urban and rural. The informal settlements that were the abode of urban Africans provided safe grounds for the movement to spread its influence among the Africans. Ngobe had been tricked into believing that his friend was taking him to meet a prostitute only to find himself in a ‘ghostly building’ where he was made to drink raw blood and swear to “be prepared to die for the cause of Mau Mau . . . go to the forest and root out Europeans and the government from there . . . starting with my wife and best friends, to bring others here to the oath” (51). What is significant about this experience is that “The blood seemed to have added a new spark to his life already for now he had taken the oath and felt the need for Africans to rise; he too would be taking several friends to Majengo” (51). The oath

that he takes transforms Ngobe from the passive white man's servant that he had been to a strong supporter of the liberation movement.

In another story, "The Land Freedom Fighter," (*Nexus* 3, 5-10) by Jan Esmail, we see the state of economic deprivation and great loss that the freedom fighters suffered especially after the end of what seems to have been a futile struggle. It is the story of Joseph Mwai, a teacher who used to collaborate with the Mau Mau. Ngei, one of his pupils, betrayed him to the authorities and Mwai had to consequently flee to the forest where he stayed for thirteen years, fighting and running from government forces. He is one of the last fighters to come out of the forest as they surrendered to the government. He is gripped by a sense of betrayal and despondency. Everyone in his family was killed in the Emergency without even having a chance to put up a struggle (7). The irony of the situation is that Ngei, the pupil who had betrayed him is now a major in the army of the new Africans-led government. He leads a luxurious life in a modern two-storied house that is adorned with a thick carpet, a huge television set and a cupboard of assorted liquors. He drives a jeep and has a row of medals above his breast pocket. Out of guilt, Ngei has been looking for Mwai who he acknowledges as a mentor. He says that it is Mwai who made him a man. "Whatever I am is due to him . . . a father, a guide, a teacher . . . taught us to be impartial, to be proud and ambitious" (8). Tragic irony is further seen as Mwai pleads with Ngei to get him a job in the army. Mwai's family has been languishing in abject poverty. He could not take his clever son to school while one of Ngei's children is now attending a European boarding school. Mwai laments, "Where did I go wrong? I was left at the post because I fought for my country, because I was one of the last to come out of the forest. While my pupils progressed, I went backwards" (7). Mwai, like many other fellow

fighters, has become cynical about the spirit of patriotism that had inspired to join the struggle.

The story dramatizes the betrayal and disillusionment that the people who joined the Mau Mau war in the 1950s suffered, especially after the attainment of independence in 1963, and the ascendancy to power of the African political elite. The bulk of the people who came to power were former collaborators or sons of former collaborators with the colonial government. Jomo Kenyatta became the first Prime Minister and, later, the president, and soon started acquiring monarchical powers. Charles Hornsby notes that some tension developed between the ex-Mau Mau fighters and the loyalists as the country then instituted what he calls a “political culture of orderly amnesia” (115). Hornsby further notes that “Kenyatta’s response was to bury all discussions of the war as far as practically possible. Those ex-freedom fighters and detainees who wished to join the new Kenya would be welcome . . . but they received no compensation or special privileges” (115). It is this betrayal of the fighters that that fills Mwai, in the story above, with despondency and bitterness.

The bitterness and disillusionment following the betrayal and abandonment of ex-freedom fighters is also the subject of David Gicomoya’s short story “Gathondu” (*Nexus* 4, 7-8). Gathondu, the protagonist in the story, is a dispossessed urban hustler who makes a living by hawking petty items such as keys, rings, cheap spoons, plastic combs, pens and handkerchiefs. As he watches people eating and drinking in the eating hotels where he takes his wares, he laments that these apparently successful urban dwellers do not care about what he is offering for sale. His mind drifts twelve years into the past when he abandoned his job to join the freedom fighters in the forest. Though we are not

told what he was doing before going to the forest, we learn that he had managed to keep his brother in school and had even hoped to get married. He remembers his daring exploits in the forest which earned him rapid promotion in the Mau Mau. As a punishment by the colonial government, his brother was murdered and the land of his family seized “and yet they fought on, even when they murdered Kimathi. Only uhuru could bring him out” (8). It is therefore a tragedy for the new Kenyan nation that many like Gathonde have been rendered destitute in a heartless city where they live in hunger. Gathonde is shocked to observe the heartlessness of the city and the misery that the urban poor live in when he meets a sickly emaciated man lying in a backstreet:

He [Gathonde] shuddered as he looked once more at that bag of bones, the living corpse that heaved weakly but regularly; the sunken, sun baked stomach, seemingly touching the spine. None in the wave after wave of the passing crowd seemed to notice. (7)

The only time the better off city dwellers are shaken from their indifference is when their security is threatened. In the story, Gathonde finds himself taking his wares to an overcrowded bus stop as the people travel up-country en-mass for the holidays. He loses his box in the pushing crowd and as he struggles to retrieve it, he is mistaken for a thief by the mob which descends on him with kicks and blows leaving him bleeding and half blind. It takes the intervention of the police to rescue him from the murderous mob.

This story of Gathonde’s personal misadventure is another story about the hypocritical and treacherous nationalism of the new political elite after Kenya’s independence. As the story comes to the end we are told that “as the engine [of the police patrol car] roared and

the tires squealed, the dying strains of ‘Harambee, Harambee’ could be heard from a portable radio in the crowd” (8). The word “Harambee” was Kenya’s political mobilization mantra during the reigns of Kenyatta and Moi. It was a clarion call made by Jomo Kenyatta when he took the reins of power as the first president of Kenya in 1964, exhorting Kenyans to pull together and build the new nation.

However as Gathendu’s story ironically reveals, this pulling together was not informed by a spirit of collective social justice or egalitarian nationhood that those who had fought for freedom aspired for. The new political elite and the emerging middle class established a neo-colonial bourgeoisie social economic order that marginalized the economically disadvantaged populace that the majority of Kenyans were. Kenya had reached the moment after colonialism where, as Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* sees it, “[t]he national bourgeoisie identifies itself with the Western bourgeoisie along its paths of negation and decadence” (123). Fanon further observes that the, “native bourgeoisie that comes to power uses its class aggressiveness to corner the positions formerly kept for foreigners” (125). In Kenya, the African leaders trained their eyes on the national wealth – large tracts of land and lucrative career opportunities – to enrich themselves and their families. As Atieno-Odhiambo notes in “From the English Country Garden to ‘Mikambo Mibale,’”

At the bottom of the class pyramid were the urban *sans culottes*, the Gĩkũyũ propertyless, the *descamisados* shirtless ones in Latin American literature, known in Gĩkũyũ parlance as the *mitarukire*, those in rags or the have-nots . . . demanding the restitution of their lost land all the way from Kanunga in Kiambu to Gakindu in Nyeri. (161-162)

This dispossession is what constitutes the central conflict in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977) and play, co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* (1982). The two works envision a revolution spearheaded by peasants and workers who can no longer bear with the "social conditions under which they worked after independence (Ngũgĩ, "Interview with Jussawalla and Dasenbrock," 312). It is this resentment that fills the hearts of people like Mwai and Gathendu in the stories discussed above.

The stories discussed in this section represent the body of literature that emerged in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s which not only lamented about the evils of colonialism but also mourned the failure of the dreams of independence. The strong feeling of disillusionment and betrayal that the stories express is characteristic of the literature from a majority of the formerly colonized African countries. The nationalist narratives that arose in protest against colonialism and its injustices such as in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* gave way to a literature of disenchantment with the post-colonial nation-state that we, for instance, find in Ngũgĩ's later works. *Busara* and other journals of this period were therefore representative of the evolving trends in the concerns of Kenyan writers. There was also the representation of changing lifestyles as the Kenyan society increasingly embraced modern/Western culture. This is the issue that we discuss in the following section.

2.4 Urbanization and Transition to Modernity

Urbanization and the transition from a traditional to a modern society was, in Kenya and other formerly colonised nations, a function of the colonial process. Colonialism entailed a process of the systematic socio-economic, cultural and political transformation of the

colonial subject as western modernity gradually took root in the Empire. Stuart Hall traces modern societies back to their origins in the rapid and extensive social and economic development which followed the decline of feudalism in Western Europe (1). Hall notes that modern societies are characterized by such features as the dominance of secular forms of political power, a monetarized exchange economy, the decline of traditional social order, the decline of a religious worldview typical of traditional societies and the rise of popular materialistic culture (6). Colonialism introduced some of these values in the colonies in the process of ‘civilizing’ the natives thus leading to what came to be regarded as modern native societies.

Modernity in formerly colonised nations was ushered through the introduction of western education, Christianity, capitalism and the establishment of the state as a political structure of governance. This transformation led to urbanization which resulted to new modern/western lifestyles on one hand and the rise of various challenges that were caused by the resultant rural-urban migration on the other. Indeed, the evolution of the Kenyan society from a rural traditional society to an urban one was marked by conditions of cultural conflict, alienation and dispossession that came to be the major concerns for the emerging writers in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Writing in the first issue of *Nexus*, Valerie D’Cruz in “Critical Trends in African Literature” underscores the fact that the literature produced at the moment of *Nexus*’ publication was characterized by the concerns about the effects of the transformation that the society was undergoing. According to her, “the bulk of African writing centres around the polemic between the African traditional and the new mode of life and living occasioned by the advent of Christianity and Western civilization” (43). The

transformation of the Kenyan society from a traditional rural society to a modern one was especially manifest in an emergent urban culture and new socio-economic realities at the time. Narratives of the urban experience started emerging in the late 1960s and were the subject of a number of novels in the 1970s such as Kibera's *Voices in the Dark* (1970) and Mwangi's urban trilogy *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). These stories dramatize the disillusionment that characterized life especially for the youth who migrated to the city in the hope of getting a good life.

Kibera was one of the leading writers of what could be regarded as the second generation of African Kenyan creative writers. This was a generation that, though still falling back to the narrative of nationalism of the earlier writers, focused more on the problems of political disillusionment that threw the postcolonial urban subject into angst against political class who were mainly rooted in the urban centres. *Nexus/Busara* has several short stories and poems that present a portrait of life in the city in the period after independence. Invariably, the city was a squalid space, inhabited by a huge population of the poor who lived in dungeons of deprivation. The urban poor engaged in all sorts of criminal activities to survive – selling illicit liquor, robbery and prostitution. A number of short stories in *Busara* have addressed the problems that characterized this moment.

Kibera captures the cultural dilemma that characterized life in Kenya at the dawn of the modern era in his “Letter to the Haunting Past” (*Nexus* 1, 24-28). This is a short story in which the narrator addresses a personified past in a second person narrative point-of-view, expressing the crisis that the transitory narrator is undergoing as the past and the present contest to determine his consciousness. He says,

I now find the ancestral herald so distant. I do not know much about old wine . . . the better part of me has drunk of the new gourd. But I do know . . . between us, between my nostalgia for you and the reality of the moment, between the incantation of the witchdoctor's magic wand and the Bible, between your arrow and my pen, swirls, yet in the contrast the thick life-blood; so that you and I revolve in a tied history. (24)

The writer laments the fact that in Africa, where the old meets the new and gives way, modernization is a vexing process. The white man's religion brought spiritual confusion between the Catholics and Protestants. The urban setting is characterized by anxiety, idleness and ignorance and is a place of lamentable moral depravity and, as Tom Odhiambo observes, "juvenile delinquency" ("Alternative Moral Economies" 243) accompanied the marginalised youth who were experimenting and playing the "foreign beat generation to the tune of the imported leather jacket, the tightness of the wee than knee-high skirt and and the skin lightening cream of the ashamed" (25). The narrator in Kibera's story acknowledges the inevitability of this moment saying that "I cannot discard into the commitment of your black Rubicon, the fairer grains lying in the mortar, for both have become a part of me. Hence shall I stay and strive to yield shape to this transitory embryo (25). The narrator is admitting his crisis of identity at this transitory moment.

In another story, "1954" (*Nexus* 2, 14-20), Kibera gives a portrait of the emerging urban scenario as colonialism tightens its grip on Kenya. Nairobi is portrayed as a place that is populated with beggars who "wipe their eyes on the back of the hand or the tattered sleeve in an attempt to come to terms with the new day" (14). The story paints a bleak

picture of a city that is polluted by the industrial effluent and dirty beggars in equal measure. These beggars, casualties of the Mau Mau war which was at its peak in the period the story unfolds, are used in the story as markers of economic and social destitution which ironically negates the “civilising mission” that colonialism couched its dehumanising ethos with. The setting is colonial Nairobi with streets named after colonial settlers such as Delamere Avenue. Lord Delamere was a wealthy British farmer and businessman who had acquired huge tracts of land in Kenya. The street named after him in Kibera’s story is therefore a symbol of the entrenchment of the structures of colonialism in the land and the impoverishment it had caused to the natives, making them paupers in their own country.

David Gatruboi's “A Child of Sin” (*Nexus* 4, 32-40) is a story set in Majengo. This is one of the earliest and largest slums to develop in Nairobi since the days of colonialism. It is part of Mathare Valley which Nici Nelson describes as “a large spontaneous settlement in Nairobi ... an ‘informal sector’ suburb” where most of the housing had been built by owner-occupiers with mud and wattle on land they did not own but had merely occupied (114). Majengo occupies a major place in Kenyan urban literature for it is often depicted as the “slum-capital” of Nairobi’s informal settlement and is especially associated with commercial sex trade. It is a place where, as Nelson further notes,

Sex-work ... was referred to as ‘selling from one’s kiosk’ as a service like selling milk. Women justified their sex work on purely pragmatic grounds that, first they had no education, second they had children to support, and third it was a service no different from cooking food They were defining sex work as the commercialization of one of the reproductive roles of wives. (115)

In Gatruboi's story, the place is said to have no drainage. It is a place where filth – excreta, kitchen waste – is scattered all over; a place of violent feuds between drunkards, pimps, hooligans and life-hardened whores. There is a block of twelve rooms occupied by “women of trade” (prostitutes). The children have to “stay out of the way – playing around the block; then the mosque, the social hall and the municipal beer hall” (33). We are further told that on “reaching maturity, the children spilled into the city centre” (33).

Aida and Nalieya are two children who are forced to move out when their mother's male clients come to their house. They would end up sleeping with boys in the landlord's son's room. Ultimately they are pushed into prostitution and into an unbreakable vicious cycle of failure. They start patronizing bars where brutal men sexually exploit them. Aida is sexually exploited by a sugar daddy who does not pay a pound for a night's sex. Later a young man deceives her and makes her spend a night in the corridor. On another occasion, three men take her to Riruta, a Nairobi suburb village, and throw her out naked at dawn after sexually assaulting her. She is further assaulted by the man who rescues her. Aida's experiences represent the horrors of living in the squalor of urban life in Kenya especially for the vulnerable girl-child.

Ironically, we learn from the story that church has condemned the street children while parliament and the city administration have recommended that they be classified as criminals who should be hunted down as they are an embarrassment to tourists. Thus, the institutions which are supposed to protect and provide restitution for the underprivileged like Aida, collude with the state and the law in criminalising poverty and informal economies. We are told that in the wake of her desperation, Aida “did not even cry. The

stoicism of her type of life forbids such frailties” (35). The harsh treatment from the society has led Aida to a state of despondency and stoic resignation.

“Maskini” (*Busara* 6.2, 27-37) by Kivutha Kibwana, is another short story that revisits the grim realities of life for the urban poor. “Maskini” is the name main protagonist in the story. It is the Kiswahili word for the English word, “poverty,” and is symbolic of the life of dispossession that the story’s protagonist lives. The story begins with Maskini, in a whore house ready to leave after paying the five shillings fee for sex. The woman he has had sex with belongs to a gang of robbers that is planning to rob the bank where he works as a security guard. She has been sent to approach him by her fellow gang members. The woman does not let Maskini leave before he promises to take part in the robbery. Maskini agrees to co-operate when he is promised to receive “one pregnant bag of money” which will make him “a real man” (30). He visualizes himself becoming a millionaire. As Maskini moves to a bar on his way home we are told that he likes drinks second to women “there is nothing like both for burying frustrations, even if for some time” (31). We also learn in the story that Maskini has forgotten his family at home and the children are sick and have neither food nor fees. Maskini is a victim of urban dispossession which has driven him to drunkenness, cheap sex and has now finally pushed him to crime as he agrees to cooperate with the robbers.

Maskini is excited at the thought that he is going to overcome poverty and become like the Benz-man who drives past him on his way to the bar. He fancies himself moving to the elitist Muthaiga Estate in Nairobi and becoming a great leader who will provide education to children, mow down slums and have all prostitutes asked to go home. However, this remains a pipe dream as Maskini is shot dead by the same gang that

tricked him into letting them into the bank. The story depicts the desperation of the urban poor which pushes them to look for short-cuts for making money. Maskini, like many of his kind, resorts to criminal activities such as robbery in an attempt to solve his financial problems. Further, the story not only shows how relationships in the city could be treacherous and perilous as greed and selfishness drive the actions of such people as the gang that kills Maskini; but it also shows the urgency with which the urban subject trapped in seemingly irremediable failure attempt to disentangle themselves from poverty and the slum as insignias of doomed futures even at the cost of self sacrifice through underground economic activities.

In their squalor, the urban poor have acquired an increased political consciousness that makes them question circumstances of their predicament. Just like the Mau Mau freedom fighters who lament their frustrations after ending up as beggars in post-independence Kenya, the youth are also disillusioned after coming to the city with big dreams only to end up eking a living in very demeaning situations. This is the plight of Juma Saidi and his fellow youths in Oluoch Obura's "Story" *Busara* 6: 2, 17–21). Juma arrives in Furaha City where he is surprised to find beggars in this place "of skyscrapers and countless cars" (17). Unlike his village, the city is the embodiment of evolving modernity where:

Anybody with a sense of civilization was dressed to kill. The cultured men wore double-breast London-tailored suits with ties to match. Women with sophisticated attire in the Parisian fashion (sic). This was the new class of Africans conscious of progress. In this fast technological world . . . these were the people on the move . . . the people who mattered. (18)

Juma ends up in Matopeni (mud) village which is a shame to the city – an abode of the poor infested with garbage, rats and “perfume from the sewage plant nearby” (18). He spends four years in the city and has only had a casual labour’s job. As they enjoy a drink of changaa (an illicit local hard drink) in an illegal beer den in Matopeni, the young men mourn about their broken dreams. Karafuu has been jobless for seven years and cannot go anywhere near the offices in town. He now declares that he is fed up and calls upon his friend not to just drown their sorrows in drink but wake up to the reality of their servile position in the largely economically unequal society that Kenya has become.

However, it is not just the poor who are restless in the city. The new progressive man that Juma Saidi observes in Obura’s story above finds himself immersed in new realities of a nascent urban culture. In *Season of Harvest* Wanjala talks of a new hero in urban Kenyan literature that emerged in the 1970s. He describes it as the literature of “the trashy and scabrous imitation of brothel and low life” (136). He notes that:

The new hero is the man who resists temptations of this life: the woman who works in the city but resists drinking, loose sex outside marriage, and the moral turpitude that comes with these activities. The anti-hero on the other hand, is the man or woman who takes these activities as a normal way of life, the vogue that includes going to the film with your “gal”, attending bogey dances, watching a football match and boxing rallies, gambling and the like. (136)

The urban literature that records the evolving mood of the nation through the slum as topoi of discontent is well buttressed in the early issues of *nexus*. Kahiga’s short story “In Silent Shadows” (*Nexus* 3, 12-14) gives insight into the new native lower middle class

urbanites that seem “trapped in Westernization” (12). They spend their days in burdensome careers where they are servants of time. The careers are monotonous as they “spend the freshest hours of (their) day performing little tasks that allow no scope for individual expression or personal involvement” (12). A good number of workers are in a “frenzied quest for money” (13). Caught up in existential difficulties, some even think that God is dead. The story represents the rise of an individualistic and materialistic urban society that disarticulates the lesser fortunate urban youth who steep into hedonism for momentary consolation. The “taxi”, “wallet talk” and “neon signs” (13) have become the common thing as the alienated urbanites escape in cinemas, bars and night clubs which “have their mouths open to receive us” (13). The ‘clubbing’ culture has taken root in the “modern civilized town” and brought about new issues of moral concern for the society. The urbanites “shake” stiff pelvis . . . liven up (your) soul with a drop of something violent, watch strip tease and dance to “crazy jazz” to heal the ravages of the day; “to release violent pent-up feelings” (13). We further gather from the story that relationships thrive through lies and prostitution becomes a preferred past-time, even for married men who are not satisfied with their wives. The story is therefore a critique of the rise of a culturally and morally debauched new generation as Kenya became increasingly urbanized in the 1960s and 1970s.

Busara was therefore a forum where, as Bodil Frederiksen says of *Joe* – a popular Kenyan magazine also published in the 1970s, “the issues and themes voiced in the magazine were of central concern to emerging and modernizing sections of the African population . . . The magazine was a mouthpiece for the pressing concerns for the African middle and lower middle classes” (101). Using the short story form, the writers in *Busara*

created incisive portrait of the city and captured the various challenges of urbanization as Kenyans increasingly embraced modernity. One other major feature of the emerging urban elite was alienation of the newly educated (mostly men) and the subsequent crisis of identity that made them behave as black-white men.

2.5 The Black-White Man, the White Lady and Anti-Colonial Sex

The phenomenon of “black-Europeanism” was another issue that characterized social relationships in Kenya in the period immediately after independence. This was a situation in which Africans would suffer a crisis of identity that would make them imitate the mannerisms of the whites. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon describes the post-independent black middle class which thinks itself not in its own terms but in the terms of the more privileging whiteness it aspires for. Fanon explains the mindset of this racially compromised subject that negatively appraises its own skin colour: “Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the Zebra stripping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white” (45). This self-denigration was especially common with the Western educated native Kenyans who had come back to the country mostly after completing their studies in the colonial metropolices.

A few stories in *Busara* show how the alienated Western-educated characters came to associate their rural Kenyan roots with primitivism and pestilence. Such is the figure that John Nginga’s “The Wound of Joy” (*Busara* 2.1, 34-43) and James Thuo’s “The Begotten Son” (*Nexus* 4, 24-30) use as interpretive focalizer of how the urban modernity is critiqued. In both short stories, a young man arrives from abroad with a chain of degrees and gets a good job in the city. Mwaniki in Nginga’s story has married a white woman who, to the embarrassment of her mother-in-law “licked his face” (41). The

woman is averse to the 'primitive' mother-in-law who arrives at her door step. We learn from the story that Mwaniki resented his mother's visit as it "was certainly not the kind of mother he wanted to introduce to his wife. She [the mother] should at least have washed herself and worn better clothes. He feared that his wife might not like her and he was very embarrassed" (41). The wife chases away the sickly mother who is forced to seek refuge at her other son's residence in another part of Nairobi.

A similar scenario unfolds in Thuo's story. Mucheru has come back to Kenya after education abroad and lives a luxurious life in the city. When Njeri, his mother, visits their home, Mrs. Mucheru initially mistakes her for a hawkker. Her feet are sprayed with a disinfectant before she is allowed to get into the house and is denied the pleasure of holding her grandson. In a stream of disparaging questions, Mrs. Mucheru queries how it was possible for "such an ancient woman [to] know how to hold a modern baby? What else can such a woman do but give my son diseases, infest him with lice and bugs?" (25). Mrs. Mucheru's behaviour in the story represents the alienation and pseudo-elitist sensibilities of some of people who managed to get education and employment immediately after Kenya became independent. These people saw themselves as a class above those who were illiterate and semi-illiterate, and imitated the lifestyles of the departed colonialists.

The colour code as a trope of conflict and conflicting universes is prevalent in the narratives of transition as Joseph Kimura's "In Search of a Husband" (*Busara* 1.1 32-39) shows. In the story, Jack, a young Kenyan, comes back to the country from America where he had gone for higher studies. He is married to a white woman but the couple is apparently incompatible and the marriage fails and they eventually divorce. Jack seems

to have been driven more by the desire to marry a white woman than genuine love. The failure of this marriage disillusioned and depressed Jack who is unable to start any other meaningful relationship.

Jack's alienation becomes particularly evident when his cousin, Grace Wanja, comes to the city in search of a husband. She ends up staying with Jack who eventually impregnates her. In the Gĩkũyũ traditions which Jack belongs, it is incestuous to have sex with a cousin. This violation of the incest taboo shows that Jack no longer respects his roots. He is a cultural dissident who does not care about the moral codes of his traditional society. The affair eventually lands Wanja in the hands of the police when she kills the infant after she gives birth by throwing it into a manhole. The story is therefore an indictment of the moral crisis of the new elite, especially in their hankering for European modernism which, for young Western-educated men like Jack, reposed in the bosom of a white woman. Thus they will say, in Fanon's words, "When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine" (145). In these stories, thus we see, to borrow the words of Eric Arnesen in "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination", we see the urgency of paying attention to the "utility of whiteness as a category of historical analysis" (3).

Fanon has attributed black men's craving for white women in the early days of European modernization to the fact that the colonial project was racist and it conferred more power to the white colonizer. To appropriate the power and privileges of whiteness meant shortcutting the system and marrying to power. According to Fanon, the alienated black man had the feeling of "want[ing] to be acknowledged not as a *black* but a *white* Who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of

white love. I am loved like a white man” (45). Black Europeanism was a legacy of both slavery and colonialism as historical experiences that systematically denigrated the black peoples’ cultures and identities.

Interestingly, the politics of relationships between black men and white women seem to have infiltrated the East African literary imaginary in the period in which *Busara* was published. In an article, “A Letter to Philip Ochieng [From the Van],” (*Busara* 3.2 13-18), Angira, who was the editor of *Busara* in 1970/1971, alludes to an unhealthy competition and hypocrisy amongst the literary practitioners in Nairobi around this time (1970). For him, what the society in general, and some of his colleagues in particular, were doing was not different from the departed colonialist especially in their quest to accumulate wealth and seize opportunities for their selfish gain. He notes that everyone in their generation considered themselves immortal: “Seth Andangala acts 24 hours without quitting the stage while Rubadiri and Serumaga are waiting to stage *The Elephants* (16). Making a subtle reference to Okot p’Bitek whose anti-imperialist *Song of Lawino* (1966) had achieved great success by then, Angira continues:

Take a walk to Norfolk, or to Susana and you find some of the chaps who shout loudest ‘go West’ with white ladies I have ceased to care much about the noise making class. You find a so called non-conformist racialist who hates all white men, and this character finds the greatest pride in taking white women to bed. That becomes their passport to heroism. (16)

In “Political Penis or Anticolonial Sex” (*Busara* 3.2 19-21) E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, echoes Angira’s sentiments cited above. Atieno invokes Fanon’s argument about black men and white women sexual relationships which are apparently motivated by, on the

one hand, the black man's desire to be white and on the other hand the white woman's love for animals (19). In reading both Angira's and Atieno-Odhiambo's articles, we discern the extent to which black-Europeanism was prevalent in Kenya in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was not just for the black man who had returned home from abroad like Mwaniki, Mucheru and Jack in the stories discussed earlier, but also for the other new urban elite. Literary practitioners were part of these elite and were indeed notorious in indulging in the Eurocentric hedonism of their contemporaries akin to that we cited in Kahiga's "In Silent Shadows" above and in their appetite for sex with white women. In "Political Penis", Atieno-Odhiambo confirms Angira's accusations to their fellow literati saying that the article was "a tirade dedicated to Ngugi, p'Bitek, Ruganda, Mazrui, Okello Oculi, Okola, Nturu, Angira, Kibera, Seruma, Serumaga, Palangyo, Ruhumbika, Kamenju, pa'Lakob, Anyang' Nyong'o, Magaga Alot, Mutiso, Mbithi, Bukenya" (19). These were prominent East African writers who purported to be the champions of African cultures and values. Atieno-Odhiambo notes that these writers did not practice what they preached. Citing an event that had taken place a few days earlier, Atieno says:

The other day we had a Writers' Workshop. A Writers' Association of Kenya workshop. We were all very worked up. Having mental orgasms. Taban was masturbating. Naked. On the floor. Okot was erect The question was blackness. How to be African. We went to Greenview. To have a drink. A white girl had an orgasm. About Okot p'Bitek. We only saw her wet cunt. And then we decided we should drive away and go and open the door and let the big chief do her quick, quick, quick, quiiiiick!. (20)

What Atieno-Odhiambo is pointing at is the hypocrisy of these writers who would spend the day debating on the question of black identity yet get excited over a white girl and want to take her to bed later in the day. Fanon has further argued that black men's desire for white women is also retaliatory. "There is clearly a wish to be white", he says, "A lust for revenge in any case" (6). An extremist manifestation of the colonial subjects' quest for revenge against the colonialists was the raping of white women. This is for instance the case in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 1967 edition of *A Grain of Wheat* in which Koinandu, a lieutenant in the Mau Mau war against British colonialists in Kenya, celebrates his raping of Dr. Lynd who is a European female scientist based at a rural forest station called Githima. But in the case of the writers addressed in Atieno-Odhiambo's article above, the quest for revenge against imperialists through carnal knowledge could only be used to justify the black man's lust for white women's flesh. As Atieno notes:

The argument is that in sleeping with a white girl he is paying the national debt. These whites, so the argument runs, wangled us, so we must wangle them in return. Rubadiri christened this philosophy in *No Bride Price* and I have heard Ruganda and Ngugi evangelizing about it loudly at Capitol Bar in Wandegeny near Makerere. (21)

Both Angira's and Atieno-Odhiambo's articles instigate a debate on the integrity of literary practitioners and question the writers' commitment to the ideals they espoused in their works. Flirtation with white women betrayed an underbelly of the literati that blemished their moral positions in the society. Thus Atieno-Odhiambo cautions: "Literary greatness does not come out of yearning for the white girls' sex, or does it, Mr. Penis, my East African writer?" ("Political Penis" 21). Raising this issue in *Busara* as

the two did was a bold move given that all the writers addressed in their articles were either directly or indirectly involved in the production of the magazine. The relations between blacks and whites remained an important theme in Kenyan literature despite the end of colonialism. Another significant trajectory of discussions on racial relations was that of the identity of Asians in Kenya which is the subject of the next session.

2.6 A Portrait of Asians in Kenya

Since their migration to East Africa in the late nineteenth century, Asians have occupied a rather ambivalent space in Kenyan identity politics. Majority of Asians, mostly Indians, came to Kenya as traders and established shops in all parts of the country including some of the remotest trading posts. Nevertheless, the bulk of Asians especially in the period after independence remained interstitial and transitional in their stay in Kenya, mainly tied to the land by their business interests that spread throughout the county. The identity of Asians in East Africa has been a subject of many literary works and scholarly debates in the region and beyond. We have a few examples of such works in *Busara*.

Tom Heidlebaugh's short story "The Spring in Far Kashmir" (*Nexus* 3 24-28) is an account of Jethabhai C. Patel (JC), an Indian shopkeeper, who has been operating his family business in remote townships in the heart of Pokot, Tugen and Turkana in Kenya. He leads a lonely life among a people whose language he hardly knows and only utters short phrases to sell goods to them. Presently, the government has cut off Asian languages broadcasts and JC cannot enjoy songs in Gujarati on his transistor radio. There are no Hindu women, no Bengali drums or Madrasi men in bright turbans. We learn that the Patel family had started from Nakuru and then spread towards Lake Rudolf and moved upwards along the Rift Valley. Though he integrates well with the locals whose

needs he serves, selling to them cough medicine, salt and sugar, he still feels alienated from them. He lives in fear of the Pokot warriors and stays aloof, scornful of the culture of the local people and their God. He is very apprehensive. To keep his originary home alive, he dreams of a spring in a place far from this remote village and out of Africa:

These people, thought JC Patel, have never even heard of a spring. They have no songs of love or gentle maidens. Hererimoi is all they sing, herd your cattle, be a bull. Here, thought Patel, the heart does not break, nor does it seek refuge in a snowy cave. No they just say God exists . . . of what use, asked Patel in his loneliness, is life without dreams of Kashmir. (27)

This stream of Patel's thoughts reveals his alienation from the social and physical environment of this remote outpost and his subsequent cynicism towards life in Africa. His interstitial subjectivity oscillates between the dreams of faraway Kashmir and the reality of his mundane life among the Pokot. The local people on the other hand see him as an intruder, "a strange, brown man, who charged too much for too little" (26). When Patel attends a party organized in the village to celebrate the wedding of Komol Wero Kobol, his cook, he flees from the scene feeling embarrassed after one man forces him to drink their sour millet beer and asks him to jump in a dance. The story demonstrates that though the Asians were aggressive enough to set up businesses in even remote places in Kenya in the days immediately after independence, some of them were perpetually haunted by a feeling of dislocation that made them remain a closed society and hence only sparingly interacted with the local people beyond their business transactions.

The displacement of Asians in Kenya is also the subject of Azim Nanji's short play "When in Rome" (*Nexus* 3 29-35). In the play, Jimmy has stayed for some time in England where he has picked some English habits that make him see fellow Asians as rigidly conservative and introverted. In addition, being a Kenyan-Asian, he feels unsettled and disadvantaged in post-colonial Kenya. He laments:

I consider it one of my greatest misfortunes to have been born in an Asian Society. It's all right in India but here – we are like mercenaries. Fingers in the European pie during the colonial days – transferred to the African pie after independence. No individuality. (33)

In Nanji's play, post-independence Kenyan Asians are portrayed as victims of historical circumstances that uprooted them from their native country and placed them in Kenya where they have always had to play second fiddle in matters of national concern. This is an almost mimetic reflection of the history of Asians in East Africa. Most of them initially came to Kenya as labourers hired by the British colonial government in India to build the Kenya-Uganda railway whose construction started in Mombasa in 1896. After the completion of the railway, a number of them settled in East Africa. Though a few people like Pio Gama Pinto and Makhan Singh were active in Kenyan politics, Asians in Kenya concentrated on entrepreneurship. Native Kenyans generally perceived Asians as unscrupulous business people because of the way they seemed to dominate trade in the country. An increasing Indophobia after independence led to the removal of Asians in the civil service in both Uganda and Kenya in the 1960s and their eventual expulsion from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972. Nanji's play paints a bleak picture for the Kenyan Asian whose destiny seems to be transitional and migratory as seen in Jimmy's longing for the

life he had back in England. But as Jimmy wallows in a miasma of rootlessness, there is a ray of hope for Sharda, a friend of his, who tells him to think positively and think of other Asians as “people who care to work towards a properly integrated society where everyone is accepted as an individual” (33). The need for integration of people from different races and origins voiced in Sharda’s argument is a concern that has pre-occupied Kenyan creative writers and literary critics since the 1960s and *Busara* was one of the publications that provided a forum for ventilation on the Asian experience in Kenya through short stories, short plays and poetry. The next section delves into the poetry that was published in the magazine

2.7 The Rise of Written East African Poetry

Other than the short stories discussed in the previous sections, *Busara* also published a lot of poetry which depict an emergent trend in written poetry in Kenya during the first two decades after independence. The poems in the journal are a good representation of the kind of poetry that was being written in Kenya at the time, most of which streamed from universities and was published in magazines and newspapers. Okot p’Bitek was the most influential poet in the East African region in this formative period due to the critical attention that *Song of Lawino* (1966) and *Song of Ocol* (1970) received. Another notable poet was David Rubadiri who, together with David Cook – his colleague at Makerere University, edited one of the earliest anthologies in the region, *Poems From East Africa* (1971). Jonathan Kariara was another pioneer poet who, as a student in early 1960s, acted as an editor of the Makerere students’ magazine, *Penpoint*, and later worked as an editor with Oxford University Press. He edited, together with Ellen Kitonga, another anthology of poetry, *Introduction to East African Poetry*. Kassam, Angira and A.D. Amateshe are

some of the notable Kenyan poets who started their craft in *Busara* when they were students at the University of Nairobi.

The 1967 publication of *Drum Beat*, which was edited by Lennard Okola and published by the East African Publishing House (EAPH), was the first major effort to promote the writing of poetry in the East African region. John Nottingham who was the founding editor of EAPH was keen to tap more literary talents as he had done earlier with Okot's *Song of Lawino* (1966) which he had come across in the 1965 East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs seminar mentioned earlier in this study. As Okola notes in the preface to the anthology, many of the poems in *Drum Beat*,

[h]ave appeared in magazines, notably local student publications or *Transition*, the *East African Journal* and *Nexus*. Most of the writers are in their twenties and have a whole visit (sic) of literary activity awaiting further development. (14)

Okola was acknowledging the crucial role that magazines and journal were playing in promoting the writing of poetry in the region. Kassam and Hamida Mohamedali, who had published their poems in *Nexus*, contributed to Okola's anthology.

One major trend that became evident as young East African poets started writing was their heavy inclination towards the European poetic traditions they had learnt at the university. Okola acknowledges the influence of English poets such as T.S. Eliot and William Wordsworth on the poetry published in *Drum Beat*. This trend seems to have been widespread among early modern African poets. In Nigeria, for example, Milton Krieger notes that "*The Horn* (a University of Ibadan students' magazine of poetry published from 1958 to 1964) drew on both the formal British literature syllabus and on

modernist, international tastes with Ibadan's English Department faculty" (402). In East Africa, Rubadiri also saw one of the major tendencies of the young East African poets of the 1960s as the continued reliance on European models:

After independence . . . one found that the trends of writing were individualistic – they were personal. If anyone sat down to write a poem, he wrote a poem about himself; no one reached back, as in West Africa, towards the traditional cultural roots and heritages and so on. A boy wrote a poem because his whole literary tradition had moulded him to try and emulate the only literature he had come into contact with. So people wrote like Keats and Wordsworth – on roses and sunsets and moonshine, and this sort of subject all on a very personal and individual sort of basis. (149)

Apparently, this early East African poets' propensity for European poetic style did not also impress some of the expatriate critics who may have been seen to propagate it (164). Cook, for instance, was an English literary scholar based at Makerere University who castigated his young protégés in the East African region for their lack of originality. In "The Craft of Poetry," Cook laments:

[m]any would-be poets set up the dead end roads towards becoming later day British romantics. This urge explains that the craft of poetry is presumed to lie essentially in rhyme, inversions, archaisms, regular stanza forms, and a steady beat and so on, in defiance of all contemporary evidence. (32)

As university teachers, Cook and Rubadiri were encouraging their students to be more original in their poetic compositions in a way that would give them a distinct identity as

East African poets. *Poems From East Africa* (1971), which the two scholars edited, has remained a seminal text in the growth and development of East African poetry.

Some of Kassam's poems are good examples of the trend isolated by Rubadiri as exemplars eurocentric style. Kassam's three poems in the maiden issue of *Nexus*, which he co-edited with Kibera, are written in the tradition of European romantic poetry. Just like the romantic poets, Kassam seems fascinated with nature, the mystery of life and displays a marked affinity for solitude. "Were I some Velvet Wind" is a poem about the quest for "knowledge of time and place/ for the image/that became man" (2). In three regular stanzas, the poet invokes nature – the wind, the woods, the sea and the moon – which he sees as the abode of knowledge. In "Now that the Twilight", the poet describes nightfall thus:

My heart, caught between moment of night
And day, grows frantic
With tumultuous thoughts
Shadows spring to life and truth to
Untruth
.... only
Death shall provide the metamorphosis. (21)

It is a poem that explores the mysteries of life and death; of knowing and not knowing – truth and untruth in a manner reminiscent of Romantic poetry. The other poem, "An Affirmation," expresses the poet's befuddlement with life while "Hazel – listen," is about a romantic encounter in which the weather takes great symbolic significance. Kassam's

penchant for the European poetic style becomes more evident in the poem “Once When Birds of a Season.” The poet starts by quoting John Keats: “The sea keeps eternal whispering around desolate shores” (18), and then proceeds to express himself in rhyming and regular stanzas imitative English modernist poetry:

Once when the birds of a season
Circled the lemon-blind sky
I caught a solitary bird
Midflight in my desperate eye

It cried: “Here have strangers brought
Dim nightmarish dreams with them
Passionate bloodhound thoughts
And a masquerade for name.

Here by the desolate shore
Of a wild and a wind-tossed sea
They heard drums begin to strike
And the devil to shake the tree.”

Another that dipped its wings
Stirred the water into rings
Rose upon the wind and flew
To claim with eye lids of dew. (18)

The poem has the elaborate symbolism and imagery of nature associated with the romantic tradition of which Keats was a prominent figure. In the poem, the poetic

persona laments the viciousness of the physical world. The poet manipulates language to create a rhyme scheme which seems to be merely decorative. The deep symbolism of its images makes it difficult to interpret as it seems to allude to a situation that the reader may not easily discern. In *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, Chinweizu and colleagues have rebuked early African poets who heavily imitated European poets as “euromodernists”. They give the example of the ‘*Ibadan- Nsukka school of Nigerian poetry*’(italics original) which included poets such as Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Michael Echeruo and Christopher Okigbo. [They were so called because they were associated with the University of Ibadan and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka]. According to Chinweizu and colleagues, the poetry of these poets “tends to be craggy, lumpy, full of obstructions, unnecessarily and artificially difficult. Simple ideas are often deliberately clothed in esoteric idiom” (166). Some of Kassam’s poems belong to this category which, to use Gikandi’s words, in connection to Chinweizu and colleagues, illustrate “the elitism of African literature, especially poetry, and its concern with abstract themes and images at the expense of real experiences” (*Columbia Guide* 147).

A survey of more poems in *Busara* further reveals this “euro-modernist” inclination of some the pioneer Kenyan poets. Mohamedalis’ “The Realm of Dreams” is a lament about existential hardships. Its allusion to a very personal experience its heavily figurative language makes it rather obscure:

The dew weeps for the forsaken

Lamenting the sobbing mess

Suckled

By solace-sodden words

Hoarded like a sick harvest
Lustrous beads of rapturous passion
Trampled
A denouement of birth's nothingness
 its mistake
Bleeding bitterness convulses
Memory of happier hours
Of a life lived of squalid lassitude
 dour and savagely melancholy
A sullen Emptiness
A left over
Heaving with the wind whirling
Splinters of that mute tranquility
Out of existence.
But now the wind is leaving
A compassionate quietude
A peace born of strive. (29)

Angira was perhaps the most sophisticated and most prolific poet of the pioneer generation of Kenyan poets. He was a student of commerce at the University of Nairobi from 1968 to 1971 and a regular contributor to *Busara* of which he became editor in 1969. Evident in his writing is the influence of the Nigerian 'euromodernist' poets discussed above. Angira hints at his reverence for Christopher Okigbo when he introduces his anthology, *Soft Corals*, with a quote from Okigbo's poetry: "The moon has

I'll wait for Okigbo on the clarinet

I'll wait for Penina on the bugle

I'll wait for Rosebella on the soprano

I'll wait and wait for the lyricist to

Fly past

Then I too will fly past. (*Soft Corals* 1-22)

Angira's experimentation with language is also apparently inspired by the works of Ayi Kwei Armah as suggested by the poem "Factors" which the poet describes as "A subscription to Ayi Kwei Armah who invented this title" (*Soft Corals* 51). The imagery and diction of the poem is also so convoluted to the extent of being nonsensical. The reader has to grapple with the meaning of such lines as the following:

The descamisados in the backyard stinking

.....

Of Sierra Maestra

We have known them

The Eutimios

and those who appoint

Government in exile

But of the quiet

Sufferings

The Camilo Cienfuegos

They are few

In any case

We can all shout

Venceremos!

Yet a handful can act

Patria o muerto! (*Soft Corals*, 53)

Peter Amuka has acknowledged the influence of Okigbo in Angira's poetry, asserting that, "obscurity is a mask for meaning in Jared Angira's *Soft Corals* whenever it is found" (44). There is little aesthetic achievement for a poem like the ones cited above if the meaning is lost to the reader. The poems are comparable to Soyinka's long 'euromodernist' poem "Idanre" of which Chinuweizu and colleagues conclude:

The imagery is imprecise and opaque and lacking in evocative power . . . in this narrative poem it is never clear who does what to whom and with what consequences. It is often difficult to tell who the many pronouns – he, she, we, us – refer to. We are shut off from the experience on both the intellectual and emotional levels. The language is a formidable barrier; and even after you have hacked your way through it, you still cannot understand what, if anything, is supposed to be going on. (189)

Nevertheless, Angira stood out as a poet to reckon with among his contemporaries to the extent that he was appointed *Busara*'s assistant editor in 1969 (Volume 2, Number 3) and then its Editor-in-Chief in the 1970/1971 issues in spite of being a commerce student at a time when the journal was dominated by students of English Department which published it. With three anthologies published within three years – *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972) and *Soft Corals* (1973) – he was probably the most prolific Kenyan poet of his

generation. However, the fact that he was trending the path taken by the '*Ibadan- Nsukka school of Nigerian poetry*' discussed above may not have gone well with the East African literary critics as a result of which his poetry received little critical attention. It would seem that Okot had set the tone and style of East African poetry and aspiring poets in the region would have to resort to the resources of the African oral traditions. Wanjala hints at this unwritten rule when he argues:

Unlike poets like Christopher Okigbo, Michael Echeruo and Gabriel Okara – all Nigerians – whose poetry is remarkably influenced by the diction of Western poets, East African poetry has cut its links with the West very fast. There is unique influence of oral tradition abroad, which comes from the fact that most of Kenyan and East African poets have not been associated with departments of literature at the university. (*Season*, 96)

Standa is one writer who seems to have followed the path Okot had set for East African poets. In an essay—"Me and You,"— published in *Busara* 2.2, Standa laments the moral degeneration of the new modern generation in which all people in respectable professions have taken to drunkenness. Echoing Lawino in Okot's poem, the speaker wonders why he should stop worshipping the God he understands and listen to a strange God. The essay seems to provide the material for his later well known poem "I Speak for the Bush" published in *Poems from East Africa* (1971). The persona, just like Lawino, laments about the moral degeneration of the modern society.

Sam Mbure, who was working at the Oxford University Press, was one of the few non-students who published poetry in *Busara*. Though his use of rhyme scheme and apparent

fascination with nature suggest that he subscribes to the romanticism of Kassam and Mohamedali discussed earlier, his poems are simple in language and hardly delve into deep symbolic representations. They are brief epigrammatic pieces that comment on some natural phenomena. For instance, “The Pool” talks about a pool of water while “Companion” talks about how the movement of a star makes good company through the wild night (25). The poems are witty and present a metaphorical puzzling interpretation of phenomena using conceit – a poetic form that uses an extended metaphor to express a concept like “love” and is normally associated with the 17th Century European metaphysical poets. “Night Affair,” for instance, describes the night as a “virgin” whore that is violated by impatient lovers who waylay her at dusk only to abandon her at dawn when she is of no more use to them:

From her bed
She springs
mighty red
mighty virgin
One by one
her lovers wait
impatiently
in the lonely night
one by one
They hug her
they tear her gown
till now she becomes

mighty yellow
mighty whore
One by one
her lovers withdraw
till she is abandoned
like a barren spouse
a barren wife
without a lover. (34)

Using anthropomorphism, the poet describes the night in an extended metaphor about the passage of time as sexual violation of the “mighty virgin.” The poem associates the night with sinister activities as she (the night) is raped and transformed into a whore and then abandoned by selfish “lovers.” The use of conceit makes the poem humorous. Mbure’s poetry in *Busara* further demonstrates that European poetry was one of the major influences on the early generation of East African poets. However, Mbure’s poetry is easy and adapted to suit the East African audience which show that the borrowing of forms was not necessarily a bad thing, and that it was indeed a way of enriching modern East African poetry. This position is reiterated by Evan Mwangi’s when he argues that:

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rise of a poetic tradition that located its themes and techniques in the East African region while also drawing from Western sources This poetry borrows from oral literature and explores issues that immediately affect the East African communities in a way that make it impossible for the poetry to be analysed meaningfully without paying attention to

socio-cultural and political circumstances in the region. (*The Columbia Guide* 138).

In conclusion it is evident that *Busara* and other magazines of its period served a crucial role of giving aspiring young writers a forum for experimentation with the poetic form. Initially, there was a heavy leaning toward 18th and 19th Century European poetry but the poetry remained rooted in the East African soil in its reflection of experiences in the region. Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966) and *Song of Ocol* (1970) were instrumental in the development in East African poetry and young poets realized they could write poetry that drew material from their local setting. In 1972, Cook foresaw the change from a Eurocentric perspective to a more locally oriented poetic tradition in East Africa saying that "I imagine that we have reached a point in time when reference to daffodils or countryside covered with snow by East African writers will raise a smile rather than a serious discussion" (45). With time there was increased synthesis of Western influences and local inspirations which shaped such distinct East African voices as we encounter in Cook and Rubadiri's *Poems From East Africa* (1971).

2.8 *Busara* and Literary Criticism

The first issues of *Busara* seem to have given more emphasis to creative writing than literary criticism. However, in the 1969 issue (Volume 2, Number 1), Gacheche, who was the editor together with Kassam, sought to reverse this trend. He called upon the contributors to consider giving more articles on criticism. He observed:

While it is only fair to expect a magazine like *Busara* to publicize the tremendous creative activity going on in East Africa, an English Department-based

publication will be bent more on reflecting literary trends in East Africa and elsewhere. We therefore solicit more contributions in the form of critical essays and readers' opinions on any aspect of the literary and artistic scene. (*Busara* 2.1, 3)

The journal had already started attracting reviews from established critics. Most of the early critics were members of staff at the Nairobi University College with most of them being expatriate scholars. *Nexus* 1, for instance, had essays by expatriates such as Pinnelope Minney who was a lecturer at the Institute of Adult Studies, E.W. Wright who was a senior lecturer at the Department of English, Julie Bidwell and Valerie D' Cruz who later later got married to Kibera. Later issues saw the entry of Calder, Roscoe, Stewart, Cook, Taban and Okot. A host of Kenyan critics also contributed to *Busara*. These included Albert Ojuka, Atieno-Odhiambo, Wanjala, Luvai, Arthur Kemoli, Mary Kimori, Peter Amuka, M. N. Ruchoya, Joseph Kimura, Ellen Kitonga and Billy Ogana Wandera.

Publishing consistently in *Busara* and other journals of the same period, Taban distinguished himself as an iconoclast of the first generation of East African writers and critics. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Taban's presence started being felt in East African literary debates while he was a student at Howard University especially after he published the article "Can We Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa." He joined the University College of Nairobi in 1968 after completing his Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa Writing Workshop. His arrival heralded the flourishing of a literary community in Nairobi for he started the University of Nairobi Writers' Workshop where young writers – mostly university students – used to meet regularly at

the premises of Elimo Njau's art gallery, Paa ya Paa. The presentations at the workshop would eventually be published fortnightly in a pamphlet called *Currents* and some eventually got published in *Busara* and later into an anthology, *Faces at Crossroads*.

Taban was a multi-generic writer who wrote poetry, short stories and commentaries on literature and culture that more often than not created controversy. His earliest contribution of a critical essay to *Nexus* was an article titled "Post Script" published in Volume 4 in July 1968. This article reiterated his 'East African literary barrenness' theme. The article was apparently provoked by a debate on whether the University College, Nairobi should establish a Chair of African literature at that moment. Taban found it pre-mature to establish such a position noting that there was little written African literature at that moment to warrant it. He argued,

Yes we have our myths. But who has done an extensive or definite research in them yet, or who have used them as literary springboards? We have traditional African literature but how many traditionals (sic) do we have? (*Nexus* 4, 5)

Nevertheless, in what would seem like a change of heart on this matter, Taban – together with Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Owuor Anyumba – spearheaded the restructuring of the Department of English at the University College, Nairobi that led to the establishment of the Department of Literature with the study of African literature at the centre of its curriculum.

Taban advocated a Universalist approach to literary production and proposed a theory he called 'synthesism'. In formulating this theory, Taban was critical of what he saw as retrogressive nationalism of pioneer writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and empty

‘Africanism’ of the Negritude literary movement that had been initiated in Paris by Sedar Senghor, Leone Damas and Aime Cesaire about three decades earlier. He accused nationalist writers and scholars of intellectual hypocrisy saying, for instance: “One can shed tears over anything: Viet Nam, Sharpeville, Pinto, African socialism, etc, etc *ad infinitum et ad absurdum*. What one can shed and shed superfluously are crocodile tears” (6). Some of his early published works include *The Last Word: Cultural Synthesisism* (1969), *Fixions and Other Stories* (1969), *Another Nigger Dead: Poems* (1970), *Frantz Fanon’s Uneven Ribs* (1971) and *Another Last Word* (1990).

Taban’s early writing style and critical pronouncements invited a lot of criticism from his students and colleagues in the literary fraternity in the region. His ideas were eccentric; his language obscure. One of the earliest reviews on Taban was Kimura’s “A Review of *The Last Word*” (*Busara* 3.1 44-48). Kimura highlights Taban’s inclination toward universalism and also points out his eccentricism seen, for instance, in the article “Tibble, Tutuola, Taban and Thugs” which Kimura describes as:

[a] melee of classical allusions, personal observations, and heaps of over-literate dicta in which Taban pushes through the labyrinth of his mind, places us at the top of his intellectual pedestal, removes the supports, sends us avalanching to the abyss way below, while he is left up above triumphantly asking: “How did you like it?” (47)

Wanjala, who was a student between 1968 and 1972, and a member of the faculty in the Department of Literature from 1973, was one of the most consistent contributors of critical essays to *Busara* and was a member of its editorial team in 1971. He assumed the

chairmanship of the University of Nairobi Writers' Workshop in 1969. The Writers' Workshop was a project inspired by Taban who had joined the university's Institute of Development Studies in 1968 as a fresh graduate from Iowa Writers' Workshop. Wanjala's first article in *Busara* was "Discovering New East African Poets," published in 1969, Volume 2, Number 3, in which he analysed the *Poems of Nature and Faith* (1964) by early Kenyan scholar and poet, John S. Mbiti, and *The Abandoned Hut* (1969) by Ugandan poet Joseph Buruga. Wanjala was the editor of some of the articles published in *Currents* and compiled them into the anthology *Faces at Crossroads: A "Currents" Anthology*. As a literary critic, Wanjala saw oral literature as a major influence to the aesthetics of modern East African literature and emphasized the role of literature in reflecting and shaping the ideals of the society. For him, the ultimate "mark of a great work of art is the artistic mergence of imagination with the social reality" (*Season 5*). As if to vindicate his conviction about the close ties that bind literature and society, Wanjala founded *Joliso: East African Journal of Literature and Society* in 1973 which he co-edited with Atieno-Odhiambo, then a member of the faculty in the History Department at the University of Nairobi.

One of Wanjala's most notable reviews published in *Busara* was "The Tabanic Genre" published in 1971. The essay is a critique of theories of 'Cultural Synthesis' and 'Genresynthesis' espoused by Taban in his books *The Last Word* (1969) and *Meditations in Limbo* (1970). In the article, Wanjala saw Taban as an idiosyncratic writer whose works revealed his "theories of elitism, his writer-audience concepts, and above all the hilarious and narcissistic image he entertains of himself as a Tutolian Complete Gentleman, created from disparate elements of the world culture" (23). He reiterated

Kimura's observations above, noting that Taban "forges utopia after utopia where he himself is the epic hero" (25). Taban has remained a subject of literary debate in the East African region to date.

Okot was another renowned writer and scholar who took a radical position in literary criticism in *Busara*. In "What is Literature" Okot rejected the elitist Eurocentric perceptions of literature that had taken root in the East African academy during and after colonialism. One major trend at the university at that time was that of 'The Great Tradition' in which, according to F. R. Leavis, great works of such English writers as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad would be considered as works of great aesthetic and moral significance, "in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life" (Leavis, 10). Okot rejected such Eurocentric notions of literature and emphasized the communal essence of literature in what he referred to as "an African cultural revolution" (21). Citing his personal growth as a writer, Okot acknowledged that his mother's songs and fireside stories as well as other village poets and dancers in Gulu where he grew up and returned to after college, as a teacher, inspired his love for literature. It is this experience with the folklore of his community that inspired him to write *Song of Lawino*.

For Okot, literature is expressive of "[t]he joy or sorrow in the human heart finds its way through the song" (26). It was for him a futility for literary education to be geared towards acquiring a certificate; a false assumption that, "[t]he ability to quote Homer and Shakespeare is a mark of 'education' or 'refinement'" (27). His radical proposal was that,

In our schools and universities then, literature must be freed from the prison of examination, in which it was put by the class-ridden society of the Western world.

It must be made into a *festival* as it is in the countryside. Let the people sing and dance, let them exchange stories and attend theatres for the joy of it. (Busara 4.1, 27)

Okot's suggestion that the study of literature be divorced from examination was certainly not tenable in the East African education system which was modelled along Cambridge School Certificate system in which he had sat for his secondary school Advanced Level Certificate at Budo School, Uganda. His ideas were relevant and, indeed, came to inform the literature curriculum at the University of Nairobi when, following the formation of Department of Literature, a theatre arts class was introduced and part of examination for the members of this class was the actual performance of designated plays.

Incidentally, the growth of drama in East African region took a slower pace than fiction and poetry. A few reviews in *Busara* highlighted the paucity of original theatrical performances in the region. In "What Future for Drama" *Busara*, Mary Kimori hailed the introduction of drama for postgraduate students at the University College, Nairobi. She however, decried the lack of plays in the region. By 1969 when she wrote the article, Kimori noted that there was only "a rough assortment of plays" (35) published in the anthology *Short East African Plays in English* (1968) which was edited by Cook and Miles Lee and James Ngugi's *The Black Hermit* (1968). Subsequently, most theatre groups remained beholden to European playwrights especially Shakespeare. In "Drama in East Africa," M. N. Ruchoya echoed Kimori's critique of East African theatre's lack of quality plays and overreliance on Shakespeare (45). Generally local drama took time to thrive in Kenya. It is only after the formation of the University of Nairobi Free Travelling

Theatre in early 1970s and the entry of playwrights like John Ruganda that the theatre scene started becoming alive with local drama.

One other major critical issue that occasionally came up in *Busara* was the question of the Negritude movement in African literature which was associated with Francophone poets. It would seem like East African writers had followed the path taken by West and South African Anglophone writers and avoided negritude as a philosophy that would inform their works. In West Africa, W. H. Stevenson notes the word ‘negritude’ and poetry dependent on the concept disappeared from *The Horn*, the Nigerian Students’ Poetry Magazine (1958-1964), after Soyinka published his critique in which he dismissed the literary movement as empty “romanticism of the Negro . . . suspect and quite boring sometimes” (Stevenson 18). Dismissal of Negritude was echoed by other writers including Okigbo in Nigeria and Mphahlele in South Africa and this greatly influenced the critical reception of the movement in the rest of Anglophone African countries.

In East Africa, Taban had dismissed Negritude as a retrogressive philosophy that was to be shunned by progressive Africans thinkers. Lennard Okola also observed that East African poets had kept aloof from “Negritude enthusiasm” (sic) supposedly because they “subconsciously” felt that “much of the colonial situation has been explained for him by the longer established West African poets and, therefore, considers negritude a dead subject which would dissipate his creative energy in vague nostalgia” (*Drum Beat* 13). Wanjala also saw Negritude as “an act of revelling in ‘dreams’ when society wants the truth” (“African Response to Negritude” 42). It is only Luvai, a contemporary of Wanjala, who sought a broader understanding of the concept noting that even poems like Soyinka’s “Telephone Conversation” (which attacked white racism) or Gabriel Okara’s

“Piano and Drums” (which is about the conflict between Western and African cultures) were written in the same spirit as the Negritude poetry (“Negritude: A Redefinition” 88). This study notes that negritude had little influence on Kenyan literature as the movement’s relevance in African literature continued to diminish owing to the fact that, after the end of colonialism, the African writer was now facing new realities that called for new approaches. Other than being cited in discussions forums on African literature, the literary movement did not influence the writing of poetry in East African region the way it had done in Francophone West Africa.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have placed *Busara* in the context of the period of the emergence of modern East African literature in English in the 1960s and 1970s. The magazine published short stories, poetry and critical essays mostly by students and members of staff at the University College, Nairobi and later University of Nairobi. It also published articles from writers outside the university fraternity. The chapter has cross-examined the major issues of concern in the magazine. The themes of colonialism and the Mau Mau resistance movement were the major pre-occupations of the early Kenyan writers. *Busara* also came to existence at a period of increasing political and socio-economic disillusionment as the new political elite abandoned the dreams of independence and transformed Kenya into a neo-colony. This was further complicated by the challenges of urbanization which at this transitional moment brought tension between traditional African cultures and the urban/Western lifestyles. There were also challenges of economic dispossession for the urban poor and alienation for the new urban elite as black Europeanism became a disease of the newly educated. The survival of the migrant

societies, especially those of Asian origin was also a matter of concern. The magazine therefore provided a forum for the young writers represent and interrogate the issues that shaped the lives of Kenyans in the days just before and after independence.

Though dominated by the short story, the magazine also published poetry from a more varied list of contributors than the short story did. Initially, there was more affinity to euromoderinst trends in poetry than is the case in the short stories. Following in the tradition of early writers such as Ogot and Okot, the writers of both the short story and poetry harnessed the resources of African oral tradition to create works that had an East African flavour. Critical essays were contributed by students and the staff in the Department of Literature including expatriate scholars such as Calder and Roscoe. Ogot, Taban and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o were some of the more established writers and critics who got involved in the production of *Busara*.

The publication of *Busara* and other literary magazines in the 1960s and 1970s marked a critical stage in the growth and development of literature in Kenya. The periodicals provided an avenue for the production of a literature that disapproved Taban's claim about East African "literary barrenness" and which confirmed Bruce King's assertion that, following the end of colonialism, "[t]he twilight of the empire and its literary traditions are being revisioned through re-examined memories and the construction of new mythologies" (9). *Busara* thrived during a period of sustained literary production in Kenya as literary practitioners, mostly from the university community, and publishers kept the literary scene alive. The 1975 demise of the East African Community and, subsequently, that of the East African Literature Bureau dealt a death blow to *Busara*. The political climate was also getting less and less conducive for writers as Kenyatta's

government became increasingly authoritarian. The experiences of during two decades that followed after 1975 in Kenya constitute the bulk of the issues addressed in *Mũtiiri: Njaranda ya Mũkarĩre* which is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION AND THE POETICS OF EXILE IN

MŪTHIRI

It is not true that my history is only in my heart; it is indeed there, but it is also in that dusty road in my town, and in every villager, living and dead, who has ever walked on it; it is in my continent and, yes, in the world. That dusty little road is my link to other destinations. To ask everybody to shut down their history, pack their bags and buy a one way ticket to Europe or America is just crazy to my way of thinking. (Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile*, 91)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the conditions, content and immanent intentions of *Mūthiri: Njaranda ya Mīkarĩre*. Founded in 1994 by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o at the New York University, the journal invites speculations about the motivations behind its establishment as well as its achievements as a journal of literature and culture in Gĩkũyũ. This study notes that the life of this journal is intertwined with the personal experiences and intellectual ambitions of Ngũgĩ – a fact that is underpinned by its migration, with the editor, from New York University to University of California, Irvine, in 2003. As I argue in this chapter, the content of *Mūthiri* is embedded in specific historical junctures that constitute the postcolonial condition in Kenya and the condition of exile that haunts a majority of its writers. Consequently, most of the texts in the journal are not only informed by “a strong dystopian current” (Irele 10) as they lament the authoritarianism of Kenyan political regimes in the 1970s and 1980s but are also narratives of the writers’ (symbolic) homecoming from exile.

The dystopia that inheres in several works published in *Mũtiiri* is a manifestation of how contemporary African literature has continued to grapple with “the dilemmas of the post-independence situation [which have] Provoked a new discourse of dissidence . . . aimed at uncovering the pathologies of governance that have contributed to the tragic unfolding of the postcolonial condition in Africa (Irele 10). Julie Mullaney identifies some of these pathologies as bloody civil wars, military rule, dictatorship, ethnic conflict and genocide as well as social inequalities (13). In Kenya, the ne-colonial government became so authoritarian that, as Mullaney would put it, “the project of decolonization and postcolonial nation building [became] . . . erratic and traumatizing” (13). Rampant detentions and execution of people perceived to be anti-government pushed many intellectuals to exile. A majority of the writers who contribute to *Mũtiiri* were some of the victims who fled the country in the 1980s.

In *Home and Exile* (2000), Chinua Achebe discusses the experience of writers dislocated from their homelands by circumstances that often lead them to relocate to Europe or America. Achebe observes that these writers undergo a state of restlessness, alienation and nostalgia that keep them looking back to “that little dusty road” (91) in their native land in search for inspiration. In *Postcolonial Nostalgias* (2011), Dennis Walder, who defines ‘nostalgia’ as “the search for remembered times and places” (1), also observes that the exiled postcolonial writer operates in “a twilight zone . . . the uncertain zone between memory and history” (2). The writers in *Mũtiiri* are mostly intellectuals who were pushed to exile by the Kenyan government in the 1980s and probably ended in the “twilight zone” that Walder talks about. They were therefore equally susceptible to what Salman Rushdie says in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991): “[i]t may be that writers in my

position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt” (10). These writers’ preoccupation with the histories and memories of their days back in Kenya is the first frontier of their symbolic return ‘home.’

The second frontier of this return is the writers’ use of Gĩkũyũ as their language of expression in the works published in the journal. *Mũtiiri* gave Ngũgĩ an opportunity to invent a community of writers in Gĩkũyũ in America and the rest of the diasporas. Unlike many postcolonial writers who have remained “obsessed with the project of refashioning” and “appropriating” the languages of erstwhile colonial masters such as English while relegating expression in indigenous languages “into a shadowy domain of ‘oral traditions’” (Barber 7), Ngũgĩ set out to prove to the world that native African languages such as Gĩkũyũ could effectively express modern ideas. It is in the light of the above critical perspectives that I start my analysis and evaluation of *Mũtiiri* by putting the journal in the context of Ngũgĩ’s literary career.

3.2 Tracking the Roots of *Mũtiiri* in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Literary Career

At the “twilight zone” of his life in America, Ngũgĩ probably looked back and, with nostalgia, saw that dusty little road he had left at Kamĩrĩĩthũ more than a decade earlier. In a desperate bid to bring back the golden days at Kamĩrĩĩthũ, he founded *Mũtiiri* at the New York University in 1994. Just like the protagonist of the “one way ticket to Europe or America” in Achebe’s dictum cited above, Ngũgĩ did not have the opportunity to use his return air ticket for a journey back to Kenya when he went to launch his novel *Devil on the Cross* in London. This was in June 1982 – a year in which Charles Hornsby says that Kenya underwent a “return to authoritarianism” (374) with the re-introduction of

interview with Jussawalla and Dasenbrock, the play was, “scripted together with the peasants from Kamĩrĩthũ . . . talked about the history of the struggle against colonialism, particularly the peasants’ struggle as led by Dedan Kimathi But the play also reflected the social conditions they worked in after independence” (312). The performances at the village theatre attracted huge crowds and were subsequently stopped by an increasingly paranoid Kenyatta government. Ngũgĩ had published *Petals of Blood*, the same year. The novel is a portrait of the betrayal and disillusionment of the citizenry due to the failure of the nationalist ideals that had defined the moment of decolonization in Kenya. The political elite had viewed *Petals of Blood* as an attack on the government and now saw the writing and performance of *Ngahiika Ndenda* as another of Ngũgĩ’s clandestine activities. As Ngũgĩ further notes in the interview cited above, “these factors probably made a neo-colonialist state like Kenya feel uncomfortable about a play by the people, which seemed to be critical of what had been happening since independence” (312). He was subsequently detained from 31st December 1977 to 12th December 1978 at Kamĩĩ Maximum Prison.

This experience at Kamĩrĩthũ seems to have created a new threshold in Ngũgĩ’s literary career especially his politics of language in African literature. If the question about the appropriate language of African literary expression has remained one of the most contentious issues in the conceptualization of modern African literature, Ngũgĩ has been the most vocal and perhaps the most cited advocate of the use of native African languages. His decision to write in Gĩkũyũ was a vindication of his position. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ admits that “It was Kamĩrĩthũ which forced me to turn to Gĩkũyũ and hence into what for me has amounted to ‘an epistemological break’ with my

past, particularly in the area of theatre” (44). Incidentally, in an interview with Harish Trivedi, Ngũgĩ also cites 1977 as the year he rejected the name ‘James’, resorting to the use of his Gĩkũyũ names as a “beginning to my questioning of the whole naming system – including language – because language after all is a naming system” (401). He further explains the choice of the Gĩkũyũ language for the village theatre:

[b]ecause I was working at this community, the question of language became no longer an abstraction...but something which now demanded a practical response. The work we did in the village obviously had to be done in an African language and in this case the Gĩkũyũ language. (401)

Ngũgĩ’s detention hardened his resolve to use Gĩkũyũ as the language of his creative writing. As he further reveals his made him decide to “continue writing in the very language which had been the reason for my incarceration” (401).

Gĩkandi elaborates Ngũgĩ’s assertion in *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o*:

Ngũgĩ’s priorities had changed after the Kamĩrĩĩthũ experiment and his subsequent imprisonment. If his earlier works had sought to represent the history of the postcolony and the everyday events that dominated life in it, his later works were increasingly concerned with creating an alternative to the bourgeois public sphere inherited from colonialism and perpetuated in postcoloniality. (226)

The Kamĩrĩĩthũ experience marked Ngũgĩ’s transformation as a writer and social critic. He had already made a departure from the nationalist, anti-colonial narrative to a critique of the neo-colonial state in *Petals of Blood* while Kamĩrĩĩthũ emboldened his decision to start writing his creative works in Gĩkũyũ and shift from an elitist audience to that of the

workers and peasants. This was a transformation that was symbolically embodied in the transfer of his creative energies from the elitist position at the university to the egalitarian Kamĩĩĩĩthũ village peoples' theatre. This transition is coupled with his increased inclination towards performance not only in his plays *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* but also in the appropriation of orature in his later novels. We can therefore track the roots of *Mũtiiri* in the developments occasioned by the 1977 Kamĩĩĩĩthũ project.

The founding of *Mũtiiri* can further be attributed to the conditions of exile that have also greatly influenced Ngũgĩ's trajectory as a creative writer. Bill Ashcroft and colleagues explain exile as a condition that involves the idea of a separation or distancing from either a literal homeland or from a cultural and ethnic homeland (85-86). They cite Andrew Gurr's distinction between expatriation, which is a voluntary act, and exile, which is an involuntary constraint. They further explain exile as a characteristic of a number of different colonial conditions which is problematized by the increasing number of diasporic peoples throughout the world. In addition, they note that, "[e]xile was also produced by colonialism as pressure was exerted on many colonized peoples to exile themselves from their own cultures, their languages and traditions" (86).

Ngũgĩ shares a similar view of exile and goes on to identify it as both physical and spiritual. In *Moving the Centre* he elaborates his theory of exile noting that the people of formerly colonized nations are in a perpetual state of exile for a number of reasons. He cites the contradiction inherent in the agency of the educated African elites who had been sent to the higher institutions of learning by their peasant communities so that they could come back and help in the "collective survival but ended up joining the multinational

companies whose profits depended on the misery of the very people who had sent them to bring them their share” (124). This is a kind of spiritual exile which is similar to the practice of writers who opted for European languages which were spoken by a very small proportion of the population. Thus Ngũgĩ contends:

The African Prometheus had been sent to wrest the fire from the gods, but instead became captive, contented at warming himself at the fireside of the gods. Otherwise he carried the fire in containers that were completely sealed and for which the majority had no key. For whom were they writing? (107)

To illustrate his case, Ngũgĩ explains that he was conscious of his exiled condition as early as 1966 when a feeling of despair engulfed him as he wrote *A Grain of Wheat* while pursuing graduate studies at Leeds University in England. He questioned his role as a writer as he reflected on the fact that the people whose lives he wrote about were never going to read his books: “I had carefully sealed their lives in a linguistic case. Thus whether I was based in Kenya or outside, my opting for English had already marked me as a writer in exile” (107).

Ngũgĩ’s exilic condition was further complicated by the political realities in Kenya where Kenyatta’s “age and autocratic inclinations created a political system that begun to see its perpetuation (sic) as its primary reason for existence” (Hornsby 6) and whose “conservative and authoritarian political culture . . . was sustained into the twenty-first century under Moi, who truly followed into the footsteps of his patron” (6). Ngũgĩ laments that the elite who came to power in Africa at independence were “pampered with military gadgets of all kinds with which to reign in a restive population” and hence “often

turned an entire country into a prison-house” (*Moving the Centre* 107). This alienation of the people relegated African writers, a good number of whom were “prison graduates”, to “the corridors of silence” (107) which was akin to physical exile.

It then seems like Ngũgĩ’s literary career has been haunted by this sense of alienation, this sense of linguistic and spiritual exile – much more aggravated by his physical exile at Kamĩĩ Maximum Security Prison and later in Europe and America. It is perhaps for this feeling of dislocation that he has invested a good deal of his creative and critical energies in “the search for a way back among the people” which for him and many writers of formerly colonized nations was “hampered by the very linguistic prison they had been thrown into by their colonial legacy” (108). Thus the homecoming motif straddles his literary oeuvre. Since the Kamĩĩĩthũ project, it does appear that (at least through the 1980s and 1990s) writing has been, for him, an attempt to create an imaginary home away from home. Especially for his creative works, writing has been a ritual of imaginary return home – a home that history had designated for him as Kamĩĩĩthũ.

Incidentally, Kamĩĩĩthũ became the the symbolic space for Ngũgĩ’s ‘homecoming’ much earlier in his life than it has been generally acknowledged. In *Detained: A Writer’s Personal Diary* (1981) he admits that there is a preponderance of the theme of return in his novels, plays and short stories. He explains that after closing school at the end of his first term at Alliance High School, he returned to the village only to find his home reduced to a pile of mud-stones, bits of grass, charcoal and ashes. This was the origin of the emotion behind the return motif in Ngũgĩ: “It is deeply rooted in my return to Kamĩĩĩthũ in 1955” (73).

The 1977 Kamĩrĩthũ project was on the other hand a cultural and linguistic homecoming from a spiritual exile that ironically pushed Ngũgĩ to the physical exile of imprisonment at Kamĩĩ and eventually to political exile in Britain and America. This study concludes that writing in exile especially in Gĩkũyũ was, for him, a spiritual homecoming; a symbolic return to Kamĩrĩthũ. Ngũgĩ himself asserts that “[w]riting has always been my way of reconnecting myself to the landscape of my birth and upbringing” (*Moving the Centre* 156).

The publication of *Mũtiiri* is also related to Ngũgĩ’s earlier attempt to redefine the African novel towards making it less ‘Afro-European’ than his early novels. He wrote his first Gĩkũyũ novel *Caaitani Mũtharaba-inĩ* while in prison and later wrote *Matigari ma Njirungi* (1986) in England. Angela Rodrigues has argued that Ngũgĩ was making yet another departure when he wrote his novels in Gĩkũyũ:

For Ngũgĩ, the re-appropriation of the novel by the peasants and the workers in Africa was an important social, cultural and political event that could only be accomplished once it was written in African languages and in a model that was accessible to them” (n. pag.).

In addition, Ngũgĩ’s conditions of exile played a major role in shaping the aesthetics of his Gĩkũyũ novels. Gĩkandi has noted that, “the author’s alienation from his country made him nostalgic for the oral tales of his childhood” (227). Ngũgĩ corroborates this claim when he says that:

In 1983/84, I wrote *Matigari*, a novel of return in the Gĩkũyũ language, and I felt a sense of belonging such as I had felt when in 1978 at Kamĩĩ Maximum Security

Prison in Cell No.16. I had written *Caaitani Mũtharaba-inĩ* (*Devil on the Cross*) as an attempt to reconnect myself to the community from which I had been so brutally cut by the neo-colonial regime in Kenya. (*Moving the Centre*, 106)

Ngũgĩ also wrote the *Njamba Nene* stories for children in the 1980s after which he seems to have taken a break from creative writing until May 1997 when he started writing his latest novel *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, published in 2004. He also published scholarly essays such as *Homecoming: Writers in Politics* and *Decolonising the Mind* which set the tone for his later publications. The 1990s was a prolific decade in which Ngũgĩ published *Moving the Centre* (1993) and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* (1997), as well as a revised version of *Writers in Politics* (1997). Whereas all these were written in English, *Mũtiiri* was in Gĩkũyũ. Its publication marked a radical departure from the tradition of publishing what would be considered as mainstream literary and cultural journals by virtue of the fact that it was patronized by an established American institution of higher learning. *Mũtiiri* was based at the Comparative Literature Department of New York University. In a 1996 interview with Lee Nichols of the Voice of America, Ngũgĩ saw the launching of the journal as a pioneering initiative: “I believe this is the first time that a journal of modern literature and culture in an African language has the base and the support of a mainstream department in a major university” (382).

This study however argues that writing in Gĩkũyũ started long before Ngũgĩ was born in 1938. Ann Biersteker’s study, “Gĩkũyũ Literature: Development from Early Christian Writings to Ngũgĩ’s Later Novels”, gives a fairly comprehensive history of writing in Gĩkũyũ. She notes that Christian missionaries and the colonial government publishers, such as Eagle Press, pioneered publishing in Kenya. Consequently, Christian literature

thrived ahead of other publications. One of the earliest works in Gĩkũyũ was the translation of The New Testament of The Bible which was published in 1926. By then, literacy was still low among the Gĩkũyũ people and few could read or understand English. This led to a proliferation of publications in Gĩkũyũ by writers such as Stanley Kiama Gathigira, Justin Itotia and Henry Mworira. Biersteker observes that “[f]or many writers, the decision to write in Gikuyu (sic) has been a strategic political decision based upon consideration of the viability of alternative language choices” (307).

The first newspaper published in Gĩkũyũ was *Muigwithania* (The Reconciler/ Unifier), first published in 1928. It was a mouthpiece of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), a political organization that was formed in Central Kenya to act on behalf of the Gĩkũyũ community by presenting their grievances to the British government. As Evan Mwangi notes, an Asian press published *Muigwithania* (*Columbia Guide* 57) and Kenyatta, who was the General Secretary of KCA, was its editor. In 1940, the colonial government proscribed the newspaper, together with KCA.

From the 1930s, there was a proliferation of independent non-missionary and non-government presses in Kenya. A number of ethnographies were published including Gathigira’s *Mũkarĩre ya Aagĩkũyũ* (The Customs of the Gĩkũyũ) (1934), published by London based Sheldon Press and Itotia’s *Endwo Niiri na Iriiri* (Beloved of Friends and Foes) (1938). *Endwo Niiri* was self-published and was one of the first works to be published by the independent press. According to Biersteker:

Such presses have been central to the development of literature in Gĩkũyũ because they have enabled writers to address issues and topics in works that would not

have been published by the heavily censored missionary and government presses To publish works in Gikuyu and works that addressed political and social issues of concern to the Gĩkũyũ speakers, it became necessary for writers to establish their own presses. These presses have played a critical role in dissemination of literature in Gĩkũyũ. (309-310)

More writers in Gĩkũyũ emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. Biersteker refers to them as the second generation of Gĩkũyũ writers. One of the most prominent writers in this generation was Gakaara wa Wanjau. Gakaara was one among a group of activist publishers and writers who, through his Gakaara Book Service, used literature to support the cause of KCA and KAU (Kenya African Union – a more nationalist political party formed in 1944 under the leadership of Kenyatta to succeed the tribally inclined KAU). Other writers included Bildad Kaggia, John Kabogoro Cege, Isaac Gathanju, Kinuthia wa Mugiia, Stanley Mathenge, Victor Murage Wokabi, Morris Mwai Koigi, and Henry Mwaniki Mworira. They produced political newspapers, booklets and pamphlets in Gĩkũyũ and most of them were published by Henry Mworira and Gakaara wa Wanjau. Gakaara published such titles as *Mageria Nomo Mahota* (Trying is Managing) (1952), *Witikio wa Gikuyu na Mumbi* (The Creed of Gikuyu and Mumbi) (1952), *Nyimbo Cia Kwarahura Aagĩkũyũ* (Songs to Awaken the Gĩkũyũ) (1951) and *Nyimbo Cia Gukunguira Wiyathi* (Songs Celebrating Independence) (1963).

Gakaara continued writing in Gĩkũyũ and publishing his works at his publishing firm which he relocated from Nairobi to Karatina, his home town. In the 1970s, and early 1980s, Gakaara published a regular magazine *Gĩkũyũ na Mumbi* in which he published forty instalments of the *Wa-Nduta* series. The series presented anecdotes based on the

experiences of a fictional character called Kiwai wa-Nduta who was a middle aged former freedom fighter now struggling to make ends meet in post-independence Kenya.

Gakaara is one the earliest writers to suffer the brunt of the authoritarian Kenyan governments due to his writing. The colonial British government arrested him in 1952 and detained him for his involvement in publications that supported the liberation struggle. *Nyimbo* (Songs) was for instance a compilation of songs that called upon the Gĩkũyũ people to unite and defend their land against the colonialists. Three decades later, the Moi government arrested and detained him in 1986 for being suspected to be a member of Mwakenya, an underground organization that the then government believed to be dissident. The peak of Gakaara's writing career was the publication of his prison memoirs *Mwandiki wa Mau Mau Ithamĩrio-inĩ* (1983). It won the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1984 and was reissued in an English translation as *Mau Mau Author in Detention* in 1988 by East African Educational Publishers.

Ngũgĩ's championing of Gĩkũyũ as a language of literary expression must be appreciated in the context of this early writing in Gĩkũyũ. Since the publications of Gakaara in the 1980s and Ngũgĩ's *Matigari ma Njirungi (Matigari)* in 1986, there was little significant publication of works in Gĩkũyũ until the founding of *Mũtiiri* in 1994. Though other publications such as *Mwĩhoko: Gũtirĩ Ũtukũ Ũtakĩaga*, a magazine published by the Catholic Diocese of Murang'a, emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, *Mũtiiri* remains a unique project as it was associated with Gĩkũyũ intellectuals and thus assumed the status of a pseudo-academic journal.

However, the publication of *Mũtiiri* in America would raise a number of questions. What were the implications of publishing a journal in the Gĩkũyũ language in an American university? What was its target audience? Who would write for it and how would its activities be coordinated? How would it be marketed? As Gĩkandi wonders, “What did it mean to produce a journal when Ngũgĩ was separated from its immediate readers and linguistic resources of an African language? What would be its themes and cultural grammar in a cosmopolitan city?” (*Ngugi wa Thiong’o* 275).

One of Ngũgĩ’s arguments in justifying the publication of *Mũtiiri* was that, “The idea is to show that if the Gĩkũyũ language, which is not very different from any other African language can sustain a modern literature and thought, then the same is possible in any other similarly situated languages” (Nichols 383). Thus, it would appear like one of Ngũgĩ’s principle goals of the project was to insert Gĩkũyũ into the mainstream of globally accessible languages such as English and French. According to Gĩkandi:

Mũtiiri was an important project in Ngũgĩ’s critical discourse not because it embodied the kind of epistemological rapture he had sought when he ‘broke’ with English, but because it seemed, momentarily at least, to provide the editor and his associates with a space in which a cultural project initiated at Kamĩrĩĩthũ could be continued in exile. (*Ngugi wa Thiong’o* 275-6)

However, this study notes that on one hand, the Kamĩrĩĩthũ’s project was a more egalitarian initiative that effectively mobilized popular participation of workers and peasants. *Mũtiiri* on the other hand was far removed from the people it would claim to reach out for. The first issue, for instance, has contributions by what seems to be a coterie

of Gĩkũyũ scholars who were contacted by Ngũgĩ to submit articles. Of the fifteen contributors in *Mũtiiri Manja I* (Volume 1), eight of them are university professors and all, with the exception of Cege wa Gĩthiora who was teaching in Mexico, were based in universities in the United States of America (USA). Two were students in the USA and later become professors in the same place while the other three articles were translations from Kiswahili. It is only Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ who came from outside America as he was then living in Zimbabwe but was a close associate of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. This trend was replicated in the second and third volumes.

Further, the acknowledgment page of the first issue reveals that there was great support to the founding of the journal by the Department of Comparative Literature, New York University and moral support to the editor from renowned professors such as Professor Manthia Diawara of New York University, Professor Charles Cantalupo of Penn State University and Ann Biersteker of Yale University. The first issues were edited by Ngũgĩ, assisted by professors Gĩtahi Gĩtĩĩ, Kĩmani wa Njogu, and Mr. Gĩthogori who was then a computer expert in America. The journal was therefore bound to be perceived as a ‘professorial’ academic project; exclusionist and elitist – out of reach for the ordinary Gĩkũyũ speaking *mwananchi* it purported to be its target audience.

This study suggests that the founding of *Mũtiiri* in 1994 in America was, for Ngũgĩ and its contributors, a twofold project. Firstly, it was away of reconnecting with their African roots, a way of reclaiming their Kenyan/Gĩkũyũ identity. Secondly, it was a project by Ngũgĩ to put into practice his theory of language that African languages have the capacity to express modern ideas in the same way as the languages of former colonial masters did. *Mũtiiri* was like the 1977 Kamĩrĩĩthũ Theatre in that it involved group participation in a

homecoming project in which Ngũgĩ sought to recuperate the Kamĩrĩĩthũ phenomenon and promote literature in an African language by having it published in an American academy. By crossing the borders of their location in exile through dreams and memories, the editor and contributors to the journal have narrated Kenyan history tracing it back to the colonial times and going all the way to the 1980s when majority of the contributors left Kenya for exile.

Mũtiiri has published poetry, prison memoirs, critical essays and prose narratives that cut across the major themes in modern Kenyan literature. Ngũgĩ's overarching influence in tone and content is evident in the bulk of the articles studied. An analysis of the items in six of the eight volumes of the journal points toward the fact that *Mũtiiri* is a symbolic return to Kamĩrĩĩthũ – a publishing outpost for Ngũgĩ and his associates in exile to not only reconnect with the land of their birth and revisit the realities that have shaped Kenya's postcolonial history, but to also sustain the crusade for the appreciation of African languages as best suited to articulate issues of African cultures, philosophical and scientific thoughts as opposed to the languages of their former colonial masters.

3.3 The Historical Context of *Mũtiiri*

There is a sustained overlapping of literature and history in *Mũtiiri*. In the editorial to the first issue of the journal, Ngũgĩ indicates that *Mũtiiri* would identify itself with history in its publication of works of fiction, poetry, and essays on philosophy, history, politics, and economics (7). The contributors to the journal have revisited the issues of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Kenya and the subsequent resistance to the authoritarianism of these systems. The association of the journal with Kenya's social and political histories goes back to the advent of colonialism towards the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1888, the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) was granted the Royal Charter to rule over British East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar). This was followed, seven years later, by the declaration of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya by Her Majesty's Agent and Consul General in Mombasa on 1st July 1895 (Kihoro 5). This marked the formal establishment of Kenya as a colonial and later neo-colonial state. Since then, Kenya has had a chequered history, oscillating from moments of high optimism such as was witnessed during the celebrations on the 12th December, 1963 when the country gained independence from the British, to moments of grief and despondency among the populace sometimes occasioned by authoritarian tendencies of the regimes that took power after independence. The political structures laid down at the advent of colonialism have continued to impact on the constitution of Kenyan cultural and political identities. Literature has played a major role in representing and mediating this history. Thus, one can hardly appreciate Kenyan literature without an insight into Kenya's past and present. *Mũtiiri*, just like many other literary works, is a journal that could be read as literary document on Kenyan social and political history. Indeed this is acknowledged in the editorial of its maiden issue which proclaims: "Kwinyitithania na *Mũtiiri* ni kwinyitithania na hisituria" (associating with *Mũtiiri* is associating with history) (Ngũgĩ 7).

One fact that has remained characteristic of Kenya's history over the years is that of coercion and resistance. As early as 1892, popular Gĩkũyũ mythology on resistance to colonialism claims that Waiyaki wa Hinga, a Gĩkũyũ chief in Dagorreti near Nairobi, was buried alive by the agents of IBEAC after his militia burnt down a garrison the company had built in the area following the flouting of the agreement that the chief had made with

Captain Fredrick Lugard. Though no clear evidence has ever been given to confirm the claims about this brutal killing, the incident has always been cited as seminal to the resistant nationalist movement that culminated into the formation of Mau Mau in late 1940s. Maina Kihoro has noted that in 1897 Governor Arthur Hardinge made regulations called the “Native Courts Regulations” under which he gave himself extensive powers of detention and deportation of “natives” in the interest of what he called “peace, order and good government” (9). The powers of the Governor were amended, extended and varied seven times, “but otherwise remained a potent weapon against those who were identified as being disaffected with Her Majesty’s administration (9).

Other well known cases of resistance to colonial domination and exploitation at the dawn of colonial Kenya included the Nandi resistance led by Koitalel Arap Samoei (1896-1906); the Abagusii rebellion started by Moraa wa Ngiti starting 1908 and the 1912- 1914 Giriama resistance led by Mekatilili wa Menza. All these ended up either with the deportation or killing of the leaders. Colonial resistance and repression intensified through the 1920s when, for instance, in 1922 Harry Thuku’s detention led to the massacre of at least twenty-two protestors by the colonial government. The 1930s saw the likes of Muindi Mbingu deported, while the 1940s had resistance movements such as Dini Msambwa, Dini ya Jesu Kristo and Dini ya Mbojo. Mau Mau was banned in 1950 and its transformation to a guerrilla movement led to the declaration of the State of Emergency and the arrest of those perceived to be its leaders including Jomo Kenyatta on 20th October, 1952. Political mobilization continued with the formation of political parties up to 1963 when Kenya got independence from the British.

The culture of repression and coercion was taken up by the new political elite after the euphoria of the new republic was spent. This led to more resistance, more detention of dissenting voices and political assassinations. Tamara Sivanandan has noted that, “by the late 1960s, aided by the Western and Eastern bloc powers whose own interests coincided with those of strong rulers, many of these societies [postcolonial nations] were under some kind of authoritarian regime (often military) or one-party”(69). In Kenya, there was the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto in 1965 and Tom Mboya in 1969. Ngũgĩ himself resigned from his teaching position at the University of Nairobi in protest against the expulsion of students who had defied the order not to invite Jaramogi Ondiga to speak at the university in 1969. This repression went on into the 1970s when J.M. Kariuki was killed amid increasing paranoia and authoritarianism in the government. It is this political situation that led to the banning of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* at Kamĩĩĩthũ and the eventual detention of Ngũgĩ in 1977.

The 1980s were years of declining economic performance and increased political tensions. A failed coup attempt in 1982,

shocked the nation and changed its future . . . the government was increasingly repressive . . . the combination of Moi’s paranoia and the influence of a cabal of hard-line advisors would set Kenya on a course that was a damage to the country’s identity, economy, political stability and faith in government. (Hornsby 397)

The freedom of the press was constrained and intellectuals were harassed and jailed. In 1983, there was the formation of the Mwakenya “Marxist organization”, an underground

protest movement “suspected to be a creation of the security forces to justify their violent repression” (Hornsby 414). Hornsby further indicates that between March 1986 and March 1987, at least seventy-five journalists, academics, students and peasants were jailed for crimes such as possession of seditious literature (415). Kenyans witnessed more detentions and political assassinations 1990s.

This is the background from which *Mũtiiri* emerged. The vibrant literary environment in Kenya that characterized the years of *Busara* as discussed in the previous chapter started declining from mid-970s and made a nosedive in the 1980s. According to Gĩkandi:

[f]rom the beginning of 1980s onwards, writers and critics in the region were to find themselves in an unprecedented state of political, cultural and economic crisis This period will be remembered for the collapse of modern institutions such as the schools, universities and publishing houses that had been established during the first two decades of independence. (*The Columbia Guide*,18)

The maiden issue of *Mũtiiri* was published in April 1994 and the majority of the people who contributed to the journal were victims of the post-1982 crackdown by the Moi regime. Their writings give a panoramic view of Kenya’s troubled history from the early days of colonialism to the 1990s. The bulk of these writers have lived in Europe and America as exiles since the eighties. Though by and large, their imaginative and autobiographical works in the journal unfold in rural and urban Kenya or Kenyan prisons and detention camps. Only a few have written about their lives in exile. *Mũtiiri* itself has been published in exile – first at the New York University and then at the University of California. Thus the journal has proved to be a crucial publishing outpost that has given

these writers a platform from which to reconnect with the landscape of their birth. The nature of this reconnection will be addressed in Section 3.3. Before then we need to find out who these writers are.

3.4 Dons, Dissidents and Exiles

As mentioned above, some of the writers who have been contributing to *Mũtiiri* constitute a generation of Kenyans who bore the brunt of the dictatorship of the Kenyatta and Moi regimes in the 1970s and 1980s. Being a journal in Gĩkũyũ, the writers are to a large extent speakers of the language with only a few translations from Kiswahili, Spanish and English. Many of them were academics at Nairobi and Kenyatta universities. Whereas a number of them fled the country unscathed, there are those who went through jails and police torture before they could flee the country after their release. However there are a few who had migrated to Europe and America mostly in pursuit of higher education and also a few who have been resident in Kenya. The journal therefore pools together a fraternity of Kenyans whose collective identity has been shaped by similar historical circumstances and whose artistic and critical visions broadly lean towards the ideologies of Ngũgĩ, the journal's founding editor, especially after the 1977 Kamĩrĩthũ project.

Of the fifteen writers who contributed to *Mũtiiri* Manja1 (Volume1), six of them were jailed at Kamĩtĩ Maximum Security Prison at different times. The earliest victim is Abdulatif Abdalla who was thrown behind bars for three years by the Kenyatta government for writing a pamphlet “Kenya Twendapi?” (“Kenya Where Are We Headed”?) in 1969. Some of the poems he wrote in Kiswahili while in jail appear in translation in *Mũtiiri*.

As discussed earlier, Ngũgĩ's detention in 1977 and the threat on his life in 1982 were highly instrumental in moulding the career path that he took after he had settled in exile. Interestingly, Ngũgĩ mutes his anti-establishment political criticism in *Mũtiiri*, and leaves it to what we may consider his 'lieutenants' and chooses to concentrate on his pet theme, the role of African languages in African literature. He has also written several "love knots" dedicated to the woman he met and married in 1992 in America – Njeeri wa Ngũgĩ.

Alamin Mazrui (his poetry appears in translation in *Mũtiiri*), Maina wa Kĩnyatti and Kamonje Wachira (who uses the pen name K.K. Gĩtiiri in *Mũtiiri*) were all lecturers at Kenyatta University when they were detained in 1982. There was then continued disaffection against the government especially after the amendment of the constitution to make Kenya a *de jure* one party state which culminated in the August 1982 attempted coup. The contributions of these writers give testimony to the weight of the oppression and injustice they went through after they were falsely charged with sedition and hurled into prison.

The other ex-detainee who has made a contribution in later issues is Ngotho wa Kariuki who used to be the Dean of the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Nairobi. He was detained in 1986 together with other academics and political activists in a crackdown of what the government perceived as Mwakenya dissidents. There is also Jeff Kwĩriki who was a student activist detained in the same period and later forced to flee to exile in Norway. As noted earlier, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, the co-author of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, also fled to Zimbabwe in 1982 to avoid arrest while Gĩtahi Gĩtĩĩ who was teaching at Kenyatta University fled the country in 1986.

Other writers who were involved in *Mũtiiri* since its inception are people who went abroad mainly to further their studies. They include Gĩcingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, Kĩmani wa Njogu, Cege Gĩthiora, Waithĩra wa Mbuthia, Ndungi wa Mũngai and Bantu Mwaũra. Starting with the fourth volume, there is greater contribution by new writers such as Mwangi wa Mũtahi, Gatua wa Mbũgua and Mbũgua wa Mũngai. There is also more contribution from outside America and an increased participation by writers living in Kenya such as Njaramba wa Kagwĩra who was an actor in the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre. Njeeri wa Ngũgĩ has also been fully involved in the management of the journal. The journal therefore became increasingly more diverse in content and promoted the emergence of new writers in Gĩkũyũ and, indeed, invented a community of (new) Gĩkũyũ speakers in the Diaspora.

3.5 Repression and Resistance in Postcolonial Kenya

As noted earlier, Kenya has a history of armed resistance against colonialism which climaxed in the 1952-1956 Mau Mau guerrilla warfare. Though the Mau Mau fighters were subdued and defeated by the better equipped British soldiers, the insurgency weakened the settler rule and paved the way for independence for Kenya in 1963. As observed elsewhere in this study, this history of resistance has been etched in the minds of a majority of Kenyan writers and has been widely written about in Kenyan literature.

In its second issue *Mũtiiri* devotes a large section titled “Mau Mau na Wiyathi” (“Mau Mau and Independence”) which focuses on the Mau Mau guerrilla movement’s resistance to the British colonialists. Three out of the five articles here were written by Maina wa Kĩnyatti while he was in detention at Kamĩĩ Maximum Security Prison. Then a professor of history at Kenyatta University and researching on the history of the Mau Mau

movement, Kĩnyatti was accused of writing and harbouring seditious literature. One of the articles is a long narrative poem, “Mau Mau na Wiyathi,” (Mau Mau and Freedom) that traces the roots of Mau Mau to the 1884 Berlin conference which formalized the establishment colonies in Africa by European nations. Appropriating the epic form, Kĩnyatti gives a detailed account of the colonial process in Kenya and the rise of heroic resistance to imperialism up to the dawn of independence in 1963. The poem is a tribute to Mau Mau and it opens with one of the movement’s song that asserts its unwavering resolve to fight until freedom is won and closes with the declaration of its heroes and martyrs as the pillars of political independence in Kenya.

Gĩkũyũ

English

Wiyathi! Wiyathi!	Freedom ! Freedom!
Wiyathi bururi wa Kirinyaga	Freedom to the nation of Kenya
Bururi wa gikeno wi ituamba na mititu	A nation of joy; of fertile valleys and forests
Kenya ni bururi wa andu airu	Kenya is a black man’s country
Tutiuragia Kunyitwo	We care not for arrests
Kana guikio njeera	We care not for imprisonment
Kana gutwarwo icigirira	We care not for detention
Toondu tutigaatiga gutetera wiyathi	Because we will never tire to fight for freedom
Nginya bururi uthire Nduma. (53)	Till darkness shall depart our nation

In another article, “Marua Kuma Kamiti,” (A Letter From Kamiti) Maina uses the letter form and addresses himself to his parents back at home. The letter starts with a lament that he is currently in a very precarious situation as a prisoner and has only managed to steal a moment so as to write the letter. He explains to his parents the circumstances of his arrest:

Gĩkũyũ

Ndaikirio njeera ati toonde ni ndareega kurumirira huumungaati, ndoonga iria iraaathana bururu-ini uyu witu; bururi twatigiirwo ni aagu na aagu; bururi wa maithe maitu aa Ndemi na Mathaathi; bururi wa mbari ya Iregi; bururi uria njamba ngiri na ngiri cia ruuriri ciatiire thakame, kuna makiurutira mioyo yao hindi ya mbaara nene ya wiyathi. (47)

English

I was thrown into jail when I refused to assent to the whims of the home guards, the bourgeoisie ruling our country; this country handed down to us by our ancestors; this country of our fathers, Ndemi and Mathaathi; this country of the Iregi generation; this country whose thousands of the heroes of the nation spilt blood and lost their lives during the war of independence.

The letter is another reference to the narrative of the struggle for land and independence from the colonialists in Kenya. Through the epistolary form, Maina revisits history and invokes the mythology of his people by alluding to the ancestors (*aagu na aagu*) and the legendary giants of the tribe believed to have been the first to clear and till land (*Ndemi* and *Mathaathi*). He exalts the Iregi generation, the Gĩkũyũ age-set that rebelled against the colonialists, and vilifies the home guards for not only betraying the struggle for

independence but also for killing the dreams of Kenyans after independence. The use of the letter form and the fact that it is addressed to the writer's parents makes the experience personal and poignant, and the reader is drawn to empathise with the writer who is a victim of an unjust system and has no recourse other than writing this letter in his state of incarceration.

Several other writers in *Mũtiiri* have dealt with the subject of the struggle for freedom during the emergency period in Kenya. In his poem "Tucose Mbara Nginyo" (Let us go back to the Beginning), Gĩtĩ looks back at the experiences of the Mau Mau struggle with resentment. The poem laments about imprisonment, detention, torture, hard labour, rape, and murder many that Africans went through during the war (77). Cege wa Gĩthiora mourns for his uncle who was killed during the emergency period. In the poem "Maama Cege" (Uncle Chege), the poetic persona seeks to understand the meaning of death in such circumstances as colonialism had created. The poem shows the pain of losing loved ones through the war. As the poet concludes, the persona finds consolation in the thought that his uncle did not die in vain, since the blood of those who died like him would cleanse the nation and rid the land of the evils of colonialism.

Gĩkũyũ

English

. . . Ndeenda kumenya

. . . i'd wish to know

wariirwo he gitumi

if you were killed for a reason

Menye warihiirie uu kana kii

for whom and what you aveged

Kana wathinjiirwo nyumba

or if it was for the house

Amu ndionaga gitumi

for i see no reason why

Atangikorwo mwene nyaga

unless God

Aaneire nyukwa koori	gave your mother a kid
Agatuire wega	to feed well
Ati akeende ta ki ni geetha	and to cherish most
riria Nyumba na Bururi	so that when the House and Nation
cikaagacagaca ni thakame	shall be soaked with blood
Nathaahu uihure thi	and wickedness shall reign
Ukaamiherere na kumitahikia	you will appease the land
Niguo njiarwa tutheereme	for the future of posterity
uroogocwo. (84)	may you be blessed

The persona's interpretation of Cege's uncle's death reveals an aspect of the spiritual essence of the struggle for freedom. It alludes to the Biblical offering of the ram as a sacrifice to God. The victim's blood is seen as a symbol of self-sacrifice that would bring atonement and victory for the nation. The persona subordinates his feelings of personal loss and despair to the greater ideal of national victory. This is apparently a spiritual way of coping with death of kinsmen and friends as a consequence of the war and of keeping alive the hope for victory.

A large proportion of the contributions to *Mũtiiri* are by men who remain oblivious of the significance of women, especially in the struggle for independence in Kenya. In *Africa Writes Back to Self*, Evan Mwangi argues that African women writers have been engaged in revisioning older texts by male writers which have repressed the experiences of women in the struggle against imperialism. He says that “[w]omen writers attempt to transform the grammar of nationalism in male texts into a politicized intertextual deconstruction of images of women in masculine discourses of nationalist liberation”

(139). The male writers in *Mũtiiri*, especially on the subject of the Mau Mau struggle, are mute about any role that women played.

Mwangi's argument is vindicated in Wanjiru wa Kiarie "Atumia na Mbaara ya Mau Mau" (Women and the Mau Mau war) where she contends that the writing of the history of Mau Mau as written by men has been insensitive to the role that women played in the struggle. She explains that women were very helpful in the provision of food, as spies for the fighters and in transporting arms, medicine and clothes. The writer considers these roles as important as those that the men played. Besides, she further argues, women joined the fighters in the forest and fought alongside men and some were arrested and detained. The colonial laws affected women as much as they did men. The colonialists referred to the wives of men involved with Mau in such epithets as "prostitutes". They were forced to build roads and were sexually exploited by the home guards. Wanjiru argues that "atumia ni andu mookiriite muno maundui-ni megii uhinyiriria wa thirikaari ya mukoronia ni twagiriirwo ni kurumburia wira wa atumia mbaara-ini ino ya wiyathi riria tukwandika mamikonii (women fought oppression by the colonial government we should recognize their role when writing about the struggle for freedom) (26). The article thus underscores the fate of women in postcolonial Kenya who not only suffered the brunt of colonialism but have also been relegated to the level of nonentities in their role in Kenya's struggle for independence.

Generally, the motif of Mau Mau insurgency features in the works of several other writers in all the volumes of the journal. For most of them, the struggle for liberation from colonialism forms the background upon which Kenya as a postcolonial nation must be intellectualized. The achievement of political independence in 1963 was the peak of a

struggle that had taken several decades. Ironically, whereas the stories on Mau Mau celebrated the heroic nationalism of the struggle for independence, the literature that followed was a literature of disillusionment with the new political establishment.

The period after colonialism in Kenya was characterized by what Neil Lazarus describes as “loss of meaning and conditions of anomie that break up into widely scattered historical contingencies” (3). Kenya gradually degenerated into a neo-colonial authoritarian state as the new political elite dispensed with the ideals of the Mau Mau liberation struggle. As Gĩkandi puts it, Kenya remained, “the archetypal neo-colonial state . . . in which colonial institutions could survive under the guise of independence” (*Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o*, 34). The gains made at independence were quashed by the neo-colonial political class, most of whom had their allegiance with the colonial masters. The arrogance and callousness of the neo-colonial ruling class in Kenya is the subject of several works in *Mũtiiri*.

In a poem dedicated to J.M. Kariuki, the Kenyan politician who was assassinated in 1975 and his body thrown away into the Ngong forest, Maina wa Kĩnyatti incriminates Kenyatta, the then president of Kenya, as the murderer who used four policemen to assassinate J.M. The words attributed to the murderous persona who executed J.M. bears testimony to the brutality of the government of the day:

Gĩkũyũ

Wee ni we utarekaga
tumerie kanyamu
Ni gututhitanga kwi muingi?

English

So you are the one who can't let us
swallow morsel
Because of reporting us to the masses?

Indo cia bururi ni cia nyukwa, gati gaaka?	Is national wealth your mother's, cunt?
Nawe ni hindi ukumenya uria ndarutirwo	You will now know what I was taught
Ngeretha (Mũtiiri 2, 73)	by the British

The persona is vicious and violent as his choice of words reveal. His use of taboo language underpins his wickedness and the rottenness of the system he is working for. He is an agent of neo-colonial dictatorship who is practising the lessons he learnt from the British colonialist. Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ is also critical of the abuse of power in neo-colonial Kenya. His poem, “Uthuuri wa Uthuri” (The manliness of fart), uses word play and scatological images to satirize political dictatorship as seen in the following stanza:

Gikũyũ

English

Nii therukaga ta kioro giikire igata	I boil like a latrine stuffed with soda ash
Nikio gwakwa njigwiitwo ugwo	That's why I am obeyed at home
Ingimira njathimure kana ninge ndore	If I blow my nose, sneeze or fart loudly
Njitikaguo ni kaniini na kanene	Small and big ones answer
Uuru no njigwe kamwe gatuo gakinyuria	Just let one of them complain
Norimwe ni nyumagirwo ni kioro	Sometimes I get constipation
Ndaawa ikoima o murimo	So I order medicine from abroad
Ndoogo ya kuhuhiriria	Sometimes to spray
Aria maromia kioro giakwa	Those causing me constipation
Amu ngeretha yoigire	For the British said
Nikio ngundagia ndoogo	Prevention is better than cure
Aria matumaga kioro giakwa kiume	That is why I feed them with smoke
Ngahuthahuthirwo ninda haniini	Those who cause my constipation

Ngahota kuharwo wega

To relieve my stomach

Uuru no njigue kamwe gakinyuria. (44-5) But let me hear any of them complain.

“Uthuuri” refers to both the condition of being an elderly man and the act of selecting, while “uthuri” means fart. The politician in the poem is described as greedy, corrupt and brutal. His mouth is in his anus. He uses shit to settle scores “Ruharo niruo haaraga naruo” (43) and fart to confound his subjects. His fart leaves children of the same family fighting about who farted. Sometimes the sound unleashed while farting is soft and silent (“gaciihu”) and at other times it is loud and violent (“ndore”). The subject of this poem, the leader, has schemed to acquire absolute power, enlisting the services of sycophants who carry the whip for him. This dictator sometimes “boils like a latrine stuffed with soda ash” (44) to stamp out rebellion. At other times, he suffers constipation and orders for medicine from abroad. He sometimes turns into a vampire who drinks the blood of his victims and cannibalizes choice organs like the liver and kidneys (45). The poem alludes to the dictatorship of the Moi regime that drove Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ to exile and subjected many of the writer’s colleagues to torture. It is a biting satire that underpins the bitterness of those who were victims of political repression by the Kenyan government.

The leadership described in wa Mĩriĩ’s poem above is a leadership that subjected Kenyan writers to repression and harassment. Repression of writers in Kenya began with the Kenyatta government when, in 1970, it arrested and jailed Abdilatif Abdalla for writing and publishing *Kenya Twendapi?*. The imprisonment of writers led to a steady growth of ‘prison literature’ as an important genre in Kenyan literature. *Mũtiiri* has published several works, mostly poetry, on the experiences of writers in Kenyan jails and detention camps in neo-colonial Kenya.

Some of the works about experiences in prison in *Mũtiiri* include the poems that Abdalla wrote while in prison as translated from Kiswahili to Gĩkũyũ by Kĩmani wa Njogu. In the poems, Abdalla laments about the injustice of political imprisonment in neo-colonial Kenya. “Ihũũha” (the boil), sees the evils of the postcolonial regime as a painful boil that is tormenting the persona:

Gĩkũyũ	English
Ngoroini gikeno ndiri...	I am sad at heart
Utuku na muthenya, gwakwa gutiri...	I have neither day nor night
Riraanyamaaria muno...	It’s torturous....
Ona toro ndikomaga. (<i>Mũtiiri</i> 1, 49)	I cannot even sleep

Located on the persona’s buttocks, the boil is swelling day by day. The persona looks forward to the day it will be ripe enough to be squeezed so that only a scar will remain. The boil symbolizes the maladies of postcolonial Kenya such as political injustice. The persona is stoic, resilient and optimistic that he and fellow Kenyan’s will eventually overcome the tyranny of the government. The persona’s resolve to remain firm in his convictions is emphatically expressed in another poem “Ndigaatiga witikio wakwa” (I will never forsake my conviction). In the poem, he asserts that he is what he believes and will have to die to terminate this belief. The poem shows the hardened resolve of those who were victims of the unjust system; they would fight to the bitter end.

State repression of writers and censorship intensified in the 1980s, a time Hornsby describes as a period of “heavy footsteps” (355). Daniel arap Moi had succeeded Kenyatta after the latter’s death in 1978 and vowed to follow the footsteps of his

predecessor. Hornsby notes that Kenya in the 1980s was characterized by the state's weakening hold on political discourse and the worsening of relations with the university which was dominated by able, critical and socialist academics. Hornsby further notes that "academic repression grew as publication with anything with political content became unwise" (355). This confrontational relationship drove many intellectuals into open resistance to the government in the 1980s and 1990s which made the state to resort to coercion through the police force and detention without trial.

In "How Arrests and Political Repression by Moi Led to the August 1, 1982 Coup Attempt," Njonjo Kihuria notes that in the May and June of 1982, the Moi regime swooped on politicians, lawyers, university lecturers and peasants, detaining some without trial and charging others "on trumped up charges of being in possession of seditious publications" (n. pag.). Those who were arrested included academicians Mazrui, Mũkarũ Ng'ang'a, Edward Oyugi, Kamonje Wachira, Kĩnyatti, Willy Mutunga and politician, George Anyona. It is during the same period that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o escaped arrest as he had travelled to London. The writings of Kĩnyatti, Mazrui, and Wachira in *Mũtiiri* are memoirs of their experience in prison following these arrests.

Wachira was detained for a year at Hola, a former colonial detention camp near the Kenyan coast. Using the penname K.K. Gĩtiiri, Wachira wrote "Thagana therera!" (Thagana flow forth), a poem in which he laments about the evils of neo-colonialism in Kenya. Published in *Mũtiiri* Volume 2, the poem is a tribute to River Thagana (Tana), the longest river in Kenya, in which the author traces the paths of Thagana from the springs of Mt. Kenya all the way to the Indian Ocean. The poem uses apostrophe and is conceived as an oral fable. It is narrated to a child who is present

though the persona addresses the river directly in most of the stanzas. It begins by the persona inviting the child to come and have a share of the communal wisdom that has been handed down from the ancestors through generations. The epic journey commences where the river begins at the peaks of Mt. Kenya. This is captured in the opening stanza cited below:

Gĩkũyũ

English

1. Kiimerera Irima-ini.

The Spring at the Mountain

Huguka na guuku mwana mwega, mwana muugi,	Turn this way good, wise child,
Uigue cianaganwo kuuma	Hear tales told since days
aagu na aagu	of our ancestors
Utaaro wa ngerekano na miuge miumbike	The fables and riddles
Ta huguka uikie riitho mbere ya kuuria	Look far into the
ruoro rutemaga	eastern horizon
One matu mairu macuuhite	See how dark clouds sag
Ta mikamo ya Mwitha ikiingira	Like the udder of Mwitha entering
muthoigu gutaanaira	the pen before dusk
Ta baara wega wone tucumbiri twiri	Behold the two peaks
Twiguikiite thumbi njeru ya tharunji na ira	sporting a white crown of snow
Twiyambiite ruotootia-ini rwa irima nene,	Stretching atop the high mountain
Imaamo cia Nyene na Arekio aake	The hideout of God and his disciples

(Mũtiiri 2, 19)

Written in six parts, the poem takes us through the journey in 16 pages (*Mũtiiri* 2, 19-34) in which the poetic persona venerates the river for its physical, spiritual, socio-historical and political importance. Those who have lived in River Tana's neighbourhood may have seen it as just the source of water for their household and farming needs but for the poet, the river is the queen of the nation; a repository of Kenyan history, its culture and spiritual essence; it is the abode of Mwathi (God) who is the judge; a testimony to the fertility of the land; a spring of knowledge; a bearer of secrets; a haven for wild animals; a promise of immortality; guardian of truth, and the custodian of prophets and seers. The persona therefore sees it as the ultimate antidote to the wickedness of postcolonial Kenya.

Gĩtiiri's tone in the poem is not just celebratory as suggested above; it is also bitter and accusatory. Writing under incarceration, the poet's voice is sad and soul-searching, seeking answers to questions about the predicament that had befallen him and fellow political prisoners – detention without trial. Why was he, twenty years after political independence, a political detainee in Kenya? The persona cites the abandonment of pre-colonial African traditions to the greed of postcolonial leaders as the root cause of the maladies that had befallen the nation. Hola Camp, where he was detained, was a former colonial detention camp that was now adopted by the post-colonial state for the same purpose as those of the colonialists. For the poet, the colonial structures were still intact in Kenya and the poem was a lament on this personal as well as national tragedy.

When the river reaches Hola, the epic of its nationalist duties merges with the personal narrative of the poet. The river yet again witnesses the history of oppression carried out at the detention camp. Thagana's waters have been polluted since colonial days; polluted by debris of poverty and suffering; polluted by the blood and bodies of fallen freedom

fighters. Environmental pollution acquires manifold symbolic significance as the river becomes the embodiment of the defiled nation. Yet Thagana remains the only source of consolation for the detainee whose hardships are unbearable. Its birds sing songs of hope for him. Its snakes assault the policemen and the hyenas laugh mockingly at the neo-colonialist. The poet thus suggests that all is not lost. He envisions the possibility of salvation for him and the nation. In its journey through the years, the river has gathered all that defines modern Kenya: its historical growth and fractures from the colonial and to neo-colonial times; its promises and broken dreams and even the possibilities of regeneration.

Kĩnyatti, who was detained at Kamĩĩ Maximum Prison at the same time as Wachira, has also published in *Mũtiiri* excerpts of his memoirs about his life in prison after the 1982 arrest. In the first excerpt, “Kunyiitwo na Guikio Njeera” (Arrested and Imprisoned), he explains how he was arrested:

Gikũyũ

Thigari ithathatu cia borithi ya Ruhonge rwa Mwanja ciokire gwakwa mucii, Kenyatta Yunibaasiti, muthenya wa iiri mweri wa gatandatu 1982 ciyoheete mathaita ma mbaara, ikiuria mutumia wakwa Mumbi, ‘Guuku nikwa Maina wa Kĩnyatti? Ari kuo? Ithui turi borithi na tureenda kumuuria ciuria. (52)

English

Six policemen from the Special Branch came to my residence at Kenyatta University, on the second of June, 1982. They were armed. They asked my wife, Mumbi: is this Maina wa Kĩnyatti’s house? Is he in? We are policemen and we want to ask him some questions.

The policemen searched the house and carried with them a type-writer, twenty-three books, and twenty-nine files in which he had written a manuscript about the history of Mau Mau. He was remanded in bleak conditions for a hundred and thirty three days before being jailed for six years at Kamĩĩ, purportedly for writing a seditious article titled “Moi’s Divisive Tactics Exposed” (54) which was said to have been published by the dissident “December Twelve Movement. “The police, who would sarcastically refer to him as the “Karl Marx of the University”, accused him, together with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, of having started the movement which they claimed had transformed itself to Mwakenya. The memoirs which are published in the first four volumes of *Mũtiiri* give a chronology of torture, humiliation and dehumanization of the political prisoners as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Gĩkũyũ	English
Mooko makwa bingu	Handcuffs on my hands
Maguru makwa nyororo	Chains on my legs
Ageni aakwa theero ni heho na ng’aragu	My guests are cold and hunger
Irio iria ndiiaga	The food I eat
Ikuuagwo na maceera	Is carried in buckets
Ithaiitwo na taama mweru ta kiimba	Covered with a white cloth like a corpse
Kioro ni ndoo maguruini	Toilet is a bucket at my feet
Thimitini thi haria ngomaga	On the cement where I sleep
Kiruheere kirerage maniuruini ona ngiria	Stench in my nostrils as I eat
No ona ingiura mbembe	But even if it rained in hailstones

Kana yure heni na ngwa

Come lightening or thunder

Kihooto ndigatiga kwenjera (67)

I will never stop excavating justice

These injustices and others were intended to break the spirit of the prisoners. The detainees were kept in complete information black-out and they suffered great solitude. The most dehumanizing experience was sexual starvation and the perversion it caused. The poet says that some prisoners were forced to offer themselves in homosexual unions to get some food or at a small cash payment (72). Nevertheless, as the persona says in the excerpt above, the prisoners' resolve to fight injustice remained steadfast.

The state, in its crackdown, also targeted the academia by arresting and detaining university students. Jeff Mwangi, who has contributed an article in *Mũtiiri*, and Titus Andungosi, who was the chairman of the university students' union at the time, were some of the students who were detained. The action of the government caused unrest in Kenyan universities which led to more use of force against the students. In "Kiriro Gia Ciana Ciitu" (The Cry of Our Children) (35), Kĩmani wa Njogu laments the killing of University of Nairobi students who were shot dead by the police in February 10, 1985 while they had gathered to pray for peace in the country. The rampant abuse of power bred more opposition. Thus more people were jailed, more protestors were killed, and many others fled to exile.

In the face of state repression, Kenyan writers found solace in the hope that the situation would come to change in future. They foresaw a future in which justice and freedom would triumph over dictatorship. Endurance, resilience and hope for freedom are conditions commonly expressed in Kenyan literature that find expression in *Mũtiiri*.

Mazrui's poem "Ni Igatucokerera" (Everything will come back to us) for instance expresses the confidence that all the workers and peasants who were dispossessed of their rights would get them back:

Gikūyū	English
Njuui ithereraga wega na gikeno	Rivers flowing in happiness
Maria maiiyurite magakira ki	Overflowing lakes laying still
Maria manene marutaga muhuuyu	Big lakes frothing
Hugururuini	at the shores
Macio moothe nimagaaatucokerera	All these will come back to us
Muthenya umwe ni magaatuika maitu	One day they will be our own
Kuri ari oothe meekuhota gweterera	All these will come back to us
Kuri ari oothe mekuhota kuumiriria	For those who are patient
Kuri aria oothe maanatihio	For those who've been hurt
Kuri aria maanaririra bururi uyu witu	For those who have wept for our nation
Kuri aria oothe maanaraara nja na kuumiriria heho	For those who have ever slept in the cold
Makiruirira wiyathi witu	Fighting for our freedom
Handu ha meroragire njata na mweri mari ngombo	Instead of watching the stars and the moon from slavery
Kuri acio oothe ngumeera ngumeera	To all these I say
Ciothe ni igaacooka	Everything will come back to us
Itucokerere ithui ithuothe twi hamwe	Come back to all of us together

Ituikē ciitu ringi muthenya ucio wakinya They will be ours when that day comes
(37-38) (Translated from Kiswahili by Kimani wa Njogu)

In another poem titled “Ni ri?” (When will it be?), Mazrui looks forward to the day when the heroes of the people will troop back home in victory (79). Kĩnyatti tells of his enduring hope and that of fellow political prisoners; a hope that is inspired by the history of struggle and conquest which they had inherited from legendary freedom fighters – “from Iregi/from Mwangeka and Koitalel/ from Muthoni / From Kimaathi and Kago” (“Nyamuthenya ya Muohwo Njeera,” 43). In “Thagana Therera” discussed earlier, Gĩtiiri ends the poem at a highly optimistic note. As the river pours into the ocean, its water evaporates, forms clouds and come back to the land as a blessing of rain. Thus the poet concludes:

Gĩkũyũ

English

Therera, rui runene, therera

Flow forth, great river, flow forth

Wakinya iria inene

Upon reaching the big ocean you’ll

Uthaaganwo

be welcomed

Wauruo nditiko,

And relieved all your burdens

Uituru muguu wa maai maaku

You’ll pour your flooding waters

Thagana, Mto wa Pokomoni

Thagana the river of the Pokomos

Minja kirathimo iria-ini

Spit your blessings into the ocean

Utaanahire nyamungumi na

Bless the whales and

ciumbe ciothe

all animals.

Nguva yongithie mahatha

Let the *Nguva* suckle twins

Nayothi Yothe inyootoke

Let all the earth be quenched

Riu ricamure maai,	Let the sun heat the water,
mirukiihang'arare,	vapours will rise,
Matu manyue miruki iyo,	The skies inhale the vapours
mathimbe	and sag
Maambationi huuho macookio	They'll be swept by the winds
irima-ini	up the mountains
Githiururi kia muoyo gikinyanire.	The cycle of life now complete
Matu magaithie, matutungirie, macuuhe,	The clouds, aroused will swell
Tucumbiri tuonge o ringi.	The mountain peaks suck them again.
Mbura yure,	And rain will fall
icookie buuthi kihumo,	bringing forth a bounty
Thaahu uthaahe, migiro na ironda,	Abominations and taboos will
ithire	end
Utuku uyu ukie,	Dawn for this night,
tuuhige ta tene.	we'll regain the knowledge of yore
Naguo werere ucooke bururi'	The nation will flourish yet again,
Thagana, gikiha kia muoyo,	Thagana, vein of life,
therera mindi na mindi	flow to eternity
Nawe mwana mwega uganire	And you beloved child narrate to
muingi magegania maya! (34)	the multitudes about this mystery!

The Moi government also faced a lot of unrest in early 1990s when there was agitation for the change from a single party to a multi-party political system. Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia planned to hold a pro-reform rally at Kamukunji Grounds Nairobi,

demanding the amendment of the constitution to pave way for multiparty democracy on 7th July 1990. They were arrested and detained at Kamĩĩ. In the same year, Robert Ouko, a senior politician and Minister for Foreign affairs, died in what majority of Kenyans suspected to be a state sponsored assassination. These are just a few of the events that led to increased agitation and the formation of the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) in 1991. Even though the Kenyan constitution was eventually amended in 1992 to allow the formation many parties, disunity amongst opposition politicians led to the re-election of Moi. The status quo therefore hardly changed and, in spite of increased freedom of expression, writers were still wary of the high-handedness of the government.

The events in the early 1990s in Kenya provided Kenyan writers with another historical juncture – another temporal context – for their writing. *Mũtiiri*, founded about three years later, provided a forum for publication of such literature. Gakuhi wa Kĩnyatti’s “Ciama Nyingi Goko-iya” (“Multi-partyism”) Is a poem about how the government tried in vain to suppress the multi-party movement:

Gĩkũyũ	English
Mwaka wa 1991	In 1991
Muingi wa Kenya	The people of Kenya
Makiiyumiria	Came out
Makiuga	They said
Matari na nganja	Without doubt
Ati Kenya ikwenda	That Kenya needed
Ciama nyingi	Many parties
Thirikari ya KANU	The KANU government

Ikinyitwo rwathaatha	Was held by the jaws
Ikimaka muno	It panicked
Ikiheena watho	And released orders
Atongoria manyiitwo	That leaders be arrested
Magithamio na aria angi	Some were detained and others
Magiikio korokoro (75)	Were jailed

The poet uses a simple language and structure to effectively communicate his message in the poem. Similarly, in “Mucemanio Kaamukunji” (A Meeting at Kamukunji), Bantu Mwaũra talks of how “the vultures of the nation” sent by “Nyakondo wa Gathimbu” (the Ogre of the rod) (91 – 92) descended on the people who had gathered at Kamukunji grounds with whips and tear gas canisters maiming many people:

Gikũyũ	English
Mucemanio Kaamukunji	A Meeting at Kaamukunji
Itungati	The warriors
cia Wiyaaathi, uuma na ihooto	of freedom ,truth and justice
ni cia thandire mbu	yelled
ni bururi gukaya	as the nation screamed
na toнду gutiri ikayaga itari nume	and no one screams for nothing
cikiuga tucemanie	they planned a meeting
kaamukunji kiharo kia wiyathi	at Kaamukunji the freedom square
namo mahuru ma bururi	then the monsters of the nation
matongooreetio ni ria	led by
Nyakondo wa Gathimbu	the ogre of the rod

magitworoota na ka-mwera	pointed at us, warning,
gutukayakaiya	daring us
ati turoohitia	to try
Itungati	The warriors
mbari ya Iregi	the descendants of Iregi
igicuna tiiri ikiuga	licked the soil and swore
gutiri irumaga keeri hinya uragira kuingi	no one reigns for another season,
Kaamukunji no tugacemania	Kaamukunji we shall go

(91-92)

The poem captures the unwavering resolve of Kenyans who were opposed to one party dictatorship to attend the meeting that would mobilise people to rise up against an unjust system. The functionaries of the repressive regime are referred to in metaphors of beasts like vultures and ogres to show their dehumanized nature.

Beside the themes of postcolonial repression and resistance, Kenyan literature continued to engage on other issues of social concern. The gap between the rich and the poor is the subject of Mwaũra's poem "Citi: Makuruta Matu-ini na Makuruta Mikuru-ini" (City: Cruising in the Skies and Cruising in the Gullies). In the poem, the persona is blinded by the glaring reflection from the windows of a luxurious car that cruises by while on the pavement he meets a beggar woman surrounded by her street children, pleading for money. The persona laments:

Gĩkũyũ

English

Aaria magicaaya ni huuni

While those ones are groaning after overeating

Me makuruta matu-ini	In their sky bound cruises
Aya maraacaya ni huuta	These ones are groaning because of hunger
Me mikuru-ini	In the gullies
Ino niyo “city”	This is the “city”
Ino niyo Kenya njeeru. (133) This is the new Kenya.	

The juxtaposition of the urban poor and the rich underlines the heartlessness of the city, which is here presented as a metaphor of the new nation. There is glaring economic inequalities between the rich and the poor. The persona blames this disparity on poor governance. The bourgeoisie are greedy and insensitive to the plight of the suffering masses to the extent that they do not realize that the people are getting restless.

The suffering of the urban proletariat is also the subject of Al Amin Mazrui’s poem “Mathare” translated from Kiswahili by Kĩmani wa Njogu. The poem talks of urban squalor and hard life that is characteristic of slums such as Mathare in Nairobi where life is as depicted in the poem:

Gĩkũyũ	English
Utuuro wa nguucanio	A life of struggle
Iria righthuguthio ni maai kurura	A sea swelling with bitter waters
Nduma neene itumanite	Thick darkness
Iiyuire bururi wothe	spreading through the nation
Mikuru-ini	In the valley
Mukuruini wa gikuu na muoyo (39)	The valley of life and death

Just like Mwaũra, Mazrui attributes the problem of urban dispossession to poor political leadership. As Wairimũ wa Mĩriĩ confirms in her poem “Thamaki Njega” [Good fish], Kenyans won independence, “the good fish”, only to lose it in the polluted waters of bad leadership – greed, selfishness, and tyranny (31). The introduction of multi-party politics in 1992 in Kenya does not make life better. The masses’ disillusionment and disaffection towards the political class persists. The formation of tribal parties leads to disunity and increased tribalism that makes the country easily drift back to dictatorship as Gakuhĩ wa Kĩnyatti indicates in his poem “Ciama Nyingi Goko-iyā” (73) (Many Parties in Vain). Gatua wa Mbũgua’s “King’ei ng’undui-ini ciitu” (The cutthroat in our Farmyard) shows that the country remains a country of “King’ang’i, kingei’ mung’ang’ithia and mang’eani” (the crocodile, the cutthroat, tormentors and murderers) (121).

Ndung’u Mutua underscores the bitterness and increased political consciousness among the people in his poem “Mutikanjiekie Kiara Iniuru” (Do not poke your finger into my nose). The poem warns the politicians to keep their battles to themselves for the common people have lost patience with them and are raring to rise against the oppressors (82). This voice of protest is echoed in many other works in the journal. The citizenry is now agitated and questioning the government as in Bantu Mwaũra’s poem “Nuu na ti nunu?” (Who is it and not silence), in which the poetic persona wonders who brought so many evils into the country:

Gĩkũyũ

English

Nuu wathagumirie muthithu wa bururi?

Who chewed the national coffers?

Nuu wainikiriria ikumbi ria bururi?

Who emptied the national granary?

Ni kirimu kiriku giakundania

kieha gicagi kigima?

Nuu na ti nunu? (113)

Who brought sorrow and

misery all over

Who is it and it's not silence?

It is in this spirit of protest that “Rwanakinya” (When it has Arrived) by Wangari wa Macharia announces the end of greed and oppression by the leaders who have eaten everything including waste matter to the extent that their stomachs are sagging. According to the poem, these imposters have fallen asleep and cannot see that the storm of change is raging. The persona says that the flooded river of the revolution has broken its banks and is now drowning the KANU government (112). The poem symbolically alludes to the 2002 elections in Kenya in which the ruling party lost power to the opposition after having ruled the country since independence in 1963.

The poems cited above are a reflection of the writers’ interpretations of post-independent Kenya. They are a literary contribution to the perennial discourse on Mau Mau, dispossession, disillusionment and resistance to authoritarianism in Kenya. The writers used *Mũtiiri* as a platform for revisiting issues that have preoccupied writers and critics in Kenya. Notably, the writer preferred literary genre in exposing the postcolonial ruptures in Kenya is poetry. Poetry is a genre that expresses strong feelings and gives deep insights into human experience which may explain why it was the preferred genre for the writers in *Mũtiiri*. Besides, poetry takes less time and space to write and publish, and has widely been used in literature of resistance to authoritarianism. That they were writing these issues in *Gĩkũyũ* may have given the ideas a freshness that inspired a spirit of novelty and experimentation that urged the writers on. The enthusiasm that writing in *Gĩkũyũ* generated must have been more profound in the more personal writings such as

Kĩnyatti's prison memoirs. Writing in Gĩkũyũ in a journal published in America inevitably places *Mũtiiri* in the context of the politics of language in African literature which is the issue I discuss in the next section.

3.6 Language, Popular Culture and Technology

In all his editorials in *Mũtiiri*, Ngũgĩ reiterates that the journal's principle mission is to nurture the growth of Gĩkũyũ and to demonstrate that native African languages can express modern ideas as effectively as the languages of ester while colonial masters. In the editorial to the second volume, for instance, Ngũgĩ says that the successful publication Volume One was of great historical significance:

Gĩkũyũ

Mũtiiri ni yatemeire thiomĩ cia Abirika njira. Maundu maria yakuuĩite, kuuma uhoro wa thiomĩ nginya o wa makompiuta, ni moonanirie atĩ kuna gutiri kauugi ona kariku ga tene kana ka matuku aya, gatangukuu ni thiomĩ cia Abirika. (7)

English

Mũtiiri has charted the way forward for African languages. Its content, ranging from issues of language to issues of computers demonstrates that there is no knowledge that cannot be borne by African languages.

In the above statement, Ngũgĩ suggests that *Mũtiiri* has provided a forum for African writers to demonstrate the potential of African languages to express ideas in written literature, modern technology and culture. This section examines how the writers in the journal have addressed the issue of Gĩkũyũ as a language that can effectively express contemporary ideas.

Mũtiiri emerged from the background of, among other contexts, the language debate in African literature. The debate goes back to the early days of modern African literature with the 1962 African writers of English expression conference held at Makerere University providing one of the earliest opportunities for a live debate on what the appropriate language of expression for African writer should be. Two outstanding camps have always emerged – the one advocating the use of native African languages on one hand and the one calling for the acceptance of languages of former colonial masters such as German and Portuguese on the other. Achebe is perhaps the most cited advocate of the latter camp. In *Hopes and Impediments* (1988), Achebe defends his preference of English saying that the people of his country, Nigeria, have already embraced it as the language of their expression. He says that “For me it is ... a pragmatic matter A language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself” (63). This argument is countered by Ngũgĩ whose *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) is a collection of essays advocating the use of African languages.

Karin Barber takes issues with such a position as Achebe and other postcolonial critics have taken in which preference is given to the languages of ex-colonizers over indigenous African languages. Barber notes that postcolonial criticism has been pre-occupied with the question of “the postcolonial other conveniently articulate in English and consolingly pre-occupied with his or her relations to the centre – ‘writing back’ in a language the ex-colonizers can understand because it is a modified register of their own” (3). Barber faults critical perspectives such as those modelled along commonwealth criticism (criticism based on the relationship between Britain and former colonies) as being inadequate:

The early stage of self-denigration and espousal of British values is succeeded by a phase of rejection of colonial culture and then its radical re-appropriation. The periphery now takes on the culture and language of the centre and transforms it, breaking it, infusing it with local registers, and refashioning it so that it speaks with the voice of the marginalized. Instead of hegemonic English we get a plurality of local englishes. (6)

There is therefore the tendency in postcolonial criticism to ignore literatures in indigenous languages or to have them “strongly yoked to orality and the pre-colonial order” (9). Barber’s arguments correspond to a great extent to Ngũgĩ’s position on language in African literature which he has written and spoken about in various forums including *Mũtiiri*.

In the editorial to its inaugural issue, Ngũgĩ reiterates that *Mũtiiri*’s key objective is to spearhead the revival of “ruthiomi rwitu, thiomi ciitu cia Kenya, na thiomi ciitu cia Abirika” (“our language, our Kenyan languages, and our African languages”) (8). One of Ngũgĩ’s major arguments in this editorial is that creative writers play a major role in liberating their languages. He contends that African creative writers have to be at the forefront of developing their languages as it happened with languages such as English, Italian, Russian and Vietnamese. According to Ngũgĩ, African writers should follow in the footsteps of writers like John Milton, Shakespeare and Dante who chose to write in their native languages and stop developing colonial languages (16-17). He finds the claim that African languages do not have adequate vocabulary in politics, philosophy, entrepreneurship, science, and technology untenable. This argument is a challenge to African writers who have apparently failed to rise up to the task of writing in their native

languages. Ngũgĩ seems to suggest that it is the creative writers who have failed. We can therefore guess that he may have founded the journal in a bid to inspire Gĩkũyũ writers to write in their native language.

In “Kingeretha: Ruthiomi Rwa Thi Yothe? Kaba Githwairi!” (English: A Language for the Whole World? Better Kiswahili!), Ngũgĩ asserts that “ruthiomi ni ruo bengi ya kiririkano kia muingi. Ruthiomi niruo thitoo ya utonga wa meeciria ma ruriri.” (“Language is the bank of a peoples’ memory. Language is the storehouse of a nation’s intellectual wealth”) (85). He denounces the racism and oppression of the colonizing languages such as English towards African languages and contends that the mentality that one should disarrange and impoverish others so as to remain strong and wealthy should be discarded (94-95). The essay was first presented in a British Broadcasting Corporation conference on the English language in 1988. To prove his case that African languages could effectively communicate modern ideas, Ngũgĩ, using a translator, presented the paper in Gĩkũyũ to an audience that had little if any acquaintance with the language. He was then demonstrating that the medium of translation would enable African languages to communicate to people who were not users of the languages. The article was later published in the *Yale Journal of Criticism*, an affirmative and symbolic act in which a native African language was being inserted in the mainstream of the Western academy.

Wambui wa Gĩthiora shares her memories in “Githomo Giakwa” (“My Education”), explaining how she went through the Kenyan education system from childhood to adulthood and how in the process she acquired both Gĩkũyũ and English. As a child she was excited to learn how to read and speak her mother-tongue as the system encouraged it. But in the 1960s, there was a new education system that emphasized the learning of the

English language at the expense of local languages. Speaking in mother-tongue was banned in schools and a monitor was used to establish those who spoke in Gĩkũyũ. They would be humiliated and punished for even “laughing in Gĩkũyũ” (143). The books they used had Indian children as the interlocutors and this alienated the African pupils. The use of local languages would disappear completely when one joined secondary school. Generally, the education rewarded those who excelled in English by, for instance, making them easily get jobs, while those who did not do well in the language were punished by being denied employment opportunities. The essay shows the major role that colonial education played in the systematic denigration of African languages in Kenya.

The debate on the relationship between languages and identity-formation has also focused on the issue of the acquisition of English/European names by Africans. In an interview with Harish Trivedi cited earlier in this chapter, Ngũgĩ has argued that dropping his English name was one of his initial steps in his move to decolonize his identity and in his decision to use Gĩkũyũ as the language of his creative writing (401). In “Witagwo Atia?” (What is Your Name?), Mwangi wa Mũtahi sees names as indices of cultural identity. From the days of slavery when the slaves were given new names that obliterated their African roots to the spread of Christianity where baptismal names were used to propagate colonial ideologies, the whites used their names to spread their colonizing influence. The Europeans mapped their colonial territory by renaming geographical places such as Lake Victoria which was named after the 19th Century British Queen. The writer urges Africans to wake to up to the reality of the dehumanizing nature of acquiring foreign names.

Being a journal of literature and culture, *Mūtiiri* naturally engages in the discourses of popular culture in Gĩkũyũ. There are also analyses of popular artistic forms such as gĩcaandĩ and popular music, as well as discussions on two popular theatre groups – the Kamĩrĩthũ village theatre group and Whispers Bar Theatre. In all cases, popular art forms are seen as expressions of some of the dynamics of the society in terms of its cultural, economic and political realities. Significant to this section is the way some poems and narratives published in the journal express their content using the idiom of popular Gĩkũyũ discourse.

John Storey explains culture as the “texts and practices whose principal function is to signify, to produce or to be the occasion for the production of meaning” (2). He goes on to define popular culture as culture that is “widely favoured or well liked by many people though it may lack the formal complexity that is associated with what is considered “high culture” (5). Wanjala explains that “popular mass culture” is “a form of entertainment accessible to the ordinary people” such as films and music (“Popular Culture in East Africa” 216) and that, today, popular literature refers to “non-canonical works which capture themes which occur in popular press” (240-241). Popular literature may not necessarily be defined by a work’s lack of complexity as such a conclusion may be contested and disproved. What stands out as common to the understanding of popular art forms is their mass appeal. This understanding applies to both oral traditional works and written works of literature. Popular literature is one of the best exemplars of how a language can be manipulated to create aesthetic effects as is evident in *Mūtiiri*.

Kĩmani’s “Wĩtiire na Gĩcaandĩ” (“Support Yourself with Gĩcaandĩ”) is an example of how *Mūtiiri* has provided a forum for engagement with popular culture in Gĩkũyũ. In

Reading Poetry as Dialogue, Kĩmani observes that gĩcaandĩ is “riddle-like dialogue poetry [that] seems to epitomize simultaneity of co-operative competitiveness, a test of wits, problem posing and problem solving” (153). Kĩmani explores the nature and function gĩcaandĩ as well as its performance as an oral art form. Gĩcaandĩ as poetry that “explored deep philosophical ideas” (*Mũtiiri* 2, 137) and one whose “dialogic nature enhanced harmony and egalitarianism in the traditional Gĩkũyũ society” (137) is, for *Mũtiiri*, a case in point where Gĩkũyũ has effectively been used as a language of literary expression. Kĩmani’s discussion of gĩcaandĩ in *Mũtiiri* also points to the role of the journal in “[r]ecuperating [] disappearing traditional art form[s]” (Gĩtĩtĩ, *Recuperating a traditional art form* 114). Kĩmani thus invites the readers to engage with gĩcaandĩ as they would in a performance of the poem in the traditional setting.

“Kamaru Mwarimu wa Muingi” (Kamaru the People’s Teacher”) is another item of popular culture in *Mũtiiri*. The essay is Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ’s critical appraisal of Joseph Kamarũ, a renowned Gĩkũyũ popular musician. In the essay, Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ asserts that artists in local languages are social analysts who relate and interpret the history, politics and culture of their people. They also play the role of prophets and act as custodians to their vernacular languages. Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ thus sees the role of contemporary musician as similar to that of the traditional oral artist whose primary duty was to educate his society. The essay credits vernacular languages for their capacity to communicate and entertain and again dismisses the premise that African languages are inferior.

In the same vein, Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ has written about the Kamĩrĩĩthũ community theatre in “Kamĩrĩĩthũ: Kĩmũrĩ Kĩa Abirika” (“Kamĩrĩĩthũ: The Torch of Africa”). The community theatre was an example of popular theatre which, as stated earlier in this study, was

founded by Ngũgĩ and the workers and peasants of the Kamĩĩĩthũ village in 1977. Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ's article highlights the egalitarian nature of this project in the way it involved the villagers right from the research stage where they selected songs from the repertoire of traditional songs of their community; their collective contribution in developing and editing the scrip of *Ngahiika Ndeenda*, in auditioning for the cast, in the rehearsals and even in the construction of the stage and auditorium where the performances took place. Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ conceives Kamĩĩĩthũ's initiative as a phenomenon that occupies a pivotal place in the history of theatre in Kenya. Its spirit epitomized the rise of an indigenous African theatre that openly addressed local concerns. The writer concludes:

Gĩkũyũ

Kamĩĩĩthũ yari ugima wa mathaako ma Kiabirika bururi-ini. Kamĩĩĩthũ yari njira kuuga mathako ma Giikenya ni mariku, na mathaakagwo na thiomu iriku, na nuu makoragwo makiariria . . . Kamĩĩĩthũ niyonanirie hinya wa ngwataniro ya muingi. (49)

English

Kamĩĩĩthũ was the coming of age of the African theatre in the country. Kamĩĩĩthũ was an avenue to assert what Kenyan drama is, its language and its intended audience . . . Kamĩĩĩthũ demonstrated the solidarity of the masses.

Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ is here acknowledging the role of popular theatre in promoting vernacular languages on one hand, and the suitability of these languages as languages of cultural expression on the other hand.

Mbũgwa wa Mũngai has written about Wahome Mũtahi as a humour columnist, a playwright and producer of popular ‘bar theatre’, and a novelist. In “Wahome Mũtahi: Gukunguira Hinya wa Mitheko” (“Wahome Mũtahi: Celebrating the Power of Laughter”) wa Mũngai gives an account of his personal experiences with Mũtahi as an ardent reader of “Whispers”, Mũtahi’s humorous newspaper column, and later in Mũtahi’s theatre productions and one-on-one conversations with the writer. As wa Mũngai notes, Mũtahi who was jailed in 1986 as a Mwakenya suspect, survived jail and came to make Kenya laugh at its foibles (86). His experimentation with the ‘bar theatre’ in which he wrote and produced highly satirical plays in Gĩkũyũ such as the play “Mugaathe Mubogothi” (“His Excellency the Babblers”) which castigated dictatorship and the corruption of the political elite in Kenya was very much like Ngũgĩ’s Kamĩrĩĩthũ project. Both initiatives were not only produced in an environment of repression by the government but were also protesting the reign of dictatorship and corruption in Kenya. In addition, they used Gĩkũyũ as the language of their imagination and both had a vision of a revolution that would come in future.

Despite having a relatively expanded democratic space in the 1990s, Mbũgwa observes that Wahome operated with the fear of a replay of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ crackdown by the intolerant government which was, by and large, the target of his satire (87). Wanjala has also discussed Mũtahi elsewhere and argued that Mũtahi was an influential popular literature writer in the early 1990s when Kenyans clamoured for the expansion of democratic space and freedom of expression. Wanjala says that the “alternative press” played a major role in the struggle for change and sees the works of Mũtahi as a “new type of political commitment . . . where writers wrote in committed way but with a lot of

humour and satire” (“Popular Culture” 241). Mbũgwa’s article in *Mũtiiri* helps the reader to appreciate Wahome and the role of the creative writer in representing and interrogating the political history of the nation using humour and satire, and also to celebrate Wahome’s contribution in developing indigenous popular theatre in Kenyan languages.

Mũtiiri has also published items that appropriate some forms of popular culture in their rendition. Gĩtĩtĩ, for example, has used graffiti as an art form that can be used to subvert an unjust political system that, for instance, resorts to censorship and police brutality to suppress voices of protest. Riddling is another form that is alluded to in a section titled “Ndai cia bururi” (The riddles of the nation). In this section, Kĩmani, for instance, poses a riddle in “Ndai” (“Riddle”) about a place his poetic persona visited and found everything done in unorthodox manners.

Gĩkũyũ

English

Ndai

Riddle

Ndi na ndai ngugutegera

I have a riddle for you

Umitegure wigwatiire

Unriddle it for yourself

Waremwu uuhe kigacwa

if you fail – a prize for me

Nigeetha ngutegurire

to unriddle it for you

Ndaathiire thaama ya kundu

I once visited a place

Ngitheka ngiita Maithori

Where I laughed to tears

Ni mbia iikuria tunyaau

Rats prey on cats

Na thiiya ikahita ngui

Antelopes hunt the dog

Ni athuuri maraamia nyumba

And old men defecate inside the house

Magikaanagio ni Ciana	as their children try to stop them
Na ndakinya thibitari	When I got to hospital
Ngiona mukami wa ng'ombe	I saw the milk man
Agitheeca arwaru ciindano	Injecting people
Naake ndagitaari muhindi	While an Indian doctor
E ruuru-ini akiriithia	Was grazing cows in the bush
Ngiathamia kanua ngimaka	My mouth went agape
Ndoona muruthi munene	When I saw a huge lion
Uteng'retio ni ng'ombe	Being chased by a cow
Ta njira mundu wa nyumba	Tell me my kinsman
Kundu kuu wakumenya? (27)	Do you know this place?

Just as a riddle, the poem cites several puzzling situations, and poses a question to imaginary respondents who should give the poser a prize if they fail to get the correct answer. The poem is a witty comment on the deprived and chaotic nature of the society in the persona's world. It is a society that is full of ironies, where the natural order of things has been contravened and corrupted. Besides, hierarchies of power relations have collapsed giving room for subversion. Indeed the victim has turned on the victimizer. The concluding question of the riddle suggests that the place alluded to is a specific place where a discerning kinsman should know well. The poem was published in 1997, a period in Kenya when opposition politicians had intensified their criticism of the Moi government. The poem makes reference to increased freedom of expression in Kenya in

the 1990s and continued dictatorship and corruption by those in power which undermined moral authority to rule.

Apart from demonstrating that Gĩkũyũ is an effective language of artistic imagination, the contributors in *Mũtiiri* have shown how the language can develop by borrowing from other languages. The writers have also discussed the relationship between vernacular languages and development in science and technology. In its determination to spread ‘civilization’ to the rest of the world, Europe sought to stamp its influence in all spheres of life of the colonial subjects. One sphere that has been less politicized as a legacy of colonialism is that of science and technology. A few articles in *Mũtiiri* are an exploration of knowledge in the fields of computers, agriculture, business and even the implication of science and technology to the use of African languages in expressing knowledge in these fields.

In his essay “Witiire na Kompiuta” (Support yourself with Computers), Gĩthogori notes that the reason why the colonialist subdued Africans and reigned over them was because they had superior weapons of war. Gĩthogori recommends that Africans should keep abreast with technological developments and warns: “Matuku maya twerekeire, mbaara ndiriikorwo iri ya matharaita, iriikorwo iri ya mauugi meegii tekinorojia ya moohoro, na twaga kwimenyerera no tuukuhooteka ringi” (In future, war will not be fought with guns, it will be a war of information technology, and if we are not careful we will be conquered once again] (137). He notes that the people who will be left behind in the development knowledge in computers will end up being enslaved again by neo-colonialists. Even neo-colonial governments are bound to abuse computers as instruments of political control as much as the bourgeoisie class will take advantage of the proletariat by using computers as

tools of exploitation. The writer therefore seems to suggest that we must develop our languages to be able to express our knowledge of computers in them as this will lead to widespread understanding of computer gadgets.

Gĩthogori proceeds to invent new Gĩkũyũ words which he uses to educate his readers on the parts and functions of computers. These include such words as ‘handiwea’, ‘kiimbundi’, ‘ndithiburii’ and ‘thibiyu’ (139), which he has borrowed from the English words ‘hardware’, ‘keyboard’, ‘display’ and ‘CPU’ respectively. He also enlightens the reader on how computers are used to process and communicate information, how ‘mondemu’ [modem], ‘netiwaki’ [network], ‘intaneeti’ (internet) help one to “guceera kuraihu na gwaku” (travel far from your home) (143). Gĩthogori’s essay underscores the need for Africans to keep abreast of technological advancement especially in Information and Communication Technology in order to keep in pace with development trends in the modern age. He affirms that the mastery of modern technology will not only keep neo-colonialism at bay but also help Africans to engage in wider national and transnational transactions.

However, Gĩthogori’s invention of Gĩkũyũ words for computer parts and processes is mechanical and self-defeatist as he derives the words from English which he purportedly is running away from. Users of these words must first understand the English words for them to make sense of the new Gĩkũyũ words. This ironic situation proves that despite the fact that native African languages have potential for growth and increased capacity to communicate modern epistemologies, we cannot dispense with European languages for it is them that constitute the grammar of European modernity. Even in contemporary

registers of spoken African languages, there is increased borrowing of words from European languages.

Gatua wa Mbũgwa looks at the relationship between language and agriculture in his essay “Thiomi cia Afrika na Urimi” (African Languages and Agriculture.” The writer argues that the colonialist subjugation of African languages led to loss of indigenous knowledge including that in agriculture. He advances Ngũgĩ’s theory of language that “Thiomi nicio makumbi na mabengi ma maugi ma andu” (languages are the granaries and the banks of peoples’ epistemologies) (43). He argues that to promote the use of a given language is to promote the agricultural practices of its users. When the educated class starts speaking the language of foreigners, they will tend to prefer products named in that language and its culture. A farmer who was growing traditional vegetables such as “terere na managu” “terere and manage” (47) may start growing cabbages because it is what the speakers of the English language are asking for.

Mbũgwa links agricultural practices in formerly colonized countries to imperialism by explaining how traditional mixed farming whose emphasis on food crops was systematically replaced by cash crop farming brought by the white settlers. The introduction of modern farming was one of the motivations of the imperial project’s determination to exploit the colonized. Apart from taking their land, the colonizers used the land to grow cash crops that would provide raw materials for their industries back home. Modern farming was therefore part of the capitalist system that ended up exploiting the dispossessed Africans who were now forced to work in the colonial settlers’ plantations. Neo-colonial exploitation has persisted as most formerly colonized countries are still used merely as the sources of raw materials for industries in the West.

At another level, Mbũgwa argues that African land has been abused by being used for military purposes. He notes:

Gĩkũyũ

Migunda iria yatigara handu ha kuhanda irio, miingi niiria ihandagwo maini (mines) kana micinga, mbomu na indo ingi cia mbaara . . . nyingi cia cio cia kuma thi cia Ruraya rwa mwena wa ruguru. Migunda taino mihande matharaita igethagwo o gikuu kana wonje handu ha kugethwo irio ni ene migunda. (50)

English

The remaining land instead of being planted with food crops, most of it is planted with mines or guns, bombs or other weapons of war... most of it from the West. Such a land which is planted with weapons only yields bombs or maimed people instead of food for the land owners.

Africa has had many conflicts precipitated by neo-colonial regimes in power. Besides, African countries have provided ground for military training for Western nations. Mbũgwa suggests that to overcome such violation of land and human rights in Africa, Africans must protect their languages and cultures, and reject neo-colonialism.

The peak of *Mũtiiri's* engagement in the politics of African languages debate is its publication of the presentations at the year 2000 conference, "Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures in the Twenty First Century" which was held in Asmara, Eritrea. Ngũgĩ was the chief convener of this meeting which attracted participants from all over Africa, the Caribbeans and America. Several writers in *Gĩkũyũ*, most of whom were active contributors to *Mũtiiri* since its inception in 1994, attended the meeting.

Some of the essays discussed above such as wa Mũngai's essay on Wahome Mũtahi and Gatua wa Mbũgua's discussion on language and agriculture were presented at this conference.

The Asmara conference, which was said to be the first ever on African languages (*Mũtiiri* 8, 1), came up with what was dubbed as "The Asmara Declaration" (2-3). The discussants interrogated the place of African languages in epistemological research, publishing, and governance in Africa and the world at large. According to the declaration, Africans and the rest of the world should celebrate the richness of African languages and literatures. The participants noted that in spite of the many challenges facing African languages, the languages would survive for years to come. In addition, the declaration recognized the retrogressive effects of colonialism on the African continent and decried the oddity of the use of languages of former colonial languages in Africa. Taking place at the onset of a new millennium, the conference called for a new beginning for the continent to repossess its languages and thus secure the heritage of its people.

In conclusion we may note that the founding of *Mũtiiri* was to a large extent geared towards the promotion and development of Gĩkũyũ as a language that could express ideas in the context of European modernism. In "Mazruiana and Global Language: Eurocentricism and African Counter-penetration" Al Amin Mazrui, notes that Ali Mazrui, who was at the time *Mũtiiri* was founded the vice president of International African Institute in London, had asked Ngũgĩ to make it a bilingual Gĩkũyũ-Kiswahili journal to expand its readership. Al Amin notes that Ngũgĩ,

[E]xpressed a concern that a bilingual *Mũtiiri* would foster a kind of dependency relationship between Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili that may not be in the developmental interest of Gĩkũyũ. To Ngũgĩ then . . . Africa's linguistic counter-penetration would be enhanced if African languages could separately demonstrate self-sufficiency and self-reliance as a media of intellectual, scholarly and technological discourse. (169)

Ngũgĩ may therefore seem to have been essentialist in his conception of *Mũtiiri*'s role as journal that would advance linguistic nationalism. Nevertheless, if Ngũgĩ's ambition in founding *Mũtiiri* was to insert Gĩkũyũ – a native African language – in the mainstream of cosmopolitan world languages, then he has the support of Karin Barber who contends that “there are more Yoruba speakers than speakers of Swedish, Norwegian and Danish put together and no one suggests that the Scandinavians ‘have no voice’ but to stop writing in their own languages forthwith (13). Indeed for Barber,

The model proposed by postcolonial criticism – the model in which colonial glottophagia silences the native until he or she masters and subverts the colonizer's language – is based on a fundamental misconception, almost a will to ignorance. By casting the indigenous as always and only outside or underneath the ‘mainstream’ literary discourses of modern Africa, it turns a blind eye to what is in fact the actual mainstream, the cultural discourses of the majority, in most of Africa. (11)

Barber is here problematizing the notion of ‘mainstream languages’ which colonialism and its Eurocentric legacy have made seem to be a preserve of European languages. It is

this notion that Ngũgĩ sought to disabuse in starting a journal in Gĩkũyũ. Though it did not reach a wide readership of Gĩkũyũ speakers who were its ideal readers, the journal created an avenue for the writers to express themselves in their native language which for them was a kind of homecoming from a linguistic exile. The condition of exile is another postcolonial reality that we encounter in *Mũtiiri* as I highlighted earlier in this chapter and as I proceed to further discuss in the next section.

3.7 Home and Exile

Mũtiiri can be described as a Kenyan journal in exile. A majority of its contributors are writers who were either forced into exile by the Kenyan government or people who willingly migrated to the diasporas in pursuit of opportunities for educational and career advancement. *Mũtiiri* is Kenyan because a majority of the articles published in it are about experiences which some of the writers underwent in Kenya before they went abroad. There are, however, a few articles on the subject of life in exile and the feeling of dislocation, alienation and nostalgia for the Kenyan home that their writers have experienced in the diasporas. Its status as a journal in exile is further implicated by its publication in America, a continent away from the native land of Gĩkũyũ speakers. Exile is therefore a major condition that has shaped the character of *Mũtiiri*.

One writer who chronicles his experiences in exile in *Mũtiiri* is Cege wa Gĩthiora. His long poem “Marua ma Maitu” (A Letter to My Mother) is a semi-autobiographical account of the poet’s experiences when he migrates to Mexico in pursuit of higher education. Gĩthiora’s plight, as brought out in the poem, is like that of many writers in exile who as Salman Rushdie notes in *Imaginary Homelands* “are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars

of salt” (10). Published in three instalments in Volumes One, Two and Three, “Marua ma Maitu” gives testimony to the tribulations of Kenyans living in the diaspora and the nostalgia with which they remember their native country. Below is the opening stanza.

Gikūyū	English
Maitu	Mother
Ni nii muuruguo Cege	It’s your son Cege
Ni nii uria wagutigire na wega	It’s I who left you in peace
Agithii murimo gwetha uugi	Went abroad in search of knowledge
Agigitiga gikeno na thuutha	And left pleasure behind
Agikora gikeno kia eene ruraaya	And found the pleasure of foreigners
Kiari kieha hari we	Was misery for him
Rukuri rwao rucamaga ta muthunga	Their meat-pie tastes like bitter weed
Mwana na aciari ni a riika rimwe	Child and parents are agemates
Riera no ta ndoogo ya mukungugu	The weather is thick smoke
Maitu	Mother
Ndaaririre maithori making’ara	I wept till my tears dried up
(25)	

In this introductory stanza, the autobiographical persona sounds disconsolate. He tells us about the cultural shock he encounters in Mexico. He laments with a deep sense of loss how his life in exile has deprived him of the comfort he enjoyed back in his home country. As the poem later unfolds, and with despair and longing, the persona explains how he suffers from racial discrimination and loneliness, and how he thinks of the great distance between Mexico and Kenya. He is tormented by thoughts of a return to his

native land, where he would feast on traditional Gĩkũyũ cuisine consisting of such delicacies as “ngimo, nyama cia hiihio, ndundiro, mitura, ucuru na muraatina” (ngimo, roast meat, home-made sausages, porridge and muratina, the traditional beer) (20). The mother in Gĩthiora’s poem is symbolic of his Kenya, his motherland, with its promise of love and comfort as opposed to the life of deprivation in exile.

Another poem similar to “Marua ma Maitu” is Kĩmani’s “Thambia Maithori Maitu” (Wipe My Tears, Mother). Kĩmani wrote the poem in 1991 when he was staying in New Haven, USA as a student at the University of Yale. However, the poet does not dwell on the tribulations of life in exile. The persona in the poem is a son who is in a hurry to return to his motherland as soon as possible so that he can be with his mother who is presently ailing. The following first two stanzas capture the spirit of the poem:

Gĩkũyũ

English

Thambia Maithori, maitu, ndi njira,	Wipe my tears, mother, here I come
Njeeri wanjarire njetereria uthiu waku	Njeeri my mother let your face await me
Nindireehika nii kihii giauku	I hasten on my way, I your son
Ninguthuka njuke kuu Gicuka	I’m rushing on my way to Nairobi
Ngereire irima-ini na ndia ndiku	Traversing mountains and deep seas
Numiriire ngoro yakwa	Chasing my heart
Iria iri naawe on riu ndi kuraaya	Which is with you despite the distance
Ni nguuka gukuona ngukumbatirie	I’ll come to see and embrace you

(69)

The son acknowledges that his mother has in the past made great sacrifices for his sake and hopes to soon be by her side to console her and affirm his solidarity with her in her struggles to cope with the affliction she is undergoing. Just like Gĩthiora’s poem discussed above, the persona’s biological mother in “Thambia Maithori Maitu” is symbolic of the nation. Kĩmani wrote the poem at a time of political unrest in Kenya as opposition politicians heightened the struggle for the repeal of the Kenyan constitution in order to introduce multi-party politics. The country was ‘sick’, following years of authoritarianism as discussed earlier in this chapter. The poet actually suggests that the mother whose illness he mourns is the struggling Kenyan masses:

Gĩkũyũ

English

Meeeciiria makwa matingihuuruka

My mind can’t find peace

itookiite hari we

lest I be by your side

Njigie mugambo waku ringi

And hear your voice again

Nguhuutie gwoko gwaku maitu wanjiarire

And touch your hand , my mother

Guoko gwaku kwa urio

Your right hand

Guoko kwanagariura tiiri

A hand that has tilled land

Kuuma Kirinyaga nginya Githumo

From Kirinyaga to Kisumu

Kuuma Mombatha nginya Karimatura

From Mombasa to Garbatulla

Niguo ndikaanaraarire

So that I may not sleep hungry

Kana thii na bara ndi njaga

Or walk naked in the streets

Kana njage ha kumaamirira

Or lack a place to stay

(69-70)

The poem is therefore an expression of the love and political commitment that some Kenyans living abroad have for their country. By the 1990s when the poem was written, globalization had increasingly become a reality and Kenyans living in the diaspora identified themselves closely with their motherland. They therefore saw it as their patriotic duty to participate especially in the country's political discourse since, as Rushdie says of Indians living outside India, "they too had a right to speak" (14) about Kenya in moments of crisis in the country.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is subtle about his experiences of life in exile in *Mũtiiri*. Exile only appears as a subtext in his love poems published in the series dubbed "Makundo ma Wendo" ("Love Knots") (*Mũtiiri* 1 81-90) in the first three volumes. Ngũgĩ is more known as a novelist, playwright and essayist and his contribution of poetry in the journal is interesting. His poetry is devoid of the open political message that we find in his novels and plays and he seems more keen on form than content in his poems. He is the sole contributor to the "Love Knots" section in the first and second volumes but his influence becomes clear when other writers follow suite and contribute to this section in subsequent issues. Ngũgĩ's poems are dedicated to Njeeri, whom he married in the United States of America in 1992. In a series of brief witty poems, Ngũgĩ explores the meaning of love. The poems are personal and intimate; petite and playful expressions of romance. They bring variety and moments of relieve from the more polemical writings that dominate the journal. Being expressions of Ngũgĩ's immense love for Njeeri, the poems can be appreciated in relation to his experience of exile. There are nuances of the hardships of a life devoid of the intimacies of love that Ngũgĩ may have led after having been separated from his first wife by the condition of exile.

“Kũrĩ Njeeri” (“For Njeeri”), for example, gives an account of how the two first met in 1989 when Njeeri had gone to receive Ngũgĩ at the Metro North Station in New York when he was going to speak in Jersey City. This meeting was a defining moment for Ngũgĩ. He confesses that he fell in love at first sight and that he at once saw an antidote for the challenges of his seven years in political exile. He says that the stories and the laughter they shared were a great relief:

Gikũyũ	English
Twatemire maingi	We talked a lot
Na makiria ma mathiina ma thaamio ya uteti	Especially about political exile
Amu riurira kwene ona riri ria uteti ri ruo	For political exile is traumatizing
Ringi ona gukira njoho ya uteti Kamĩtĩ	More than imprisonment at Kamĩtĩ
Ni uririkanaga ng’ano twakuuranirie	Do you remember stories we shared
Kana mitheko twathekire muthenya ucio	or the laughter we laughed that day?
Na o rimwe tha ciaku na uthiu waku	At once your remorse, your face
Ikiharurukia miaka mugwanja ya thaama	Collapsed my seven years of exile
Riiri waku ukinjookia gwitu	Your gracefulness transported me
Rimuuru	to Limuru
Na kwanyu Mangu kuria tene	And to Mangu that was once
kwaganagwo	famous
.....
Kuinuka no tukainuka	Home we shall go
Tuthiomage cia mucii na thiomi ciitu	To speak in our tongues
Riu kiamukire maya mathime na rurimi rwitu	Take these delivered in our tongue

Ukunde ngunde tukundanie ma wendo! Let's together take sips of love!

(*Mũtiiri*1, 81)

The poem is an expression of Ngũgĩ's moment of triumph over the indignity of political and linguistic exile. The writer transforms the experience of meeting and falling in love with Njeeri into an allegory of his imaginary return from exile. He attests that her remorsefulness and gracefulness brought an end albeit momentarily to the anxieties of life in exile. It was a homecoming moment that transported the author back to his Kenyan village in Limuru. As the persona in the poem suggests, Njeeri had become the symbol of Kenya as a nation and falling in love with her a metaphor of return as Ngũgĩ symbolically repossessed his motherland and kept alive the hope of a future physical return to Kamĩĩĩthũ.

In all *Mũtiiri* can be seen as an item of nostalgia; an indulgence by *Mũtiiri* contributors in the fantasy of a romantic return to their motherland and to Gĩkũyũ, their mother tongue. Having been sent into exile, initially by the glottophagia of the colonial situation that erased their native language and culture, and later by postcolonial conditions that fractured the nationalist ideals of a free and progressive Kenya, the writers must have found a home, albeit intellectual, in *Mũtiiri*. Their poetry and expositions are narratives of spiritual return from exile. They are homecoming narratives of Ngũgĩ's invented community of new-Gĩkũyũ writers.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has been a critical engagement with *Mũtiiri* to establish what constitutes its identity as a journal of literature and culture. Since its inception in 1994, the journal has

been published in eight volumes of essays, autobiographical and imaginative works most of which are a representation of Kenya's colonial and post-colonial political and social history. Most of the essays are polemical debates on various topics such as the language of African literature, culture, gender, politics, science and technology. Poetry is the most prevalent genre of the imaginative works. There are also autobiographical works such as Kĩnyatti's memoirs of his experience as a political detainee at Kamĩtĩ Maximum Prison. Perhaps owing to the fact that the journal is published in the USA, most of the writers are Kenyans in the diaspora with a good number of them being people who fled the country in the 1980s to avoid state persecution.

There is diversity in form in the works published in *Mũtiiri*. Kenyan history and Gĩkũyũ tradition are the texts from which the writers derive the content of their imaginative works. The writers make reference to events and situations that range from the pre-colonial Kenya to the 1990s. The experiences of colonialism, Mau Mau and the emergency, neo-colonial dictatorship as well as the authors' personal narratives inform the texts and inter-texts in *Mũtiiri*. There are for instance prison narratives told in verse as in the poetry of Abdilatif Abdalla as well as in diary form as in Kĩnyatti's prison notes. The writers have used the dialect that is spoken by a high proportion of Gĩkũyũ speakers. Other than the essay by Gĩthogori on computers that borrows words from English to coin new Gĩkũyũ words, the articles in *Mũtiiri* are mostly written in a common Gĩkũyũ register.

The writers are nevertheless more experimental with the language in their poetry. The use of puns, alliteration and parallelism in, for instance, some of the political poems of Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, Gĩtĩfĩ and Bantu Mwaũra, or in the 'love knots' of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

present a creative rendition of social and political realities in an idiom that accentuates the register of the Gĩkũyũ popular culture. Experimentation is also seen in Gĩtiiri's poem in which he appropriates the epic form to narrate the tribulations and triumphs of Thagana (Tana River) which makes a troubled yet majestic conquest of the land as it flows from the peaks of Mt. Kenya down to the Indian Ocean. The river in the poem is symbolic of the spirit of a resilient and relentless struggle for freedom that the autobiographical persona, being a political detainee in Hola, and Kenyans at large aspire for. Kĩnyatti has also written an 'epic' poem, "Wiyathi: Hisituria ya Ucamba" ("Freedom: The History of Heroism"), which narrates the history of Kenya's struggle for freedom since the 1884 Berlin conference partitioned Africa into colonial states up to 1963 when Kenya got independence from the British. Satiric forms also abound in the journal such as in the racy poems of Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ. One of his poems "Uthuuri wa Uthuri" ("The Manliness of Fart") uses scatological images to satirize a dictator who uses all means to annihilate his enemies and disorganize his subjects.

A tone of anger and protest characterize most of the poems, a majority of which are a critique of the authoritarian regime that pushed some of the writers into exile. The writers have criticized Western imperialism as much as they have challenged neo-colonial greed and abuse of political power. Published away from the possibility of censorship and incrimination that was practised by the Moi regime in the 1980s, the writers have unreservedly expressed their strong feelings about the injustices perpetrated by the political class in Kenya.

The writers have also put a strong case in support of the use of the Gĩkũyũ and other African languages in articulating various forms of knowledge. The fact that *Mũtiiri* is

published in the Gĩkũyũ language is, for Ngũgĩ and its other contributors, an opportunity to showcase the richness of the language and its capacity to express contemporary ideas. Ngũgĩ's overriding influence is evident not only in the tone of protest that runs through the journal, but also in the recurrence of the themes of colonial and postcolonial Kenyan history and the writers determination to disapprove the myth of the inferiority of native African languages.

Nevertheless, writing and publishing in indigenous Kenyan languages remains a subject of heated debate. Recent government policy has required that local languages be taught in the lower primary classes up to Class Three. However, English remains the language of instruction in Kenyan schools and readership of publications in indigenous languages (other than Kisahili) is quite low. Granted that publishers are in business to make profit, the challenge of low sales of magazines and books in vernacular remains a big stumbling block to the desire to promote publication in Gĩkũyũ and other indigenous Kenyan languages.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUB-VERSIONS, RE-GENERATIONS AND THE QUEST FOR

RELEVANCE IN *KWANI?*

Let the fire burn, let the fire get them, the fire that burns inside our hearts surprise them.

Fire, fire let it announce a revolution.

(Kalamashaka, translated from Sheng by Binyavanga Wainaina,
Kwani? 01, 44)

4.1 Introduction

Kwani? made a dramatic entry onto the Kenyan literary scene. Binyavanga Wainaina's winning of the Caine Prize for Writing in Africa in 2002 heralded the rise of a new generation of Kenyan writers which, as Doreen Strauhs has argued, recuperated Kenya's place on the World literary map (21). As if the 2002 victory was not enough, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor published "Weight of Whispers" in the maiden issue of *Kwani?*, and went ahead, for a second consecutive year, to deliver the Caine Prize to the Kenyan literary stable in 2003. Thus, right from the beginning, the *modus operandi* for *Kwani?* seems to have been set: It would relentlessly make its presence felt in a bid to create new centres of focus in Kenyan literary discourse; it would burst all borders of literary production in Kenya and give voice to the voiceless (youth). In Kalamashaka's words cited above, the fire that burnt inside the hearts of previously unheard of youth had come to announce a revolution.

In a speech he made at one of the December 2013 series of events organized to celebrate ten years of *Kwani?* since its inception in 2003, Mbũgua wa Mũngai observed that the

magazine emerged from a background of a repressive political regime that had stifled the traditional spaces of intellectual discourse, especially the academy, forcing Kenyans to re-invent the spaces of creative expression. As we have already discussed in the previous chapter, the political climate in Kenya, especially after the 1982 coup attempt, was authoritarian and decidedly anti-university, forcing many academicians to either become cronies of the political class, shut up or flee to exile. According to wa Mũngai, this atmosphere contributed to proliferation of alternative and mainly informal spaces of creative expression such as the street for street comedians, the *matatu* sub-culture, bar theater, popular music and popular magazines which thrived and were able to subvert the official state controlled narratives. It is within this subversive tradition that *Kwani?* arose as an alternative space for literary and cultural expression.

Kwani? was preceded by a less publicized *Jahazi* founded by Bantu Mwaũra in 1998. The founding of the two journals seems to have been informed by similar philosophies, especially in their tendency to negate the university as their centre of consciousness and their inclination toward the civil society movement in Kenya. Garnett Oluoch-Olunya has affirmed that whereas *Transition*, the seminal East African journal of literature and culture, drew from the university, “*Jahazi* was deliberate in locating itself away from the institution” (44). As she explains:

Its reasons were two-fold. Even as the editor himself was suspicious of the prescriptive nature of such centres of power, well-known for conservatism and conformity and in Kenya shamelessly compromised by Moi, the funder, Ford was intent on building innovative institutions away from such strictures. (44)

Kwani?, which is also sponsored by Ford (an international New York based philanthropic organization), has for a long time likewise avoided association with the university – a fact evident right from its maiden issue where Wainaina exhorts upcoming *Kwani?* writers to aspire a new aesthetic. He argues that “[s]uch an aesthetic shall not be donated to us from the corridors of a university, or from the Ministry of Culture. It will come from the individual creations of thousands of creative people” (*Kwani?* 01, 6). Aurelie Journo also sees *Kwani?* as an alternative avenue for creativity in Kenya. She observes that “*Kwani?* was born outside academia and seeks to displace or relocate the locus of literary production outside what could be termed established cultural institutions” (1).

The idea that eventually culminated into the founding of *Kwani?* was hatched by Wainaina in 2001, though the journal was launched in 2003. Wainaina had been a student at Transkei University, returning to Kenya in 2000. While in South Africa he worked as a freelance writer for *G21*, an Australian based magazine, and when he arrived in Kenya he started looking for people he could relate with as a writer. In his search, he came across people who were interested in books, literature and culture, most of whom were working in the media and the civil society. He established contact with Ali Zaidi, a journalist with the *EastAfrican* newspaper. A group soon coalesced around him and started meeting at Ali’s garden every Sunday to share their writing experiences and read their writings. Some of these people included Wanjiru Kinyanjui, Yvonne Owuor, Parselelo Kantai, Tom Maliti, Njeri Kirago, Judy Kibinge and Kairu Kamau. According to Billy Kahora, the managing editor of *Kwani?* from 2005 to the time of completing this study in 2015, the group consisted of people interested in Kenya from a cultural perspective (personal interview, 2011).

Wainaina was determined to implement ideas he had encountered in South Africa as a writer. Together with the people who had now formed a writer's club, they decided to start a website that would showcase Kenyan writing. Kahora further observes that at the time, on-going literary debates kept referring back to writers of the earlier generation like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the young aspiring writers to some extent felt divorced from this debate. At around this time Wainaina submitted a story, "Discovering Home", to *G21*, which went ahead to win the 2002 Caine Prize for African Writing. This injected relief among the members who used to meet at Ali Zaidi's garden. The idea of starting a website became even more attractive and they approached the Ford Foundation with a proposal. It was found viable to start with a hard copy and the first edition had Owuor's story "Weight of Whispers" which won the 2003 Caine Prize. This was a big boost to the esteem of the members of the group. It gave *Kwani?* a new impetus and created confidence in the donors.

Kwani Trust was formed to provide the administrative structures and the group started getting some money to publish the magazine. Further encouragement came when Kantai's story "Comrade Lemma and the Black Jerusalem Boys" which was published in *Kwani?* 02 was shortlisted for the Cain Prize in 2004. It is at the same time that Billy Kahora, who had been known to Wainaina in South Africa, joined *Kwani?* as its assistant editor. Kahora introduced the component of creative non-fiction in *Kwani?* with "The True Story of David Munyakei", which was published in *Kwani?* 03.

According to Ogude and colleagues, *Kwani?* emerged in a period of post-Moi dictatorship and has been producing "literary journals and booklets born in a context of freedom and political transition" (xi). They further contend that the "new literary

tradition signalled a remarkable re-emergence of artistic and cultural re-invention that echoed back to the tradition of the 1960s and 1970s” (xi). This is an argument that is explored in greater depth by Tom Odhiambo’s critical appraisal of *Kwani?*’s achievements and failures in its first five issues. In “*Kwani?* and the Imaginations around Re-invention of Art and Culture in Kenya”, Odhiambo notes that *Kwani?* had initially set out to nurture and grow local talent but,

[T]he evidence so far suggests that the magazine has achieved little of its initial objectives, and that its stated intentions are undermined by its reliance on donor funding, its transnational and global tendencies and its editorial practices which have probably encouraged what it calls ‘non-creative fiction’ more than fiction.
(24)

Odhiambo goes on to give a profile of *Kwani?* showing how it evolved since its first issue. The issues are broadly defined by the ‘macro themes’ around which each of them revolves. He indicates that *Kwani?* 01 which published the Caine Prize winner “Weight of Whispers” drew largely from history, “was irreverent, flamboyant, and breached artistic and genre boundaries and indeed seemed to suggest a literary revolution” (27). *Kwani?* 02 was “unwilling to localize itself too much” (28) while still drawing inspiration from the Mau Mau/Bob Marley in a way that sustained its apparent revolutionary zeal, while *Kwani?* 03 was “the ‘Sheng’ edition” which as Odhiambo further argues “reads like an experiment at broadening the range of audiences for the publication” (28). *Kwani?* 04 is the post-referendum edition which is informed by “a sense of Kikuyu isolation” following the collapse of “the post-Moi dream of a corruption free and inclusive Kenya” (28). Lastly, Odhiambo notes that *Kwani?* 05 also drew from the politics of the day as it

largely published “Witness and Victim accounts” (28) of the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. Odhiambo’s discussion cited above is important to this study especially in its association of the works published in *Kwani?* with the Kenyan socio-historical context. This study delves deeper into how the details of form and content of specific texts in *Kwani?* represent the dynamics of society in Kenya and beyond from a historical perspective.

It is notable that in its quest for greater influence and acceptability, *Kwani?* has evolved into a more inclusive forum as could be adduced from its development since *Kwani?* 05. The *Kwani?* 06 issue was purely dedicated to the short story genre sourced through a themed competition on what it means to live in Kenya/Africa. *Kwani?* 07 reached out to narratives from the Kenyan/African diasporas and was again dominated by the short story. In 2012, *Kwani?* organized a novel writing competition for unpublished manuscripts which got participants from the entire African continent and beyond. The competitions have made *Kwani?* to increasingly engage with the local academia as it has sought the expertise of, among others, university teachers as judges and facilitators of workshops and seminars.

Kwani? also organizes regular reading sessions which are also geared toward expanding the participation of old and upcoming writers. Another major literary event organized by *Kwani?* is the *Kwani?* Litfest – an international festival of literature and culture that has had the participation of world renowned authors such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Helon Habila and Kojo Laing. Moreover, it has collaborated with international publishers to get rights to publish writers such as Chimamanda Adichie and Owuor in Kenya. Indeed, as it celebrated its ten years of literary and cultural production, *Kwani?* not only reflected

upon its productive past but also took the opportunity to launch Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Owuor's *Dust* (2013) both of them being *Kwani?*'s Kenyan editions of the novels.

By the end of 2014, *Kwani?* had published seven volumes of the *Kwani?* journal and ten short narratives in the *Kwanini?* Series. It had also published several works in the *Kwani?* Series which caters for works longer than the short narratives in *Kwanini?* Series such as novels and the longer works of creative nonfiction. The works produced in the *Kwani?* Series include the Kenyan editions of Adichie's novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003, 2006), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013) as well a 2010 edition of Stanley Gazemba's *The Stone Hills of Maragoli*. Others are the memoirs of Joseph Muthee's life in detention, *Kizuizini* (2006), and Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (2012). It has also published creative non-fiction stories such as Eva Kasaya's *Tale of Kasaya* (2010) and Kahora's *The True Story of David Munyakei* (2008) and an anthology of poetry *To Be a Man* (2009). In 2011, *Kwani?* co-published the stories that were shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing that year in an anthology *To See the Mountain and Other Stories*. The anthology was a co-publishing arrangement between the Caine Prize for African Writing, New Internationalist, Cassava Republic in Nigeria and Jacana Media in South Africa.

In summary, *Kwani?* takes credit for having re-generated the Kenyan literary landscape by introducing new and young writers who were hitherto unheard of and expanding the frontiers of the Kenyan literary experience by publishing new works, holding writing competitions and organizing literary activities that have animated the Kenyan literary landscape. Just like the magazines studied in the previous chapters, *Kwani?* has served as

a crucial publishing outpost for contemporary writers in Kenya and beyond. What follows below is a more detailed analysis in a survey of the journal's content and contexts.

4.2 Re-imagining Nationalism and Transnationalism

In what could be perceived as the unofficial logo of *Kwani?* is a baton stripped in the colours of the Kenyan flag, with a slogan beside it expressed in bold caps: PROUDLY KENYAN. This appears at the bottom of the back cover of the magazines as if playfully and symbolically alluding to what could have been the rudimentary inspiration and aspiration of the founders of *Kwani?*. Were they setting out to tell the Kenyan story in a manner that it had never been told before as they claimed, or were they borrowing from government policy? The argument that *Kwani?* had come to re-invigorate Kenyan literature is reiterated in the editorials of the journal and vindicated by the bulk of the content of all the issues of the magazine. Though the logo was a belated inclusion (the first editions of the first three issues of *Kwani?* did not bear it), the desire to represent the Kenyan experience and 'refurbish' Kenyan literature seems to have been the self-appointed mission of the *Kwani?* contributors. They were apparently spurred on by Wainaina who, as the founding editor, may have consciously or unconsciously sought to propagate the theme and vision of his seminal creative non-fiction autobiographical novella *Discovering Home* (2003).

Looking at the editorial statements of the journal reveals what would amount to a major editorial policy on its content. As Odhiambo argues, it would appear like *Kwani?* set out to bring together a group of "writers and others who were 'concerned' about the state of Kenya's literature" (25). In *Kwani?* 01, Wainaina embarks on his 'discovering home'

journey and traverses the Kenyan artistic space where he meets with a multiplicity of talents of people who, he reckons, had been largely unrecognized. These include artists, designers and writers who are “young self motivated people who have created a space for themselves in an adverse economy by being innovative” (*Kwani?* 01, 6)

Kwani? 02 is silent about the magazine's ambition at re-inventing the Kenyan story, most probably because it is edited by Ebba Kalondo, a Ugandan, who was standing in for Wainaina and who could have been an outsider to the journal's initial obsessions. On the contrary, Kalondo hints at the pan-Africanist vision that later catches up with *Kwani?* as he celebrates Kantai from Kenya, Monicah Arac Nyeko and Doreen Baingana, both from Uganda for making it to the 2004 Caine Prize for writing in Africa. He as well celebrates Adichie from Nigeria for her entry into the Orange Prize for Women Writing. This pan-Africanist spirit had right from the start been hinted at as significant to *Kwani?* by Owuor's “Weight of Whispers” and Mahmood Mamdani's essay both of which were based on the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Nevertheless, the spirit of Kenyan literary nationalism remained the apparent overriding focus of the *Kwani?* editors.

The arrival of Kahora as the assistant editor of *Kwani?* 03 and the subsequent issues seemed to entrench the yet amorphous nationalist agenda for the journal. Kahora was an old friend of Wainaina with whom they had time in South Africa as students and they had also come back home to, one imagines, midwife the birth of a new literary generation in Kenya. *Kwani?* 03 was spearheaded by the seven writers whom Kahora refers to as “The Limuru 7” as they were work-shopped at a ‘Limuru hiding’ in a bid to interrogate some questions that reflect the Kenyan writer today. Limuru is Ngũgĩ's Kenyan home town. In *Kwani?* 03, Kahora says: “We wanted to reflect the Kenyan street, the Kenyan

shamba, the Kenyan bar and of course the language of the Kenyan family” (6). The workshop was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the writers were aspiring to learn, as Kahora again puts it “how to scratch beyond the surface and micro narrate beyond the grand Kenyan themes affecting us today For the Limuru 7 our holy grail became to write as Kenyans speak, live and breathe” (6).

From this standpoint the journal sent forth the seven writers to travel far and wide in the country, to hunt and deliver short creative non-fiction narratives of “unpretentious powerful prose” (6). It is perhaps after these travels that Kahora came to declare a year later that Kenya is,

[An] incredible story telling space Over the last 12 months I have listened to tens of stories and even been lucky to live in some of them. And just like when I started drinking and heard one amazing narrative after the next in pubs all over the city, in *mtaa* corners . . . and I thought – Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Oh Shit what an incredible space I live in . . . and why doesn’t this come out in any of our formal and official mediums that truly tell us about the nature of the Kenyan condition. (*Kwani?* 04, i)

It would take another workshop for *Kwani?* to gather material for its fifth issue. Now steeped deep into creative non-fiction, the twin issues of *Kwani?* 05 read like documentaries on Kenya post-election violence in 2008. The bulk of their content is witness testimonials by victims of the violence, essays, reports and photographs. Ironically, some of the writers associated with *Kwani?* saw the violence as a golden opportunity for Kenya’s literary rebirth: “We now have the chance to occupy the centre .

. . . . War and conflict has been the great contemporary African themes that we have been locked out of,” (*Kwani?* 04 ii) Kahora quotes a fellow writer who called him when the violence broke out. And he agrees with him: “At long last, I explained, with the post election conflict to draw upon, the Kenyan writer no longer needed to watch from the sidelines” (ii).

Though what it publishes in *Kwani?* 05 could hardly be called literary (with the exception of poetry), the editor again claims that its efforts were groundbreaking:

We are without precedents . . . the contemporary writer is now naked and new born Our literary canon is a river run dry. . . . Today, without more contemporary defining texts of Kenya, in the absence of stories, narratives that count, we are at the danger of letting demagoguery take over. (12)

One doubts whether *Kwani?* came anywhere close to creating a new literary canon in the region in *Kwani?* 05. What remained consistent is its obsession with the Kenyan (nationalist) narrative that this time edged even more closer to newspapers reporting than the creative-non-fiction of earlier editions, complete with journalistic interviews, essays, analyses, photographs, short text messages, cartoons, illustrations and posters. Indeed in *Kwani?* 05 Part Two, Kahora, having been among the judges of commonwealth writers’ prize decried lack of submission of works from Kenya, noting that even the texts that have been awarded local prizes such as the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature are not “as incisive and full of expression, as defining as the candidates for the commonwealth prize are of their respective spaces” (12). Thus he wonders: “Are there even any defining texts for the present or the future, let alone the past” (12).

This frustration could explain why *Kwani?* decided to make a detour to “its founding premise” (*Kwani?* 06 8) which Kahora insinuates to have been fiction. Having failed to come up with contemporary creative non-fiction defining texts from Wainaina’s and Kahora’s ‘Generation X’, *Kwani?* 06 retreated to fiction which had been the backbone of *Kwani* 01 and *Kwani* 02. That this could not be work-shopped as earlier issues had done perhaps explains why *Kwani?* now adopted the prize giving strategy and announced “The Kenya I Live In Short Story Competition,” and limited the participation to only those who were born in 1978 and after. Thus what remained apparently consistent is the obsession with the idea of Kenya. Even when it decided to go further afield and source for narratives from the diasporas in *Kwani?* 07, the stories are largely about life in the “Kenyan enclaves” (*Kwani?* 07 16) abroad and those of coming back to Kenya.

Generally, evidence shows that Kenya’s political and literary history forms the background upon which *Kwani?* was founded and thrived. It hardly makes any departure from what it sees as a conservative past and indeed initially seemed poised to advance the political and nationalist project that early Kenyan writers initiated two generations ago. Just like the pioneer Kenyan writers, *Kwani?* was founded at a moment of great political and historical significance in the country following the ousting of the authoritarian Moi regime in 2002. Odhiambo affirms this by noting that, “the country was ‘bubbling’ with newness; which is the spirit with which the first issue of *Kwani?* indeed celebrates and undoubtedly promotes” (“*Kwani?* and the Imaginations” 26). It is not thus surprising that even the slogan cited above (Proudly Kenyan) echoes the slogan for the Brand Kenya government public relations department popularized by the Kibaki regime’s government spokesman, Alfred Mutua: “*Najivunia kuwa Mkenya*” (“I am proud to be a Kenyan”).

Nevertheless, just as Odhiambo has further argued, *Kwani?*'s desire to project a Kenyan identity was largely undermined by the internationalist orientation of the founding members who incidentally seemed keener about reaching out to companions from the rest of Africa and the diasporas for support and inspiration than within the country. Probably due to the influence of the Ford Foundation policies cited earlier in this chapter, the founders of the journal avoided the Kenyan academy where they could have tapped a lot of talent. Indeed, *Kwani?* initially operated much like a club of friends, head-hunting its key contributors and meeting in places that were hardly within the reach of majority of would be young aspiring writers. It may therefore seem like *Kwani?* was torn between adopting a strongly Kenyan identity and pursuing a transnational perspective. As its popularity increased, it naturally gravitated towards the latter. One thing that remained consistent about the journal is its preoccupation with the histories of Kenya and beyond as I discuss in the next section.

4.3 Representations of History in *Kwani?*

The relationship between history and literature has been widely acknowledged. History and literature complement each other in providing perceptions of social reality. As Aderemi Bamikunle observes, "literature relates to history by being a product of history . . . uses what it takes from history to reconstruct history according to the visions of literature" (73). Historical facts always find their way into literature either as actual accounts of past events or as reflections of actual events. Indeed, history provides temporal junctures upon which most works of art revolve. Kenyan writers have engaged in the reconstruction of Kenya history in a myriad of ways. Whether in fiction, in

memoirs, in poetry, or in drama, allusion to traditional myths and memorable historical events and characters is a major feature of literature.

Reading through all the issues of *Kwani?*, we encounter several accounts referring to Kenyan history way back to the pre-colonial and colonial times as well as the post-colonial contemporary moments. These include anthropological histories, social and political histories. These are expressed in the diversity of forms that constitute *Kwani?* including fiction, creative nonfiction, biographical works, essays and photographs. The texts are presented either as artefacts such as photographs of historical significance or essays and prose narratives that provide new insights to our understanding of traditional African society, the resistance to colonialism and contemporary social histories such as the problems ethnicity and political conflicts. This subsection looks at a few of the works that represent historical realities in *Kwani?*.

4.3.1 Re-telling Histories of Pre-colonial Societies

One thing that reveals *Kwani?*'s propensity towards historical narratives is its attempt to dig out the past of some tribes in Kenya, tracing it back to their pre-colonial traditional setup *Kwani?* 04, focuses on the Kikuyu while *Kwani?* 05 Part One and *Kwani?* 05 Part Two explore the Luo and Kalejin communities respectively.

In Charles Matathia's essay "Kikuyu dialogues" the writer seeks answers to the problems that have afflicted contemporary Kikuyu society. In his quest, he finds himself sitting with elders in a local bar whose verdict is that contemporary problems are because of the society's departure from "the way our community lived in the olden days" (50). Wairimu Njambi and William O'Brien's "Women to Women Marriage" is an anthropological

essay that invokes the Gĩkũyũ traditional practices, for instance, in describing the process of a marriage between one woman and another as follows:

Kuhikania the process of getting married, and *uhiki*, the marriage ceremony, takes place in the same manner for woman-woman marriages as with woman-man marriages. In fact there is no separate term to differentiate a woman-woman marriage from a woman-man marriage The woman seeking a marriage partner, the *muhikania* announces, either through a *kiama* (a customary civil organization) or through her own effort, her desire to find a marriage partner, or *muhiki*. (110)

The essay makes reference to traditional marriage process and the role played by the *Kiama*, a council of elders, which constituted the Gĩkũyũ pre-colonial system of governance. The function of these two essays seems hardly aesthetic. Their immediate function in *Kwani?* is to inform – to give a link between the Gĩkũyũ traditional past and some contemporary norms and practices among the Gĩkũyũ community.

David Kaiza's travelogue in *Kwani?* 05 Part One is an account of his journey through Kenya's Nyanza region during which he gathers an oral history of the Luo. Though the article purports to provide a background upon which Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence exploded, it is to a large extent an anthropological account of such issues as how the Luos migrated from Egypt along the River Nile, allegedly in order to come and protect it at the source. It also delves into the pre-colonial social organizational character of the Luo including their formation of age groups and the layout of their homesteads.

The discussion is again an exposition that gives us insights into the pre-colonial life of the Luo and therefore serves an anthropological purpose.

Kwani? 05 Part Two takes *Kwani?*'s anthropological project further as Wainaina takes a trip through the Kalejin nation in which he makes scanty observations on the landscape and mannerisms of the local people. This is supplemented by an excerpt from Benjamin Kipkorir's book *The Marakwet of Kenya: A preliminary study* and another excerpt on the Kalejin Calendar by Kipkoech Arap Sang. The first excerpt dwells on information about the pre-colonial Kalejin religion and cultural practices such as initiation. The second one is a document on the social organization of the Kalejins into "age sets and age grades" and their ancient calendar. The excerpts are therefore academic historical studies of the pre-colonial Kalejin community.

The publication of Kaiza's second travelogue, "From the Land of Anaka," in *Kwani?* 05 Part Two further vindicates the observation that much as the editor has claimed that these articles sought to "illuminate the cultures of different ethnic communities to provide some context" (Kahora 142) to Kenya's 2008 post-election violence, the narratives and expositions on pre-colonial Kenya societies were an integral part of *Kwani?*'s content that, prior to their publication, had nothing to do with the political situation in Kenya in 2008. Kaiza's article is on the history of the Bunyoro Empire in Uganda which is unrelated to Kenyan politics. The essay was apparently commissioned by *Kwani?* in its bid to diversify its anthropological content. Its publication underpins the journal's desire to project a pan-Africanist image of itself by venturing beyond the Kenyan borders. This pan-Africanist dream became increasingly manifest in *Kwani?* as the journal became more successful and more widely read.

Kwani?'s preoccupation with the history of the tribe is also evident in its earlier publications as is the case with the story of Chief Wambugu in *Kwani? 03*. The article written by renowned historians, Neal Sobania and Godfrey Muriuki, is an explication of some seven photographs giving a profile of the legendary Gĩkũyũ colonial chief. These photos are taken from stereoscopic cards published in 1909, and, as the accompanying stories expound, provide "a unique opportunity to see how the people appeared and lived" (108). They depict the polygamous nature of the traditional Gĩkũyũ society (Chief Wambugu had 42 wives), the subsistence farming practices and such domestic chores as grinding corn and fetching water from the village wells in gourds. Having been taken about a century ago by the time of their publication in *Kwani?*, the photographs are gems from a distant past that must have seemed exotic for the *Kwani?* generation of writers.

The conclusion we therefore draw from the above illustrations is that, in principal, *Kwani?* appreciates the pre-colonial traditional cultures as important in our understanding of contemporary Kenyan cultures and identities. Some of them, like the excerpts cited, are plain historical documents of anthropological extraction. Besides, there is an attempt, as is the case with Wainaina and Kaiza, to infuse literary elements in these narratives. The choice of the travelogue by these writers as the form with which to represent these facts adds a personal style and voice which is enhanced by the artistic manipulation of language for aesthetic effect. Thus we are able to not only glean the historical facts from the texts but also appreciate them as expressions in creative writing. More reference to history is evident in *Kwani?*'s engagement with Mau Mau narratives I discuss in the following section.

4.3.2 Stories from the Mau Mau Archive

The Mau Mau uprising that led to the declaration of a State-of-Emergency by the colonial government in Kenya in 1952 remains a ubiquitous narrative of resistance that has transcended generational boundaries in Kenyan literature. The movement provided a crucial historical juncture that not only shaped the intellectual consciousness of a few pioneer Kenyan writers but also continues to inspire revolutionary ideals among the young generation of Kenyan writers. This influence is quite evident *Kwani?*

To begin with, the covers of both *Kwani?* 01 and *Kwani?* 02 bear an imposing image of a dreadlocked man which, as Odhiambo suggests, could point to the journal's allegiance to the ideals of youth and freedom espoused by Bob Marley or "the renewal of Mau Mau discourse in the post-Moi era as well as subtly invite its youthful readers to see themselves as the new revolutionaries" ("*Kwani?* and the Imaginations" 28). This use of photographs to embody the Mau Mau spirit is carried on in *Kwani?* 03 whose first page is filled with "a rare photo of Dedan Kimathi" (5), the legendary leader of the Mau Mau movement, retrieved from the Kenya National Archives. The photo presents a Kimathi with short dreadlocks looking more youthful, upright and looking far ahead unlike the commonly published image of a subdued Kimathi in chains after his capture. *Kwani?* here seeks to revision Kimathi's story usually borne in the earlier photo depicting his helplessness in the chains of colonialism and now portrays him as a visionary who continues to inspire the youth with the revolutionary ideals he espoused.

Kwani? 04 sustains the pictorial narrative of the Mau Mau by publishing five photographs of the Mau Mau suspects arriving at a detention camp, the suspects and their families being screened and the suspects in the Thompson falls detention camp. The suspects are

here presented as victims whose suffering for the cause of freedom must not only be appreciated but is also an inspiration to the young generation.

The Mau Mau narrative also finds itself in the short stories of Kantai and Andia Kisia both of whom are key writers for *Kwani?*, especially in its early issues. Kantai's story "Comrade Lemma and the Black Jerusalem Boys' Band" laments about the fate of the forgotten heroes of the independence struggle and the debilitating state of disillusionment and despondency that the real heroes have had to live with. Set at the moment of Kenya's 40th Independence Day celebrations, the story, through a series of flashbacks, relates about the life of Sylvania's childhood, youth and now old age. His youth coincides with a period of heightened Mau Mau activities when many African men were detained with some, like his father, dying in the detention camps. We learn that Sylvania then composed the song "Joka" which turned him into a celebrity overnight after he performed it with the Jerusalem Boys' Band that played at Mr. Ben's bar in the African quarters of Jerusalem Estate in Nairobi. It is then that he took the name Comrade Lemma, which was the name of a feared freedom fighter and assumed the leadership of the band. "Joka" was a song of freedom, inspired by a similar song from South Africa that Sylvania used to hear over his mother's radio. The song became so popular that it was being considered for the position of the national anthem at independence. Ironically, it was banned within the first year of independence and Lemma's life degenerated especially as he and his mother were pushed to live in a slum, beneath the bridge where his mother eventually died.

The story abounds with tragic irony, witticism and satire as it exposes the hypocrisy, insensitivity and self-serving motives of the quest for the national heroes which turns out

to be mockery to would-be heroes of the freedom struggle. It is a story that falls in Odhiambo's "post-Moi Mau Mau discourse" (*Kwani?* and the Imaginations 27) where the so called Mau Mau veterans have continued to lament the neglect with which the state has treated them. The publication of the story at a time when most of the people who took part in the Mau Mau war have either died in poverty or are very old and poor made it a relevant contribution to debate on the need for compensation for those who were victims of the war.

Kisia's "A Likely Story" is another story engrossed with the Mau Mau narrative. Published ahead of Kantai's "Comrade Lemma and the Black Jerusalem Boys' Band", the story also alludes to Kenya's celebration of 40 years of independence and hinges on the motif of the perennial vain and inconsequential search for the hero of the Mau Mau liberation movement that was introduced in Kenyan literature in Ngũgĩ's *A Grain of Wheat* in 1967. In the story, Prof. Kĩmani has come back to Kenya after twenty years in political exile.

The story is focalized through a first person narrator who happens to have been Kĩmani's colleague at the university. The narrator provides critical insights into the circumstances that precipitated the professor's sacking at the university, his eventual detention and the subsequent flight to exile. Prof. Kĩmani, who is a thinly veiled image of Kĩnyatti – the Kenyan scholar whose research on Mau Mau landed him in detention in 1982, has had a perennial desire to establish the truth about Dedan Kimathi, and that of the movement at large. He has come back to Kenya to make one more effort to dig out any credible information and starts off at the national archives. The archive attendant frustrates him. There seems to have been a deliberate attempt to obliterate all worthwhile information on

Kimathi from the archives. According to the professor, the conflicting strands of the narrative of Mau Mau have been crafted through speculation: “it is a story in which some sing songs of praise and others of damnation, where the same breath speaks of cowardice and heroism, where the articulation of the deity is met with the retort of a butcher” (77).

The story points towards Jomo Kenyatta’s authoritarianism and autocracy, making reference to political assassinations that the state had obliterated from history. We gather that at the archives,

[T]he wall opposite was covered in the paraphernalia of forgetfulness. There were faded pictures of Pio Pinto and Mboya and the mustachioed (sic) McKenzie. There were the dates of birth and dates of death for each as well as a convenient lack of elaboration as to the method [of dispatch]. (77)

The story castigates the effort to distort and misappropriate the history of resistance and quest for freedom in colonial and post-colonial Kenya. The Kenyatta Day celebrations for which Prof. Kĩmani had always been invited to celebrate at statehouse is a mockery of the freedom struggle. We are told that,

for the likes of Prof. Kĩmani, it was a bittersweet day. The celebration of a time and of a man of whom he strongly disapproved, in fact a man who had appropriated for himself an entire revolution and then refused to let the “hooligans” have any part of his country. (78)

Such are the distortions that have constantly fuelled Prof. Kĩmani’s passion in his search for the truth. His writings have interrogated Kenyan history at length and his obsession with the search for the truth is what landed him in detention and eventual exile. His return

at the 40th anniversary celebration is only further confounding as it yields nothing. The nation is still obsessed with the cosmetic search for the grave of the Mau Mau legend, a “farce” that ends with the digging up holes to locate his remains: “but two hours of steady digging yielded only an old army issue boot, a few rusty nails and a Taita charm These oddments were entirely unsatisfactory. They would not sustain a nation” (84).

Kisia’s story is therefore an incisive contribution to the discourse of post-colonial Kenyan history whose overriding trajectory stems from the country’s colonial occupation to the Mau Mau and other resistance movements and post-independence politics of authoritarianism and resistance. The story echoes many other Kenyan texts that have dwelt on this subject and compares well with the less academic accounts like those of the Sheng-speaking generation, an example of which is represented in *Kwani?* by the Kalamashaka, Mashifta and Ukoo Flani Mau Mau hip-hop groups.

Kalamashaka is a music group composed of three artists which came into the limelight of Kenyan music in 1997. Rapping in Sheng (an urban-based language in Kenya which is a mixture of Kiswahili, English and other Kenyan languages and is mostly used by the young people), the group was propelled to the limelight by their pet theme of revolution. In an interview with Wainaina, Kama, one of the group members echoes the resentment against Kenyatta and Kenya’s neo-colonial political elite who appropriated wealth and power at the expense of struggling majority such as the youth whom the music group represents. Kama, just like Prof. Kĩmani in Kisia’s story, argues that Kimathi deserved more tributes than Kenyatta and should have been the first one to say “Harambee” (53). “Harambee” (pull together) was Kenyatta’s clarion call at Kenya’s independence in 1963 which exhorted Kenyans to unite and build the nation together. However, the Kenyatta

state degenerated into neo-colonial authoritarianism in its bid to protect the selfish interests of those who assumed political office at independence, the bulk of whom were erstwhile collaborators with the colonialists who had now appropriated power and wealth. Kalamashaka is therefore challenging Kenya's distorted official political histories such as the slogan "Harambee!" being presented as a call for national unity.

"Mashifta" on the other hand gets its name from the "Shiftas" who were an insurgent group of the Somali people of Kenya who, from 1963 to 1967, waged a secessionist war against the Kenyan government. A Somali popular word for bandits, the name accords the group a revolutionary identity and is much in the spirit of 'Ukoo Flani' which appropriates 'Mau Mau' as its name. This is a clear indication of the continued sense of alienation among the powerless majority especially the youth who have hence sought to seek hope and inspiration from historically relegated resistance movements. Indeed these youth seems to see Mũngiki as a timely resurrection of Mau Mau which according to Kama in Wainaina's interview is "trying to restore culture" (57). Mũngiki started in Kenya in the 1980s as an illegal self-help organization of mostly unemployed Gĩkũyũ youth whose ideology was derived from the Mau Mau movement especially in its rejection of what the founders saw as colonizing tendencies of Christianity in particular and Westernization at large. Mũngiki's rebellious nature made it attractive to dispossessed youth who like Kama thought that it could provide a panacea for their economic problems. This is the kind of spirit that got many young men in Kenya joining the Mau Mau war in the 1950s.

Generally the motif of the Mau Mau resistance movement runs through *Kwani?* from the ‘dreadlocked’ identity markers of some of its contributors, including its founding editor, to narratives and allusions in the fiction, nonfiction and poetry in the journal.

4.3.3 *Kwani?* and the Post-Kenyatta Politics

The evaluation of Kenyan history has been analysed in temporal stages that usually correspond to the political era of the country’s respective presidents since independence. As noted in the previous chapter, Daniel arap Moi, the second president of Kenya, followed the authoritarian legacy of his predecessor with “heavy footsteps” (Hornsby 157). The 1982 coup attempt and its aftermath became a significant temporal moment that has continued to find expression in literary works.

A case in point is another of Kisia’s short story “1982”. The story is written as a diary in which a prison warder keeps a record of the arrests, confinements and executions of political prisoners who are brought in after the 1982 failed coup. It is a morbid tale of how the corrupt officer takes advantage of the prisoners, stealing their clothes and other valuables and even extorting money from the family of one prisoner, Hilary Odhiambo, as they desperately search for his body in the overcrowded morgue after he is executed. The story shows the injustice the victims of the paranoid state that Kenya had become faced. The entrenchment of corruption had eaten deep into the society that had now become so callous and dehumanized to the extent of extorting money, as it were, from the dead.

Corruption is another vice that has featured prominently in Kenyan public discourses and has inevitably become a common subject for literary works by Kenyan writers. One

story in *Kwani?* that addresses the question of graft in Kenya is Kahora's "The True Story of David Munyakei". This was first published in *Kwani? 03* but later re-issued on its own in the pocket-size *Kwanini* Series. The story was initially meant to be a documentary commissioned by Transparency International, the world body known to crusade against corruption, as part of its tenth anniversary celebrations. It is an account of David Munyakei, a Central Bank of Kenya clerk in the early 1990s, who became the whistle blower to the "Goldenberg Scandal" in 1993. This was a national scandal which was about corruption involving huge sums of money by senior government officials. Munyakei got into trouble with the government after leaking incriminating information to the press and the opposition politicians who took the matter to court. On one hand, Judy Kibinge, whose company was tasked by TI to produce the documentary, explains the painstaking search for Munyakei more than ten years after he lost his job at CBK. Kahora, on the other hand, tries to account for Munyakei's life since he lost his job. In so doing, Kahora reveals the triumphs and tribulations of an innocent Kenyan whose only mistake in the context of Moi's government was to stand for the truth.

Kahora presents Munyakei's story in the form of creative non-fiction. This is an emerging genre in Kenya, popularized by *Kwani?*, in which the writer represents historical truth embellishing it with the linguistic resources prevalent in fiction writing. The writer therefore imposes a personal voice in the presentation of factual reality that makes readers appreciate it as a work of creative writing. One of its greatest achievements is its narration of social histories and its potential to expose injustices in society as Kahora's "The True Story" does. Kahora narrates Munyakei's life after the loss of his job in 1993; his sojourn in Mombasa where he got a job as a salesman in order to

survive and how he eventually acquired an Islamic name and married a Bajuni woman according to Islamic traditions. It is also a story about his eventual retreat to his rural home in Masaai land at Olokurto where the writers traced him.

The story dramatizes the vulnerability of the subaltern individuals who stand up to fight corruption in a society where those in positions of power are the grandmasters of the game. It is an evil that is not easy to root-out and those who stand for the truth, like Munyakei, are condemned and eliminated from the system. Even after a new and supposedly more liberal government comes to power in 2002, Munyakei does not get justice. He only gets false promises from the Minister for Justice and eventually gets a mean offer in 2004 which he declines. His miserable death a year later, and without reprieve, is a testimony to the deep-seated injustice that the poor and powerless in Kenya are condemned to live with.

Again, the stories cited above are evidence of *Kwani?*'s determination to engage in the 'burning issues' of the Kenyan society and to document Kenya's social and political history. It seems to have fashioned itself as the mouthpiece for the voiceless, the defender of the defenceless. Munyakei's story in particular demonstrates *Kwani?*'s affinity to the activities of the civil society movement especially considering that it was a project of an international non-governmental organization, Transparency International. This propensity toward themes in social history becomes much more elaborate in *Kwani?* 05 whose twin issues are wholly devoted to Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence.

4.3.4 Portraits of Ethnicity and Political Violence

Events of great historical significance have always provided fodder for creative writers; they provide a temporal and spatial back-cloth upon which their stories are cast. *Kwani?*'s engagement with history has also seen it embark on narratives that document the violent political events fuelled by ethnicity in Kenya and beyond. As noted earlier in this chapter, some *Kwani?* writers were somewhat excited about the 2007/2008 post-election violence that rocked Kenya for they saw in its aftermath another watershed moment for creative writing in Kenya. They could now write stories of war which, one of the members cited earlier, ironically, thinks is the great theme of African literature. This study notes that texts based on ethnic violence in the context of African political history actually appeared in *Kwani?* right from the first issue in which the Rwanda genocide featured in a prominent way.

The 1994 ethnic war in Rwanda in which the Hutus rose against the Tutsis and fellow moderate Hutus will remain etched in the psyche of the world community for generations. There have been many writings on this tragic event raging from short stories, memoirs, biographies to analytical essays. In its inaugural issue, *Kwani?* published two major items: a short story, "Weight of Whispers," by (Yvonne) Adhiambo Owuor, and a historical essay, "A Brief History of Genocide," by Mahmood Mamdani.

Owuor's story depicts the daunting experiences of Boniface Kuseremana and his family consisting of his mother Agnethe-mama, his sister Chichi; and Lune, his fiancé. He had been a diplomat before the war and had lived in many cities in the world. Five days after the plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi is shot down, killing both of them, war breaks in Rwanda and by virtue of belonging to a royal family, Kuseremana

and his family are targeted. On getting information that the fighters are coming for him, he hurriedly makes arrangements to flee from Rwanda with his family and fiancé. They are lucky to get the last seats in the last plane that flies out of Rwanda at the time. They make a stopover in Nairobi, Kenya, hoping to get travel documents that would let them move to Europe, and later, Canada.

The story dramatizes the tribulations of Kuseremana and his family as they painfully adjust to the status of refugees in a strange, hostile and exploitative environment that Nairobi turns out to be. Having been used to the comfortable life of a royal family, the narrator mourns with despair as he oversees the family's inevitable disintegration. Their financial resources diminish as they stay longer than they had hoped and are forced to move from the five stars Hilton Hotel to a backstreet room in River Road, a downtown street in Nairobi. They become victims to 'Nairobbery' as a taxi driver, policemen, an Indian jewellery dealer and the River Road landlord financially exploit them leaving them penniless and vulnerable. Besides, the attempt to get travel documents is dismaying. The eventual deaths of, first, Chichi and, then, Agnethe-Mama are the ultimate symbolism of the family's disintegration.

In highlighting the misery of these victims of war condemned to a refugee status, the story laments about the evils of war which, as the narrator says, involves: "Excoriating women wombs, crushing foetal skull, following the instructions of a prince" (31). Agnethe-Mama's husband was picked when the war broke out never to be seen again. A list of genocidaires has been made and Kuseremana's name is one of them. Thus he is living in perpetual fear – under the 'weight of whispers'.

Mamdani's 'A History of Genocide' is a historical exposition that traces the root of the animosity between the Hutus and the Tutsis to the legacy of "Hamitic Ideology" (44) that was institutionalized by the Belgian colonial government. In the essay, Mamdani explains the "Hamitic Hypothesis" in which "The Hamites were taken to be black-skinned Caucasians [who] wandered across the African continent and ruled over their racial inferiors, the black skinned blacks" (44). The Tutsis were identified as the hamites and the Hutus as the "real Africans". Subsequently, the Tutsis enjoyed certain privileges that the Hutus did not. They were favoured in school, and followed the French-language curriculum while the Hutus had a separate curriculum taught in Kiswahili and were merely destined for citizenship. This is what brew resentment among the Hutus and has since 1959 precipitated ethnic violence which culminated in the 1994 genocide.

In *Kwani?* 04, the journal also publishes Peter Trachtenberg's "The Purpose of the Blindfold" which is a polemical essay that interrogates the crusade for reconciliation carried out by the Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. In the article, the author questions the meaning and possibility of the actualization of such fluid concepts as 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation' in the context of the ethnic cleansing that took place in Rwanda. The essay which was an excerpt from his, by then, yet to be published "The Book of Calamities" deploys the strategies of creative non-fiction – manipulating language and other narrative devices such as description and dialogue to heighten the horrific effects of the war. When describing Kigali, for instance, he writes:

Kigali is shaped like a bowl, or rather, a group of bowls, the hills forming a rim around a central basin. As in other cities, the heights belong to the wealthy while

the low ground is occupied by the poor. The streets in this part of town are unpaved and ungraded. They yaw and pitch and subside into craters that might have been made by bombs The combination of topography and history yields a metaphor – the city as mass-grave, as offering bowl filled with bones and blood. (171)

Trachtenberg writes gripping accounts of how the soldiers “cut off men’s genitals and fed them to the dogs” (165); of women raped day and night by one man after another; “turned into a sort of domestic animal, naked and speechless, kept live only to be abused until it would be time to kill her” (166-7). Just like Mamdani, Trachtenberg traces the root of the conflict to Belgian’s colonial history and notes that the people of Rwanda had lived in harmony “until the Mzungu came slithering into the garden, like the first serpent – tempted the inhabitants with the knowledge of Hutu and Tutsi” (176). He points an accusing finger at America and the United Nation for having failed to intervene on grounds that seemed racist.

To consolidate his portrait of the nature of this horrific event, he draws comparisons from the Jews pogrom and a “True Crime” narrative of an Andrea Yates, a depressed American woman who had drowned her five children in a bathtub. The writer is skeptical about the concerted quest for justice vis a vis reconciliation sought by the tribunals (Gacaca) which he says are involved in “The stately unscrolling of collective memory” (169). For him they made sense as they offered a dialogue between the survivors and the accused with a role too, for the witnesses; “an entire country telling the story of its wounds and coming into agreement about who and what had made it, the agreement being a prelude to the wound’s healing” (171) . Yet, up to the end of his article, the

author remains cynical at the prospect of an enduring reconciliation. He concludes that “Lion and antelopes are known to coexist as . . . beside water holes, in the brief interval before one pounces on the other” (211).

To a certain extent, the Rwandan genocide may seem to provide a background upon which Kenya’s 2008 post-election violence needs to be appreciated. This could be so because the two countries are in the same region and the violence in both cases was fuelled by tribal animosity instigated by the struggle for political power. Besides, the perpetration was done in much similar ways and the Kenyan case seemed to be following the Rwandese script. Indeed there were fears that the Kenyan conflict could degenerate to the magnitude as huge as that of Rwanda which occasioned frantic remedial efforts by world leaders which culminated in the peace accord that led to the formation of a coalition government in 2008. It is therefore not surprising that *Kwani?* 05 which was largely devoted to “the first 100 days of 2008” in Kenya looks back to 1994 in Rwanda.

This connection is, for instance, seen in Father Healy’s memoirs “Reflection” published alongside Kenya’s tales of the 2008 political mayhem in *Kwani?* 05 Part One. The memoirs span the period from April 1994 when war broke out in Rwanda to April 2007 when he was still exploring the possibilities that “peace and justice and forgiveness and mercy and reconciliation can flow like a river throughout Rwanda, East Africa, The Horn of Africa, the continent of Africa, the whole world” (290). He was a missionary priest in Tanzania and still has vivid memories of that fateful day, April 7, 1994 which “began 100 days of brutal and unrestrained genocide and violence” (287). Cited in the memoirs is a poem he wrote in October 1994, lamenting the plight of Hutu refugees who had crossed over to Tanzania to escape the mayhem. Thus he mourns:

They came walking, walking

.....

They came trudging

.....

Women, plenty of women, men, girls, boys

Along line of bewildered children

An endless stream of weary humanity (288)

However, it is Kahora's short story "The Gorilla's Apprentice" that seems to more openly underpin the close affinity between the Rwandese and Kenyan violence. The story bears some echoes of Owuor's "Weight of Whispers". It involves a Prof. Charles Semambo who is a scholar consultant who had fled Rwanda after the genocide and settled in Kenya after bribing the authorities. Besides, the key character in the story, Sebastian, the mountain gorilla, is also a refugee rescued from extinction during the genocide. The story is focalized through Jimmy Gikonyo, a young Kenyan man about to turn 18 at the time when the political violence starts in Kenya. He has always loved animals and has been going to the animal orphanage whereby a close relationship between him and Sebastian has developed. He is pleased to meet Prof. Semambo whom he eavesdrop on as the latter surprisingly talks to Sebastian in the orphanage. He befriends Semambo hoping to learn from him how to talk with the gorilla.

As the story unfolds billowing smoke can be seen as houses go up in flames in Kibera, the slum village bordering the orphanage. The thunder of gunshots and frenzied screams of people can be heard coming from the city centre. Jimmy finds the animal more companionable than the humans who are now butchering each other in the city and all

over the country. Back in Kileleshwa, a suburban estate in Nairobi where he lives with his divorced prostitute mother, things are no better. The flats are like a brothel where rich men come to pick girls. In the township of Kangemi, in the neighbourhood, we see more houses being burned down, while inside the house, the TV set relays images of the escalating violence in the city. As the narrator watches a policeman scale a wall and shoot dead a fleeing unarmed youth, as more and more violence rocks the city, we grasp the heartlessness and horror of the political violence that eventually, if symbolically, seems to have depressed Sebastian to death. The story is therefore a reflection of the dehumanizing nature of ethnically motivated wars such as the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya and the trauma it causes the victims.

The twin editions of *Kwani?* 05 consist of a multiplicity of accounts about the 2008 violence in Kenya. *Kwani?* took it upon itself to conduct a comprehensive coverage of this event with the bulk of it being, according to Arno Kopecky – the *Kwani?* Online Editor at the time, a “Testimonial Project”. She says:

What we wanted was simply to record, in a single document, statements of what happened from the people involved from people who threw stones, and people who had stones thrown at them; from farmers and nurses and hustlers. . . . We wanted them to speak at length. (48)

Thus *Kwani?* sent several of its writers, who, incidentally, had been work-shopped to write stories on the elections. They went to the major hotspots and brought back nearly 200 testimonial narratives from both the victims and perpetrators. Apart from the confessional tales, we have a myriad of articles raging from short text messages in mobile

phones to e-mails, photographs, cartoons, commentaries, poetry, and travelogues. Of these, it is only travelogues and poetry that are expressed in literary style. The poetry is especially outstanding in the efficacy with which it captures the action and atmosphere that prevailed at the moment.

A good example is Tony Mochama's "Give War a Chance" which dramatizes the way the belligerent atmosphere that eventually exploded into tribal violence in 2008 was fuelled by ethnic solidarity among the members of certain tribes in Kenya. The poem is suggestive of its live performance and is expressed in multiple voices that represent the different tribes involved in the war. The following is the opening stanza:

'O you, o yoo, x3' (the 'ooos' must be blood curdling)

Abasacha, Abagusii, Arise,

Amachuma, aye, bring your chumas,

The vigilante groups of kisungusungu,

Let us drive the invaders from Sotik-Borabu,

Until they feel kizungu-zungu,

For these Galeoz, are as foreign as wa-zungu,

Chinkororo, let us do the kuku dance

O yoo o yoooooooo – and all that I'm saying,

Is give war a chance! (*Kwani?* 05 Part Two, 22)

The poem starts with "a blood curdling" (22) war cry as the persona prevails upon the Abagusii to take up arms and parade their militia men to commence the war and evict the Kalejins who had invaded and occupied their land. The rest of the poem dramatizes how

the Luos, the Kalejins, the Kikuyus and the Kambas took part in the tribal violence. There is mixing of different languages to mark-off the respective tribes and their stereotypical speech idiosyncrasies. The irregular shapes of different stanzas, the satire, dark humour, and irony underscore the tension and thoughtlessness that instigated the violence. There are many other poems in both editions that just like testimonials demonstrate the callousness and banality of this event.

Generally, *Kwani?* seeks to remind us of the past which official discourses tend to repress. In *Kwani?* 05, the journal turns out to be a chronicler of contemporary Kenyan histories. Abandoning the literary ideals that one would have associated with it, *Kwani?* devotes the twin editions to reporting and documentation much like that of newspapers. Its key writers indeed formed a lobby group, the Coalition of Concerned Kenyan Writers, which proves their determination to occupy as significant position as players in the unfolding Kenyan histories much in the manner of civil society activism, the foundation from which *Kwani?* is originally seen to have emerged.

To relocate itself within the Kenyan literary map that it had claimed to have come to spearhead but now seemed to have digressed, *Kwani?* made an about-turn and detoured to the production of fiction which it claims to have been its founding principle in *Kwani?* 06. They put up a short story writing competition with a guided theme. “The Kenya I live in”, later modified to “The Kenya/Africa I live in”. The contributions were limited to writers aged 30 years and below at the time. This selectiveness again reveals the mind-set of the editors, specifically their self-proclaimed mission to produce the new generation of Kenyan writers. The stories are rich in style and cover a wide range of themes. The trend is maintained in *Kwani* 07 as yet another call out is made for contributions by writers

who have lived/or are living in Kenyan/African diaspora. Kenyan history remains significant as *Kwani?* again goes digging into the archives to publish information on Jomo Kenyatta's life in Europe; and the lives of Tom Mboya and Jaramogi Odinga's educational air-lifts to America and Europe in the 1960s that saw many Kenyans studying and later settling abroad.

4. 4 Representation of Urban Youth Culture

In *Urban Obsessions Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel*, Roger Kurtz has done a study of the first and second generation of Kenyan writers looking at the city as the narrative space where Kenyan novelists project both the obsessions and the fears of their society. He notes that the writers have represented and reproduced the dynamics of urbanization that are unique to contemporary Nairobi (6). He identifies the conflict between modernity and traditional African practices as one overriding conflict in the representation of the city and further cites the struggle for survival as another major concern for the Kenyan urban novelists. In general he observes that

If the task of artists is to provide a society with the stories and myths that help make sense of their society, one of the major challenges for Kenyan writers in the immediate postcolonial era has been to provide a new set of stories and new set of myths to help Kenyans understand the meaning of place like Nairobi and to deal with the challenges of living in such a place. In the process Kenyan writers have provided an analysis of urban social dynamics explaining and representing the city in a variety of ways. (156)

The urban conditions studied by Kurtz have naturally been transformed as the Kenyan economy expanded and Kenyan histories evolved more since the years between (1960s-1990s) that he addresses. The ever increasing population has led to more people moving to settle in the city while a whole generation of Kenyans born and brought up in the city has emerged. The character in the urban narratives no longer have to travel from upcountry to discover life in the city, many of them have grown up there. New identities have emerged as a more multicultural society has coalesced in towns and cities. Sheng has increasingly become the lingua franca of a new generation of urban Kenyan youth and the rise of the electronic/digital economy has presented new modes of social intercourse such as the e-mail, mobile phones, and the blogs. New cultural formations such as the hip-hop culture and vigilante groups have become trendy as the youth now come to dominate the urban space. Moreover, Nairobi being Kenya's cultural and political capital has long lost the façade of "The green city in the sun" and is now imagined in such unflattering metaphors as 'the concrete jungle' and such denigrating neologisms as 'Nairobbery.' It is this Nairobi, as *Kwani?* editor avers, that has been one of the key sources of narratives for *Kwani?*. In the editorial to *Kwani?* 04, Kahora explains that in preparation for the publication of that issue, the writers sought for stories "in bars, in *matatus*, churches, estates corners and in other public places" (i). The search yielded a few stories that are *Kwani?*'s addition to the repertoire of Kenyan urban narratives.

By and large, the themes of disillusionment and the struggle to survive remain central to the urban Kenyan narratives. However new concerns, building on old ones, continue to emerge. The skyscrapers have increased; the old slums have expanded as new ones have

sprouted; corruption has become the preferred way to personal social, economic and even political advancement; crime and insecurity have escalated and the present day prostitute could be a more sophisticated urbanite who dates wealthy (UN-type) expatriates and lives in up-market apartments in such suburban places like Kileleshwa, unlike the slum harlots in Meja Mwangi's novels. Thus, writing mostly from the Kenyan middle-class sensibility, the *Kwani?* writers have continued Kenyan literature's engagement with urban realities by presenting a few narratives from the perspective of those of their generation – the youth.

Upon his return to Kenya after his ten years' stay in South Africa, Wainaina's initial ambition seems to have been the desire to cultivate a generational solidarity among the Kenyan urban youth who, like him, had been dispossessed and rendered unproductive by an uncreative, reactionary older generation. Of the many talents that he scouted for was one hip-hop group, Kalamashaka, whose story he chose to headline *Kwani?*'s maiden issue. Playing into Wainaina's script, Kalamashaka posed as the mouthpiece for the disgruntled youth whom it called upon embrace an imminent revolution. It is in this spirit that Kalamashaka chants their revolutionary song, "Let the fire burn Let it announce a revolution" (44) cited at the beginning of this chapter. A majority of the youth are jobless and bitter about it. Kalamashaka's song is a wakeup call for the youth to rise up to "represent the truth and start up a revolution . . . put everybody inside the Trojan horse, break through State House and parliament, crossing African borders with no passports" (53). Wainaina's inclusion of Kalamashaka in *Kwani?*'s maiden issue can therefore be seen as a strategic attempt to consolidate the voices of the youth to air their disenchantment with the Kenyan elite which they believed was the root cause of their

woes. In so doing, Wainaina was positioning himself and *Kwani?* as champions of progressive change and freedom for the young generation.

Kwani 04 has published blog articles by Potash which echo Kalamashaka's sentiments cited above. The articles were initially published in Potash's website, "Shibboleth." In "The Epistle of Potash to the Adept," Potash says that the youth "are the living dead, miserable souls caught up in the purgatory of dreams" (39). In "Smoke and Dreams" Potash goes on to lament the economic injustices perpetrated mostly against the youth who constitute the bulk of the proletariat by the petite bourgeoisie and the aristocrats elected to political power. He says that those in power have been deluding the youth with "Great expectations that turnout to be the Theatre of Broken Dreams" (41). Thus the poor have remained "hungry and fighting with the dogs . . . for crumbs " (41). Potash suggests that this frustration has made the youth to resort to "smoking their dreams away", seeking the solace of Rastafarian escapism in hard drug because "as the pillar of smoke rises above the barren earth of their existence . . . [it] leads them to the Zion Train of Escapism" (42). Potash, like Kalamashaka believes that these are circumstances that should make the youth rise up against the unjust system.

In the commentary to the Kalamashaka interview discussed above, Wainaina identifies a "mind-shift" in Kenya in the 1990s. At the time he left Kenya in 1990 he says,

The Gods of popular culture were of the bubble gum variety. Michael Jackson, Kenny G, Keith Sweat, Eddie Murphy and so on My generation of wannabe middle-class Kenyans at the time believed in all of it . . . in Treetops and the Queen, in Karen Blixen, in Rugby, America, in Coke that came in cans, in *Time*

Magazine, CNN, Eddie Murphy, in Nikes, R&B, Hip-hop, in the Oscars and the Grammys. (*Kwani?* 01, 55)

The Kenyan urban culture was then dominated by a Eurocentric diet of popular culture epitomized by the modernized middle and upper classes of the society in Nairobi. As Wainaina further observes, it is in the nineties that the first generation of students in the 8-4-4 system of education joined university. The system encouraged the study of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject up to form four. Consequently, there was gradual change in the way Kiswahili was perceived by the youth as more and more students came to appreciate the language. The increased use of Kiswahili contributed to the growth of Sheng in schools and urban centres. The widespread use of Sheng and the rise of Kenyan hip-hop music in the 1990s played a significant role in fashioning a new culture especially among the urban youth. Wainaina further attests to this as he notes that

Kalamashaka and Mashifta rap in Swahili. It's poetry really. Not your television Swahili, full of ancient wise-sayings that no one cares about, this is Sheng grown-up-Swahili that borrowed from English, from all our mother tongues, Swahili that re-invented itself every few months. The shift was not just a language shift; the rhythms of their music are far removed from American-style rap. (*Kwani?* 01, 54)

The increased use of Sheng by the contemporary generation of urban Kenyan youth has been widely acknowledged. Joyce Nyairo, for instance, has observed that

Sheng has moved from marginal spaces in the so-called African locations of the city, to the airwaves on FM radio, to advertising billboards, and even celluloid . . .

. In all these spaces, it has become the language in which weighty moral questions are debated and the values of a generation are communicated. (145)

Her argument is supported by Kantai who asserts that members of his generation use Sheng as the language in which life is “transacted across the ethnic divides” (“Reddykulass Generation” np). *Kwani?* is one of the few publishers which pioneered the publication of poetry and stories written in Sheng. *Kwani?* 03, for instance, has been described as “the ‘Sheng’ edition” (Odhiambo, *Kwani?* and the Imaginations 28) as it has published several poems in Sheng and a series of interviews conducted in Sheng by the Mashifta hip-hop group. The poetry echoes the concerns of Kalamashaka discussed earlier in this chapter in that it dwells further on disillusionment in the society especially among the youth. Mc Kah’s two-part poetry with the title “Shengspeare: Ukombozi wa Ki Akili” (Shengspeare: The Emancipation of the Mind), for example, rants at the politicians for being greedy and corrupt; for betraying the populace and forever trampling on the rights of the masses. The persona in Part One of the poem says:

Sheng	English
Ukombozi wa Ki Akili Part 1	The Emancipation of the Mind Part 1
Wanasiasa wa plot	Politicians are plotting
Vile wata grab ma plot	How they will grab plots
Pahali pangetengezwa industries, mashule	A site for construction of industries; schools
Pangetengenezwa jela na hospitali ka	A prison or a hospital like
Mathare	Mathare

Wasee wali wazimika nashika
nare (168)

Friends, patience is gone I'm catching
fire

Just like the Kalamashaka trio, the persona in Mc Kah's poem foresees a revolution spearheaded by the youth: "Hatari ikiongezeka ma revolutionary tayari/Vijana wa mtaa, sabamba na sanaa" (If danger persists revolutionaries are ready/Youth in the streets, will use the arts). Their patience is running out and they are determined to use their creative energies to bring about change. The message of the poem therefore underpins the principle behind *Kwani?*'s resort to publishing texts in Sheng which was to subvert what its editors conceived as a reactionary status quo both in the Kenyan publishing industry and socio-political sphere.

In the "Sheng interviews", Sewer and Wiji advances *Kwani?*'s subversive strategy by engaging in various discussions with several people using Sheng. The interviews are conducted in illicit brew joints as the interlocutors continue to relish their drinks. They explore diverse historical subjects such as the origin of old Nairobi estates like Shauri Moyo, Mbotela and Maringo; the history of Mau Mau; the transformation of Nairobi from the colonial days to the post-independence Kenya and even interrogate the growth of Sheng among the urban Kenyan youth. The significance of these discussions is that they use Sheng to explore and express history in a way that the youth can readily identify with. In doing so, the two are demonstrating that Sheng is capable of representing and interrogating history like established languages. Further, Sewer and Wiji are able to show that people who speak in Sheng are apt repositories of the Kenya's history.

The successful conduct and publication of the Sheng interviews in *Kwani?* therefore confirm wa Mũngai's observation about the use of Sheng in *Nairobi's Matatu Men* when he says that "[t]hrough language, Nairobi young people create an alternative view of themselves and the world, becoming in this sense, initiators of some project rather than remaining the bystanders they feel society has made them" (154). In publishing the interviews, *Kwani?* affirmatively proves that academic knowledge abounds in all spheres and spaces – from the academy to the streets and even the beer halls in the slums. Sewer and Wiji do not have to be university scholars and neither do they have to speak in official languages. Sheng is here, as in many other occasions in the journal, elevated as the medium through which the youth are able to make sense of their past and present environment.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that *Kwani?* created an avenue through which the youth could express their world-view in Sheng. Before *Kwani?*, not much had been seen of Sheng in written discourse. Roger Kurtz and Robert Kurtz have noted that, "Sheng and other type of code-mixing are often seen as part of an oral cultural tradition appearing frequently in drama as well as in some poetry, rather than in prose" (128). In "Sheng Literature in Kenya: A Revival," Alina Rinkanya also notes that "Sheng is traditionally the language of youth – and, moreover, youth belonging to lower uneducated groups of Kenyan society (42). In view of the observations by the above scholars, Sheng has hardly been given due recognition as a language of literary expression. Though it has widely been used for informal communication—mostly by Kenyan urban youth, Sheng's potential as a language of creative expression has only been limited to its use in hip-hop music and comedy shows.

As Rinkanya further argues, following *Kwani?*'s publication of Sheng poetry and hip hop songs, Sheng was turning out to be "a medium of the literature of the young—an alternative medium of alternative writing Sheng obviously has a certain future in Kenya as an alternative to the mainstream of literature" (45). David Maillu's *Without Kiinua Mgongo* (1990) is the earliest attempt to use code-mixing strategy akin to that of Sheng. However, Maillu's is merely an experimental attempt at combining English and Kiswahili but not Sheng as it is spoken in the streets. Sheng has also been scantily used in Kenyan novels and short stories mainly in the speeches of a few characters. It is *Kwani?* that decisively took up the use of Sheng in sustained written discourse and artistic expression. Understandably, the use of Sheng may be deemed exclusionist as it might take time for Sheng to be recognized as an important language. This means that those who cannot speak English and Kiswahili will be deprived of opportunities for instance in the job market. Nevertheless, the 'mainstreaming' of Sheng as a language of creative and critical thought that *Kwani?* intimates is certainly an attempt at expanding the literary space and a subversion of the 'mainstream' conventions that sanction, albeit indirectly, the language of literary and cultural expression in Kenya.

4.5 Exotic Destinations and Diaspora Narratives

Kwani?'s attempt to brand itself as essentially a Kenyan project seems to have been undermined by trends in the era of globalization in which the *Kwani?* writers grew. In "Kwani? and the Imaginations Around the Re-invention of Art and Culture in Kenya" Odhiambo notes that *Kwani?* was "founded within a global matrix of cultural transactions and partially relied on the network of transnational contributors" (28). It has already been observed that the editors of *Kwani?* (Wainaina and Kahora) sojourned in South Africa

initially as students and later as immigrant workers. These two established a network of writers from the rest of the African continent bringing in *Kwani?*'s stable writers such as Adichie from Nigeria, Dayo Forster from Malawi as well as Kenyans in the Diaspora such as Wambui Mwangi. *Kwani?* has also had a close relationship with Chimurenga and Cassava Republic of South Africa and Nigeria respectively. In addition, *Kwani?* has reached out for and re-published articles from journals such as *Transition* which is based in America. What these efforts reveal is *Kwani?*'s inherent transnational identity and it is therefore not surprising that *Kwani? 06* invited short stories from all over Africa while *Kwani? 07* is exclusively devoted to narratives from the Kenyan diaspora.

Right from its first issue, *Kwani?* engaged with narratives by Kenyan writers in the diaspora, either writing about their experiences abroad or back in Kenya. It has also published writers from outside Kenya whose works are to be appreciated from a transnational perspective. Further, there are stories about the experiences of foreigners in Kenya such as accounts of tourists and expatriates operating in Kenya. The writings by this variety of contributors are also presented in a variety of forms ranging from biographical narratives, expository and descriptive essays, photographs, fiction and creative non-fiction. The stories represent a myriad of perspectives and realities about life in Kenya and beyond.

A few works in *Kwani?* are a representation and interrogation of the Western society's view of Africa as its exotic other; mysterious, wild, and fascinating. Since it was 'discovered' by European explorers in the 19th Century, the continent has always had a steady flow of tourists propelled by the search for adventure and romance. Hordes of visitors from Europe, Asia and America have called at Africa's ports and airports coming

to behold Africa's untamed nature and to discover its people and their primal cultures. This is another Kenyan narrative that finds expression in *Kwani?*.

Early European explorers, missionaries and settlers in Africa found the tribes they met and lived with as curious objects of study. This perspective can be seen in *Kwani?* in the photographs of Chief Wambugu and his extended family (*Kwani?* 03, 107-117). Judging by the spectacle that the photos present, it is evident that there was an elaborate preparation for the shooting. The photos were taken by a James Ricalton, published and copyrighted in 1909 by the company of Underwood and Underwood. Posing outside their conical thatch-roof-mud-houses are decorated women and girls. They are adorned with beaded necklaces, arm coils, leg bands, cowrie shells, leg bracelets, decorated beads and brass wire. Chief Wambugu appears in one of the photos, barefoot, with sixteen of his forty two wives crowding behind him. He is decorated in the headdress of ostrich plumes, a short sword, a spear and a shield. There is another photograph of women grinding corn and another one of maidens planting beans as armed warriors stand guard in the nearby bushes. As Neal Sobania and Godfrey Muriuki have observed about the photos, "For Africa, they are part and parcel of the early images that provided middle class Europe and North America with ways of seeing Africa, an unknown land" (*Kwani?* 03,108). The photos constitute part of *Kwani?*'s engagement with history in its attempt to re-awaken memories of a past that played a part in shaping contemporary Kenyan identities. Such images as Chief Wambugu's were taken by European explorers and missionaries and would become precursors to the colonial process as they were often used to construct myths of primitivity that were subsequently used to justify colonialism.

Kwani? has also published photos by Marion Kaplan, a London-born photo journalist and writer on Africa in *Kwani?* 01. One of them is a portrait of Idi Amin, the despotic Ugandan ruler from 1971 to 1979, and another one on the army of Joseph Desire Mobutu of the Congo/Zaire who had to weather many storms of uprisings against his government. There are also the photos of Tom Mboya, the renowned Kenyan politician who was gunned down in Nairobi 1969 and one of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga addressing a crowd. One more interesting photograph by Kaplan is that of a 1970 picture of Hugh Hefner who was the owner and editor of *Playboy*, a popular British magazine then, being charmed by a cheetah at the Nairobi animal orphanage. Published in the first edition of *Kwani?*, the photographs evoke memories of Kenya's/Africa's troubled history. While Mobutu was facing an insurgency in his country, Mboya is portrayed lying in his coffin following his assassination. Hefner's photo on the contrary depicts Africa as a prime tourist destination. These photos are contributions to the discourse on the images of Africa as represented by foreign media/expatriate journalists.

The fascination with Africa's seemingly exotic culture, its wildlife and its troubled history by the people from the West is again evident in a few short stories published in *Kwani?*. "My Clan KC Entry Guide" is an anonymously written story in diary form that parodies and satirises the frivolous lifestyle and parochial outlook of certain sections of the white community in Kenya – otherwise referred to as Kenyan cowboys in the story. These, according to the narrator, include "thousands of expatriates, rebellious missionaries, disenchanted Westerners, Watus and 2-day-tourists-so-in-love-with-Africa" (148). The story is a diatribe that castigates the hypocrisy of the Western countries, especially the so-called "donor countries" towards Africa, for sending expats who draw

very high salaries in the name of helping. Others come to Africa to find oil, poach ivory, or own farms in Africa. These people hardly know Africa, for them Africa is “A single country where natives dwell where famine, disease and civil wars provide marvellous backdrops for these reincarnation events to occur” (148). The images presented to them by CNN and BBC is an Africa where,

Watu women wear colourful flowery dresses with big head-scarves and balance water on their heads. Watu children have flies lurking in the corners of their eyes; mouths open in hunger as they wait for the British Army food drops Men are layabouts who need perpetual redemption. (148)

The story is another critique of the Western media’s fascination with negative images of Africa that maintain the stereotypical notion of Africa as a backward continent and which often encourage the pursuit of self-serving interests by Western governments and organizations in the name of liberating Africa from the scourge of poverty and primitivism

Wainaina’s story “An Affair Dismember” gives a more specific account of the self-serving and condescending attitude of Europeans towards Africa and its people. In the story, Mrs. Green, an English woman, adopts a poor boy from Murang’a district in Kenya and lives with him in her home at Karen—an up-market Nairobi suburb. The boy’s encounter with modern gadgets gives him a cultural shock: he marvels at such things as the microwave and the “monster” fridge that is packed with goodies which he grabs and eats ravenously. The woman’s sudden departure leaves his dreams of a bright future shattered. It turns out that the woman was using the boy to get money from donors for her

own use. Western philanthropists like Mrs. Green are thus portrayed as conniving and very hypocritical.

Wainaina's story alludes to Karen Blixen's autobiography *Out of Africa* (1959) which it seems to parody, poking fun at some of the stereotypes about Africans such as the idea that Africans were bewildered upon their encounter with modern accessories. Years later when the narrator works as a butcher in a rural town called Mwea, he has a kitten named Karen Blixen which frequently wishes it could get out of Africa because of the hunger she experiences in the house (170). Mrs. Green's daughter, Jemima, used to be his pen pal and now comes looking for him. The narrator feels that great gap between them. Her mannerisms, her attitude, her smells, her complexion and her body language only serve to alienate and make him resentful. His only consolation, it seems, is that he is "going to fuck her. I will watch those eyes flutter in a drowning panic below me" (169).

It turns out that Jemima has come to Kenya, just like her mother, to escape the loneliness of England. She says,

I feel that if I lived here, I would be strong. England is so tame. Everything has been so done! It seems like I can be what I want to be here. I hated it when mother came—I thought Africa was mine. I loved Karen Blixen! Wasn't she just divine?"
(171)

Her statement above shows her image of Africa as that of a wild untamed place that guarantees a lot of adventure. Copulation seems to be the highlight of her encounter with Africa and the narrator delights in it for it is the one moment when he wields power over

the girl. He is annoyed when she tries to teach him how to pronounce “Kenya” and therefore rants at her:

What anthropological expertise! Are you ready to write a travel book yet? Or did you read that in *The Rough Guide*? Did they also tell you how to teach me to be a Kenyan? How to pronounce my country? Will you tell your fiancé about how well you got to know the natives? (173)

The irony of the story is that it is only after the narrator is through with her that Mr. Henderson, an old white man who lives here, gets the opportunity to hold a conversation with Jemima during which the narrator imagines he will be telling her with nostalgia about the escapades of colonial settlers and adventurers in Kenya such as the Delameres, Lord Errol, Hemmingway and Blixen. The story is therefore a critique of the self-serving and exploitative interests of the West in Kenya/Africa especially because it is informed by stereotypes about blacks. In an angry tone, the writer detests and rejects what he perceives to be racial arrogance of the whites towards Africa.

Wainaina’s engagement with the polemics of the relationship between Africans and white sex tourists appears in another short story in *Kwani 02*, “Ships in High Transit.” The story is set in key tourist destinations including Nakuru and Mombasa where American dollars and wild sex with ‘pretend-Maasai’ beach boys is the name of the game. The tourists are chauffeured by a tour company called Wylde Afreaka Tours and Mombasa is portrayed as the capital of Kenya’s sex tourism. The trade is fuelled by myths about African sexuality which drive white hedonists to pursue wild adventures in Africa – myths such as that of “penises that are able to tap tap a clitoris to frenzy” (65). Wainaina

seems to suggest that the tourists come looking for sex with savage Africans and the Maasai, who have remained closely tied to their age-old customs seems, seems to be their favourite. The local people have mastered the psychology of the Western sex tourists and have therefore packaged themselves to suit the tastes of the tourists. The narrator in the story, for instance, presents himself as a,

Warrior[] (growl) . . . my muscles will crush you, my cock will tear you open, we cannot be together, you cannot handle me in bed (sorrowfully), I am a savage who understands only blood and strength, will you save me with your tenderness? Send me money to keep my totem alive, if my totem dies, my sex power dies baby. (65)

This situation has led to the existence of many ‘pretend-Maasais’– young men who dress and bear themselves as though they are real Maasais and then lay in wait for white women in the hope of making a killing. The African women also waylay white men and promise to employ skills perfected through “Tingisha dance” which “teaches my hips to grind around to please you one day” (65). The story is another of Wainaina’s disavowal of what he perceives as the avarice of the Western society in its lust for Africa as a place it mistakenly considers exotic.

The stories photographs cited above are important contribution to the continuing postcolonial discourse on the relationship between the West and Africa. Through these and similar texts not discussed in this study, *Kwani?* has again fashioned itself as a space for subversion of established viewpoints such as the myths of Western benevolence to

Africa and racial stereotypes by exposing the misconceptions and vulnerability of those who ventured to propagate these myths in Kenya.

Kwani? has also published a host of stories that relate the experiences of Kenyans who have emigrated to other countries. The prime destinations seem to be Europe and America where a majority of Kenyans went in pursuit of higher education. Two notable stories in the earlier editions are Duncan Kisia's "African Summers, Nuclear Winters" (*Kwani* 03) and Andia Kisia's "Low Life" (*Kwani* 04). In both stories a Kenyan student goes to study in America and is faced by many challenges including harsh weather, racial discrimination, alienation and lack of money for self-sustenance. The challenges ultimately drive them to desperate measures for survival and some of them end up abusing alcohol and hard drugs. The irony of it all is that most of these students come from well-to-do families back at home but find it more prestigious to go abroad and struggle, doing such menial work as washing dishes, guarding premises, nursing old people and being parking lot and gas filling stations' attendants – tasks they would never want to do in Kenya.

In its pursuit of narratives about life in the diaspora, *Kwani?* dedicated its seventh issue to contributions from writers who had either sojourned abroad for some years then came back to Kenya or those still living abroad. These included short fictions, memoirs, interviews, photographs and poetry. There are accounts from all the corners of the globe including Russia, India, South Africa, Namibia and America. The narratives from and about life abroad reveal Kenya's increased participation in the transnational and transcultural experiences that are characteristic of the contemporary world order.

The works are an indication of *Kwani?*'s response to trends in globalisation such as migration and the rise of Diaspora as “a critical site of exploration and debate” (Mullaney 6) and which, as Mullaney further puts it, are “emergent from a distinct set of a historical, social and geopolitical circumstances and yet also dynamic, fertile and recurrent feature of a world marked by constant movement of peoples” (8). They constitute *Kwani?*'s increasing engagement in transnational narratives as its identity as a Kenyan journal continues to evolve.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on *Kwani?*, the Kenyan contemporary journal of literature and culture that has brought to the fore a new generation of Kenyan writers. The journal has created a new space for hitherto unheard of writers, some of whom have gone ahead to acquire international recognition. What we have gathered is that the new generation of Kenyan writers is still concerned with the same issues that preoccupied earlier Kenyan writers. They have gone back in time for inspiration, navigating Kenyan histories all the way back to traditional society, through the colonial and post-colonial periods up to the present. Politics, socio-cultural and economic concerns have provided fodder for the writers. In addition the journal has projected itself as the voice of the youth and explored the experiences of the young people through interviews, Sheng poetry and narratives. The journal has expanded its horizons by publishing accounts of experiences of Kenyans living abroad and other transnational encounters that are significant as Kenyan experiences. Using various forms of creative expression the writers have experimented with both form and content and extended the frontiers of creative writing in Kenya and beyond. *Kwani?* has fashioned itself as leading player in Kenyan literature just like

magazines like *Penpoint* and *Busara* did in the early days of modern East African literature in English. It has positioned itself as a preeminent contemporary outpost for literary and cultural production in Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the analysis of *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* as literary journals that are representative of significant periods in Kenya's literary history. Much has been studied about the growth and development of modern Kenyan literature since its beginnings in the 1960s. This study has revisited some of the defining moments in the growth and development of modern Kenyan literature and shown how literary magazines have been integral to the formation of creative and critical traditions in Kenyan literature.

The introduction of Western/formal education for Africans brought literacy and the subsequent exposure of Kenyans to modern/written literature. This literature was, for the British colony that Kenya was, inherently inclined to English literature and was expressed in English. The exposure that it gave native Kenyans led to the publication of some of the earliest creative works by the pioneer African creative writers – chiefly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot.

As this study has shown, the literary magazine has played a significant role in nurturing creative and critical writing in the country. The early writers tried their craft in students' literary magazines like the Makerere University's *Penpoint* as well as well-established journals like *Transition* and *Black Orpheus*. Even as they turned out to be seasoned writers, the pioneer writers still got involved in journals such as the *East African Journal* and *Nexus/Busara* and *Zuka* where they made editorial input.

Modern Kenyan literature emerged at a moment of great pan-East African spirit. Literary and cultural production was then buttressed by the existence of the East African

Community regional body which indeed sponsored the *East African Journal* with the three East African presidents being its patrons. The establishment of the East African Literature Bureau in 1947 was a watershed moment for Kenyan literature. As Chris Wanjala has observed in “Popular Literature in East Africa,” the bureau “encouraged young writers and helped to alleviate the literary drought, which ravished East Africa in 1960s” (207). Makerere University which was transformed into the University of East Africa in 1963 played a major role in nurturing creative writing in the region. It was then a Constituent College of the University of London with branches in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam up to 1970 when each of the constituent college became an independent university.

If pan-East Africanism was pivotal in nurturing the literary tradition that was emerging in the first decade of political independence in Kenya, it is the literary magazine and activities by the literary community that hailed from the university and got involved in the production of the magazines that fed the fire of literary production in the region. The three university colleges had their own students’ magazines – *Nexus/Busara* in Nairobi, *Penpoint/Dhana* in Makerere and *Darlit/Umma* in Dares Salaam. Established writers such as Ngũgĩ, Ogot, p’Bitek and lo Liyong, as well as critics like Gurr, Roscoe and Zirimu made concerted efforts that soon made university students such as Kibera, Angira, Kassam, Wanjala, Atieno-Odhiambo, Wangusa, Oculi, Bukenya, and Ruganda emerge at the forefront of literary production in the region.

Following the fall of Obote to Idi Amin, there was widespread intolerance to the critics of the state in Uganda and this led to the flight of many intellectuals to exile. Consequently,

there was a convergence of the key literary practitioners in East Africa at the University of Nairobi which energized Nairobi as the new literary and cultural capital of the region

What is evident of the first two decades of Kenya's independence is a vibrant literary culture in which *Nexus/Busara* was one of the avant-garde literary mouthpieces. Naturally, as this study has shown, the journal addressed itself to the major concerns of the period which had been introduced by the pioneering writers and critics. Right from the start, modern African literature was largely a response to what emerging African writers saw as colonialist European portrait of Africa and were thus trying to re-write African history in their works.

In my analysis of *Nexus/Busara*, I have noted the preponderance of the anti-colonial narratives which were championed by the early works of Ngũgĩ and, to a certain extent, p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. The Mau Mau resistance movement and the declaration of the state-of-Emergency in 1952 in Kenya was a significant temporal event around which the works of many early writers gravitated. I have also established other emerging concerns that inspired creative writing in these early decades such as the insights from traditional pre-colonial society, the emergence of urbanised communities and other dynamics of modernity that led to alienation and increased individualism.

The degeneration of the independent nation-state into an authoritarian regime and emerging challenges brought about by urbanization inspired the stories of disillusionment that started in the late 1960s. In the early seventies, the spirit of pan-East Africanism declined as individual countries now perceived themselves to be more on their own. This culminated to the 1977 collapse of East African Community. The decline of interstate

cooperation in the region led to the demise of *Busara* in 1975 as the East African Literature Bureau, *Busara's* financial supporter, also closed down. In Kenya, the Kenyatta government became more autocratic and, following his death in 1978, an even more oppressive Moi regime came to power.

This study has traced the birth of *Mũtiiri* in 1994 to the political injustices especially against academics by the Moi government in the nineteen eighties. Kenyatta detained Ngũgĩ in 1977 and Moi pushed him to exile in 1982. Many of the writers who contributed to *Mũtiiri* are those who were fellow victims of the system as Ngũgĩ. Thus, I have established that *Mũtiiri* carries on the themes of anti-colonial resistance, and that much of its stories, memoirs and poems are a lament about the brutality of the post-independence Kenyan government on innocent citizens. They include accounts of the hardships of life in prison by writers like Abdulatif Abdalla and Maina wa Kĩnyatti as well as stories of cultural nationalism. Besides, being written in Gĩkũyũ, the journal, advances the arguments in favour of the promotion of native African languages as the languages of African Literature. Noted further is the fact that *Mũtiiri* sparingly engages in the narratives of life in exile and the bulk of what is written is recovered from the writers' memories of their home in Kenya. Thus I have concluded that one principal motivation for the many writers writing in Gĩkũyũ from the condition of exile is the desire to reconnect with their motherland. The influence of Ngũgĩ as the founding editor is felt through the six issues studied for his pet themes and polemics constitute the major content of the journal.

This study has further noted that the 1980s was characterized by heightened political surveillance and censorship by the Moi government. The literary community initiated in

the early period scattered starting from the 1970s and nearly became extinct in the 1980s as writers were arrested, silenced, jailed, killed or pushed to exile. It is this repression that to some extent led to the founding of *Mũtiiri* in America. Increased political freedom in the 1990s following the introduction of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1992, gave space for ventilation. But the continued heavy hand of the government meant that local artists and literary practitioners had to find alternative spaces for literary expression.

Alternative literary voices started emerging at the turn of the millennium. Amateur comedians like Ngenge were found at street corners in Nairobi. Wahome Mũtahi took theatre to the bar with hilarious political comedies. An artist called Hardstone released the first hip-hop song in Sheng and Kalamashaka took up the mantle to initiate a Kenyan grown hip-hop music in Sheng and local languages. The Kenyan media opened doors for private investors in television and F.M. radio stations bringing about a revolution in radio and television broadcast in the country. The “Reddyculous” comedian ushered political satire on a local TV station as they caricatured the president and his dysfunctional ministers. The ‘high culture’ and preference of exotic cultural products such as music and movies from the West started giving way to the preference of local cultural products. New dynamics informed urban youth culture that now articulated itself in Sheng. The world wide revolution in information technology and increased globalization increased communication networks that impacted significantly on literary and cultural production in Kenya. The 2002 collapsing of the Moi regime created a sense of rejuvenation, re-generation and rebirth.

It is at this juncture that *Kwani?* appeared on the Kenyan literary landscape. As this study has indicated, Wainaina’s winning of the Caine Prize for Africa Writing in 2002,

followed by that of Owuor for the same prize in 2003, helped form the foundation upon which *Kwani?* established itself. *Jahazi*, a predecessor of *Kwani?* did not have any impact on the Kenyan literary scene. Coming from the backyard of the civil society movement (just as *Kwani?*, to a certain extent, did), it did not attract critical attention from the academy which it had shunned. It did not have prize winning luminaries like those of *Kwani?* and thus remained in oblivion. As for *Kwani?*, thanks to the Caine Prize, its sponsor – the Ford Foundation, and its tactfully subversive and controversial stance, it quickly made a niche in Kenyan literary production and won laurels for its writers. It was received with both praise and condemnation.

This study has gone ahead to show how *Kwani?*, in spite of its claim of coming to create a literary revolution, follows in the footsteps of its predecessors and has revisited the narratives of yesteryears, going back in history right to the traditional society and colonial history. The themes of the Mau Mau, neo-colonial disillusionment and urbanization have resurfaced. The journal goes ahead to represent recent political and social history including the 1994 Rwanda genocide and the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya as emergent temporal events around which contemporary Kenya literature could gravitate. Similarly, there is a drift towards transnational experiences which has had the journal seem to revise its editorial policies and scout for more narratives beyond the Kenyan borders.

This study has drawn similarities and differences among *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?*. One major observation is that their content is broadly derived from Kenya's social, cultural, economic and political history. The journals have as such explored the major themes in Kenyan literature. They have for instance explored pre-colonial norms and

practices of Kenyan communities. *Busara* refers to this era mostly as historical realism in the content and context of the short stories studied here. For *Mũtiiri*, the allusion to the oral tradition comes out as an element of the writers' nostalgia for an abandoned past and their craving for escape from the harsh conditions of physical and spiritual exile. *Kwani?* revisits the pre-colonial past through anthropological images and narratives of the past in a manner that seems geared toward, for instance, educating the young generation about the history of their communities from whose past they are far removed.

The narrative of the Mau Mau resistance movement and the activities of the 1952-1956 'Emergency' period in Kenya also feature in the three journals. In *Busara*, most of the writers were young boys who had a personal experience with the struggle. Their stories are therefore a fictionalization of history as they had witnessed it. They follow in the tradition of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's early short stories and novels which are overly preoccupied with the Mau Mau experience. This early magazine therefore underscores anti-colonialism as a dominant theme of the pioneer generation of African Kenyan writers and broadens our experience of the anti-colonialist movement in Kenyan literature beside what Ngũgĩ's novels have presented.

The Mau Mau narrative in *Mũtiiri* is a lament. History here is used to foreground the injustices of neo-colonial Kenyan government against the masses and the intellectuals suspected of propagating the revolutionary ideologies espoused by the movement and the associated Marxist ideals. The story of Mau Mau is told with a bitter sense of personal and national loss, of betrayal, disillusionment and, yet, with hope for another liberation in future. The reference to Mau Mau in *Kwani?* on the other hand is iconoclastic. Though the stories still point to the broken dreams of independence, betrayal and the

dispossession of the masses and the true heroes of the anti-colonial struggle, the Mau Mau images and narratives are portrayed as a source of inspiration for the dispossessed people especially the youth who now feel that a time for their own revolution is due.

Another issue that has generated a lot of interest in Kenya's literary and cultural discourse is the urban setting. *Busara* presents an urban identity that is informed by dynamics of transition from a traditional African society, usually epitomized by the uneducated rural folks, to a modern society, usually represented by the newly educated and upcoming working class. Alienation and dispossession were the major issues concerning the Kenyan urban dweller in the 1960s and 1970s. *Mũtiiri* hardly engages the urban setting in a discursive manner. Still, the city of Nairobi is presented as a prison house where justice and human rights are dispensed with by a dictatorial Kenyan government. *Kwani?*'s city is a space for the subversion of hackneyed metanarratives and ultra-conservative social order. It is a platform for the young generation to parade fresh talent oftentimes using hip-hop and Sheng to mobilize people for an imminent revolution.

The three journals have an array of stories about personalities and events that are historically significant. Many of the stories have a Kenyan setting while a host of others are about life in exile. There are less personal and political narratives in *Busara*. This suggests that the generation of the 1960s to early 1970s was perhaps more conservative and complacent than its descendants, perhaps still nursing the hangovers of the euphoria of the independence celebrations and still looking up to the 'Great Tradition' for inspiration. A great writer then had to be a university scholar. *Mũtiiri* presents tales of woes and disenchantment, of home and exile – tales of misappropriation of political power and dislocation. *Kwani?* on the other hand reiterates the anomies of neo-colonial

Kenya in the contemporary setting by diagnosing such evils as corruption, dispossession, ethnicity, political violence and Eurocentric avarice.

The three magazines are constituted through various forms. *Busara* is the literary magazine per excellence. It has the traditional genres of fictional short stories, poetry and the critical essay. This again stems from its location in a department of literature whose focus was the preparation of creative writers and literary critics. *Mũtiiri* is dominated by poetry, probably because the form renders strong emotions more readily than narrative forms. It also has essays especially on the politics of language in Africa. *Kwani?* is a combination of a myriad of forms – from fictional short stories to creative non-fiction, poetry, expository essays, biographical works, interview reports, photographs, cartoon strips, e-mail texts and blogs. *Kwani?* is contemporary and more adventurous in design, taking advantage of development in information technology to create graphological effects that shape and spice its content.

As noted in this study, *Busara*, *Mũtiiri* and *Kwani?* are a reflection of the social dynamics that determined literary and cultural production in the respective time periods of their production. *Busara* hailed from the university and creative writing was then mostly a preserve of the intellectual elite. The academy was heavily involved in literary production, pan-East Africanism reinforced it and the regional governments as well as established publishing companies were more directly involved. This trend drastically changed starting mid-1970s. The East African Community collapsed and the Kenyan government became increasingly draconian. Thus, *Mũtiiri* is mostly identified with the casualties of the authoritarian regime of the 1980s and others in the Diasporas. *Kwani?*, on its part, emerged from the crevices of a crumbling literary edifice and introduced new

literary voices. Coming at the dawn of the second millennium, the journal rejuvenated the stream of literary activities and revived pan-Africanism and trans-nationalism as significant trends in contemporary literary and cultural production in Kenya.

The production and circulation of the journals follow patterns determined by the conditions of their production. *Busara* as a students' magazine mostly circulated among the university fraternity and enjoyed the support of the university and publishing houses like the East African Literature Bureau and the East African Publishing House. *Mũtiiri* has been published with the support of, first, the University of New York and, later, the University of California at Irvine. Judging by the list of contributors, and the fact that it has not been widely marketed in Kenya, the journal is mostly read by the speakers of the Gĩkũyũ in the diasporas. Doreen Strauhs considers *Kwani?* a good example of a literary Non Governmental Organization. It was founded under the sponsorship of Ford Foundation and is published and marketed by Kwani Trust. The trust has used local and international networks as well as the internet to widely circulate the journal.

This study has established that literary magazines have provided an easily accessible forum for budding writers who may otherwise have found it very hard to get published by the mainstream publishing houses. The magazines have therefore given them the opportunity to practise and improve their skills and get feedback more readily than they would if they were dealing with established publishers. If it were not for the magazines, would-be writers would probably never get the chance to discover their potential. This point is vindicated by experiences of major Kenyan writers. Ogot, perhaps the earliest published Kenyan African writer first published her short stories in *Black Orpheus* and *Transition*, Ngũgĩ's and Kariara's short stories were first published in *Penpoint*, Kibera

and Wanjala first wrote for *Nexus/Busara* while Wainaina, Owuor and Kantai have *Kwani?* and other contemporary international journals to thank for their creative growth. Besides, the magazines provide opportunities for training and forums for interaction with established authors which has given budding writers the requisite exposure in preparation for a writing career.

Literary and cultural journals have also provided upcoming writers with the opportunity to interact and network with people with similar aspirations thus promoting a fraternal atmosphere that has created synergies for greater productivity. The peer review that characterizes these publications helps to establish benchmarks that safeguard the quality of the writers' contributions and helps to uphold editorial policies that ultimately constitute the tradition of the fraternity and by extension the larger literary community. Such is the reason why we can talk of literary movements such as the Romantic poets in English poetry or the Negritude movement in African literature.

In this study I have identified the social dynamics that saw literary activities of the 1960s and 1970s concentrated around the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi, or the collective motivations of the *Mũtiiri* contributors as the conditions that pushed them to exile and Ngũgĩ's crusade for African languages, as well as the *Kwani?* writers' disillusionment with the 'old guard' hence the solidarity of purpose in their avowed mission to bring about a 'literary revolution' in Kenya. These group dynamics have shaped literary trends in the country and beyond.

In view of the above, this study confirms that periodicals play an integral part in the growth and development of literature. The study has shown the contributions of *Busara*,

Mũtiiri, and *Kwani?* to Kenyan literature in representing and mediating literary trends in the country and beyond in their respective periods of publication. The magazines have represented and interrogated Kenyan social and political histories perhaps much more extensively than would a novel, a play or a biography for they give room for a variety of authors to render divergent perspectives on matters of common concern. They are dialogic – giving room for contestations and concessions to thrive within the same space. Besides, they are much more affordable, are periodical – coming out severally, intermittently – can be read leisurely and are therefore likely to be more popular with the readers than novels and anthologies. As Fanon would probably reiterate, literary magazines have provided the forum for Kenyan writers to represent the literary and cultural concerns of their respective generations.

This study finally recommends that more research be undertaken in other alternative sites of literary expression. Development in digital technology has given rise on-line publications of literary works in personal blogs, electronic journals and social media sites like Facebook. An examination of this contemporary trend would point out to new developments in Kenyan literary history.

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Appendage 1

A Schedule for an Interview with *Kwani?*'s Billy Kahora on 2nd February 2011.

1. What would you cite as the significant departure of *Kwani?*'s contributors from the writings of earlier generations of Kenyan writers?
2. Why would *Kwani?* feel its contribution is unique as compared to the older generations of Kenyan writers?
3. Is it different from early East African periodicals such *Transition*, *Black Orpheus*, *Zuka*, *Busara*? What is new? / fresh?
4. Do you have specific thematic preferences?
5. What is *Kwani?*'s approach to publishing? How different is it from mainstream/traditional publishers.
6. What are *Kwani?*'s marketing strategies?
7. Which are some of the challenges of publishing and how have you tried to overcome them?
8. What would you say is the impact of NGO funding? Does it influence the aesthetics of the works produced in any way?
9. What is your target audience? How does it influence the aesthetics of the journal, for example, in terms of language and content?
10. How is *Kwani?*'s membership constituted? Is it a group of friends? Is there any age limits? How does *Kwani?* maintain group synergies?
11. What do you see as the positive or negative impact of modern technology on publishing in Kenya?

12. How would you relate *Kwani?* with other international journals like *Chimurenga*,
St. Petersburg Review, *The Granta* etc