

**THE NATIONAL, CULTURAL AND PERSONAL IDENTITY STRUGGLES  
IN SELECTED TEXTS BY YVONNE ADHIAMBO OWUOR**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE  
OF MASINDE MULIRO UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**July, 2021**

**DECLARATION**

This thesis is my original work prepared with no other than the indicated sources and support and has not been presented elsewhere for a degree or any other awards.

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The Undersigned Certify that they have read and hereby recommend for acceptance of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology entitled ‘The National, Cultural and Personal Identity Struggles in Selected Texts by YVONNE ADHIAMBO OWUOR’

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my parents and siblings.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Jairus Omuteche of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology and Dr. Kesero Tunai of Rongo University for their tireless and endless encouragement and supervision.

Thanks also to all my lecturers of the Department of Languages and Literature Education of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology for their generous contributions and assistance whenever I called on them.

Special thanks go to my family for their help, patience and generosity.

Kasiera F. E.

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Identity**-This is the character's or group's conception of difference, the markers of belonging to racial /ethnic groups or place and the processes that facilitate it. The study understands identity to refer to an interaction between what one perceives oneself to be and what they are perceived by others to be. Identity as observed by Hogg and Abrams (1988) is peoples' concept of who they are, of what sort of people they are and how they relate with others. Deng (1995) notes that identity is the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture.

**National identity**-This refers to values common to the whole nation; peculiar to a particular nation. Ojo (1985) observes that the nation is a body of people politically organized under one government with sovereign rights and recognized by other sovereign states as having a legal status .The implication here is that the main elements of the nation are geography, people, government and sovereignty. Bloom (1990) defines national identity as “that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols and have internalized the symbols of the nation” (52).

**Cultural identity**-This refers to a particular form, stage or type of civilization. This may also be viewed as the total sum of a people's way of life and includes norms and values of a society: their religion, politics, economics, technology, food, habits, medicine, rules, of marriage, the performing arts, law and so on. For Geertz (1973:44-45), culture is a set of control mechanisms-plans, recipes, rules and instruments for governing of behavior.

**Personal identity**-This refers to the concept one develops about one's self that evolves over the course of one's life. According to Wendt (1992), personal identity is a relatively stable, role-specific understanding expectations about ones' self. This may include aspects of one's life that they do not have control over, such as where one grew up or the color of their skin, as well as the choices one makes in life, such as how one spends his/her time and what he/she believes in. One demonstrates portions of his/her personal identity outwardly through what they wear and how they interact with other people.

**Self-interpellative reading**-Payne (1997) defines this as the reading that places more emphasis on the history of the text. Here, the reader collects enough information and knowledge in regard to the form of cultural or literary products, the background information of the producer and the history at the time of production. The knowledge gained enables the reader to analyze and explain the cultural or the literary works more productively.

**Postcolonialism**- This study draws the definition from McLeod (2010) who says that in literary terms postcolonialism analyses the politics of knowledge creation, control, and distribution and the functional relations of social and political power that sustain colonialism and neo-colonization and the how and the why of an imperial regime's representations, social, political, cultural and that of the colonized people.

**Other**-The dominant sense this term has to this study is belonging to a group that is different from that of the perceiver and to which it relates in terms of hierarchy. In the discourse of philosophy, the term otherness identifies and refers to the characteristics of *who?* and *what?* of the *other*, which are distinct and separate from the symbolic order of things; from the *real* (the authentic and unchangeable), political, philosophy, social norms

and social identity and from the self. Basing on Beauviou (1952), therefore, the condition of otherness is the condition of disenfranchisement (political exclusion), effected either by the state or by the social institutions invested with the corresponding socio-political power. The imposition of *Otherness* therefore alienates the labeled person from the center of society, and places him or her at the margins of society, for being the *Other*.

**Intertextuality**-This refers to various relationships a given text may have with other texts. Literary texts refer to others or to themselves in deconstructive thinking rather than to external reality. Hebel (1989) observes that intertextuality is the readers' referencing of one text in reading another or authors borrowing and transforming of a given text. This, to the research, in essence explains why texts acquire as many meanings as the readers.

**Self**- Refers to ideas that constitute the conditions of being or belonging. An individual entity is perceived to be distinguishable from other persons by essential signifier. The self is constantly evolving due to the complexities of cultures and societies. According to Myers (2009), the term self is a collection of beliefs about oneself. It embodies the ability of an individual to recognize oneself as an entity separate from the environment and other individuals. This study therefore argues that the concept of self encompasses the ability of an individual to know and understand his/her own character, feelings, motives and desires.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study analyses the representations of identity struggles in three texts by Owuor Yvonne Adhiambo: the short stories “Weight of Whispers” and “The Knife Grinders Tale” and the novel *Dust*. The selected texts are studied to determine the extent to which they project the challenges, struggles and the length characters go to in their quest to understand and (re)create their identity. The study looks at how Owuor, through her three texts’ themes, character and characterization therein, brings to the fore the national, cultural and personal struggles the characters go through in an attempt to define who they are. This study comes at a time when most Africans are conflicting with who they truly are while at the same time faced with a myriad of problems; at personal, cultural and national levels. The research further explores how the three texts capture the relationships between space-places and identity creation and struggles; and finally the artistic strategies the author employs to depict her concerns with identity struggles effectively. Using the postcolonial theoretical ideas, which are augmented by the post-structural theoretical thinking, the research explores how the author through her texts highlights the characters’ day-to-day experiences in the places they occupy in relation to the multi-layered identity struggles. Intertextuality, which is the argument that texts elaborate other texts with which they engage in various forms of dialogue, is employed in making a comparative analysis of the three primary texts; it also acts as a lens in the discovery of the various levels of meanings intertwined in the texts. This study argues that identity, as a thematic concern, is an attempt to make sense of oneself in relation to one’s world and because of this, meanings of the basic terms that describe identity are key as a starting point in the process of self-awareness. Owuor’s texts, in the contemporary East African region, are an interaction of discourses and can therefore be looked at as an interlocutor in the ongoing debates about the meaning of individual, cultural and national identities. To this end, this study finds Owuor’s characters as being conscious of their positions in the places and spaces they find themselves in.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Exploring the subject of identity within the Kenyan socio-political context needs an understanding of the ambiguities of identity and power as experienced within defined economic, cultural and political spaces. To understand the social affiliations of identity requires that we clearly recognize its systematic origins in the cultural and social frameworks. Were and Derek (1968), observe that “the sort of country that people live in affects the way they live and develop” (3). This was the case in Kenya and across most East African states where according to Were and Wilson, “the geography determined not only which areas the early inhabitants settled in but also the interaction amongst them” (5). This means that ideas of nationhood and citizenship in Kenya that emerged in the years after independence and up to date are indeed social and historical constructs. Writers, like the societies they write about, are products of certain historical forces which to varying levels shape the way they perceive reality and therefore how they represent situations.

Looking at the author’s biography the study finds that Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor was born in 1968 in Nairobi, Kenya. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Linguistics, English and History from Kenyatta University and a Masters of Arts CTV/Video Development degree from University of Reading in Britain. She has worked as a screenwriter and from 2003 to 2005 Owuor was the Executive Director of Zanzibar International Film Festival. Her short story “Weight of Whispers” won the prestigious Caine Book Prize for African short story writing.

The research argues that it is the role of the literary critic to interrogate the images presented in a particular work of art at a given time and place; by looking at and re-examining the

social, cultural, economic and political borders that create the various levels of identity and their representations. The study of *Dust*, “Weight of Whispers” and “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” attempts to discover the identity crises and the struggles characters undergo with close attention to the Kenyan nation. This is premised on the thinking that post-independent African writers have continually spoken about identity both in theory, in political-ideological commentary and more so in their literary works. The texts were therefore picked with the aim of examining how the new generation of contemporary Kenyan writers, like Owuor, depict and present to us the silent identity struggles

This study argues that identity often relies on the notion of common origin which is often linked with both geography and history; real or imagined. Imagined geography here refers to the perception of a space created through certain imagery, texts or discourses. Simandan (2016) says that, “despite often being constructed on a national level, imagined geographies also occur domestically in nations and locally within regions cities and many other places” (249). The concept of imagined geographies originated from Edward Said, particularly his work on the critique on Orientalism. Babacan (2006) argues that geographical space and place possess symbolic attributes and become significant in attachment and evoke emotions, sentiments and longing to be in a particular location. She goes on to say that the notions of territory are also linked up with concepts of place. Place then becomes a complex phenomena and implies peoples’ connections to locales. Places enable association between lived experiences, personal stories, myths, images and memories which present legacies that carry meaning to individuals and communities.

Therefore, there is a strong inter-relationship between space and place and this enables the exploration of issues of identity construction in the context of the nation. This research

explored the complexities of identity formation amongst individuals in the works under study. In so doing, the dimensions of space and place in the construction of personal, cultural and national identities will be investigated. Odhiambo (2002), commenting on the identity issue says that:

Significance of group identities has not diminished even with the formation of nation-states majorly because family, clan and ethnic groups are still the essential structures of social relationships and because in most parts of Kenya one's identity is ethnic not national. The history of migration and settlement of the communities testifies to the heterogeneous ancestry of these Kenyan people. (30-31)

Indeed Ogot (2002) opines that the inhabitants of the inter-lacustrine region of East Africa commingled for a millennium within the region creating systems of production, exchange and redistribution which were predicated on local identities rather than specific Bantu or Nilotic languages, culture and ethnic communities which has constantly led to conflict with other cultures and ethnic groups. The study therefore attempts to investigate stories and experiences of a peoples' struggle to understand their identity and the challenges they face in this endeavor.

Lamb (1984) argues that group identity, as applied to Africa, refers to a group of people sharing a common ancestry, language, symbols and territory. What this implies is that identity derives its foundation from combined memories of the past and common expectations and that many people have lived and continue to lead their lives within the framework of an ethnic group. Through the fictional characters in the three texts under study therefore, people's memories and past experiences such as ethnic violence, oppression, corruption, disillusionment, brutality and ethnicity were brought to the fore for examination. For many people, group identity stands as a symbol of communal solidarity and security. This identity, be it in rural or urban areas, remains a powerful force to reckon with, and

greatly depends on the prevailing political circumstances. Tajfet and Turner (1979) propose that:

The groups (e.g. social class, family, clan e.t.c) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world. (33)

Identity, as a concept, therefore, tends to mean different things at different times and contexts. The nature and meaning of identity are influenced and determined by cultural, socioeconomic and political changes that have continued to fashion social relations, self-identification, loyalties and interests. This study therefore investigates stories of people on the periphery, as presented in the works under study, to highlight their experiences and expectations in the larger Kenyan society thereby pinpointing their struggles and challenges.

While in agreement with the foregoing discussion, Lonsdale (1981) observes that:

Identities, from the African perspectives, assumed a triple history: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. In the pre-colonial period, ethnic groups were more rural and homogeneous and there was less competition between them for scarce economic resources than it is today. In the pre-colonial period, there was a recognized art of living in a reasonably peaceful way without a state structure in the way it is understood today. Small ethnic groups, during the colonial period were forced to merge. (139)

When looking at the identity theory, this study identifies three levels of identity whose Latin root is "*idem*", implying sameness and continuity. The first level is the essential core to identity, which is created with the individual and is constant and unalterable. This is also referred to as "inherited recipe". Taylor (1989), argues, "Our identity is constructed through our orientations, which may remain totally implicit. A functioning identity can, to a large degree, remain implicit" (7). The second level is the coherent identity formed in relation with other people, which develops and alters over time. At this level, identity is constructed through a network of social relationships. It is actually taught and learnt through the process

of socialization and daily interaction. According to Woodward (1997), “identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who don’t” (1-2).

The third level is one based on post-modern and post-structural thinking. Identity here is conceived as dislocated, unfixed, fluid and constantly in a state of flux. Indeed as Taylor (1975) points out, “sometimes the self-definitions we adopt are self-consciously reformative. As time goes by, these once innovative self-definitions turn into routines and habits; they become re-sedimented and metamorphose into elements of the implicit background horizon of orientation” (11-29). What this third definition implies is that there is no essential identity but only one that is self-constructed by the individual playing with images, icons and representations that they are confronted with. As such, the individual is considered to be a multiplicity of identities for deployment in different social roles and needs. The above conceptions of identity greatly inform our study when it comes to comprehension of the individual or personal identity struggles in relation to roles and specific situations the individual is faced with in given places and spaces.

When looking at the identity issue, the state or the nation becomes very important in identity formations of Africans. After the attainment of self-rule, in place of traditional ethnic groups or kingdoms, new states arose, bringing together multiethnic groups that the European powers had earlier on put together for their political and economic expediency.

Ojaide (2009), writing on the formation of African states notes that:

African peoples were divided into countries irrespective of ethnicities, and countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda became multiethnic nations. A new political topography came into place with every African belonging to a specific country. (56)

It is on this backdrop that most postcolonial African writers have continued to write and comment on these issues with the aim of trying to understand and tackle the concept of what it means to be generally human and specifically African.

The concept of self refers to ideas that constitute the conditions of being or belonging. An individual entity is perceived to be distinguishable from other persons by essential signifier. The self is constantly evolving due to the complexities of cultures and societies. According to Myers (2009), the term self is a collection of beliefs about oneself. It embodies the ability of an individual to recognize oneself as an entity separate from the environment and other individuals. This study therefore argues that the concept of self encompasses the ability of an individual to know and understand his or her own character, feelings, motives and desires.

On one hand identity is the character's or group's conception of difference, the markers of belonging to racial or ethnic groups or place and the processes that facilitate it. This study understands identity to refer to an interaction between what one perceives oneself to be and what they are perceived by others to be. Identity as observed by Hogg and Abrams (1988) is a peoples' concept of who they are, of what sort of people they are and how they relate with others. Deng (1995) notes that identity is the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture. An issue which is closely associated with the salience of group, ethnic and national identities has to do with citizenship conceptualizations. These conceptualizations essentially refer to people's beliefs about the organization of society and about who should be regarded as a national in-group member. When it comes to ethnic groupings, we look for example at the law of blood based on ancestry which we consider as being rather closed or inherited. Yieke

(2010) opines that “what precisely defines one’s ethnic identity and his or her membership in an ethnic group is due to the fact that one is born with an ethnic identity” (10). This means that ethnic identity is not only natural and immutable but it is also defined by one’s culture, biological heritage and territorial roots.

Personal identity on the other hand refers to the concept one develops about one’s self that evolves over the course of one’s life. According to Wend (1992), personal identity is a relatively stable, role-specific understanding expectations about one’s self. This may include aspects of one’s life that they do not have control over, such as where one grew up or the color of their skin, as well as the choices one makes in life, such as how one spends his or her time and what he or she believes in. This study argues that while identity is a volatile, flexible and abstract entity, its manifestations and the ways in which it is expressed are usually open to observe. We are able, for example, to view identity through the use of identity markers like language, dress, behavior and choice of space, whose effect depends on their recognition by other social beings. Identity markers are vital in the creation of boundaries that define similarities or differences between the marker wearer and the marker perceivers, how effective this is depends greatly on a shared understanding of their connotation.

Cultural identity, as a concept refers to a particular form, stage or type of civilization. This may also be viewed as the total sum of a people’s way of life and includes norms and values of a society: their religion, politics, economics, technology, food, habits, medicine, rules of marriage, the performing arts, law and so on. For Geertz (1973:44-45), culture is a set of control mechanisms-plans, recipes, rules and instruments for governing of behavior. In the new nation, for example, the history of struggle against colonialism becomes one of the

points of reference in building the culture and the nation. This is through the provision of the symbols and sensibility of what it means to be national culture and providing an account of how the collective, “the imagined nation”, has, by way of its endeavors, moved from one phase of its historical development into another, from its people being subjects to their becoming citizens.

This study notes that national identity refers to values common to the whole nation; peculiar to a particular nation. Ojo (1985) observes that the nation is a body of people politically organized under one government with sovereign rights and recognized by other sovereign states as having a legal status. The implication here is that the main elements of the nation are geography, people, government and sovereignty. Bloom (1990) defines national identity as “that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols and have internalized the symbols of the nation” (52). History and the related cultural and symbolic forms which come with it are, of course, central in the construction of national identities. Burke (1993) argues “nations as imagined communities are cultural artefacts which have a historical specificity” (41). Thus struggles for either domination or freedom are also struggles over what history to tell; what history is to become dominant, who is to be glorified and who is to be vilified. Langer (2010) notes “the re-telling of histories therefore accompanies efforts at decolonization and nation-building” (48). The implication of this is that a people’s history and culture or processes of signification therefore become in themselves inextricably linked.

On what constitutes a Kenyan identity Ouma (2011) says that, “The notions of what it means to be a Kenyan are intricately connected with the state’s project of building a unitary state and uniform citizens, in a context of co-existing yet antagonistic pluralities” (7). Based

on Ouma's arguments we observe that some of these pluralities like gender, ethnic region and migration status are widely acceptable. On the contrary, others like those connected to economic inequalities, notions of hierarchical relationships between various language groups and social positioning, are regarded as enablers of discriminatory practices and pathological to the project of state and nation-building.

In the definition of self-interpellative reading, Payne (1997) refers to it as the reading that places more emphasis on the history of the text. Here, the reader collects enough information and knowledge in regard to the form of cultural or literary products, the background information of the producer and the history at the time of production. The knowledge gained enables the reader to analyze and explain the cultural or the literary works more productively.

In looking at postcolonialism, as a literary concept, this study draws the definition from McLeod (2010), who says that in literary terms postcolonialism analyses the politics of knowledge creation, control, and distribution and the functional relations of social and political power that sustain colonialism and neo-colonization and the how and the why of an imperial regime's representations, social, political, cultural and that of the colonized people.

When it comes to the *Other*, the dominant sense this term has to this study, is belonging to a group that is different from that of the perceiver and to which it relates in terms of hierarchy.

In the discourse of philosophy, the term otherness identifies and refers to the characteristics of *who?* and *what?* of the *other*, which are distinct and separate from the symbolic order of things; from the *real* (the authentic and unchangeable), political, philosophy, social norms and social identity and from the self. Basing on Beauviou (1952), therefore, the condition of otherness is the condition of disenfranchisement (political exclusion), effected either by the

state or by the social institutions invested with the corresponding socio-political power .The imposition of *Otherness* therefore alienates the labeled person from the center of society, and places him or her at the margins of society, for being the *Other*.

The link between *Otherness* and postcolonialism enables us a chance at illustrating the nature of postcolonial identities. Grace (2007) opines that the postcolonial experience is often characterized by a co-existence of opposites which is a feature of consciousness, which exists along with other co-existence of silence and dynamism, singularity and multiplicity, manifest and unmanifest. (4) Seen in this light, postcolonial African identities can be said to be subjective when it comes to the choice of who one associates and identifies with. This association or identification is determined by the factors that define postcolonial identities such as; social relationships, a shared past of common descent, a history of union, the everyday practices of perceiving and treating others, and the institutions in which we are embedded.

When looking at intertextuality, as a technique, it refers to various relationships a given text may have with other texts. Literary texts refer to others or to themselves in deconstructive thinking rather than to external reality. Hebel (1989) observes that intertextuality is the readers' referencing of one text in reading another or authors borrowing and transforming of a given text. This, to our study, in essence explains why texts acquire as many meanings as the readers.

Based on the foregoing, this section argues that while developing a sense of identity and belonging is an important part of the personal, cultural and national identity struggles, identity is something that shifts and grows throughout life as characters confront new challenges and tackle different experiences. Baxter (2009) notes that, "Identity or parts of

identity may be classified by any number of things such as religion, gender or ethnicity” (45). He goes on to argue that some traits, such as race, are set at birth. Some traits may be modified later in life such as language(s) spoken or religious preferences. We argue that developing both a personal, cultural and national identity or a sense of self and those traits a person desires to have can take time and may be challenging and a struggle. This is pegged on the fact that failure to have a strong sense of self and belonging or struggling with identity issues may lead to anxiety and insecurity as is well portrayed in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s three texts under study.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The study focuses on discourses which name and highlight struggles inclusive of human sufferings and crises across the African continent so as to explore how Owuor highlights the national, cultural and personal struggles characters go through in the process of identity creation. African writers have continually spoken for the oppressed both in theory, in political-ideological commentary and more so in their creative works. In the three texts: “Weight of Whispers”, *Dust* and “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” this research examines the issue to do with identity; at the national level, cultural level and to the personal or individual level. So as to examine these, the study concerns itself with the depiction of the challenges characters confront in an attempt to form and attain their identity and understand what it means to be African and Kenyan for that matter. This is because African tales have continuously been analyzed as national allegories since the life of a nation, large or small, exceeds the capacity of what any literary work of art such as novel, poem, play or short story can actually accommodate. Chinweizu et al. (1983) in their work argue that African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures and that it has

its own traditions, models and norms (30). This study takes this to imply that African literature depends on its history and cultural imperatives to pass across its concerns. Abis (2011) studies Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* as a critical text which delineates the historical, political, social and economic circumstances that make it possible to analyze African literature dealing in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial stages of African literature.

This research argues that literary tales play an important role in many African cultures since stories reflect a group's cultural identity and these stories normally are created by and for the ethnic group telling them. As a result, for people within a given community, the story allows them to encompass their group's uniqueness. African tales henceforth show the human desires and fears of a group such as love, marriage and death. The study also argues that every story, in the African context, has a moral to teach. The three fictional texts studied were therefore used in providing the study a vital comprehension of the identity motif. Premised on the foregoing thinking, the texts were henceforth used allegorically as a means of expressing a dimension of existence greater than that of the lives of individual characters therein and with essence to examine how far the stories of identity have been portrayed to mirror the wider experience in society.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The overall aim of the study was to get a critical understanding of identity as a literary motif in the three texts studied.

The study therefore aimed to achieve a number of interrelated objectives:

- a. To examine how the selected texts conceive identity.
- b. To analyze the link between identity, spaces and places in the selected texts.

- c. To evaluate the artistic strategies the selected texts employ in the depiction of identity quest struggles.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The following questions guided the research in its discussion:

- a. How is identity conceived in the selected texts?
- b. How do the selected texts portray the link between identity, spaces and places?
- c. Which artistic strategies do the selected texts use in depicting identity quest struggles?

#### **1.5 Research Assumptions**

The research was predicated on the following assumptions:

- a. Adhiambo Yvonne Owuor's three texts project the identity issue.
- b. There is a link between identity, spaces and places in the selected texts.
- c. The selected texts effectively employ various artistic strategies in the depiction of the struggles faced by characters in their quest for identity.

#### **1.6 Rationale of the Study**

This study is guided by the idea that identity formation and representation is an interactive process, that is, there is an interaction between the person and their experiences, person and their environment, person and other characters who are themselves products of an interactive process. It was therefore important for the study to investigate the presentation of the variables involved in the formation of identities and sense of belonging as a way of understanding national, cultural and personal identity struggles.

Commenting on the colonization of Africans by the Europeans, Rodney (1989) argues that, “During the course of colonization, Western patterns of identification were imposed upon the African citizenry. Before this, various ethnicities intermingled freely and even ended up assimilating the elements of foreign communities into dominant ones. As a consequence ethnicity was a mere sign of identification. Membership was fluid” (244). The colonial situation however introduced a colonial state proffering a different social milieu altogether. Rodney seems to suggest that one of the prominent features of the new setup was the negation of freedom imposed by the imperial presence on the colonized peoples. Colonial forces achieved this by introducing new authoritarian policies, administrative values and practices, all of which were aimed at benefiting colonialists to the disadvantage of the colonized people. To be colonized, Rodney (1989), has argued, “Is to be removed from history” (244).

To further Rodney’s arguments, this study borrows from Fanon (1968), where he articulates the intricate process colonialists indulge in to create their world. He points out that, “The colonial world is a dual one that parcels groups as belonging or not belonging to a given race, species, or religious creed.” (37).

Following up closely in the literary writings discussed in the foregoing, after and since independence, Kenyan writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Francis Imbuga and Meja Mwangi with *A Grain of Wheat*, *Betrayal in the City* and *Carcass for Hounds* respectively have been narrating the country’s socio-political and economic developments, highlighting issues such as the struggle against colonialism and quest for independence, postcolonial succession politics, disillusionment, corruption, poverty and misuse of power. Although these early writers concerned themselves with the effects of colonialism and the post-

independent African state, the emergence of a new crop of Kenyan writers like Owuor who are reflecting on the Kenyan state's past, there is need to examine how these writers depict this past in the present so as to discover the ignored and somehow silent issues of belonging and identity struggles the citizenry go through. Whereas most Kenyan writers, like the ones mentioned earlier, use the centrality of the normative pre-colonial African family and community to illustrate the destructiveness of the colonial project through the disintegration of the family unit, Owuor's imagined Kenyan families are already and always living this destruction.

On the explicit issue of identity, Kerry (2017) asserts that "the tragedy of identity in the post-colony and the failure of family formation in the post-colonial world, Owuor's works offer the reader a qualified rendition through examining of the previous generations and a literal bonfire of structures of the past and in so doing the imagination of a new Kenyan identity" (21). Therefore, in analyzing Owuor's texts, the study gets a better and clear understanding of the issues faced by the characters in their identity quest. This study furthermore, in light of the foregoing, attempts to look at how the demands for acceptance of diverse identity in the present Africa raise the literary and political discussion. How the above could interact or intercept with the common cultural framework was also an issue examined.

Owuor's three texts reflect on and inform the experiences Kenyans go through in their day-to-day lives. The texts also attempt to interconnect Kenya geographically by situating their stories in different parts of the country; for example Nairobi, Northern Kenya, Central Kenya and the Western regions. The characters depicted also represent the faces of Kenya in terms of tribe, race, social class, gender, religion and many more.

Although the characters are fictional, their stories represent stories in Kenya such as those of violence, oppression, corruption, segregation, disillusionment and betrayal; most of these stories rarely get prominence in the established news publications and government official documents.

Though creative writing reflects human experience in the society subjectively, it is however possible to understand how individuals in a society view themselves and others through analysis of literary texts by writers. The choice of prose fiction by Owuor was premised on Hudson's argument that, "prose fiction is the most flexible of all literary forms" (130).

Brushwood (1998) considers prose fiction as having the ability to express a nation's reality as it can "encompass both the visible reality and the elements of reality that are not seen" (ix). He contends that prose fiction, being cultural organisms; have ideal roles and how effectively such roles are fulfilled or not provide an opportunity to analyze a writer's understanding of reality. Important to this study is also how Owuor portrays the characters in her three texts and what themes concern her most in an attempt to bring to the fore the issues afflicting the post-colonial African nation as the characters attempt to (re)define themselves with the recognition that identities are conceived and presented within interactive discourses.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The concept of identity provides the platform by which many post-colonial and contemporary literary ideas can be understood, such as identity quests, societal stratifications, gender issues, ethnicity, disillusionment, migratory patterns, corruption,

sexuality and disability. As such, it can be viewed as providing the foundation to the nascent field of identity formation in and around Kenya.

Post-independent Kenyan writers have been narrating this nation's human encounters and experiences. However, with the emergence of a new crop of Kenyan writers like Binyavanga Wainaina, Mukoma wa Ngugi, Okwiri Oduor, Boniface Kinoti Gitobu, who are keenly (re) looking at the Kenyan past, this study argues that there is a need to examine how these writers depict the past in the present to bring to light the hidden and silent personal, cultural and national experiences. This study focuses on Owuor's texts since she talks about the politics of change and she has the talent and potential to change and define how we look at identity and its trends in Africa.

Owuor's works under study reflect and inform on the struggles Kenyans have undergone for over half a century up to date. This study therefore critically and theoretically looks at these issues so as to help in the understanding of the quest for identity by the characters even as they interact with each other.

This study reflects on the nature of new and emerging social and cultural forms and the impacts of the interactions between the fictional characters in Owuor's works under study. This study thus illuminates the various ideologies on identity that inform Kenyan literature. In addition, the study helps the reader to determine if Owuor's portrayal of Kenyan history and identity quest struggles reflect the nation's personal, cultural and social relations.

### **1.8 Scope and Limitations of this Study**

This study focused on the analysis of depiction of national, cultural and personal identity struggles that come with the questing for identity formation and belonging in the three texts

by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, that is, “Weight of Whispers” (2003), “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” (2007) which are short stories and the novel *Dust* (2014). The texts bring out modern day identity issues coupled with the struggles the characters go through; these vary from gender, class, age, language and ethnicity, profession, race, societal stratification, nation-state and so on both at individual and national levels. These texts are used to examine the mentioned concerns through textual analysis on the premise that people and writers tell tales to point out and foreground their experiences and ideas in the world around them.

Although this study was focused on the three texts, textual references were made to other texts which share the same ideas with the study with a view of compacting and augmenting the study.

This study is restricted within the principles of the postcolonial literary theory. African identity struggles and quest together with the issues afflicting immigrants in and around Africa served as our guide in the review of literature.

*Dust* was read with the aim of identifying the various levels of identity: national, cultural and personal, as portrayed by the author through various characters and themes in the text. The study uses “Weight of Whispers” to explore the varied problems afflicting Africa with more emphasis on war and its effects on the citizenry at large. “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” is analyzed with a view of highlighting the identity struggles individual characters undergo in their day-to-day lives.

Although Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is a relatively new writer and has not received considerable criticism, this research got and gathered relevant information available with a view of enriching this study.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by postcolonial theoretical ideas and augmented by the post-structural theoretical thinking. These bodies of theories are related to each other in that they question particular ways of understanding and describing the world around us, cultural productions and where works of literature fall. The two also provide alternative ways of reading and interpreting literary texts and the analysis of human experiences. For these reasons, both theories are therefore anti-essentialist since they reject the idea of authoritative or singular perspectives.

As a politics (affairs of the citizenry), the field of postcolonialism addresses the politics of knowledge, that is, the matters that constitute the postcolonial identity of the decolonized people. Postcolonial theory rejects the polarity of the Colonialist discourse of centre versus the periphery and views colonialism as a destabilizing experience that changes how both the colonized and the former colonized, and the colonizer view themselves. The reasoning of postcolonial theory according to Pilario (2004) is “that all assertions of a cultural group about itself, that is, values, traits and identity are constructed under specific socio-historical conditions” (92).

Postcolonialism often addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of the formally subjugated people. Decolonized people often develop a postcolonial identity based on cultural interactions between different identities (cultural, national, ethnic, gender as well as class) which are assigned varied weight by the colonizers.

Ayub (2001) and Israel (2003) deal with the psychologically fragmented postcolonial identity, as determined by the effects (political and social, cultural and economic) of

Western colonialism in the Middle East. As such, the fragmented national identity remains a characteristic of such societies, consequence of the imperially convenient, but arbitrary, colonial boundaries (geographical and cultural) demarcated by the Europeans, with which they ignored the tribal and clan relations that determined the geographic borders of the Middle East countries, before the arrival of European imperialists. Hence the postcolonial literature about the Middle East, Africa and other post colonized states analyzes the Western discourse about identity formation, the existence and inconsistent nature of a postcolonial national-identity among the peoples of the contemporary post colonized nations. It is from Ayub's and Israel's views, as discussed above, that this study attempts to analyze how the citizens are treated by the contemporary Kenyan state as they try to identify themselves at a personal level, cultural level and national level.

Additionally, postcolonialism can be looked at from two literary angles: that of the postcolonial nations and that of the nations who continue forging a postcolonial national identity. The first category of literature presents and analyzes the internal challenges inherent to determining an ethnic identity in a decolonized nation. The second category of literature present and analyzes the degeneration of civic and nationalist unities consequent to ethnic parochialism, usually manifested as the demagoguery of "protecting the nation", a variant of the Us-and- Them binary social relation. Civil and national unity degenerate when a patriarchal regime unilaterally defines what is and what is not "the national culture" of the decolonized country; the nation-state collapses, either into communal movements, espousing grand political goals for the political postcolonial nation; or into ethnically mixed communal movements, espousing political separatism, as occurred in decolonized Rwanda, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is therefore aptly observed by Ashcroft *et al*

(2006), that “post colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction” (2). This study is thus guided by such postcolonial thoughts to examine the postcolonial extremes that exist between the characters in their identity quests.

Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha are some of the proponents and practitioners of these postcolonial ideologies. These theorists tackle the influence of colonization, decolonization, hybridity, and language and displacement movement on the post-colonial diasporas. Theirs is an attempt to reconstruct identity or to reinvent a new one.

Apart from introducing the term Subaltern, which in simple words means the “oppressed”, Gayatri Spivak also introduced the terms *essentialism* and *strategic essentialism* to describe the social functions of postcolonialism. This study finds the term *essentialism*, based on Spivak’s argument, as denoting the perceptual dangers inherent to reviving subaltern voices in ways that might (over) simplify the cultural identity of heterogeneous social groups, and, thereby, create stereotyped representations of the different identities of the people who compose a given social group. Spivak goes ahead to look at the term *strategic essentialism* and argues that it denotes a temporary, essential group –identity used in the praxis of discourse among people. Ritzer (2010), in concurrence with Spivak’s ideas relevant to this study, argues that, “essentialism can occasionally be applied-by the so-described people-to facilitate the subaltern’s communication in being heeded, heard and understood, because a strategic essentialism (a fixed and established subaltern identity) is more readily grasped and accepted by the popular majority, in the course of group discourse” (247). Spivak’s ideas were relied upon by the research with the understanding that strategic essentialism does not ignore the diversity of identities, be they personal, cultural, ethnic or even national, in a social group but it only temporarily minimizes inter-group diversity to support the essential

group-identity. Spivak emphasizes for the understanding and appreciation of group diversities rather than divisions.

So as to ground this study further, in terms of theory, the concept of ambivalence, a term that was first developed in psychoanalysis and is said to be a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting the opposite, becomes of great importance. Young (1995) says that ambivalence, “also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action” (16). The study employs this literary tenet in the analysis of how Owuor’s texts bring out the notion of identity struggles and quests for belonging. This in essence creates a unique oscillation between cynicism and idealism in which the characters find themselves. On one hand, there is a struggle for survival and difficulties which seem to debilitate the texts’ characters leaving little room to negotiate the constraints of their bleak lives in the places and spaces they live in. On the other hand, there is a certain euphoric optimism that pervades the author’s works of art, particularly among the disadvantaged, which is undergirded primarily by idealized non-African spaces.

Harreveld (2009), commenting on ambivalence says that, “Uncomfortable ambivalence, also known to as cognitive dissonance, can lead to avoidance, procrastination or to deliberate attempts to resolve the ambivalence” (45). He goes on to say that, “people experience the greatest discomfort from their ambivalence at the time when the situation requires a decision to be made” (167). This study finds that instead of a rigidly limited portrayal, Owuor deploys ambivalence as a discursive means with which to expand the outlines of how we come to think and imagine Kenyan identity struggles, pressing us to consider the inherent contradictions, complicities and contingencies that perhaps accompany any ascription of agency.

Amur (2002) says that:

African writers handle the identity problem in their fictional works of art. Identities are not fixed. They are plural and partial. The characters suffer from the clash of two cultures. Their original- birth cultures end the ones in their newly found spaces and homes. Their state is so ambiguous that they construct imaginary homelands. As their identities are inconsistent, they re-image their homelands. (137)

Amur goes on to opine that by imitating the West, the post-independent African subjects are involved in a cultural negotiation, which is called mimicry and also double consciousness (2002). As Amur finally observes:

The Africans, who had lost their identity in the former colonies of the West, strive to reclaim their original past. But it is quite impossible to recover the lost identity in the alien countries. (137)

Ambivalence is thus significant in understanding the identity struggles in the wake of globalization while Africans are at the same time trying to reconcile with the merger of cultures. This study relies on Amur's concepts on ambivalence in looking at the day-to-day personal struggles the characters go through with the aim of surviving in the new found places and spaces as they interact with each other.

Cultural difference, enunciation and stereotype, as brought out by Homi Bhabha, are other key ideas that this study relied on. Bhabha (1994) presents cultural difference as an alternative to cultural diversity. Thus, in cultural diversity, a culture is an "object of empirical knowledge" and pre-exists the knower while cultural difference sees culture as the point at which two or more cultures meet and it is also where most problems occur, discursively constructed rather than pre-given, a "process of enunciation of culture as "knowledgeable" (42). Bhabha goes on to talk about enunciation and argue that it is the act of utterance or expression of a culture that takes place in the third space given the fact that since culture is never pre-given it must be uttered (42-43). What this means is that it is

through enunciation that cultural difference is discovered and recognized. The enunciative process for that matter then introduces a divide between the traditional stable system of reference and the negation of the certitude of culture in the articulation of new cultural meaning. Therefore, cultural difference is a process of identification, while cultural diversity is comparative and categorized. Moreover, it is that possibility of difference and articulation that could free the signifier of skin/culture from the fixation of racial typology. Stereotype however impedes the articulation of the signifier of “race” as anything other than that. Bhabha’s ideas therefore become of importance to this study when it comes to the understanding how and why some characters, in the texts under study, behave and socialize with others they may consider “different” from them.

Another important aspect of post-colonial discourse that the study relied on is the concept of “fixity” which aids in the construction of otherness. Fixity, according to Newton (1997), implies “repetition, rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder” (56). Newton goes on to argue that stereotype depends on this notion of fixity. Stereotype in a way then creates an “identity” that stems as much from mastery and pleasure as it does from anxiety and defense of the dominant. Newton’s views are employed in this study in an attempt to understand why some characters in Owuor’s texts under study view themselves as being superior to those whom they view as being “outsiders” and hence inferior.

To augment postcolonialism, the research also used the post-structural ideologies as brought forward by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Post-structuralism is a reaction to structuralism and works against seeing language as a stable, closed system. Eagleton (1983) says that:

It is a shift from seeing the poem or novel as a closed entity, equipped with definite meanings which it is the critics' work to decipher, to seeing literature as irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a single center, essence, or meaning. (120)

Commenting on Jacques Derrida's paper *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (1966), which proved particularly influential in the creation of post-structuralism, Craig (1998), says that Derrida argued against, in essence, the notion of a knowable center (the Western idea of logocentrism), a structure that could organize the differential play of language or thought but somehow remain immune to the same "play" it depicts. What this implies is that Derrida critiques the notion of "origin" built into structuralism. This study, in an attempt to understand the various levels of identity, relied on Derrida's views in the analysis of the discourses between characters as they interact with each other from one place to the other.

Additionally, Lodge (1988), comments on post-structuralism and argues that it rejects the idea of a text as a stable structure comparable to binary structure of language and which can be analyzed as such. He further says that textual meaning should instead be viewed as characterized by instability; that there is no one truth in a text but several, so the meaning one gets from a text depends on the perspective from which one looks at it. In this regard, the study considers several perspectives; readers' and other texts' perspectives. For instance to analyze the character perceptions of their own identity and that of other characters, the latter's views are considered within the text under study.

The idea of language being a stable system ties it up in a way that compromises its ability to express others' experiences. It is at such points and levels that post-structural theory and ideas will intervene by positing language as practice and not simply a conveyer of pre-existing meanings and reality. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) discuss the process of

opening up the sutures and describe it as abrogation. They argue that through this process, postcolonial literature as the one this study deals with, frees English from the centre. The theorists continue to argue that though postcolonial literature may use words that have a basis in a particular cultural experience, the meaning of the text in which such words are used is independent of the experience and therefore one needs not share in the experience to interpret the text. The use of such words expands the ability of English to articulate varied experiences and it is the context in which they are used that should concern the reader, not the origin. Origin ceases to matter because the experiences articulated through such language are free from them.

Furthermore, intertextuality, an idea of post-structuralism, is also relied on as an interpretive tool by this study. Intertextuality is the argument that texts elaborate other texts with which they engage in various forms of dialogue. Literary theorist Julia Kristeva (1985) believed that there is a cohesive force in literature that connects all the various traditions past and present. In response to Ferdinand de Saussure's claim that signs gain their meaning through structure in a particular text, implying that meaning is transmitted directly from writer to reader, Kristeva argued that because of the influence of other texts on readers' consciousness, texts are always filtered through "codes" which bring the weight of other previous meanings with them. We are then already imbricated in a web of meaning created by other texts and the connotations surrounding them as opposed to deriving meaning directly from the structure of signs as Saussure would have it in his semiotics. This study, for the above reason, therefore relies on intertextuality, a tenet of post-structuralism, in the analysis and interpretations of Owuor's three texts under study. Foucault (1974) argues that:

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references; it is a node within a network. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; its unity is variable and relative. (23)

Like Foucault, Kehinde (2003) observes that intertextuality refers to both the relationship among literary texts and the dialogue between them and other discourses. As new layers of meaning are introduced, there is pleasure in the sense of connection and the continuity of culture. Intertextuality therefore enables us to have a much richer reading experience of the texts under study and in so doing invite new interpretations as it, brings other contexts, ideas, stories into the story at hand. Through these interpretive tools, our study was able to make more nuanced analysis of the primary texts.

### **1.10 Literature Review**

The subject of identities is both fluid and complex. Many critics have focused on how post-independent African writers have attempted to narrate and locate peoples' identity struggles over the years.

Hall and du Gay (1996), in their discussion on identity raise more questions than they provide answers to the complexities of identity. One of the questions that captivate our study is "who needs identity?". Hall and du Gay assert that the concept of identity is a paradox and suggests that identity is not an essentialist but a "strategic and a positional one" (3). For them identities are: "never unified (but they are) increasingly fragmented and fractured: never singular but multiple constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions, they are subject to radical historicizations and are constantly in the process of change and transformation"(4). This study examines the above

mentioned identity complexities in Owuor's three texts with the thought that identity defines our uniqueness and at the same time pulls us into social integration as a people.

Weinreich and Saunderson (2003) give the definition of identity as, "... the totality of one's self-construal, which is how one construes oneself in the present and expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future" (58). From the foregoing, this research is therefore able to define aspects of identity such as one's ethnic identity can be said to be as that part of the totality of one's self-construal and made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's construal of past ancestry and one's future aspirations in relation to ethnicity. The description or representation of individual and group identities is therefore a central task to our study as the issue of "identity" needs to be mapped and defined in the texts under study. Guided by the research objectives, the study analyzes how the fictional characters describe the identity of themselves and of the other, in ways which encompass both their idiosyncratic qualities and their group memberships according to circumstances, spaces and places.

Narrowing down to a post- independent Kenyan writer, Ravenscroft (1990) in a reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* says that the disinheritance of the Gikuyu religion and tribal culture by white colonialism figures is very evident in the novel and that the novel greatly addresses the issues the Africans and Kenyans as a group went through. The study sought to reflect on the issue of "Kenyaness" from the historical hindsight of general debates informing nationhood and cultural identity. Looked at from a different angle, this study analyzes Owuor's texts at personal, cultural and national levels of identity accompanied by the struggles therein.

Ngugi (1972), talking about the forcing of the birth of Kenyan nationalism says that:

To look from the tribe to a wider concept of human association is to be progressive. When this begins to happen, a Kenyan nation will be born. It will be an association not of different tribal entities, but of individuals free to journey to those heights of which they are capable, nationalism by breaking some tribal shells will be a help. But nationalism should not in turn become another shackle nor should it be the end. (24)

Ngugi is here calling upon people from different tribes to step beyond their tribal background and by the process of imagination to construct a nation. However, even though Ngugi wants to see the birth of Kenyan nationalism at the time of decolonization, he does not see nationalism as a discriminatory or fixed entity which excludes other non-mainstream groups. Rather he clearly says that nationalism is ever-changing and is based on the immediate socio-political contest during which the nationalist movement is formed. This study tackles the problems that arise in terms of nationhood like; discrimination and exclusion and what it means to be Kenyan.

In reading of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*, Mungai (2010), comments on the residents of Ilmorog as,

A dusty rural settlement perched upon the escarpment overlooking the Rift Valley-wearied body and soul by an unrelenting drought, having waited in vain for help from their Member of Parliament, trekking to the city in search of their fugitive Member of Parliament. It is a journey fraught with many risks, personal and collective, but determined to see their effort through to the end, the villagers soldier on to the city of many lights. (16)

What is illustrative about this epic journey as argued by Mbugua is not the many things that happen along the way but rather the discoveries that the people of Ilmorog make about themselves, their neighbors and friends and the power-wielding class. From his argument, this study observes that Owuor, an African writer like many others before her, in her texts has tried to uncover the problems and challenges that the citizens (the oppressed) undergo in their day-to-day lives as they try to unravel who they truly are.

This study, based on the foregoing, argues that national communities and identities are normally constructed and are the result of a collectivity of shared myths and legends, heroes, events, landscapes and memories disseminated through media -oral, print or electronic- in the creation of an imagined national community and identity. When a national identity has not solidified, as is the case in Kenya, and in the context of intense competition for limited resources, power and representation, many citizens find comfort in the ethno-linguistic affiliations. Cultural identities, as Hall has observed:

Are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of position which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental “law of origin. (226)

From Hall’s observation the study gets to learn that cultural identities have a dialogic relationship manifested in mutuality and interconnectivity with national identities as well as other forms of consciousness (professional, urbanicity, gender and so on). Hall goes on to argue that it is because of the foregoing reasons that in moments of crisis, cultural identities can be very polarizing possibly because they are the ones crafted at childhood through parenting and community socialization. This study looks at Hall’s arguments with the aim of analyzing the extents to which characters in Owuor’s three texts under study try to protect those they view as “belonging” to them while at the same time discriminating those from other places and hence “not belonging”.

When it comes to post-structuralism, this study considers meaning to be produced through discourse. Discourse here refers to the way in which we organize and explain lived experience through language. Weedon (1987) states that, “discourse fields, or groups of related discourse, consists of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and process” (97). Meaning from this perspective can therefore

be said to be intersubjective and is created through competing discourses. Based on the above, this study finds that engagement with texts of various kinds then becomes central in this process. Weedon's views are therefore relied upon when looking at how the interaction of characters in the texts is culturally based and hence influencing identity, both at personal, cultural and national levels.

In looking at the role of post- structuralism Maxine (1994) opines that post structuralism is "perspectivism and divergence of point of view: where the voices of the long disqualified, the long silenced are being attended to" (28). This research looks at and analyzes the voices of the characters in the texts under study as they grapple with the issue of identity with the understanding that it is through a sharing in the conversations and dialogues in the texts that shared meanings of identity are created.

Closely linked to the post-structuralist tenets above is intertextuality, a post structuralist construct. In an attempt to define intertextuality Barthes (1979) argues that, "The creating of meanings is shaped by other voices, texts and understandings" (196). Therefore as readers and writers move between texts and thus engage in telling a story to others, new meanings are created. This research takes this to mean that when a story is shared, that text becomes a source of further dialogue and narration by both the writer and the reader.

In addition to Barthes arguments above, Cixous (1991) suggests that through writing we come to read or write ourselves in this intertextual weaving. Characters' lived experiences, through the stories they tell, can then be negotiated, organized structured and henceforth interpreted. This study, for this reason, analyzed the various characters and the narratives they tell so as to form a cultural link between individuals, groups and their national settings since the goals and intentions of individuals, cultures and nation states are comprehensible

as wholes through narratives. According to Adrian (2010), cultural identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. He goes on to say that cultural identity is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social groups that has its own distinct culture. Going by Adrian's views, we can argue that cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity. This study analyzes how identity as a whole and cultural identity in particular helps the characters in the texts under study to understand the relationships around them as they try to determine who they are as individuals in the communities they find themselves. According to the foregoing, an individual's identity is shaped by the people within their culture and their surroundings.

Reflecting on the events that followed the disputed December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 election results in Kenya, Njogu (2008, ix-x ) argues that to focus on the growth of a national identity without paying sufficient attention to local processes of interaction and solidarity and the particularity of experience can be grossly misleading. Apparently, national identities suppress and mask other identities. These masked identities could be potentially explosive if found in the mix of political manipulation, economic deprivation, corruption, militia groups with small arms, limitation of freedoms and violation of rights. This study is premised on such arguments in laying basis to the conflicts that constantly face Kenyans in their identity quest.

Ethnicity as an identity issue is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp, and yet it's one of the most essential in understanding Africa. Lamb (1984) argues that:

African leaders deplore ethnocentrism. They call it the cancer that threatens to eat out the very fabric of the nation... It is a factor in political struggles and distribution of resources: it often determines who gets jobs, who gets promoted, who gets accepted to a university, because by its very definition ethnicity implies sharing among members of the extended family, making sure that your own are looked after first. (9)

He goes on to state that to give a job to a fellow ethnic member is not nepotism, it is an obligation. Also, for a political leader to choose his closest advisers and bodyguards from the ranks of his own ethnic group is not patronage, it is a good common sense. It ensures security, continuity, and authority. Lamb's argument tends to inform this research on the need to relook at the issue of ethnicity as a people as we interact and relate with people from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. This study relies on such views, by scholars, so as get a clearer understanding of the ethnic identities in Owuor's texts.

Closely linked to Lamb's arguments the study looks at Warah's (2008), comments on the Kenyan identity crisis. He argues that:

The country exploded because we failed to implement crucial reforms that would have addressed issues of social and economic justice and equity and thus allowed frustrations within society to simmer to boiling point. We have sacrificed our Kenyan identity at the altar of ethnic identity .We have created a culture where wealth and power for their own sake are seen as worthy goals. We have consistently failed to address graft in a systematic manner. We deify our politicians and are disappointed when they turn out to be tin gods. (22)

Warah is here questioning Kenya's political culture in which the ruling elite exercise total dominance on citizens. In a sense, the crisis in Kenya is one of identity and leadership and failure by citizens to set higher benchmarks and expectations for those who govern them. This study argues that as a symbol of identity, as correctly observed by Rasna above, ethnicity is old and harmless hence should be used to help in building national, Kenyan, identity as opposed to creating rifts among people.

According to Carr (1986), a community exists whenever a narrative account of *we* exists. One or a few of the group members in the terms of *we* formulate this narrative and others accept it. The members thus begin addressing each other as members of a community and feel a sense of a shared culture. However, new versions of this common and shared story can emerge. These new versions can be the basis of factions that can threaten the united existence of the community (156-158). Carr points out that a minority group that feels repressed at the hands of the majority can arise and attempt to oppose the repression. Similarly, a country that emerges from colonialism always assumes it has a shared sense of history because it was colonized and the fight for independence was communal. However, within this society, there are members on the margin who feel that the country is just a geographical set-up that they do not belong to. This study borrows from Carr's study when it comes to handling Owuor's narration of the stories of such people by interweaving fictional characters and their identity quest struggles.

In looking at culture, our study borrows from Geertz's (1973), ideas where he notes that culture is "a set of control mechanisms plans, recipes, rules, instruments-for governing of behavior." According to him, this view of culture "begins with the assumption that human thought is basically both social and public-that its natural habitat is the house yard, the market place, and the town square" (44). Geertz's interpretation has the requisite implications of power and control mechanisms embedded in culture, which allow for the exploitation of gender inequality and inequity. This research examined how culture leads to the formation of various identities as Geertz has expounded on in the foregoing discussion.

In his discussion of culture, Said (1993) identifies two meanings of culture. First, it refers to the many practices like the arts, communication, and representation, which have relative

autonomy from the economic, social, and political domains. These human expressions have an aesthetic dimension embedded in art and seek to cause pleasure and entertainment. Second, culture includes a community's reservoir of what defines them as a people, in most cases representing the best that has been known and thought. Through culture, we are able to see society in its strengths and weaknesses and to understand ourselves. Said's views on culture, viewed as such, gives prominence to our study's interest on identity which therefore becomes a dynamic space for engagement by various interests and forces. Our study however opines that the danger with the uncritical reading of this notion of culture is that it may entail a valorization of one's culture and an assumption that it is not answerable to views from the rest of the world.

While talking about cultural identity Hall (1994) says that:

Cultural identity has its histories and these have both material and symbolic effects which continue to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple factual "past", since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always already "after the break". It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. (395)

In a sense, then communities are always "becoming"; always in change and transformation. In its tolerant form, cultural identity reaches out and embraces "otherness", embracing its impermanence and transitoriness. Being guided by Hall's arguments therefore, this study was interested in how cultural identity through its interaction with historical events, both through space and time, is formed in the three texts by Owuor Adhiambo Yvonne under study.

In his commentary on what he thinks is Kenyan literature Indangasi, (2003) says that, "the development of nations and their attendant national consciousness has been accompanied by

the growth of a national literature which is a form of national consciousness” (1-9). According to him, what defines national literature is the content of the form. He argues that the choice of language of creativity, Christian themes and motif, the theme of armed struggle and populist sensibility characterize Kenyan literature. Indangasi concludes that, although Kenyan literature can change with time, “what is Kenyan about Kenyan literature might as well be what is Kenyan about Kenyans” (8). In the three texts under study, Owuor attempts to depict Kenyan’s national consciousness through stories of people in constant struggles. As such, this study focuses on how the texts highlight national consciousness in the post-independent Kenyan state.

Selasi (2014), while reviewing *Dust* observes that *Dust* is a novel about Kenya and it interrogates what Kenya is. He notes, “Owuor tells her country’s stories and they are plural: urban, rural, Indian, English, Luo and Kikuyu-with bitter honesty.” Selasi’s observation on the novel focuses on diverse Kenyan histories and the identity diversities therein; this is an area that this study also interests itself in, with emphasis on the identity quest struggles.

In his commentary on Ngugi’s literary works, Omuteche’s (2014) “*Historification and Kenya’s Plural Identities: Re- reading Ngugi’s Historiography,*” critiques Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s strategies of constructing nationalism and heroism in some of his creative works; *Petals of Blood* and *Weep Not Child*. He focuses on Ngugi’s choice and projections of characters in relation to historical epoch and setting by evaluating how the depiction can reveal his re- interpretation and re -representations of histories in order to tease out possible silence in his construction of Kenyans national identities. Omuteche argues that Ngugi being one of the leading Kenyan writers uses image of identification and the contradictory nature of Kenyans national collective identity and ethnocentric culture identities to desire the

contemporary Kenyan society. This study builds on Omuteche's study by looking at how Owuor narrates national identity as a considerable group of people united by a common culture, values, standards and political aspirations and occupying a definite territory and having a sense of common identity.

While talking about how ethnicity and gender, as two major indexes of identity, in East Africa today are treated in exemplary works of short and long prose, Makokha (2011), specifically looks at how these two indices contribute to the aesthetic and formal thematization as well as treatment of identity issues. He tries to examine how recent contours of literary writing across East Africa in light of the call for appreciations of diversity within African identity discourses, especially in the context of expanding ethnic and gender conflicts. Makokha argues that creative imagination is one of the pathways by which a people or culture present itself to the world. It represents their internal and external environments. He says that this is the guiding assumptions in his study and it's rooted to the core of post-colonial studies as a discipline. Based on Makokha's views, this study looks at how our cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide for identifiable national identities.

With regard to the evolving realities in Africa, realizing the struggles and oppression of individuals seeking their identity, Odom (2008), in her review takes us through the harrowing, real-life experiences of approximately 30,000 Southern Sudanese boys, between the ages of 8 and 15, who walked nearly 1000 miles searching for a safe refuge. Through the eyes and experiences of Eight-year-old Garang Deng, one of the leaders, we are told their story and that of Tom, an American who is helping in the camp, he spreads the news, about the boys' plight. At 21 years old, Garang and other "Lost Boy" are offered a home in the

U.S. This review opens the researcher's eyes to look and see the plight of the immigrants around Africa and how well we can help in settling them in the new surroundings they get themselves in.

In reading "Weight of Whispers" Wamathai (2011), looks closely at the intriguing protagonist, Boniface Louise R. Kuseremane. This study is taken through the story of a man who one had the universe at his feet, a man used to glamour, beautiful women and who travelled the globe on a wish. He however finds himself suddenly thrown into a world of disarray when the political situation in his homeland brutally finding him into exile in Kenya. Wamathai explores the struggles this well-off family go through as immigrants in a foreign nation as they try to make ends meet during times of displacements, be they internal or external while at the same time trying to form new identities. The study of Owuor's three texts was based on the same premises with a view of getting a clear understanding of the characters' identities in the various spaces and places they find themselves.

In his commentary of "Weight of Whispers" Wainaina (2003) notes that "Weight of Whispers" has the density of a novel, the narrative tension of a thriller and the insights expected of a far more experienced writer. He goes on to say that Owuor has an unerring eye for lavish languages and an imagination that offers the reader possibilities he/she did not think possible. This study takes into consideration Wainaina's views with a view of interrogating how Owuor uses varied narrative strategies in bringing out the fictional characters' day-to-day identity quest struggles.

Writing for The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Black (2012) argues that the displaced individuals' debate continue to flood news sources today but the realities experienced by those who flee their homes in search of new opportunities, even political

asylum, in most cases end up “shored” and “pushed” to “the margins”. What Black’s argument means is that very little attention and action has been put in place to address the challenges the displaced and disadvantaged in the society go through. This study interrogates the strategies that Owuor uses like questioning patriarchy with the aim of elaborating the identity quest. This is premised on the view that the texts under study emphasize familiar motifs that other literary works of art before them have all along focused on; balances between old and new allegiances to family and the unique hardships faced by the characters once settled in the new surroundings they find themselves in.

Ege (2014), while commenting on the struggles and challenges encountered by Somalis in Kenya at the height of the crackdown on illegal immigrants (Somalis) in Nairobi Kenya (Eastleigh), Abdi says that the Somalis from way back in 1991, after Somalia’s collapse to the present crisis where thousands of Somalis (disproportionately) the poor including women and children, were interned at the city soccer stadium are part of the continued status of limbo, that is, neither citizen, refugee nor human. Abdi goes on to argue that struggles that were being experienced at the moment pointed to yet another one of the numerous onslaughts from the day the immigrants set ground in the Kenyan urban areas and right from the well-known Daadab refugee camp, in the Northern frontiers of Kenya, to the current situation they find themselves in. The researcher is exposed to how the arrests, pillage and rape of Somalis in the urban setting through the years that appear to have been endorsed through silence and UNHCR’s collusion that one who is not confined to a perpetual and abstract Somalia is indeed in a state of limbo in which there is no protection from the very same perpetual limbo. When this is added to the frequent usage of the terms “terrorist” and warlord, all serving to make it difficult to even extricate the human from the Somali refugee,

in a land that is fraught with overly deterministic mythologies about ethnicities in general, then the situation can only be described as rife. Closely linked to the issues that Ege addresses above, this study examines how the characters in the selected texts, afflicted with all manner of problems, try to renegotiate their belonging and identities.

In reading *Dust* Kerry (2014), analyses the struggles of citizens in trying to locate themselves as they try to comprehend the new demands of a new, unfamiliar, and uncaring nation. She identifies citizens as ones carrying the demands of the nation when it comes to creation of identity, national, where violence moves through people and communities like the capricious rains and floods which shape, destroy and remake the landscapes. Our study relies on Kerry's advice on the need for studies on identity to embrace and look at the disrupted, displaced, dislocated and isolated in the new post-independent African state as they seek an identity for themselves.

While writing on Owuor's *Dust* Ron (2015) notes that:

Owuor can clear gloom with passages of Dickensian comedy or tender romances but most of her novel takes place in "haunted silences." Mostly between the lamentation of a single family and the corruption of national politics, swirling around one young man's death to create a vortex of grief that draws in generations of deceit and Kenya's tumultuous modern history. (27)

This study therefore attempts an analysis of *Dust* so as to identify issues to do with identity and its pursuit and challenges faced by the characters in the settings they find themselves in.

Kenya, according to Owuor in *Dust*, is a country knit together by secrets. In *Dust*, each character owns a share of his land's violent past, a history that longs to be forgotten. The characters live and love in an atmosphere of mutually agreed-upon silence. It is such sentiments that Owuor tries to reverse and correct. The study of this text therefore aims to

bring to the fore the issues afflicting us as Kenyans as a whole so that we can have a better understanding of our past and present and in so doing shape our future as a nation.

Additionally, Owuor says that she draws inspiration to write from the people around her and singles out Kenya with its self-irony, its spaces and multiple layers. Owuor concerns herself with many of the social and political issues that have become increasingly central within literary studies which include; nationalism, cultural globalization, gender and sexuality, urbanization, digital cultures, and environmentalism and ecopoetics. Owuor's concerns, on identity and its struggles, above are the same ones that our study attempts to tackle.

In his discussion on the link between identities, spaces and places, Smith (2001) observes that, "The relationship between identities, spaces and places can be looked at from the context of modernity, history and politics of representation (15). He goes on to argue that it is this link that leads to "historical determinism", he says intersects historical events, social spaces and groups by gender, class and ethnicity (16). Looked at from this angle, the link between spaces, places and identity can be said to lead to the exploration of how the spaces have evolved over time through social constructs over time and power. This therefore makes it possible, to some extent, to bring to context the politics of representation, as the making of identity in a specific place and community also relates to the exclusion or inclusion in a community which this study sought to analyze.

Commenting on the relationship between space and identity, Roger Kurtz, in *Nyaloka's Gift* says that Oludhe Macgoye's story, *Homing In*, "explores the frustrations and small triumphs of making personal connections in society that is designed to keep people apart" (186). What this observation means is that the novel is about elaborating characters' struggle to belong. He goes ahead to say that, about the book's title, "it could mean either the process

of Macgoye's own adaptation of Kenya or the process of by which one tries to belong to a place so as to make it home" (187). Kurtz' arguments imply that Macgoye's novel explores Kenyan history through works of fiction and this history is full of characters and individuals attempting to define themselves and their real relationship with the country and others. Analyzed this way, the novel can be said to be concerned with individual and group identity in the varied spaces and places characters find themselves in. This study based on texts written in the post independent Kenyan state, just like Oludhe's text, borrows from Kurtz's arguments in its analysis of the link between identity, spaces and places.

To further the foregoing argument this study looks at Zarina's (2008) views, she is a young Kenyan of South Asian origin and says that:

Each of us seeks to know our personal identity and where and how we can make sense of our lives and plan for the future...whereas we are Kenyan South Asians; we are not a monolithic community with an organized leadership. We are a conglomeration of many diverse communities, languages, religions and customs. (28)

A closer analysis of our social genealogy makes us to either discover or at least imagine and correctly assume, as Zarina points out above, a complex network of social histories from which we come. As Masolo (2002) observes, "our complex lives of multiple choices and interests, ranging from occupation to friendships and amusements, and to participation in public policy-oriented activities ; all bring us into bonds with others in yet more complex ways" (19). Based on Zarina's and Masolo's observations above, this study takes into consideration the recognition that a new and more complex sense of community is based on the premise that identities of persons are shaped by the social worlds they find themselves in as they play various roles and are therefore susceptible to change as such social worlds mutate through time and space.

The reality of ethnic communities enables many African people to experience their world and to identify themselves in multiple ways. As observed by Karp (1995), “They think of themselves as one people in some settings and as different people in others” (222). The implication of this is that one may identify himself/herself as a member of one ethnic community or only a section of it when the nature of political discourse and space demand and firmly as a Kenyan at another time under different setting of discourse space, an area that interests this study.

In his analysis of “Weight of Whispers,” Kizito (2011) notes that, “Somewhere between the lines of this haunting story, so it seems, sits a painter who uses words as his medium of artistic conjecture. Every detail of the grand and sad story of the Kuseremane’s family is reflected through these images in the mind of the reader. These images are very striking and no reader can miss them from the powerful and evocative writing style that Owuor deploys in this award-winning story” (107). Based on Kizito’s arguments, our proposed study elucidates an appreciation of how imagery and other stylistic devices have been employed by Owuor in her writings as reflectors and intensifiers of the topic under study. This is because through the use of the correct literary style, the author is capable of creating a strong connection between her, the readers and the text.

Still on the foregoing issue of style, Kosgei (2017) justifying her exploration of how death as a metaphor in *Dust* can be utilized in constructing meaning rich enough to explain Kenya’s past and present predicament, focuses on the different forms and portraits of death present in the novel and how these deaths, historically factual or imagined, present the image of Kenya as a burning, dying nation. She notes that, “of importance is the fact that these deaths span close to half a century of the nation’s life: historical political

assassinations that started in the 1960's culminate in the 2007/2008 post-election violent Kenya; and the death of Hugh that happened almost forty years ago is intertwined with Odidi's death in the present time-the two, in fact, are buried side by side on the same day" (10). Such analysis of the stylistic devices as employed, by Owuor, enriched our understanding of post-colonial Kenya as presented in the texts under study with close relation to the issue of identity and belonging.

In her analysis of *Dust*, Bitek (2015) looks at 'dust' as a metaphor for what stories collect as journeys are made. These stories are those attempting a definition of a nation, a formation of an identity. Yet, it is lost as soon as it is found just as dust can hardly be gathered due to its fleeting nature. She goes on to argue that these may not just be aspects that are soon lost but may just have been illusory. By looking at how Owuor employs metaphors and other related styles in her texts, this study helps us to understand the texts construction of the nature and identity of the nation of Kenya.

This study also finds it necessary to look at the connection between history and the narratives. Ankersmit (2010) talks about the link between history and the narratives, he argues that narratives often offer representations of things that have happened, whether real or imaginary and that for a narrative to represent, it must be organized around some central theme whether in actual or an imagined reality. He argues that a fictional text is always left open for possible multiple interpretations, epiphany of reality itself. According to Ankersmit, a fictional text is normally explicit. Since Owuor's texts are fictional, and revolve around people, this study focused on how the stories presented reflect the Kenyan nation due to existence of diverse narratives and identities therein.

In conclusion, this section has reviewed the relevant literature talking about or dealing with our study's topic on identity. This study has looked at how various literary scholars perceive the question of identity and its quest at the national, cultural and personal levels. The study also reviewed critical works from Africa, Eastern Africa and Kenya in particular, with the aim of broadening our understanding of the identity quest struggles, as narrated over the years by various post independent African writers, more emphasis was however placed on Owuor's three texts under study.

### **1.11 Methodology**

The selection of the texts to be studied took into consideration the period of publication of the texts, the race and nationality of the author. This was premised on the thought that an author writes about the experiences and happenings in the environment in which he/she comes from. The three texts under study were published in the early years of the twenty first century. This makes them appropriate for the study of the contemporary issues to do with identity. Being a Kenyan woman and brought up in a post-independent East African state, the selection of the author and her texts therefore becomes timely, relevant and purposeful with regard to the research topic. The presence of characters of various ethnicities, from varied geographical locales and nationalities enables the study to analyze the representations of characters and their perceptions towards identity formation and the challenges therein in a specified period in East Africa.

The study employs a close textual analysis and self-interpellative reading of the selected texts and materials. In using close textual analysis, the study employs the techniques of descriptive research whereby data is selected in the form of statements from the texts under

study. To do a close textual reading of a text, the study chooses a specific passage and analyzes it in fine details. This is done with the aim of magnifying the key points and yield a richer understanding of the text so as to lay solid groundwork for our study. The researcher then comments on points of style and on the reactions as a reader. The statements are then analyzed, evaluated and compared within and between the texts in relation to language and place with the intention of determining character perceptions and thoughts about other characters. The main reason of using the close textual reading is not only to produce the meaning of the three texts under study, but also to reach all possible types of ambiguities and ironies. So as to analyze identity across the texts, the study looked at the protagonists and their antagonists and how they interact with each other through the plot and the conflicts faced.

Self-interpellative reading, which is mostly done on narratives, essays, speeches and scenes of plays, was employed in trying to understand what the author was intending for us, the readers, to know and feel. Self-interpellation as argued by Althusser (1971), “helps us to describe the process by which ideology, embodied in major social and political institutions, constitutes the very nature of individual subjects’ identities through the process of “hailing” them in social interactions” (158). Interpellation is more about how larger cultural values are shared. Texts in other words, are not simply about the intentions of an author. Every text bears the stamp of its time, either in expressing its cultures values of the time, or resisting them. In order to be thoughtful and to have some agency over our lives, we use interpellative reading and in so doing we are able, not only to get the explicit values that an author, here Owuor, brings to the text, but also the deeper unexplained ideas therein. Self-interpellative reading, as a technique, therefore comes in when it comes to an in-depth interpretation and

understanding of the texts. An analysis of the three primary texts has been done in order to investigate the author's approach in regards to the quest for identity and the characters' struggles in the Kenyan society as narrated and presented in Owuor's texts. The two comparative strategies, self-interpellative reading and close textual analysis as expounded on above, are employed on a text by text and point by point basis.

The study's comparisons are guided by the postcolonial theoretical ideas and post structuralism scholarly ideas. The postcolonial ideas are used in the analysis of the texts together with the modification of post-structuralists' ideas, in so doing we are able to incorporate the two into the postcolonial era and ideas about a narrative.

The above mentioned methods are used so as to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons for various characters' actions, their opinions about other characters and also hypothesize our research focusing on the issues of identity, its formation and the challenges therein in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's "Weight of Whispers", "The Knife Grinder's Tale" and *Dust*.

So as to present the study's data, description and analysis of relevant literary arguments is employed with the aim of generating enough material information for the study. An analysis of research texts is also done, commentaries, relevant writings and documented interviews with literary scholars and press persons examined and analyzed within the parameters guiding this study.

Through close textual reading, self-interpellative reading, comparative analysis and analysis of the change in plot together with a close look at the narrative voice of narrators and their point of view, we investigate the techniques put into place by the author to highlight the

struggles experienced by characters and those seeking identity, self-fulfillment and an understanding of oneself.

## **1.12 Chapter Breakdown**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The chapter gives the background of the study, objectives of the study, the research problems, research assumptions, literature review, a general conceptualization of the study, scope and limitations, the theoretical framework and the methodology to be employed.

### **Chapter 2: Conceptualization of Identities**

This chapter examines the various levels of identities the characters can be grouped into: personal, cultural, national, gender, societal stratification, language, nation-state and so on and how they shape the characters' identity quest. As the protagonists struggle to understand their identity, and in an attempt to shield themselves from persecution of the state and those they interact with, most of them end up being disappointed by the exclusionary practices of modern nation-state. This is tied to the insistence on the oppositional categories of "citizen" and "stranger", "settler" and "native" and "insider" and "outsider."

### **Chapter 3: Physical Places, Spaces and Identity**

This chapter studies how the physical places and spaces in which identity processes take place influence identity formation and development. It is evident that the spaces and places the characters operate in are as important in the formation of their social relations as are the events they engage in and that identities are multiplitious in nature both from the cultural, ethnic, national, political and economic stand points.

#### **Chapter 4: Artistic Strategies in the Narration of Identity Struggles**

This chapter explores the various artistic strategies employed by Owuor in texts under study in relation to the identity struggles the characters find themselves in as they try to cope in their surroundings and how they tackle and understand their new-found identities. Of particular concern is to determine the comparable strategies in the texts and how some effectively or ineffectively carry out the functions Owuor assigns them.

#### **Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

This marks the end of the study and involves the re-evaluation of the research problems and research findings. Here we also make suggestions and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IDENTITIES

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research question of this study. Here the study discusses the concept of identity and how it has been conceived in the selected texts by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor. The argument is that the search for identity has been a recurrent literary theme which many authors across the African continent such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Petals of Blood*, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and Oludhe Macgoye in *Homing In* have addressed. This struggle has continued to trigger in the individuals a quest for identity as Homi Bhabha asserts, "The question of identification is never the affirmation of pre-given identity, never self-fulfilling prophecy- it is always the production of an image of identity and transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (45).

Therefore, triggered by personal and cultural identity questions, many African writers have been writing literary works that outline characters' search for identity and the struggle to survive wherever they find themselves. Every individual in any society without considering the differences of race and culture, at some point comes across the question of identity in his or her life. So as to answer this identity question of "Who am I?" African writers as noted by Okoth (2015), "Needed to explore this history, their roots, their behavior, their view points, their aims and their history and roots" (88). This is a problem that became even more complicated as Achieng goes on to note, "because of displacement, ethnicity and racial differences therefore, quest for self-definition and identity are the most important concerns recurrently foregrounded in African literature" (88). Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor in her texts,

addresses issues to do with quest for belonging: identity crises, identity search, coupled with search for justice.

## **2.2. The Unsettled Protagonist and the Quest for Belonging in “Weight of Whispers”**

The unsettled protagonist and the quest for belonging in “Weight of Whispers” is an attempt to understand the troubled character while trying to conform to the new surroundings he finds in himself since he is unable to break free from his past that keeps on haunting him. In this motif, the troubled character seeks to locate himself in the current foreign state by way of several attempts that maybe read as fleeing; especially away from those places that the subject links to the past that can no longer contain in their new status.

This study is grounded in the assumption that the characters in the texts are presented in a certain manner in popular culture and literature in Kenya and the East African region, and thus, postcolonial theory is relevant to unpacking issues within the literature about these people and characters. This theory also sheds light on how the identities become hybrids as the process of movement and interaction in certain cases impacts the psyche of the locals of these regions.

O’Donohue (1999), commenting on the concept of belonging opines, “To be human is to belong. Belonging is a circle that embraces everything; if we reject it, we damage our nature” (3). He goes on to argue that the word “belonging” holds together the two fundamental aspects of life: being and longing. Furthermore, he says “our life’s journey is the task of refining our belonging so that it may become more true, loving, good and free” (4). Looked at from this perspective, this section argues that as humans we do not have to

force belonging. The longing within us always draws us towards belonging in place and again towards new forms of belonging when we have outgrown the old ones.

Boniface Louis R. Kuseremane, the protagonist in Owuor's narrative "Weight of Whispers", comes out to this study as having a multiple-fractured and dual identities. As the story starts he struggles to downplay the precarious condition he and his family find themselves in. He later tries to escape from this state or at least to adapt to it but in the end fails when things eventually don't go as expected. At the beginning Kuseremane is very sure that he and his family will soon leave Kenya. They view themselves as visitors on transit and not at all as refugees. He considers himself a prince as he has many contacts all over the world, and not a beggar, who is let down by his friends (17). He later on realizes that they might have to stay a little bit longer than expected in Kenya and feels sure that he will get a job with his doctor's degree. This makes him to refuse to accept their current challenging situation. Out of the fear of not wanting to disturb and stress his family even more, Kuseremane keeps quiet about the rumors doing rounds about them and their worsening situation (20). On the overall, he does not want to admit his own fear, neither towards his family nor himself, because he is too scared of it and his uncontrolled reactions (18). He soon however slowly starts to accept and adapt to the situation.

In her commentary on the issue of belonging May (2011), notes that:

Belonging can be a nebulous concept, slippery and difficult to define. Belonging as attachment to place or, "doing" place identity is something that is necessarily able to be discerned by those on the "inside", as it is part of the taken for granted aspect of everyday life. (370)

Viewed from May's perspective, for the displaced and those on the move, the regular re-exploration of the concept of the "self" and identity is vital. For this reason we note that the

struggles faced by the displaced persons and those on constant movement, like the Kuseremane's, becomes an issue both to them and the host nation-state.

As brought out through the characters of Kuseremane, Lune, Chichi and Agnetha-mama, these characters have to contend with the inherent ambivalence in their struggles and quests to re-create the personal, the self and cultural identities in an urgent manner. On the onset there is the unstable self and then the other important ambivalent spatial, cultural and national spaces that the individual occupies in the modern contemporary African nation-state. Makokha (2011), in his analysis of "Weight of Whispers" observes that:

The fate of the Kuseremane family in the Kenyan exile could almost be adapted from another country in another exile. If we look at the innermost sensations we are exposed to in Owuor's story, existence, love and hate, we can tentatively detach from the surroundings and gain deeper insight in fundamental human feelings. (88)

At a deeper thematic level, this study looks at the narrative as one about good and evil, injustice and betrayal, love and loss and generally about the general struggle of living, of existence in the context of contemporary ethnicity-laced postcolonial society. On arrival in the foreign nation, Kenya, the situation of the family soon worsens when rumors about the list of genocide perpetrators start to spread. Their name is "accused, accused" (30). The name which has once opened all doors is now a heavy burden on the family. It becomes public that the Kuseremane family must somehow be related to the genocide in Rwanda. "Now tales had been added of a zealous servant instructed by an heir to wipe out the stain" (31). On realizing what Roger, Kuseremane's butler, had done, Kuseremane learns to make himself invisible so that he does not stand out of the masses and make himself an easy target for the police; "I have learned of hidden places; covered spaces that the invisible inhabit" (32). Kuseremane turns to quiet places in order to forget his real life, seems to run away from himself or his own person. While he did not understand in former times why some

things always remained unexpressed, he now “can sense why some things must remain buried in silence” (13).

The whispers finally find human voices and it makes it even harder for the family in exile in Kenya to strengthen the family’s supposedly promising contacts in Kenya and abroad. Back in Rwanda the Kuseremane name has lost, as well, its influence. The “weight of whispers” presses down grievously on the Kuseremane family. In the beginning, when it still seems rather easy to leave Kenya, the African continent, Boniface Kuseremane believes that these whispers, the rumors of their guilt, will carry no weight in Europe. But also at the end, when he stays alone in Kenya, he believes that even in Kenya, “the wind-borne whispers will fall silent” (36). Even though, only rumors, whispers exist, they weigh heavily on the family and influence greatly their possibility of settling down.

Kuseremane has learnt that, sometimes, it is better to be quiet upon certain subjects in order not to invoke fear or ire. His own name, he himself is accused with a horrible crime and it proves to be better for him and his family to remain silent about this subject. Even though he adapts to the situation, he slowly breaks down. He cries when he is not seen and becomes aggressive towards Lune and Chi-Chi. He cannot overcome the fact that his fiancée, Lune, and his own sister, Chi-Chi, had to prostitute in order to obtain the emigration papers. We expect him to be caring for the family but cannot; he senses that “he is being taunted for his ineffectuality” (29). Kuseremane blames himself for the death of his sister and cannot forgive Lune for prostitution. When his mother, Agnetha, however dies a day before they travel to Canada; he loses his remaining hope and strength (35).

He wants to stay with his sister and mother in Kenya and “live in the silence-scape and perform the rituals of return, for life” (36). This points to his state of desperation and

confused state of mind. He wants to leave and can finally, but after all the struggles and harassment he has gone through as a refugee, he either does not have the strength to leave or does not want to leave anymore, because his former life has fallen into pieces, is inexistent, another life in another time, and this now is his “second life” (36). This serves as a pointer to personal identity struggles and transformation over time and space.

Many sociological studies on belonging have a limited and limiting conception of place. This may be due to, as Gieryn (2000) calls it, “an understanding of a local place as a passive context for social life” (466). If, as Massey (1995) suggests, this study takes a view of places as “constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time” (180), with which Massey includes relations to other places, then identities and borders can change, whilst still remaining “the same” place. This study looks at place as inclusive of social relations and these places themselves as being, according to Cloke and Jones (2001) “actants” (649). This study considers place as one which is not essentialist or internalist and can change over time and encompasses relationships to other places. This is as stated by Cloke and Jones (2001) “it is through acting with and reacting to place that one becomes of “that place” and therefore “belongs” (650).

Commenting on the concept of belonging in “Weight of Whispers”, Makokha (2011), notes that, “Owuor’s story brings out the protagonist as an escapist who when faced with the situation he and his family find themselves, as refugees, prefer to circumscribe his own and his family’s status in euphemistic terms of “visitors, tourists, people in transit, universal citizens with...well...an affinity for Europe” (97). What comes out clearly here is the protagonist’s reluctance to accept the unfortunate situation he and his family are in but instead wants to pass a message of hope. This hope appears to be linked not only to the

resolution of the dreadful and insecure state of affairs both for him and his family but also for a quest to escape “the whispers”, haunting visions and a mysterious, constant uttering of his very own name, that stress him day and night. In his situation therefore, Kuseremane fails to belong as he cannot connect to the place that is Kenya.

In describing what quest is, Dieke (2010), has it that quest is that which makes the people feel religiously bound to undertake in order to discover a meaning and a pattern as an alternative to their seemingly desolate lives” (101). Kuseremane’s story is one of an individual who over the course of time slips more and more into both identity crisis and squalor in an unwelcoming foreign land. Kuseremane finally ends up being anonymous and enervated, although left ambiguous, we see Kuseremane almost contemplating suicide. Faced with all the foregoing, the attendant feeling, the character feels, is one that seeks both an encounter with the inner self, as well as the release from a sense of personal and historical emptiness.

Strongman (2014), writing on postcolonialism, makes an observation that can help contextualize Kuseremane’s identity struggles within the wider postcolonial cultural upheavals that face postcolonial societies and individuals. He notes that:

Much of the postcolonial studies are concerned with articulating patterns of gain, loss, inclusion, exclusion, identity formation and change, cultural evolution and human geographical dispersal in the wake of the after-effects of colonial rule. Postcolonial critics examine texts and images in order to make inferences about the significance of cultural identity and expression under these conditions. Often this is with a diachronic view of history. (43)

In Kuseremane’s struggles and his encounters with bureaucracy and all manner of unsettling conmen and haunting past, this study deciphers both the policy and materiality of political ideologies affecting cultural identity and expression. Within the text, aspects of

Kuseremane's origin remain elliptical and indeterminate and this can be attributed to the fact that the narrative is a present story, particularly during his early days in Nairobi; Kuseremane tends to hold onto some identity pointers. Consequently, his predicament appears to remind us of the early postcolonial Kenyan writers like Grace Ogot and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose first works demanded some form of idealistic recuperation of lost, pre-colonial cultural identity. This study argues that just like the postcolonial Africans natives found it difficult to stay in touch with those they left behind due to displacement; Kuseremane also seems unable to maintain his cultural traditions in the new places he now occupies.

Kuseremane's failure to form and live his own myth of origin is ironically not his myth at all, but instead one mediated by Belgian colonialists and later republican "independence" regimes that led to his current predicament. This leads us to view postcolonial identities through lenses other than the merely imagined past. The fact that postcolonial theories assume that all assertions of a cultural group about itself, that is, the values, traits, and identity are constructed under specific socio-historical conditions makes it necessary for us to get an understanding of such theories in reading and understanding the texts under study. The protagonist's anchors in the narrative, his misguided certainties, even toward the end of his fall, are that; he is a member of a divine- right royalty who at birth was "recognized by the priests as a man and a prince", he is a former senior diplomat; he is a successful neocolonial elite partner in both a banking and gemstone business; he is a well-educated "universal citizen" with a Ph.D. in Diplomacy and Masters in Geophysics (12-16). This brings to the fore the fragmented identity that Kuseremane faces when encountered with the kind of challenges he undergoes.

So firmly does Kuseremane want to retain these aspects of his identity that even as his predicament clearly unravels, something that the text's structural irony makes the reader to appreciate, Kuseremane does not. He is soon faced with an unhelpful and unsympathetic staff member of the American Embassy who denies him any rights to asylum since he cannot produce the correct papers, having left his back in Rwanda when he leaves in a hurry, Kuseremane still wants to shout to the woman, "I am Boniface Kuseremane, a prince, a diplomat" (17).

Further still, in an early indication of a denouement, there are still some signs of optimism, Kuseremane still feels there is a chance to escape the spell by fleeing the continent. "Soon we will be gone. To Europe, where the wind's weight of whispers does not matter; where the wind and all its suggestions have been obliterated" (19). This thinking makes it obvious that the protagonist is not only in political exile but also in a state that we can refer to as emotional exile. Kuseremane is escaping both from real problems as well as from what appears as abstract but more urgent problem: the whispers. Silencing these whispers means having peace of mind which to a larger extent is a self-serving solution to the struggles and quests that Owuor's narrative brings out. This study explains this as an escape from the *self* as the whispers come from a voice deep within that carries the truth of having committed an unforgivable crime which Kuseremane is not ready and willing to confess even to himself. This narrative brings to us clearly the fact that the protagonist took part in the issues, war and genocide, afflicting his native country of Rwanda. This as evidenced from the foregoing discussions has led to the personal identity struggles and a desire to forget and open a new page in both his life and that of his family. Sadly as refugees in a foreign land, Kenya, things

don't work out for him but end up so painfully; his wife is eventually forced into prostitution while his sister and beloved mother all die.

## **2.3 Ethnization of a Nation-State and Kuseremane's Personal Identity**

### **Struggles in Refuge**

In Owuor's "Weight of Whispers", she establishes a multifaceted construct of the refugees' experience. To achieve this, she uses Kuseremane who stands for the displaced; those who were forced to flee fighting in Rwanda and whose family and relatives have moved into Kenya. Owuor concentrates on the experiences of Kuseremane's family; before the outbreak of the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda, at the war's onset and later while in exile. Kuseremane is confronted with a number of uncomfortable situations; he appears not to know how to deal with them, when he is forced to flee his home country due to the violence and while in Kenya. When he moves to this new Kenyan society with his wife, mother and sister, he tries on one hand to adapt into this new land but on the other to keep his loyalties to his loyal lineage while at the same time fending for his family that he locates with.

Bauman's (2000) work on modernity and the Holocaust becomes of particular relevance to our study here. His examination of the systematic murder of a population deemed a threat to national integrity and racial exclusivity, as well as his discussion of the unruly figure of the stranger, who troubles the neat binary of friend and foe upon which the modern state predicated its political maneuvers become of much interest to our study on the concept of personal, cultural and national identity struggles in the texts under study.

On the above issues, Bauman's arguments productively engage with Mbembe's (2000) analysis of the shifting institutional landscape of the African Post colony. Where, "new

forms of privatized sovereignty and violence have remapped the geographies of power and spaces” (78). Mbembe goes on to observe that:

The struggle for political control and resources often invites the reinvention of identity through manipulation of indigenosity and ancestral descent. As the identity of a citizen is primarily conceived in ethnic and territorial terms, the crisis of the nation-state produces a corresponding crisis of citizenship in East Africa’s Great Lakes region. (86)

Mbembe is here referring to the economic and political shifts of the late 1980s and 1990s when, pressured by Structural Adjustment Programs and deregulated world markets, African political systems struggled to profitably reintegrate themselves into changing global economies. Ochwada (2000), points out a “crisis estimated in hundreds of thousands from Rwanda scattered all over the sub- region” (46). The causes of the tragedy can be traced to the capitalist donor countries which as Rahnema (1997) reminds us, supplied “ Rwanda with one of the highest per capita supplies of arms and ammunition on the grounds that the country had been recognized as a particularly “successful model of capitalist development”, and yet the power of identity discourse when misappropriated and disseminated through channels such as the Rwandan mass media, and feeding upon popular misconceptions and fear of foreign racial oppression, the ensuing refugee problem engulfed the region . This study posits that Kuseremane, on arriving in Kenya as a refugee, persists in clinging to mythology of personal origins along- side postcolonial discursive constructions of the Tutsi as a racialised group, we can conclude that his identity prior to, and within “Weight of Whispers” is a constant and chaotic process of becoming and this appears to be invariably beyond his control and understanding. Kuseremane as a hybridized royal and member of the neocolonial elite finds it very difficult to fit in, both in the new environment and new- found identity.

This study argues that Owuor's narrative highlights the thematic issue of struggle for existence and living, in the contemporary ethnicity laced contemporary East and Central African region. "Weight of Whispers" is a first-person narrative chronicling the life of Boniface Louis R. Kuseremane and his family after genocide breaks out in Rwanda. Kuseremane, Bon-Bon, as his sister Chi-Chi calls him; his fiancée, Lune, and mother Agnetha-mama are accustomed to the finer things in life. They are Rwandan royalty who are well-travelled, and are clearly unprepared for the impact that the genocide has on their lavish lifestyle.

Narrating to us his family's first experience in the hands of the Kenyan authorities, on arrival as refugees, Kuseremane says:

A flash of green and my US \$ 50 disappears into his pocket. His fingers prod: shirt, coat, trouser. He finds the worked snake skin wallet. No money in it; just a picture of Agnetha-mama, Lune and Chi-Chi, elegant and unsmiling, diamond in their ears, on their necks and wrists. The man tilts the picture this way and that, returns the picture into the wallet. The wallet disappears into another of his pocket. The man's teeth gleam. (1)

This study argues Kuseremane finding himself in the current globalised and fast paced context of the Kenyan capital, he is confronted with the ever- changing nuances of the *other* that fuel the processes of social fracturing and polarization. Owuor's text therefore foregrounds Kuseremane's multiple- fractured and dual identities and in so doing we are able to recognize the refugee's fragility in construction within the narrative. We also get to know how his encounters in the streets of a postcolonial Nairobi city deconstructs Kuseremane's own misguided certainties and identity from the theft of his "ring of the royal house-hold" (24), to his impoverished tenancy in the squalid River Road residence in the city. The family has fled to Kenya, believing the move to be only a temporary one, as they wait for relatives and friends abroad to assist them in their journey and settlement to Europe.

Kuseremane talks about the mother's wishes thus, "Agnethe, being a princess, knows that time solves all problems. Nevertheless she has ordered me to dispatch a telegram to sovereigns in exile, those who would be familiar with our quandary and could be depended on for empathy, cash assistance and even accommodation. The gratitude felt would extend generation unto generation" (8).

However, after sometime, reality slowly sets in; they have to sneak out of the Nairobi Hilton they settled into first and move into cheaper accommodation. Communication from those they had relied on for help dwindles and eventually dies out. Kuseremane is burdened with looking for work to support his family, but more than that, the weight of finding a way out of what is slowly becoming hell. "But now, I lower my head. The sum total of what resides in a very tall man who used to be a prince in a land eviscerated" (2).

Through the reading of this narrative this study is drawn into Kuseremane's helplessness as old friends become indifferent. The study also gets to understand the source of his fiancée's desperation. His sister and her aloof, escapist mindset also come out so clearly. As readers we are made to want more than just a glimpse into her life. The social and cultural construction of the *other* through differences in class, gender, ethnicity and nationality, as presented by Owuor, enables this study to examine the inequalities faced by characters in their identity quest struggles.

Kruger (2009) argues that, "Deregulated policies undermined the material and social bases of postcolonial states and the strategies through which they secured legitimacy" (2). Such uneven economic shifts, argues Kruger, furthered the internal dissolution of the state, which found its sovereignty restricted by the tutelary government of international creditors. The demands of global markets and political attempts to restore authoritarian rule create the

conditions for private government, as public functions are increasingly formed by private operators for private ends. What this means is that privatized forms of sovereignty reinforce the privatization of the instruments of violence because, as Kruger rightly notes, “control of the means of coercion makes it possible to secure an advantage in the other conflicts under way for appropriation of resources and other utilities formerly concentrated in the state” (3).

The narratives of Owuor and with them her productive dialogue with scholars who examine the cultural and political manipulations of identity expose the historical formation and rhetorical construction of ethnic and racial identities and hence challenging the reader to reflect on the ethics of being human. Though her search for other ways to live might be incomplete, as seen in the readings of the texts, her concern with the historical cycle of violence attracts our attention in this study.

Owuor in her narrative “Weight of Whispers” appears to be insistent on deconstructing political identities which enable the state-sponsored persecution of “foreigners.” The narrative’s main protagonist “a Tutsi of noble ancestry” by the name Boniface Luois R. Kuseremane, escapes from the Rwandan genocide only to face persistent discrimination in Kenya. The refugee, through institutions in the foreign land, such as foreign embassies, Kenyan law or lawlessness and the rude shopkeepers and landlords, who symbolize the tragedy of global capitalism, undergoes a lot of suffering and oppression. Owuor’s narrative parallels this with the historical postcolonial construction of Rwandan Tutsi as a group, an identity construction that, as seen earlier, partly enabled the genocide which led to Tutsi being the majority of refugees who were forced to run away from persecution in Rwanda. Progressively alienated from a fictional identity fashioned in the colonial discourses of race and ethnicity, the prince-turned-beggar has to contend with his new and undesirable status of

refugee, with the burden of perpetual displacement and terror of denied privilege. Owuor's narrative succeeds in exploring the enabling conditions of genocide: the historical formation of racialised identities, the capacity of modern state to design a social order desirable to those in power and the unrelenting logic with which private and public authorities are exercised against vulnerable populations.

Kuseremane's situation even worsens when they flee home. Leaving Rwanda with an entourage of female dependants, Kuseremane casually claims the right to buy "the last seats on the last plane", out of a country descending into organized chaos. Europe is the final destination for the privileged travelers belonging to a carefully groomed elite, who tolerate Kenya only as a temporary refuge. "Fortunately," the prince proclaims, "we were in transit. Soon we would be in Europe, among friends" (14). This is what Mamdani (2008) refers to as a "self-conscious racialized elitism" (89). Kuseremane's subjectivity is a testimony to the divisive politics of colonialism and its long lasting impact on the constructions of *self* and *other*. This as Partington (2006) says, is what "partially enabled the 1994 genocide" (112).

Kuseremane is described as "the tall man", whose Tutsi aristocracy is physically inscribed in the stereotyped features of his body, seems, as Mamdani (2008) notes, "to have swallowed wholesome the venom that was the Hamatic hypothesis" (48). This is due to the fact that Kuseremane appears to exploit a collective identity that is coded in colonial terms of racial superiority. Partington (2006) argues that:

For Kuseremane, the comforts promised by a privileged identity need to be vigorously defended. Throughout his sojourn in the Kenyan exile, he anxiously reiterates the paradigms defining his existence: he is a member of a divine-right royalty who at birth was "recognized by the priests as a man and a prince," he is a former senior diplomat; he is a successful neocolonial elite partner in both a banking and gem stone business, he is a well educated "universal citizen" with a Ph.D. in Diplomacy and a Masters in Geophysics. (113)

Kuseremane cannot therefore comprehend the possibility of an existence outside the circulating narratives of racialized ethnicity. Yet soon after his escape from his mother country, Rwanda, the aristocrat, turned victim, is soon confronted with the “weight of whispers” insisting on his responsibility for the genocide.

The question this study poses here however is that if he is a member of the Rwandan Tutsi Monarchy that “was abolished just prior to the country’s independence,” how could he have been implicated in the genocide? Partington (2006) rightfully argues that:

Such inconsistencies foreground the fictionality of the character and problematize any attempt at a sympathetic reading of his inevitable slide from power. While the untenability of Kuseremane’s myth of identity deconstructs the elitist categories on which the enforced and colonially-vulgar discourses of antagonistic Hutu/ Tutsi racial identity are predicated. (117)

The study’s interpretation here is that it simultaneously demonstrates the impact of such identity discourses on the construction of *self* and *other* and their reliance on fears of foreign racial oppression which were so efficiently disseminated through the Rwandan mass media.

Authored by German and Belgian colonialists, the fiction of the foreign origin of the Tutsi could be skillfully exploited in the 1990s to evoke fear of the return to “feudal servitude” and insist on the Tutsi “repatriation” to Ethiopia. Mamdani (2008) notes that:

Colonial policies racialized previously existing political identities and translated them into the volatile distinction between indigenous “native” and alien “settler”. Belgian colonialism thus relied on the Hamatic hypothesis to support the myth that those in power in the nineteenth century Rwandan Kingdom, the Tutsi, were in fact foreigners with Caucasoid racial origins in Ethiopia who had successfully established their “racial superiority” over the “local” Hutu population. (86)

What this means is that in the racial coding of “Tutsi” and “Hutu”, a superior group of white-like Hamatic peoples triumphed over an inferior race of Bantu negroids. Mamdani (2008) goes on to opine that:

Only briefly puzzled by the “civilizational progress” of a well-functioning Rwandan kingdom, the European colonizers had discovered an explanation preserving the Eurocentric myth of darkest Africa. As racial identity was visibly documented in identity cards issued since the 1930s and power allocated on the basis of racial privilege, Tutsi administrators became the official face of colonial oppression. (92)

To the dynamics of power, Belgian colonialism had added the explosive politics of race and indigeniety. Under the increasing pressure of the United Nations, the Belgian colonial state was forced to reconsider its unilateral backing of the Tutsi elite after the Second World War, and shifted its support to emerging Hutu middle class. Scherrer (2002) observes that:

The Belgian shift from Tutsi to Hutu support successfully deflected the basis of late colonial conflict from class, in which case the Belgians would have been seen equally guilty, in this one move turning the racialized Tutsi from ally to enemy. (116)

As Rwanda transformed from a Tutsi-dominated colonial administration into a postcolonial republic founded on Hutu rule, Straus Scott (2008), commenting on the foregoing says, “Race thinking that had once hardened identity categories and benefited the Tutsi minority now gave rise to ethnic nationalism. Rwanda’s new Hutu leaders claimed independence in the name of the previously oppressed Hutu majority” (22).

The above is brought out in Owuor’s narrative when she talks about fight for survival alongside good and evil in the society in the day-to-day lives of the characters. This is the same situation that the Africans, as alluded to earlier, during the colonial Rwanda went through. At one point we see Kuseremane reminiscing as he was being arrested in the Nairobi streets. He thinks back to the time he met an eccentric man at a coffee shop who was selling pornography magazines and women’s lingerie to make a living. The man was animated, making a fool of himself, giving a lot of truth to the “black people are monkeys” discourse. As they talked Kuseremane found out that the man had a Master’s degree in Sociology but in the Whiteman’s land, those degrees did not carry weight. Their

conversation highlights Kuseremane's privilege at that time but also brings to light the fleeting nature of a lot of these things we ascribe importance. Commenting on "Weight of Whispers" Nsharika (2006) says, "Status and education can be everything in one place and context and mean nothing in another" (1).

Still looking at the cause of the ethnic violence experienced in Rwanda, we note that in the midst of a deepening political crisis in the 1990s, the Habyarimana administration found it opportune to direct accusations of neo-colonial elitism and regional divisions among the Hutu onto issues of race. An effectively mobilized program of ethnic nationalism denied the linguistic and cultural commonalities of Hutu and Tutsi and instead insisted on a distinctive Hutu identity and a history of victimization to legitimize the exclusionary policies of the Rwandan nation-state and its definition of citizenship in ethnic and territorial terms. Mbembe (2000) correctly observes that, "As a consequence, an enjoyment of civil rights depended on appurtenance to an ethnic group or locality" (280).

The discourse of Tutsi racial privilege had thus shifted the imperative of racial exclusion, which encouraged the forceful eviction of "strangers" whose presence could only be perceived as a threat to national sovereignty. Securely constructed within the rhetoric of violence and autochthony, the victim who was also the enemy was blamed for the crisis of the postcolonial nation. Straus (2008) says, "Consider, for example, the broadcasts aired on state radio which instructed all Rwandans to unite against a common enemy since it's the enemy who wants to reinstate the former feudal monarchy" (50).

Those who are supposed to protect and provide assistance to the suffering refugees are the same who prey on the vulnerable and gullible young girls and women out there. When Kuseremane learns of this he feels greatly betrayed by both his fiancée and sister. He also

feels that he is the one to blame for this as he failed to provide for them, being the only male in the family.

In this narrative, this study observes, modern institutions generate divisive political identities which encourage the production of moral apathy towards those marked as “different” and therefore excluded from the protection of the state. To ensure survival, even those affected by marginalization eventually appropriate the institutional apparatus of the nation-state to contain unruly minorities as is evidenced above. A “Tutsi Prince” is victimized by the racialized identity he was once eager to embrace. Victims are seen to possess the ability of becoming killers, while those responsible for today’s (epistemic) violence might eventually become tomorrow’s victims. Therefore, the seemingly ambivalent and contradictory characterization of Kuseremane, the protagonist, as a victim and genocidaire operates within the logic of organized violence and the mutual fear of victimhood through which today’s victims become tomorrow’s killers.

#### **2.4 Narrating National Identity and Struggles of Belonging in *Dust***

This section focuses on the national identity quests and struggles characters go through in Owuor’s text *Dust*. Owuor’s narrative concerns itself with Kenya’s history; from the Mau Mau uprising of the early 1950’s to the political assassinations of 1969 to the postelection violence of 2007. The narrative also focuses on the tales of passionate human beings, most of them guilty of righteous violence. From Moses Odidi, his younger sister Arabel Ajany, their father Aggrey Nyipir to Bolton, Isaiah William and Akai Lokorijom, we are made aware of the wounds and hopes they all bear which either lead to death or redemption. In a scene describing the independence celebrations, Owuor appears to ask the questions of who

participated in the birth of the nation of Kenya and who should eat the fruits of independence.

Ogot (2010) argues that there has always been an attempt of imposing an official interpretation of the Kenyan past by selecting one identity. He says that:

The government set up a National Taskforce to seek the views of Kenyans on who should be considered heroes and heroines of the nation-state and yet the same government had identified nationalists to be recognized as national heroes including Dedan Kimathi, Bildad Kagia, Paul Ngei and Koitalel Arap Samoei. (28-29)

Here we get to learn that the government has always tended to put more focus on the wellbeing of those it considers important and have contributed more to the country than the ordinary Kenyans. One burning question therefore comes to mind, the place and position of ordinary Kenyans, who in one way or another contributed towards national liberation and fight for independence. Another persistent question is that one on the welfare and well-being of the Mau Mau fighters who endured a lot while fighting to reclaim our ancestral lands from the colonizer. In *Dust*, characters like Odidi, who have been patriotic since independence, cross our minds in light of the foregoing discussion. The narrative begins in the days that the country is at war with itself soon after the 2007/2008 post election violence. Kenyans seem to have learned to be wary and cautious of each other and in their undertakings. We come across Odidi Oganda, the son to Nyipir, “running and running” (12), and longing to be home and away from the nation- states persecution and oppression towards those viewed as being against its rule. It is clear that the most important thing he has to do is to go home. This study argues that there is an intersection between the feeling and sense of home and how or who particular individual identify themselves with. “Coming home. Wait for me” (13). He feels that at home, Wuoth Ogik, the central home in *Dust*, all

will be well. These individuals and characters unfortunately appear to join the group of “insignificant” Kenyans busy fighting poor governance but are never honored.

In the years leading to Kenya’s independence in 1963 and those that soon followed, many Kenyans fought for freedom under the spirit of patriotism and a sense of belonging to the new nation-state. Soon however, it came out clearly that there were “genuine” individuals in the post-colonial Kenya who deserved to eat the fruits of independence. Odhiambo and Lonsdale (2003) observe that:

Kenya’s arguments about its freedom’s divisive birth is all about who sacrificed most to bring freedom, about whose contributions has been most unjustly forgotten, or who has most selfishly eaten the fruits of independence, and at whose expense?  
(2)

In his commentary about Kenya’s early years of post-independence, Clough (2003) notes that:

At independence, the governing elite formed a national identity to unite the country as a state together. To do this, they formed national myths based on selective memory and amnesia. Political parties, education institutions and government institutions machineries were employed to propagate these myths, like we are one united country, we all fought for independence and many others. (254)

All these served to provide authority for the ruling elites in the country so that they could govern the “common man” with little or no resistance. This ruling group tried as much as they could to repress and hide the past memories of the colonial period that threatened the call for peace, love and unity in the newly independent Kenyan state. Clough goes on to state that, “Remembering the 1950s in Kenya means not only evoking the Mau Mau course and struggle but it also means remembering the emergency; the killings and executions; ambivalence” (255). Clough concludes by saying that soon after Kenyatta taking over, he made sure that there was continuity of the colonial regime’s ideologies. So as the people could forget about the Mau Mau, the ruling government stuck with the policy of amnesia

with regard to the Mau Mau memory. He adds that the policy of amnesia was encapsulated in the official slogan of “forgive and forget,” in that, “remembering led to division and forgetting led to unity” (256). This study argues that it is important to remember and that a people’s shared memory leads to the search for identity (re)construction.

It is maybe because of such concerns that, in the early post-independence years, most African writers embarked on writing and highlighting the struggles Africans were going through in their new nation-states. The likes of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah, most of whom had taken part in the anti-colonial struggle, now moved their focus to the oppressive and exploitative African leaders. *A Man of the People* (2001) by Achebe depicts post-independence Nigeria and shows how the leaders engaged in corruption and misrule which led to conflict between the ruling elites, the middle class and the general public. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood* portrays the nation’s betrayal of the hopes of the Kenyan citizens after independence. The government, instead of supporting the ideals of nationalism and formation of a national identity, embraced neo-colonialism which led to exploitation and marginalization of peasants and the working- class. When it comes to *Dust*, this study argues that the story comes out as one of a nation that gave its people away. During the colonial days, many Africans, Kenyans included, were enlisted to fight in the King African Rifles I Burma during the Second World War just as Nyipir’s father and older brother were as presented to us in the novel. In return however, the people’s government gives away its people and country too, so that when Tom Mboya is assassinated, it is said that it is Kenya that is murdered. “Nobody would dare kill Tom Mboya, because it means they would be willing to kill Kenya” (57). Owuor’s narrative communicates to us the fact that for as long as affected people live, and for as long as

silence and memory is part of their daily life, the nation-state will always be dying silently and secretly. We see this through the deaths that began in the 1960's which are not forgotten but recur in the 2007/2008 post-election violence taking occurring at the narrative's present time.

In addition to the early post-independent African writers from the foregoing, Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973), highlights the condition of despair in the post-colonial Kenyan state. The novel tells the story of two young Kenyans, Maina and Meja, who have come to Nairobi to seek a better urban life. Failure to get jobs and living in despair, the two start to engage in crime. They soon realize that life in the post independent Kenya is not as glorious as they had thought. This is the same experience Owuor's characters, the likes of Odidi and Nyipir; go through in their daily encounters with the government of the day.

Kehinde commenting on *Kill Me Quick* argues that:

Through the characters in the novel, most especially Meja and Maina, Mwangi exposes the complex problems confronting the Kenyan state, the suffering of the populace in the midst of plenty and the inability of the state to cater for its citizens. (203)

Looking keenly at Owuor's manner of narration and storytelling this study argues that it relies greatly on the afore mentioned African texts, a perfect example of intertextuality, which is a term associated with *post-structuralism*, which according to Quinn (2010), "Rejects the idea of a text as a single, autonomous entity created by a single author" (218). There are two types of intertextuality; citation and presupposition. The latter is explained by Quinn (2010), "Involves assumptions regarding the reader, the situation being referred to, and its context (219). What this implies is that the author relies heavily on her readers knowing the original text without her having to use extensive allusion. Intertextuality

therefore helps us to explain why texts acquire as many meanings as the readers. Owuor's text appears to borrow much from the historical background and experiences in the Kenyan state before, during and after independence. In *Dust*, characters like Nyipir who observe and see the oppression meted on those who criticize corruption and poor governance, hide themselves under illusion of a "future Kenya". "Their mouths, ears and eyes were shut and they partitioned sorrow, purchased more silence and waited for "better Kenya" which never turned up" (10). Owuor through her use of characters like Odidi is able to highlight the identity struggles in the context of ethnicity, class differences and gender characters go through and in a way broadening the fight for freedom and empowerment the likes of Ngugi and Mwangi have always advocated for in their works of art.

Nyipir warns Odidi against the risks involved in interfering with the affairs of the nation-state. He tells him, "You do not sing the songs of the people who don't know you..."(10). This warning by Nyipir comes from his earlier experience with the government operatives in 1969 who tortured him. Odidi goes to the streets after being fired from Tich Lich Engineering Company, which he had started with a friend, and starts petitioning the people to come together and stand against injustices and corruption that have become a daily routine in the society. Odidi was a brilliant engineer, whose disgust with the cynical corruption of the powerful has turned him into the leader of a criminal gang.

This study argues that Odidi's identity metamorphoses from a brilliant engineer to a robber due to the constant frustrations faced in at the hands of the ruling elite. This is after his mortgage being recalled and him lacking any means to survive. On the night of his death, he has just made the decision to leave Nairobi and return to his estranged family. A frustrated Odidi finds himself in the streets. He determinedly cries out against this corruption and

writes letters to the state to which no one replies; he also sends articles to the media houses but which no one publishes. Exasperated, he recruits a gang of robbers, as mentioned earlier, and it is through this gang that he is eventually killed in the streets. Odidi's identity transition therefore positions him for his eventual demise. Odidi's death denotes to the study that individuals are always in constant struggle and conflict when faced by the oppressive state machinery to an extent of taking on new personalities and identities.

In addition to the foregoing, this study finds *Dust* is an interesting example of intertextuality because as Kristeva (1969) argued that all works of literature being produced contemporarily are intertextual with the works that came before it. As she stated, "Any text," she argues, "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." Just like the characters in Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, set earlier than *Dust*, Owuor reworks her narrative through the contemporary characters of Odidi, Nyipir Ajany and many others to portray the nation's betrayal of the hope of Kenyan citizens after independence, the high levels of corruption the leaders engaged in and the disillusionment coupled with despair that followed after independence. Through this, Owuor aptly points out the trials and tribulations that the characters underwent in the post independent Kenyan nation-state.

In yet another instance of Owuor's ability to exploit intertextuality, we look at Heaney (1999), in his epic poem "Beowulf", presents the literal interpretation of identity by discussing who his characters are and where they come from; their patriarchal history, for instance. During Seamus' times, medieval Scandinavia, family lineage was a vital influence on an individual's identity and due to the fact Beowulf comes from a long line of royalty, he is highly respected. This concept is explored throughout the poem and it is evident that

characters cannot be introduced without a mention of their family lineage. For example, even in the opening stanzas the reader is introduced to a father figure; Shield Sheafson before Heaney presents a second character, Beow, who is established with the line “Shield had fathered a famous son.” Heaney’s construction of Sheafson as the ideal hero prior to introducing his son highlights the poem’s obsession with ancestral heritage.

Owuor, just like Heaney, constructs an identity for her characters not only based on their family lineage but also through the enhancement of their reputation. Characters like Nyipir by Owuor and Sheafson Heaney are portrayed as coming from reputable families and known to fight against the evils of the day in the nation state. Our contemporary reading of *Dust* is necessarily intertextual since Owuor employs the same tactic when it comes to the creation of her main characters. This study argues that this is some kind of intertextuality. Owuor’s characters attempt to create a solid positive representation of themselves, often by boasting of their achievements.

As Ajany says, Odidi died from heroic idealism as he had been organizing the disenchanting youth to work for a different future for themselves and it was sad that the “stupid” nation-state did not have the capacity to grasp Odidi’s vision and instead destroyed him (287). Through the re-telling of Odidi’s story, the author is able to highlight the struggles and despair, coupled with disillusionment that has characterized the Kenyan state since independence. Odidi’s narrative can be looked at as a representative of the narratives of individuals in Kenya. Such individuals are those who, after long struggles and quests to free secure a nation-state of all evils and form an identity, end up in more despair and pain.

Writing about the pessimistic nature of Kenyans even after attainment of self-rule Ogot (2010) observes that as a nation-state, we need a history that seeks to explain “why the high

hopes associated with the struggle for independence have been disappointed, and why the legacy of nationalism in Kenya has not resulted into a cohesive society” (50). Although Owuor in her text is not quick to point out the negative ethnicity, underneath the narrative lies disquiet over ethnicity as an identity issue which is shown through the ruling society and unfair distribution of resources. Cheeseman (2008), while commenting on the 2007-2008 post-election violence says, “Salient ethno-regional identities reinforced by historical grievances over land ownership, economic inequality and political exclusion are central to an understanding of the Kenyan crisis” (167). He goes on to add that the spread of the violence in Kenya owed much to the informalisation of the state, the diffusion of violence beyond central control, and the rise of militias connected to the political elite (169).

Commenting on *Dust* Abdulrazak (2015) says that:

The text is set against the backdrop of the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections in Kenya. The result of the presidential election was contested, but nevertheless Mwai Kibaki was hurriedly sworn in as president, inaugurating weeks of violence and hundreds of deaths. The political meaning of these events and their historical connections to cynical imperial manipulations and violence, to atrocities in response to the Mau Mau rebellion and to the brutalities of post-independence state-are not fully explained in the novel. Explanations unfold as memories and secrets are forced out by circumstances, revealing themselves to the reader and to the figures in the narrative. (23)

Once the peace accord between Kibaki and Raila was signed, the political leaders went back to their usual crusade messages calling upon Kenyans to “forgive and forget” and to build a more united Kenya. All these serve to remind the reader of the national myths created during independence which called on Kenyans to unite despite their personal, cultural and ethnic differences. The assumption has always been that Kenyans can always embrace each other regardless of the varied identities, cultural and ethnic, and they can live together in peace, love and unity as a nation-state. After Kenya’s attainment of self-rule, citizens hoped that

the new African government would end the torture and oppression that had been linked with the British colonial government. However, arrests and imprisonment went on as those individuals viewed as opposing the newly formed independent government policies were taken in, tortured and even assassinated. Awitor (2014), commenting on the disillusionment Kenyans are experiencing correctly observes that:

Through the analysis of the daily life of the protagonists, the ordinary people and events, most African literary writers examine the socio-political, economic and moral decadence of post-independence African nation-states. Most post-independence leaders, rulers and elite exhibited failures by failing to elaborate a viable economic and societal project to meet the expectations and needs of their citizens. Instead, the new ruling class amassed fortune while the majority of people wallow in poverty. (175)

From the foregoing it is therefore right to point out that being abused; the masses and the common people become disoriented. They seek for any possible means to alleviate their burden. In order to heal contemporary African malaise, Africans must acknowledge their responsibility in their failure, identify their illness and procure an appropriate treatment.

This section posits that, based on fictions of race and ethnicity, identities are subjected to constant and extensive political manipulation, so that even former colonizers and settlers can position themselves as natives while the locals are reduced to foreign intruders. Colonial and fascist discourses of race provide a powerful rhetorical medium which can be exploited either for political capital or to discriminate against “undesirable” populations. For those seduced by the prospect of power and citizenship, the readiness to assimilate to official identity discourses will result in certain death. This is brought out clearly by Owuor through the narrator in *Dust* when he says “After independence, fear split words into smaller and smaller fragments until words become secret and suffocation came. The state was seizing people and no one cried” (25). Nyipir goes on to recall the way bodies started showing up

mutilated and dead, the loudest protests were formed out of whispers. Raina (2009) observes that:

Even when colonies no longer exist, the subservient mindset of the silenced native still continues and can be observed in the silenced realm of literature and images of the life trickle and filter out from the former colonized lands, projecting only certain aspects of life experiences. Thus its very existence is altered due to the discourse of the powerful and is accepted as a conventional norm, as a fact rather than a philosophy of fiction. (34)

The implication of the foregoing is that the issues of social justice are often ignored in the politics of power when dealing with the representation of minorities within the African continent. *Dust* presents Kenya as a dying state just like the deaths of the political figures including Pio Gama Pinto, Tom Mboya, Argwings Kodhek, Ronald Ngala, Karumba Kungu, Josiah Kariuki and Robert Ouko. These are political figures who were assassinated in the history of Kenya between 1965 and 1990, and whose deaths the novel reiterates. The deaths of these prominent politicians is not so much the focus as is the idea of the “disappeared unknown” cause a growing fear in the lives of Kenyans who then choose silence as a weapon for survival. Many “bodies turned up mutilated and truly dead,” but all one could afford was “silence” and “protests created out of whispers” (30). The study also gets to know that the deaths were too many to be contained even by silences, and therefore needed more people to obliterate the bodies from the earth’s face. Because of this, men had to be contracted to destroy bodies. Warui, who later on subcontracts Nyipir, has been doing this far too long. They both bury bodies of nameless people under the blanket of the night and in silence (176). Owuor in narrating historical political assassinations reveals to us many other deaths that happened but which were ignored by those in power.

Furthermore, the foregoing issues apply to the fictional characters and their representation, especially when the representations are in relation to and for an audience that belongs to the areas that form these powerful individuals and cultures. According to Sims (1982),

There is power in The Word. People in position of power over others have historically understood, and often feared, the potential of The Word to influence the minds of the people over whom they hold sway. (1)

So as to achieve its goal, the government of the day called on the masses to embrace forgiveness and reconciliation while at the same time using the state power and machinery to fight those who “refused” to surrender their past memories. The citizenry was henceforth silenced for the sake of peace and those who dared speak were labeled the enemies of the state. The narrator of *Dust*, Nyipir, says that:

Citizens blind and deaf even when they saw neighbors being hauled away, howling. Some buried bodies of mysteriously smashed up relatives and addressed their anguish in riddles that archangels might decipher. Provincial offices and chiefs passed decrees in village after village: *From now on, we shall not speak of so-and-so again. Anybody who mentions this name is an enemy of our nation.* Afterwards, nobody was even willing to admit that so-and-so had even existed. (302)

Through the narration of Nyipir’s experiences, being taken through a number of violent incidents, Owuor in *Dust* is able to create a narrative in which violence persisted soon after independence and haunts the nation state. Nyipir, while reflecting on Kenya, tells Ajany that Kenyans had been at war even before she was born and the nature of war has been its silence because of not having resolved conflicts and challenges such as assassinations, corruption and an unfulfilled promise after independence. Those voices that spoke of discontent were silenced and suppressed by the state. We see this when Nyipir accepts that, “even if you plant another story into the silence, the buried thing returns to ask for its blood from the living, death does not keep secrets well” (69). What this statement implies is that whatever

murder was committed and was supposedly silenced, it would always come to haunt the perpetrators.

This study finds that the silences and the processes of silencing affect the quest for identity since language or voice are important in the formation of identity. However, if that very language or voice is absent because of censorship or silencing, the individuals find it difficult to construct their identity. As a citizen, Nyipir has had a sense of belonging to Kenya, a political entity with common sentiments that originated from a shared historical experience; however, the sentiments and feelings soon fade when he is tortured. The government uses the police to silence its critics. Soon after the death of Tom Mboya, Nyipir undergoes torture in the hands of the police for openly speaking out about the excesses of the government leaders. The result of these silences and silencing is that the citizens are not able to build a sense of self-continuity and coherence which end up contributing to the fracturing of the national identity as is the case in Owuor's narrative.

Owuor, in her narrative moans the fallen heroes, including Tom Mboya who had sacrificed a lot for the sake of the nation. This is an attempt to illustrate that since attainment of independence, the country has kept on silencing those perceived to be dissidents and has inculcated fear so as to destroy the collective memory of suffering Kenyans have been through and continue to endure. Madison (2004) says collective memory is:

The theory that a people whether by race, family or culture gather memories which influences how we see our lives. Also called "societal remembrance." Collective memory refers to how we remember things through a social lens. Some are basic such as shared lessons learned growing up, how to make a bed, take shower or brush our hair. We naturally pass these lessons down as we learned them. (82)

The government of the day had learned and perfected the art of silencing those who spoke out, through arrests, jailing and killings, and for this reason most citizens decided to keep

quiet and observe as things happened to and around them. The government does this as a way of ensuring that the citizenry forgot the past atrocities inflicted upon them. This is not only a case of cultural ambivalence but also cultural diversity that Owuor highlights in her narrative.

The nature of an authoritarian regime that used ethnic favoritism and totalitarian policies had forced the characters to live in fear and watch as atrocity after atrocity was meted out on them and their relatives. Nyipir's experience in the hands of the state and while living in other parts of the country like Kapendo and his encounter with other cultures to some sense lowers his ethnic sense of self, negating it in fact. However, his return from these hostile locations coupled with the time away from his homeland consolidates his need to rediscover both the self, cultural and the nation-state. To do this, he embarks on a journey of finding out what happened to his people in the past. By doing this, Owuor through the character of Nyipir, is able to highlight to us the country's social problems, economic situation, political background as well as the shifts in identity. Nyipir realizes that identity, and so do we, is always in flux and is multiplicitous as the places and times we live in today.

Several of the characters in Owuor's narrative have lost children and many have left their homes. It is the Trader who brings to the fore these shared stories and histories as many people share their stories with him through the constant interaction and trust they have in him. He is even referred to as a "gatherer and carrier" of stories. This study argues that memory plays an important part in identity formation and creation of a positive sense of self since memory of past episodes provides a sense of personal and group identity. Many of the characters in the novel share common experiences. These characters are people of many provenances: Turkana from the North, Luo from the South, Somali herdsmen and traders, an

Eritrean police officer, an Indian shopkeeper, Missionaries and an English colonial police officer.

The Trader reveals that Petrus was part of the Kenya Interrogation Squad from 1968 to 1989. Some of Petrus' roles included interrogating Nyipir. Petrus also took part in the Wagalla Massacre in 1984. The narrator says that:

A 1984 northern frontiers security operation had gone out of control. Five thousand corpses later, he had been summoned to help clean things up. He had overseen the washing of blood-spattered Wagalla runway, had arranged burials in secret sites, had terrorized would be-witnesses into what should have been eternal silences. (323)

The Wagalla Massacre was a result of a campaign by the Kenyan government to disarm Somali Degodia clan in a town centre near Wajir in February 1984. According to Abdi (2007), the Wagalla Massacre, was hatched because of the existing unresolved issues, it has also roots in Somalia tribal wars and eventually in regional politics that by coincidence gave one Somali clan the upper hand. (11) Abdi goes on to say that the decision to deploy the army at Wagalla was arrived at a meeting held in the office of the Vice-President. The meeting was a result of perceived threat to national security by rebel clan of the Somali tribe. The plan was meant to gather all the male members of Degodia clan that was suspected to be troublesome and punish them until they would surrender their weapons (17).

Based on the happenings before, during and after the Wagalla massacre and a closer look at Owuor's narratives, we get to learn of the struggles for identity and belonging. This is premised on the fact that these narratives are seen to deliver powerful critiques of modern nation-state, its desire for politically opportune order, its monotony of violence, and disenfranchised categories of identity. The text also does not overlook the disastrous effects that new forms of privatized government and violence have on unsuspecting civilians.

Bureaucratic efficiency appears to be as morally indifferent to the plight of vulnerable social groups as bureaucratic corruption is; state-sponsored programs narrow the criteria for citizenship and generate new struggles for power and resources; and internal borders endlessly proliferate when dehumanized populations are confined to various locations and landscapes. This study argues that Owuor through her narrative becomes a mouthpiece of much importance when it comes to the narration of and re-telling of the national identity struggles of belonging.

Jeni (2016), in her argument says that:

Although sometimes writers may deal with their personal crisis of identities and feelings of alienation at other points they appear to have a higher calling, becoming the mouthpieces for the confusion and aimlessness for the nation or an entire generation. Writers like Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot fall into the category of writers who defined the mores of their age. Their experience of living abroad at the time of war, disillusionment and existential struggle colored their literature and also captured the general sentiments of that age. (6)

Writers eventually channel their experiences into work and therefore leaving behind a documentation that not only gives an account of the facts, but presents an accurate portrayal of the emotional and mental anguish felt by the collective population of the period.

Owuor finds it timely to re-live and re-tell the Wagalla Massacre experience for her audience and Kenyans in particular so that they can remember and be able to talk about other massacres such as Bulla Karatasi in 1984, Malka Mari in 1981 and the Lotiriri massacre in 1984 in which according to Ahmed (2011), “Security personnel killed hundreds of civilians and permanently disabled others” (18). Owuor also re-tells these experiences so that the atrocities and struggles in which many civilians were tortured and killed in the name of forging togetherness and a national identity by the state can be re-told to prevent similar

experiences recurring. This study therefore argues that memory is what gives us all our unique identity.

## **2.5 The Self in “The Knife Grinder’s Tale”**

One of the most important themes and sub-themes of literature is the *quest for self*. In life as well as in literature the attempts to understand self are predominant. According to Randall (1955), “all human activities are perhaps centered on these endeavors to come to terms with the self. In literature the search for self is a predominant concern of authors of all genres” (26). When we try to discuss self we also need to look at life itself. This is because the most inclusive perspective of human individuals is what is commonly called his life. A life without further definition suggests some biological totality, sometimes the temporal span of an organism between birth and death.

In the words of Buchler (1974):

The order that constitutes a human being is itself located in wider, more pervasive orders. For a man, or any other natural complex, to be located in or included in such an order is to share traits that are of wider scope. Any order, any complex included and is included in other orders. There is no privileged order of beings, no inherently primary order. Another way of saying this is: any order may be primary in a given respect. (89)

Buchler goes on to argue that the order of a man’s consciousness is one among the countless orders of the world, and one among the orders that go to make up his being. It may become primary, however, when man stands in a relation to other complexes which are felt, or of which they are aware it is the kind of order, and presumably the only kind, which can define its own limits, and which can define the forum of primary belonging to other orders. This study argues that what formulates and makes up the nature of human beings to be different from other beings, orders, is that they are unique since they are able to relate and realize the

existence of other beings in their locations and surroundings. In other words, human beings possess the assertive power of judgment that is superior to all other beings around them.

In “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” Otieno, better known as Dj in the slums of Nairobi, feels so excited on learning that he has got a job at Mama Lucy’s shop and hotel in Nairobi. “Baba I got a job at Mama Lucy’s shop” (1). His father however appears to be hesitant about the son’s decision as he, the father, wants him to go on with his education and one day become an engineer. The father says, “You are my dirge singer. Always follow my shadow as it will lead you to better and greater ways. What about school?” (1). What the father seems to convey to the son is that he should take up the responsibility of taking care of him and carrying on with the father’s ambitions and aspirations. Turner *et al* (1992), argue that:

...[S]ocial identity and self-categorization theories provide a distinctive perspective on the relationship between the self and collective. They assume that individuals can do and act as both individual persons and social groups and that, since both individuals and social groups exist objectively, both personal and social categorical self-categorizations provide valid representations of self in differing social contexts. (1)

Social identity looked at this way can be termed as the way of explaining the concrete social realities of collective life. It is a way of looking at the psychological processes that interact with and make possible the distinctive “group facts” of social life.

In light of the foregoing, Owuor’s narrative is very apt in exploring the links between the self-evaluative aspects of social identity and the intergroup conflicts the characters are faced with. These aspects determine what people are most likely to do when they pursue a more positive social identity. Cameron (2007), opines that “Social identity theory distinguishes between three types of aspects and strategies for status improvement; individual mobility, social competition, and social creativity” (240). Generally, individuals wish to maintain a

positive social identity by maintaining the group's favorable social standing over that of relevant out-groups.

Mitchell (2000) argues that, "The relationship between individuals and communities with their landscape can be interpreted to reveal their contextualized social, political, economic, and cultural realities that impinge on their sense of belonging and statuses of "outsider" or "insider" (10). The study takes this to mean that an individual's belonging takes account of the materiality of the person's location and space at a particular point and time. In "The Knife Grinder's Tale" Dj believes that for him to get to know and understand his self identity , then he should move away from their rural home to Nairobi and follow his ambitions and passions of becoming a knife grinder. The father on the other hand feels that for the family to remain together and forge ahead to greater levels of success then his son, Dj, should go to university and become an engineer, a career path the father has always insisted on the son pursuing.

Dj is however not convinced with the father's thinking and he soon after disappears from home to pursue his new ambitions; trying to make a living away from home and take on a new self discovery. In a conversation with the father as he attempts to convince him to allow him to follow his goals by going to work in Nairobi, Dj reveals to us that he is not sure about whether he will do as the father wants or he will pursue his own ambitions. "What about engineering?" (1) The father asks him. In response Dj says, "In doubt. Am a knife grinder Baba" (2).

Jerome (1990) commenting on the self says that, selves are not isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head, but are distributed interpersonally. He goes on to argue that selves do not arise rootlessly in response only to the present, they take meaning as well

as from the historical circumstances that gave shape to the culture of which they are an expression (138). This study takes this to mean that the components that make up the self and behavior are not merely emotions, cognition and actions each acting in isolation, but aspects of larger whole that achieves its integration only within a cultural system. The actions and activities the individual engages in are influenced by his/her surroundings and the circumstances at the time and place.

In “The Knife Grinder’s Tale”, in pursuit of what he considers to be his destiny and *self*, Dj eventually runs to the slums of Nairobi after the disagreement with the father. Later on however, Dj is aimlessly murdered by a mob while walking in the slums of Kibera, he is stoned to death by a group of “upright citizens” who thought he “looked like” a thief. This greatly traumatizes the father and he takes it upon himself to travel to the capital city and see for himself where his son was killed. In a conversation with Mama Lucy, Baba Otieno asks, “Why? Why? Why? Why my son?” (8) What happens to Dj and the way he was killed is a pure case of mistaken identity, defined by the Webster Dictionary as “a situation in which someone or something is mistakenly thought to be someone or something else.” Being a new inhabitant in the slums of Kibera, Dj is murdered by the slum dwellers. Tony Craig *et al* (2012) commenting on place familiarity says, “People gain actual familiarity through direct experience of environments and its inhabitants” (9). DJ’s lack of familiarity with the new surroundings he finds himself in can also be attributed to his killing.

In his commentary about the self in literature, Howe (1991) says that:

A construct of the mind, an hypothesis of being, socially formed even as it can be quickly turned against the very social formations that have brought it into birth. The locus of self often appears as “inner,” experienced as a presence savingly apart from both social milieu and quotidian existence. (56)

This study agrees here that identity can be formed by self- reflection or develops by the outward influence of an observer. The fact that the formation of identity is based on an individual's perceptions shows on the one hand that identity may be formed rather selectively and that on the other hand the influences on this process may be multiple: Not only forces inside the individual but equally outside influences may enter his/her self-concept. Mostly the two processes will hardly be separable but interact rather closely. On the one hand, the individual him/herself may consciously adopt features he or she considers useful. Jerome further says, "other traits may enter the psyche unconsciously for instance by childhood education on the other hand, an outside observer may label the individual with a completely different version of his or her identity" (139). Otieno, while in slums of Kibera, finds it difficult to fit in even as he interacts with the inhabitants in these places. This can be attributed to the fact that he has very little contact with them for the few days he has been staying here. The study finds this to mean that the outside observer may have expectations, formed ideas or prejudices about the individual concerned and ascribe him a completely different identity according to his/her intentions or his capacity to dominate over the individual. The outside and inside perspective of identity interact and work on each other and form a rather contradictory structure when the individual projects outside images on his or her own psyche.

So as to find closure and peace of mind by himself, Baba Otieno sets out to find for himself what happened to his only son. We learn this in a conversation with a neighbor at the shores of Lake Vitoria. The neighbor pleads with him not to go by saying "Please Ogwang, you need not go" (6). He is however so much pre-occupied by the thoughts of seeing the lost and now dead son. "I need to go. I have to know the place where he last lay. I need to know

where. I need to know” (6). In furtherance of the foregoing, we look at Tayfel and Turner’s (1986), research on social categorization and intergroup discrimination made a basic distinction between personal and social identity as differing levels of inclusiveness in self-categorization and sought to show how the emergent high-order properties of group processes could be explained in terms of a functional shift in self- perception from personal to social identity. They argue that the basic capacity of people to engage in collective behavior (group formation, social influence, and social stereotyping) is related to the essential character of the self- process. They further say that the collective does not merely impinge on, influence or modify the psychological real individual behavior we describe in terms of personality or individual differences (24).

Going by the above, we see that on his arrival in Nairobi and Kibera, Baba Otieno experiences a lot of trouble in trying to locate the son’s last work place. The narrative takes us through his hustle and bustle in the crowded streets and slums where no one seems to bother with him but instead goes on with his/her daily routines. Tired and troubled by the state of affairs happening around him, Baba Otieno eventually meets Mama Lucy and insists on being shown the exact place where Dj was killed. He demands, “I want to see that last place he laid” (7). Baba Dj keeps hold of the fond memories about the son despite the fact that the two did not agree ideologically. This study sees this as a way and path through which the bereaved father finds a sense of closure and acceptance after the demise of the son.

In addition to the earlier description of the self this study takes a look at Merriam- Webster dictionary, which defines the self and self-awareness as being the capacity for introspection and the ability to recognize oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other

individuals. As the narrative unfolds it becomes evident that the reason for the killing of the young man is mistaken identity, and the issue to do with stereotyping due his cultural background and tribal affiliations. Jacobs (1961) observes that “crime and mob psychology flourishes when people do not know or meaningfully interact with their neighbors” (90). Jacobs goes on to state that slums often do not have the three primary qualities needed in order to make them safer: “a clear demarcation between public and private space, diversity of street use and fairly constant road side use, which translates into eyes on the street” (91). Going by Jacobs’ arguments, this study notes therefore that it is the nature of people who dwell in specific places and certain groupings in specified locations like the slums to categorize and stigmatize those perceived to be outsiders and not belonging where they reside. Hence they categorize Otieno.

Having been shown where his son was killed at and learning how he, Dj, was murdered, Baba Otieno comes out at the end even more disillusioned, made to feel as if he does not belong, and in a state of self-pity and denial. Much of the struggles that Dj goes through can be linked to him being alienated the slum dwellers who which result in feelings of powerlessness or hopelessness. This can be attributed to in part because Dj had worked himself all the way to where he was at the time of his death. He now owns a bicycle at the displeasure of many slum dwellers. They even brand him as being a thief and an outsider. This is brought to us in a flashback of events on that particular fateful day. The crowd is heard shouting “*Mwizi! Ulikuja Nairobi bila baiskeli na sai uko nayo! Mwizi! Mwizi!*” (10). (Thief! You came to Nairobi without a bicycle and now you have one. Thief! Thief!) The crowd then descends on him killing him on the spot. Commenting on the identity issue Rosch (1978), says that:

Personal identity refers to self-categories which define the individual as a unique person in terms of their individual differences from other (in-groups) persons. Social identity on the other hand refers to social categorizations of self and others, self-categories which define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories. Social identity refers to the social categorical self (e.g. “us” versus “them”, in-group versus out-group, us, women, men, white, blacks etc) (27).

Closely linked to Rosch’s ideas above the study takes a look at Mead (1934), who writes on mind, self and society from the stand point of a social behaviorist and says that:

There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for appearance of the *self*; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience. (142)

In light of the above this study argues that the self has a character which is different from that of the physiological organism proper and is formed through an individual’s interacts with others. The self is something that has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process. At the end however, we find ones total physique and emotional aspects intertwine in the formation of the self which eventually reacts to the surrounding world whenever faced with a threat. Dj’s brief stay in the slums of Nairobi and his inability to fit in, he is viewed as an outsider, may be attributed to his untimely murder. In an attempt to locate the agency of self and self-empowerment, Fanon (1963) aptly observes that:

When it encounters resistance from their other, the self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire...As soon as the I desire I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here –and- now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity is so for as I battle for the creation of human world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself and it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate my cycle of freedom. (8-9)

From Fanon’s observation, this study deduces that through human living and day-to-day interaction, there is the creation of personal identity and the recreation of the self through the

daily life of the various individuals and communities. Otieno's interaction with the slum dwellers and his difficulty to fit in during his brief stay is a clear illustration of the foregoing discussion on the self.

Commenting on the concept of the self, Turner and Oakes (1986) say that:

When we think of and perceive ourselves as “we” and “us” as opposed to “I” and “Me”, this is ordinary and normal self-experience in which the self is defined in terms of others who exist outside of the individual person doing the experiencing and therefore cannot be reduced to purely personal identity. (20)

This study understands the foregoing to mean that at certain times the subjective self is defined and experienced as identical, equivalent, similar to, or interchangeable with, a social class of people in contrast to some other class. This is well summed up by Turner and Oakes (1986), when they argue that, “Psychologically, the social collectivity becomes self” (18). In “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” we see that Otieno’s survival in the slums of Kibera is cut short by the social surroundings he finds himself in, for being seen as an outsider and his failure to *belong* due to his rural upbringing he is eventually murdered by a mob. All in all, this study finds individual identity, *the self*, arguably a blurred concept: A set of characteristic but possibly contradictory traits of a singular person in a certain instance observed from certain perspective.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This section has found out that in their search for an understanding of their identity and in an attempt to seek shelter from state-sponsored persecution and terror and being viewed as outsiders, the protagonists in Owuor’s “Weight of Whispers,” *Dust* and “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” are disappointed by the exclusionary practices of modern nation-state and

its insistence on the oppositional categories of “citizen” and “stranger”, “settler” and “native” and “insider and outsider.”

This study concludes that personal, cultural and national identities are fluid and, therefore, indeterminate. They are however the basic forms of understanding the identity quests and struggles. Characters from each ethnic and cultural setting perceive themselves as sets of ideas that are opposed to the other ethnic and cultural groupings. For all the texts studied here, it is evident that one sided views of the other culture are responsible for the incomplete comprehension and appreciation of personal and cultural differences and beliefs.

Furthermore, as “difference” mutates into a source of identity struggle, at personal, cultural and national levels, and conflict, characters and with effect individuals are especially left vulnerable to organized hostility. Owuor’s narratives enter into a constructive dialogue with scholars who question etiological myths equating the modern with civilizational progress and the social production of moral responsibility. Owuor’s tales thus engage the rhetoric of violence that has often preoccupied Kenyan women’s and contemporary literature. These are writers like Muthoni Kimani, who examined the Kikuyu identity struggles during the fight for freedom to Aseth Odaga, who concerns herself with the building of a united multi-ethnic country instead of the ethnic stereotyping experienced in Kenya, this study notes that Kenyan literary writers have always tackled post-colonial issues to do with race, ethnicity and the identity politics.

This study observes that what unites Owuor’s narratives is their interest in the historical processes through which personal, cultural and national identities are generated. As they highlight how these identities are politically manipulated to operate as a source of victimization and privilege, they suggest parallels between different historical scenarios of

violence. But rather than addressing the physical violence directed against particular populations, the narratives reveal the enabling conditions of violence and are particularly concerned with the epistemic violence of identity discourses that establish privileged and disenfranchised positions within the nation-state. Since only select social groups are granted the privilege of citizenship, the exclusory practices of the nation-state relate as much to the physical borders of political territories as to the epistemological boundaries between “citizen”, “native” and “stranger.”

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SPACE-PLACES AND IDENTITY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the conception of identity in the texts under study. This chapter analyses the second research objective. It discusses the link between space, places and identity. It begins by first looking at the link between identity, spaces and places and then goes on to look at how the idea of space-places can help reveal the complexities of identity struggles depicted in Owuor's literary works under study.

#### **3.2 Space-Places**

The concept of place is a versatile one when it comes to the context of literary studies. Gaston (1994), says that "Place contains both spatiality and temporality, it is a meaningful and concrete instance of more abstract space and it displays layers of time and thus memory" (282). Awarding sense to a place may happen through storytelling and from this point of view, it is highly enlightening to look at how progress made in human geography and other traditionally spatial disciplines may be used in analyzing literature. This section focuses on meaning of space, places and their influence on shaping and re-shaping of characters' identity as depicted and created in the fiction of contemporary Kenyan writer Yvonne Owuor Adhiambo.

Tuan (2001) is one of the theoreticians who concern themselves with the concepts of space and places. He gives the difference between space and place as, "enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values" (54).

Monster (2009), analyses this distinction between space and place and one of the theoreticians she refers to is Yi-Fu Tuan, who sees space as a movement and place as pause (42). On her part, Monster argues that literature is a privileged medium for the conveying of places and reflects on the connection between literature and place. This study takes this to imply that since humans have fundamental needs to understand themselves in connection to places and the fact that literature is traditionally dedicated to analyzing fundamental needs of humans and how they relate to the world, we are therefore made to study the space- places occupied by the various characters in Owuor's literary works under study.

This chapter pays closer attention to what makes a place be exactly what it is, what gives a place its "sense." The stories that are woven into these places together with the memories they bring about, sensorial experiences of the place and the intimate contact with places through the everyday and the special practice of movement are some of the elements that contribute to this meaning-awarding process. Rus (2010) argues that:

The sense of a place is not only awarded by the stories and memories linked to it, but also by the sensorial experiences one has in connection to the given place. The senses play a fundamental role in our experience of places, being the primary way in which we know places, while also contributing to the anchoring of memories. (10)

For Monster (2009), place is perceived as a form of the more abstract space and something that we relate to and invest meaning into. Place "becomes" and not "is", which contains in it the tremendous potential of a study of place in literature. Hence Monster defines place as:

Place is rather the form of space or spatiality where human life unfolds. It is concrete, sensuous and associated with human life which unfolds in places; and just when we invest life and meaning in a given location, there may appear a place. (36)

One of the words Monster uses to characterize place is "sensuality" and this is an element very well represented in the texts under study, as the sense perceptions and reminiscences play a major part in knowing and locating individuals. This fact also makes place to be

subjective and influenced by personal experiences, which again brings us back to literature, which has the means to express fully this subjectivity. The foregoing discussion also characterizes place as dynamic, it is not something given, but rather something that needs to be created from space. This is done by investing meaning and life in a given location. To achieve this, more emphasis is placed on the lived experienced by the characters since stories are inextricably linked to our feelings toward places. This study argues that an individual's cultural ties are tied closely to the places they occupy in the sense that specific places have an impact on the culture(s) that grows up in its midst.

The advantage of analyzing Owuor's texts from this perspective is given by the fact that the narratives stretch over a long time span, which allows for reflection on the dynamic character of places seen together with the stability of places as containers of memories. It is also viewed that there is an interplay between space place and with a character's sense of place and with it his or her cultural believes and identity. All this is premised on the thought that these ideas are not mutually exclusive but in fact, there is a close link between them.

Investing meaning in a place may happen in different ways, but one of the two most important ones are writing a place and memories connected to a place. Miller (1995) also discusses the continuous construction of places and the role that literature plays in this process: "The topography of place is not something there already, waiting to be described. It is made, perfomatively, by word or other signs, for example, by song or poem" (276).

Just like Monster, Miller draws attention to the nature of places which in order to be described must first be created in a performative act. Space and place production happen in the fictional characters' experience of places, which in the case of Owuor's texts is very prominent. It is therefore worth investigating this power within the boundary of the fictional

work itself, by looking at how stories attached to different locations through the narrative act contribute to creating these meaningful spaces and places.

### **3.3 Space-Places and Representation of Identity in “Weight of Whispers”**

The study, in this section, attempts to look at how the author is able to utilize extratextual patterns of a literary work to create their own vision of the world. This study argues that an individual’s character and identity are determined by the places they find themselves in.

Yuri (1977) commenting on literary space says that it:

[R]epresents an author’s model of the world, expressed in the language of special representation. In a literary work, space models different relations of world- picture: temporal social, ethical and others. In literary models of the world-space sometimes metaphorically adopts meanings of relations in the modeled world- structure that are themselves not spatial at all. (218)

According to Yuri’s, artistic space is only a model of real space, not its copy. This argument implies that literary spaces are governed by cultural stereotypes and conventions. Lotman sums this up by saying that:

Through textual hints (described customs, clothing, etc) literary space can refer to more general knowledge of the implied reality. The aim of this measure is to make possible the association of the fictional world within the experiential one not calling it as if “by name” (220).

It is from such arguments that this study tries to analyze how Owuor has been able to exploit the extratextual hints in her texts with a view of creating a perspective about the world around the characters. This therefore argues that the places the characters find themselves in play a greater role in the creation and formation of their personal traits. Boniface Kuseremane and his family finding themselves in completely new environments, having run away from their home country, are forced to take on new identities so as to

survive the harsh realities they find themselves in as refugees. Kuseremane talking about the dilemma they find themselves in says that:

A week has passed already. In the beginning of the second one, I am awakened by the feeling I had when I found my country embassy gates here locked and blocked. The feeling of a floor shifting beneath one's feet. There is no one in authority. The ambassador is in exile. Only a guard. Who should I speak to? A blank stare. I need to arrange papers to go to Europe. A blank stare. A flag flutters in the courtyard. I do not recognize it. Then I do. It is my country's flag, someone installed it upside down. It flies at half- mast. An inadvertent act, I believe. Shifting sands. I am lost in this sea of English. (7)

Owuor's narrative goes ahead to reveal to the study that the protagonist, Boniface Louis R Kuseremane, once had the universe at his feet. He was used to glamour, refined food, beautiful women and he travelled the globe on a whim. He reminisces, "The bottle of Dom P'erigon Mille'sime in my hand...I met Lune on the funeral day of her parents, royal diplomats in France" (5-6). Going by Kuseremane's experiences and change in fortunes, this study argues that stability of social structures and statuses provide a sure foot as opposed to unstable social structures.

Kuseremane soon finds himself suddenly thrown into a world of disarray and is forced to take on a completely different identity and character when the political situation in his homeland brutally flings him into exile in an Anglophone country, Kenya. The protagonist thus informs us that:

My gold bracelet has already disappeared. Two days from this moment, while standing with Celeste on Kenyatta Avenue, where many of my people stand and seek news of home or hope that soon we will return home, I discover that fifteen thousand Kenya Shillings is insufficient compensation for a 24 carat, customized gold and sapphire bracelet. (9)

One cannot but feel the plight, the bare vulnerability of a man brought to his knees in front of the three women that a man most values; the mother, the sister and the fiancée.

Kuseremane is plagued by the struggles of adaptation in the new places they now occupy.

We are informed that:

Outside the shop, my hands are shaking. I have to remind myself to take the next step and the next step and the next step. My knees are light. I am unable to look into the eyes of those on the streets. What is my mind doing getting around the intricacies of a foreign currency? I have to get out of this country with my family. (9)

The change of countries through movement leads to change in the mannerisms and identity of the characters as they try to adapt to the new Kenyan neighbors and the other city dwellers. They are forced to change their languages, eating mannerisms, dressing code and how they associate with others.

Massey (1994) says that “place is socially constructed and operating, including interaction between people and groups, institutionalized land uses, political and economic decisions, and the language of representation” (14). This argument seems to stress that place should be looked at as interdisciplinary concept. This also means that the literature of place-making mainly deals with wider scales, nation frames, national politics, identities and many others.

Narrating how he now survives on streets of Nairobi as he goes about his day-to-day activities, while contrasting them to his princely life back in his home country, Kuseremane says that:

Woven into the seams of my exit are the faces in the line winding from the woman’s desk, into the streets. Children, women and men, faces lined with....hope? I must look at that woman again, that purveyor of hope. So I turn. I see a stately man, his beard grey. His face as dark as mine. He stoops over the desk-a posture of abnegation. So that is what I looked like to the people in the line. I want to shout to the woman; I am Boniface Kuseremane, a prince, a diplomat. (11)

The portrayal of Kuseremane’s life, before the outbreak of war back home and his current struggles, can be viewed as a form of juxtaposition; which occurs when two things or situations are placed side by side for comparison, often to highlight the contrast between the

elements. Moving to Kenya by the Kuseremanes should be something that brings to them a sense of relief and peace of mind from their perceived persecution back in their home country. However, this seems to turn into something bleak and painful. Clearly, the protagonist and his immediate family are uncomfortable in the new places they find themselves in.

In light of the foregoing, Kuseremane goes on to narrate to us how his life has taken on a completely new dimension in the space and places he finds himself in. He says, “Now my life has shifted into a realm where other loaded silences lurk” (4).

From an outsider’s perspective, Kuseremane gives a candid, yet perplexed description of the bustle of Nairobi’s inner city alleys, the brashness of a people oblivious to a man drowning in despair. By analyzing Owuor’s narrative we get to learn of the struggles and challenges that the protagonist goes through in the new place that he finds himself in he seems to wonder and keeps on asking himself questions of who he is compared to the host country’s citizens, Kenyans, who appear not to care at all about him and anybody else. This is brought to us vividly by Kuseremane when he observes that:

Now whenever I approach Kenyatta Avenue, they, my people, disperse. Or disappear into shops. Or avert their eyes. If I open a conversation, there is always a meeting that one is late for. (17)

Kuseremane describes the grim reality of business deals at the hands of cons and businessmen alike. After running out of cash, Kuseremane is pushed to the extent of selling “a 24 carat customized gold and sapphire bracelet at fifteen thousand Kenyan shillings” (9). This experience and the resultant treatment he gets from the jewelry shop owner makes him to come back to his senses and the reality that he is in exile. Kuseremane fails to feel the sensuous meaning of place which should have been aesthetic, pleasing, pleasurable and

gratifying just as it had been back in his home country. On the contrary he feels out of place and unwanted for being an “outsider” and an unwanted visitor. Stuart (1995), talks of hierarchizations and heterogeneous amassing and intermixture of broken systems that all have their origin elsewhere. He says that all these are products of colonialism, cultural and racial impunity. (37) The protagonist thus informs us of his encounter when he says “I return to confront the Indian lady, she tells me to leave before I can speak” (9). The Indian lady even goes ahead to threaten him by calling policemen on him. “Police!” I do not want trouble so I leave the jewelry shop, but not before I see her smile” (10).

With regard to the foregoing we observe that Kuseremane’s struggles as exhibiting and working with a need to connect with place in the wake of displacement; existentially and culturally. We are thus made aware of the historical production of place as being a result of displacement, migration and transcultural movement, a situation in which the Kuseremane’s currently find themselves. This study therefore argues that displacement, broken structures and disempowerment, as faced by the Kuseremanes, affect and have an influence on identity and the means of identification

Based on the foregoing, this study argues that the Kuseremane’s find themselves in a state of hybridity. Sandset (2011) talking about hybridity as a postcolonial concept opines that, “Hybrid identity is seen as being formed on both the level of biology (ethnicity or race) and culture. Hybridity is then said to be subversive and this subversive ability lies in its ability to “see” from different perspectives” (2). What this implies is that hybridity allows us to better understand different points of view. The “between” position could possibly be a partial double view that in some instances makes an understanding of different cultural, racial and other perspectives easier.

Looked at from the above perspective, this study is able to re-live the characters' experiences and how his displacement and disempowerment affect the creation of his new identity. Kuseremane narrates to us his state of confusion and dilemma he and his family find themselves in once forced to escape and move to Kenya as refugees.

We got the last four of the last eight seats on the last flight out of our city. We landed at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, Kenya at ten p.m. I wondered about Kenya. I knew the country as a transit lounge and a stopover base on my way to and out of Europe. It was only after we got a three months visitor's pass that I realized that Kenya was an Anglophone country. Fortunately, we were in transit. Soon, we would be in Europe, among friends. (5)

A closer look at the protagonist's experiences, as narrated above, the study argues that the powerful sense of displacement and not belonging may not be ascribed to a state of cultural displacement from a distant homeland. Instead, we take the fundamental cause of the sense of displacement and not belonging, that predominates the narrated events in the story, most likely to be found in the abject poverty and inhuman conditions produced by the socio-cultural effects of the Kenyan society and economy.

It is this "double consciousness", which W.E.B Dubois (1992) speaks of, that this study believes is where the hybrid moment is articulated. Dubois notes that:

No one can be a hybrid all the time, but at certain points hybridity or a "double consciousness" emerges. It is part of more complex feelings of "two-ness", of disparate and competing "thoughts", "strivings", and ideals. (38)

This study argues, basing on the foregoing, that perhaps hybridity is a contextual identity that, when pressed or nurtured emerges and makes two or more parts that the hybrid consists or fuse into a third entity. The protagonist seems to find himself in this state of confusion. He says, "I am Boniface Louis R. Kuseremane. It has been long since anyone called me by my full name. The "R" name cannot be spoken aloud" (6). Kuseremane lives in denial and a state of confusion, all the time thinking about what people think about him and the role he

played in the killings back in his home country. He has to take on a new identity with a view of surviving the harsh realities in the streets of Nairobi while at the same time ensuring that he remains unnoticed.

I still have not heard from the friends I have called. Every night, their silence whispers something my ears cannot take hold of. Deceptive murmurings. This country of leering masses- all eyes, hands and mouths, grasping and feeding off graciousness- invokes paranoia. (7)

Bhabha (2004) refers to this hybrid phenomenon, alluded to above, as the “third space”-a space where a new position that is not only the sum of two parts but something more” (55). The hybrid or hybridity should be analyzed along gender, racial, ethnic and class modalities. The state and situation the Kuseremanes find themselves in forces the family to remain and maintain silence and at the same time act aloof so as to cope and survive in their newly found home. The study is informed of this by Kuseremane when he says that:

Now my world has tilted into a realm where other loaded silences lurk. And can sense why some things must remain buried in silence, even if they resuscitate themselves at night in dreams where blood pours out of phantom mouths. In the empire of silence, the “turning away” act is a vain exorcism of a familiar demon which invades the citadel we even change, we constantly fortify. Dragging us back through old routes of anguish. (15)

Sandset (2018), sums this up when he notes that “Hybrid identity and hybridity is perhaps a contextual entity that is partially fluid and partially solid; composed of several parts that could be recognized as “almost to same, but not quite” (32). What this means is that hybridity is a cultural entity that one may view as the same, and yet is hard to pin down at times.

Nazer (2015) notes that postcolonial criticism attempts to understand political, social, cultural and psychological operations and of a group of people in relation to their location and settings. The characters in Owuor’s narrative right from Kuseremane, his mother,

Agnether, his sister, Chi-chi up to the fiancée, Lune, come draped in the country's history, wrapping the world's dramas around the personal as they struggle to adjust to their lengthy fall from grace. Once in Kenya, they are forced to adapt to the new places they find themselves entangled in and hence take on new identities to fit in. Hence, a shift from Rwanda to Kenya, with its accompanying rupture of class status forces Kuseremane's family to adopt hybridity as a strategy of facing the emerging challenges:

The sun in Nairobi in May is brutal in its rising. A rude glory. My heart longs to be eased into life with the clarion call of an African rooster. Our gentle sunrise, rolling hills. Two months have now passed. A month ago, we left the hotel. I am ashamed to say we did not pay our bill. All we had with us was transferred into and carried out in laundry bags. We left the hotel at intervals of three hours. (13)

The above is an indicator of the Kuseremane's family taking on new survival tactics; they turn into cheats, so as to be able to survive in their new surroundings. They find themselves coupled with lots of financial challenges and a need to make ends meet. They move into a more affordable hotel. Their new estate and spaces they occupy are not safe at all as evidenced in Kuseremane's fear for the safety of his family. He informs us that, "We moved into a single roomed place with an outside toilet in River Road. I have told Agnether-Mama, Lune and Chi-chi not to leave the rooms unless I am with them. Especially Chi-chi" (14). The family's displacement from their original homeland doubtlessly has consequences for the characters' interhuman relations and the new environment threatens their existence physically. The study also argues that the fear and the emotional and moral deprivation that indicate the characters' interrelations are as a result of the socioeconomic conditions they face and suffer.

The Kuseremane family has to integrate and learn new tricks for them to survive which in a way means taking on new identities. We are thus informed that:

Chi-chi has learned to say “Tafadhali, naomba maji.” She asks for water this way, there are shortages. We must leave soon. (13)

This study argues that double, hybrid or unstable identities is a key component characteristic of individuals who are alienated for one reason or another as highlighted by Owuor’s characters in the text under study. The new surroundings, spaces and places Kuseremane finds himself in have had a toll on his personal identity. From the following excerpt we get to see the tribulations that he goes through to an extent of appearing to run away from his own self:

Every afternoon, a sudden wind runs up this street, lifting dust, and garbage and plastic bags and whispers. Kuseremane, Kuseremane, Kuseremane. I turn to see if anyone else hears my name. Sometimes, I leave the room to walk the streets for the sake of having a destination. I walk therefore I am. I walk therefore I cannot see six expectant eyes waiting for me to pull an aero plane from my pocket. (14)

This study argues that Kuseremane therefore comes out, as a character, as being led to cynicism, disillusionment and despair due to his failure to provide for his family as they all depend and look unto him to solve all their day- to- day problems and the new places they find themselves as refugees. Kurtz (1987) opines that Kuseremane is a cross- border refugee with both a fragmented and identity crisis due to the problems that he is faced with (105). To this end we are in agreement with Kurtz’s opinion that Kuseremane can be viewed as a “cancelled character”, one who we find to lack coherence in identity and one struggling to find a credible identity after his displacement and sudden alienation in the new space-place he is a refugee.

While writing about space and place, Kakela (2013) observes that “Space and place are vast and ambivalent concepts that refer both to physical and visual surroundings and to their experiential and cultural aspects” (10). Space and places therefore have a major role when it comes to the creation of an individual’s character and how he or she interacts with those

around him or her. The family's single roomed house is hardly a home and even so a place for all to dwell happily. The study notes that the characters are henceforth forced to find alternative survival mechanisms even as their statuses continue to fall apart. This is evidenced by the way Kuseremane takes on a new personality with a view of forgetting the tribulations his family find themselves in while at the same time copying in the new environments as refugees in a foreign state.

Foucault (1986) says that "space is not a void, but a complex set of relations that explore how space and special arrangements maintain and produce bio-power and various cultural meanings in modern society and how they define and regulate social practices" (22). The implication of this is that the special order itself produces power, meanings, practices and habits instead of merely representing and symbolizing power. In view of Foucault's ideas, this study argues that the Kuseremane's current situation and identity struggles is a result of displacement, migration and transcultural movement occasioned by the outbreak of war back in their home country.

In furtherance of the foregoing discussion on space-places and identity, Owuor's narratives takes the reader through a flashback when, while being arrested one evening in the streets of Nairobi, Kuseremane reminisces about the past. He thinks back to the time he met an eccentric man at a coffee shop who was selling pornographic magazines and women's lingerie to earn a living. The man was animated, making a fool of himself, giving a lot of truth on "black people are monkeys" discourse in the white man's eyes.

We were sipping coffee at the end of a well concluded deal. A squat African man wearing spectacles danced into the café... in his hand a colorful and large bag like a carpet bag. He flapped his arm up and down. I wondered why, and then it dawned on me. He was simulating a monkey...sweat trickled down my spine. (24-25)

As they talked, Kuseremane found out that the man had a Masters degree in sociology but in the white man's land, those degrees did not carry any weight. Their conversation highlights Kuseremane's privileged life at that time. It also brings to light the fleeting nature of a lot of those things we ascribe importance to and that we use to ascribe meaning to what we are in a particular space and time. For instance, the Kuseremanes have previously enjoyed access to the best institutions of higher education, good health, material wealth friends in the biggest offices in the world. Their current situation, in the new exile places they now occupy, is however the complete opposite of what they are previously used to.

According to Tuan (1977) "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (6), hence a "sense of place". He argues, "From the security and stability of place, we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space and vice versa" (7). In his view, places and space not only engender feelings and are shaped by complex networks of feelings, but place and space are also intimately connected with movement and with restrictions of movement as well. Tuan reminds us that , "the more abstract notion of "space" usually connects with ideas of movement and freedom, whereas "place" connotes not only security and homeliness, but also closure, pause and even imprisonment" (6). This brings to the fore the link between place, spaces and identity of the individual character. This is seen from the behavior of the African man alluded to above. In his new foreign land, away from his real home, he does not carry much respect regardless of his educational qualifications as it would have been, were he in Africa. So as to make ends meet, he takes on a completely different and dehumanized identity in order to survive as no one, in the white man's land, seems keen to hold and assist him from the pain and suffering he is currently going through. The study therefore opines that the man is, in reality, a victim

of historical and institutionalized racism, which according to Hinson (2012), is seen in “a society where one group is politically, socially and economically dominant and the members of stigmatized groups, who are bombarded with negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic worth, may internalize those negative messages” (35). The implication of this is that such people are held back from achieving their fullest potential and reinforces the negative messages which, in turn, reinforce the oppressive systems as is seen in the African man’s misfortunes during his encounter with Kuseremane and the whites in Europe.

Kuseremane is no exception; from the above, we note that he is nostalgic of the good-old-days, when he and his family had it all. Now he can only wish and hope that their status as refugees can change for the better. Just like the seller above, Kuseremane and his family have to camouflage and take on different identities in the new places and spaces they currently occupy. Kuseremane narrates to us his experiences by noting that:

In exile we lower our heads so that we do not see in the mirror of another’s eyes, what we suspect: that our precarious existence rests entirely on the whim of another’s tolerance of our presence. A phrase crawls into my mind: “Psychic oblation.” But what does it mean? What is your name?” I can smell my name. It is the smell of salt and the musk of sweat. I want to say Yves Fontaine. As Yves Fontaine I would not be a vagrant immigrant, a pariah. As Yves Fontaine I wouldn’t be “expatriate” and therefore desirable. As Yves Fontaine I do not need an identity card. (27)

Kuseremane being faced with all manner of challenges, as seen from the foregoing, starts to think on how to counter all these through what he calls psychic oblation. Commenting on oblation, Bocodo (1975) asserts that “individual characters must be ready to carry the burden of proving themselves worthy of the very sacrifice that he made in the first place.” It is on such a backdrop that we see Kuseremane trying to redeem himself and his immediate family from the oppressive state systems while in the Kenyan exile.

### **3.4 The Act of Thingification in the Urban Landscape in “Weight of Whispers”**

This section uses the term “Thingification” with close reference to Marx’s (1872) views about alienation, where he opines that the most basic meaning of alienation can be described as “such circumstances that the objective conditions of labor (instruments of labor, objects of labor and means of subsistence) are made independent as “alien objects” of, opposed to, and dominant over laborers” (417). This study takes this to mean that those who undergo the process of Thingification are not only alienated from the means of production but also from the means of subsistence and hence find it so difficult to survive, as is the case with Kuseremane in Owuor’s tale.

Closely linked to the process of Thingification is the act of Otherness, which according to Miller (2008), is “a person’s non- conformity to and with the social norms of society; and Otherness is a condition of disenfranchisement (political exclusion), effected either by the state or by the social institutions (e.g. the professions) invested with the corresponding socio-political power” (98). To this end this research argues that the imposition of Otherness, seen here as Thingification from the foregoing, alienates the person labeled as “the Other” from the centre of society, and places him or her at the margins of society, for being the Other.

The connectedness of being-in-place or living in places is emphasized by Casey (1993) when he opined that “to be is to be in a place” (14). In light of this idea, Casey suggests that it is fruitful to focus on places instead of being or beings and explore how places constitute, modify or influence our being and how our identities are formed in interaction with places. The spaces that every one of us is occupying at every moment range from the room or the street to the city, the country or the planet in a geographical sense and, “in the sense of

feeling 'implaced from', one's home to the neighborhood, home region, nation and perhaps other, even more encompassing places of belonging" (23). Therefore Casey argues that, "These spaces and places are lived and experienced and are not just containers. Even if they serve to "implace you" or to anchor and orient you, finally becoming an integral part of your destiny" (23). He goes on to state that spaces are also constituted by you, by your ways of perceiving them and interacting with them. The relationship between bodies/mind and their spatial environment is not just natural, but also cultural. Casey says, "Implacement is an ongoing cultural process that acculturates whatever ingredients it borrows from the natural world" (31). A possible interpretation of Casey's argument is that the representations of places, themselves cultural artefacts, build on already culturally-determined meanings given to places and bodies, and at the same time may well change them in the ongoing negotiation between the given and experimentally imagined.

While in exile, Kuseremane's deliberately built privileged position of racial superiority soon turns into a position of need and a forcefully imposed stateless refugee status. His slide from power proceeds quickly after his arrival in Kenya. Well-rehearsed securities disintegrate when he is faced with the slipperiness of a foreign tongue, the loss of authority and the gradual depletion of funds. The contradictions of an unstable, delusional identity emerge poignantly when the former bank president proves unable to convert foreign currency; when the erstwhile prince no longer solicits respect from the owner of a pawnshop, but only the epithet *takataka* and when the son and brother fail to protect his female dependents.

The steep social decline finds its spatial equivalent in the family's departure from the comforts of the Nairobi's Hilton to the squalor of River Road, the shamed destination of the urban dispossessed. This study argues that disempowerment, arising from the displacement

of the Kuseremanes, lead to a crisis of identification on the family. As the familiar world disappears, the body and its psychological defenses break down amidst the anxious reiteration that, “Kuseremane’s are not refugees. They are visitors, tourists, people in transit, universal citizens with affinity to Europe” (16).

Though Europe has closed its doors to “the brother sovereigns in exile,” Kuseremane refuses to exchange the narrative of privilege for the disenfranchised status of the refugee. Transit speaks of choice. Marie (2009) commenting on the state of affairs the Kuseremane’s find themselves in observes that:

In its exploration of the metaphorical texture of wilderness, the narrative debunks the myths of a carefully regulated and morally responsible modern society. While the commodified wilderness of exotic animals has been effectively domesticated for human consumption, real danger lurks in wilderness of a scavenging humanity. Policemen and immigration officers, UN staffers and embassy personnel, seem ready to pounce on their unsuspecting victims. (11)

Based on the above, this study agrees that the allegorical wilderness in “Weight of Whispers” is dominated by inhuman landscape of modern institutions, which instead on protecting the vulnerable refugees, oppress them even more. This can be seen in Kuseremane’s narration of his encounter with the foreign embassy workers. He says that:

Woven into the seams of my exit are the faces in the line winding from the woman’s desk, into the streets. Children, women and men, faces with... hope? I must look at that woman again, that purveyor of hope. So I turn. I see a stately man, his beard grey. His face as dark as mine. (12)

It is further revealed that he stoops over the desk, taking on a posture of abnegation. The thought of how he looked to the other people around him crosses his mind and he feels greatly embarrassed because of his current helpless situation in exile. He even contemplates reminding the woman in authority who he was. This however does not happen as we are made aware that Kuseremane and those in exile feel alienated and are labeled as the *other* by

foreign embassy workers and the Kenya government operatives. Odhiambo (2005) asserts that, “members of minority communities feel excluded. They are aware of, and resent, being treated differently and having fewer opportunities” (4).

Due to ethnicity and alienation the problems, for example poverty, afflicting the minority refugee groups end up being hidden from a majority of the citizenry and hence the problems end up being unaddressed. It is such issues that raise the problem of marginalization which in most cases, as seen in Owuor’s narrative, result in the Kuseremanes being defenseless and hence exposed to further manipulation and exploitation. To this end, we argue that the process of Thingification appears to have started taking a toll on the protagonist’s existence in this foreign country. He notes that, “I am now a beggar” (12).

Additionally, the protagonist goes on to inform us of the challenges he goes through, still at the hands of the state control police machinery he narrates that:

The immigration officer demanded papers. He would not listen to me. I told him about my PhD and he laughed out loud. He said: Ati PhD. PhD gani? Wewe refugee bwana! He whispers that he is compelled by section 3(f) of the immigration charter to report my illegal presence. He cracks his knuckles ‘creak’ ‘crack’. He smiles quickly. Fortunately; all things are possible. The cost of silence is 500 US dollars. I have 3000 shillings. He took it all. But returned 50 shillings for “Bus Fare” (21).

The violence generated by bureaucratic efficiency and the state’s monopoly on power appears strongly similar to the violence resulting from the performance of public functions for private ends that testifies to significant shifts in power within the postcolonial nation state. Regardless of whether it is deployed in support of state-mandated policies or as a vehicle for personal profit, the administrative apparatus of various national and international organizations repeatedly fails those who seek out its assistance. That the rules of bureaucratic culture for indifference to human despair are demonstrated in Kuseremane’s

futile attempt to secure an entry visa for the United States. At the American embassy in Nairobi, the prince encounters an employee who, in her insistence that he lacks the necessary documents to have his case processed, relies on the technical language of standardized procedures to rationalize her swift denial of his request. As the prince pleads his case, the employee's call "Next!" (17). This signals the finality with which his request has been denied.

While commenting on the aspect of Thingification in the urban landscape, the current state that Kuseremane finds himself in, Zygmunt (2000), rightly opines that:

Through the routine performance of authorized actions, human beings are reduced to manageable objects and are dehumanized in the name of procedural efficiency. Officially approved indifference, however can easily turn into hostility when such "manageable objects" resist the implementation of bureaucratic routine. (17)

The protagonist's troubles are made much worse when even the immigration officer, to whom the prince presents his accomplished résumé, reminds Kuseremane the privilege of education has been replaced by the importance of poverty and statelessness in a foreign land and space. *Ati Ph.D. gani? Wewe refugee, bwana!*" (22). Citing the section of the immigration charter which obligates him to report illegal aliens to the police, the officer extracts an exorbitant bribe from his baffled victim.

This study therefore avers that instead of the government of the day looking at Kenya's diversity, brought about by ethnicity and the refugee crisis, as a potential strength and opportunity for cultural integration, it is viewed as a threat to national unity. The resultant effect is discrimination and mistreatment of the minority refugee group. The refugees then feel that their statuses, culture and values are misunderstood and denigrated. This as Odhiambo (2005) aptly notes "sets them apart from the rest of Kenyans, living in enclaves

of their own, with values and patterns of existence vastly different from the majority local communities” (4). These communities therefore feel greatly alienated and pushed to the margins of the society as they seek to find an identity and a humane living. The refugees face challenges in accessing basic commodities and the need for recognition and appreciation of their cultural diversities. Money is also seen here as having the capacity of buying protection and the public office ensures that the transfer of resources now follows its own logic of allocation and violence.

Mamdani (2008) notes that given the educational system in colonial Rwanda, with its distinction between a “superior” French education reserved for Tutsi and an “inferior” Kiswahili curriculum for those considered Hutu, it is only fitting that the former prince has to comprehend his new status “in the language of the servant”. When Kuseremane is later arrested by the police for failing to produce either the sign of arbitrary order (valid ID) or of organized disorder (bribe), his captors delight in tormenting him in the caricatured language of reason and justice. Each time they deprive him of one of his possessions; the sacred ring, the snake skin wallet and the only photograph of his family, the bribe is rationalized in well-rehearsed legal codes: extortion translates into “evidence” while “resisting arrest” and “attempted escape” justify random violence.

Campbell (2006) writing about the refugee situation and their protracted exile in Kenya asserts that urban refugees live largely without material assistance or legal protection from the GOK or UNHCR, are vulnerable to police arrest at any time and face high levels of xenophobia from the local population. (71) In Owuor’s narrative this is portrayed in the manner in which Kuseremane’s existence strictly depends on the wishes of those in positions of power, to whom Kuseremane and those in exile appear to be always trouble-

makers and a source of disturbance, to the old order of doing things. It is for this reason that we see official models of sovereignty and violence here delivering welcome examples for the privatized exercise of power and authority.

This study therefore argues that Owuor's narrative highlights the plight of minority refugees groups in the modern Kenyan state. It is evidenced that the refugees are alienated and hence poorer than the local privileged communities and their rights are not respected since they are viewed as outsiders. This research looks at alienation here as a feeling of cultural estrangement and cultural powerlessness. A comparison of the two groups in Nairobi, the foreigners and the locals, indicates the importance of social structure for understanding the different mechanisms working within subgroups in a population so explain the relationship between estrangement, powerlessness and participation. For Lune, Kuseremane's fiancée, the threat of rape is only bearable when thought of as the cooperation necessary to ensure survival; once "discussed with family it is not a question of being forced" (29), she explains to the disbelieving prince, who feels "taunted for his ineffectuality by this woman who would be his wife" (29).

Writing on the strategies employed by Lune for survival, in light of alienation and oppression, Makokha (2011) notes that she practices familiar ballerina steps in front of the mirror; she attempts to distance herself from her own violation by performing a more opportune role. (91) He goes on to note that though her compliance, wins Lune the coveted passage to Canada, the logic of survival motivating her behavior primarily serves the interest of those who formulate the rules of exploitation in the foreign land.

Lune continues to endure pain since, after being beaten by a fiancée, who can only express his impotence in acts of domestic violence, Lune fares only marginally better than

Kuseremane. As the familiar narrative of Tutsi aristocracy slowly disintegrates, the body personality of privilege defined by the consumption of expensive food and designer clothes dissolves into an undesirable body and personality, malnourished and subjected to physical violence. The study argues that all these experiences make it so difficult for Lune and the other refugees, who have been oppressed, to cope in the restrictive Kenyan exile.

The act of Thingification in the urban landscape is further highlighted when Kuseremane accepts that “the first lesson of exile is camouflage” (28), they force themselves to believe that refugees have no other choice than to participate in their own violation. Tippens (2016) notes that, “the global increase in refugee migration creates challenges pertaining to the promotion of refugees’ wellbeing. Despite considerable attention to trauma and forced migration, there is little focus on how refugees cope with stressful situations” (26).

Here, the key stressors faced by the refugees are linked to scarcity of material resources, political and personal insecurity, and emotional stress. This study notes that the alienated individuals, in an attempt to mitigate these stressors, majorly establish borrowing networks and compartmentalizing the past and the present. In the narrative we are informed that to survive in the domesticated wilderness of human civilization does require to “turn oneself into a log” (27). Kuseremane appears to have learnt that for those in exile to avoid constant harassment by the state operatives, and then one has to keep a low profile so as not to be pointed out for exclusion and eventual persecutions, as seen from the foregoing. This study argues that individuals finding themselves in such restrictive places take on silence and muting as a way of surviving.

Mbembe (2000) in support of our argument notes that “ironically, it is an act of “Thingification” that simultaneously participates in the rationality of survival, claiming

surrender to the perpetrator's logic as a conscious choice and the phenomenology of death through which negated subjects accept their reduction to nothingness" (269). Once the Kuseremane's resign themselves to a state of perpetual transit, their hopes and frustrations are visibly inscribed into their migrations through Nairobi's urban spaces. Dirlik, (1997) observes that space and place are not to be apprehended as strictly geographical or referential but also as textual, thus enabling new hybrid subject positions within national mythologies. The study considers this to imply that the rewriting or new adaptations of famous works in other forms gives us an understanding of what constitutes the core of personal, cultural and national identity. The Kuseremane's statuses at present can be described as being a hybrid one since being used to a privileged life they are made to adapt to the new space-places they find themselves now occupying. From the luxury of Hilton Hotel, they move to the squalor of River Road and eventually, to Hurlingham, a neighborhood known for its population of Ethiopian refugees. When hope for forward movement has been lost, the anxiously repeated refrain, "soon help will arrive" and the call "next in line" signify on the collapse of time into the circularity of movement.

Commenting on the struggles of citizenship and identity in the Great Lakes region, Mbembe (2000) aptly observes that:

Whether imaginary, symbolic or a cover for economic or political struggles, these internal borders insist on the prerogative of indigeneity and the identification with particular localities and give rise to exclusionary practices, identity closure and persecution, which, as seen can easily lead to pogroms, even genocide. (87)

Inevitably, the crisis of citizenship, identity and changing political configurations of power in the Great Lakes region contribute to the simultaneous dissolution of existing territorial frameworks and the proliferation of internal borders.

The study is further made to re-examine how the author in her narrative causes the creation of various sets of images, values and references to evolve. This is premised on the fact that these images reflect a history and a heritage that also expose their inherent limitations and underlying ideology, thus paving the way for the gradual transformation nations, individuals, values and spatial representations. Besson, (2016) argues that every nation and individual itself and himself as articulated around the concept of origin and that a choice then emerges between a founding myth specific to it. He argues that this is a sort of self-generation that is devoid of any hybridity and an impure, problematic genesis, born out of the contact with another cultural, historical and geographical sphere (67). Looked at this way, it is evidenced that within the Kenyan exile itself, Kuseremanes, for instance, can be said to have been defined both historically and culturally, in close relation to their rival and double homeland of Rwanda.

Similar considerations are relevant for other characters in Owuor's narrative. More generally, the displaced individuals find themselves in an ambiguous relationship with their mother countries while trying to free themselves from its influence. Examining these enables us an understanding of how the refugees have evolved, across generations, through an underlying hybridization and thus allowing greater representativeness, not only to those directly affected but also of new refugee communities or minority groups.

This study therefore argues that the Kuseremane's quests for meaningful patterns and survival only produce a steady repetition of unreturned phone calls, abusive state agents and persistent whispers of guilt. Kuseremane tries to adapt to the situation he and his family find themselves but he eventually breaks down. This study sees him cry when no one is seeing and turns into an aggressive individual when he beats up Lune and Chi-Chi. The fact that his

fiancée and sister were forced to engage in prostitution so as to get the travel papers that would allow them to leave Kenya (29). Being the head of the family, he is supposed to be taking care of his family but he cannot and even senses that “he is being taunted for his ineffectuality” (29). He turns to self-pity when the sister dies and becomes unforgiving towards the fiancée on learning that she had prostituted so as to get the travel documents. What however leads to complete lose of hope and self- belief is the death of his mother, just a day before they travel to Canada (35). Eventually, though gradually through alienation, oppression, termed here as Thingification, which have led to his means of subsistence and survival being hindered, the former prince surrenders to a landscape of death, faithfully watching over the graves of his mother and sister and “waiting for the return of a name set ablaze when fire made dust out of two presidents’ bodies” (36).

### **3.5 Space-Places and Representation of Identity in *Dust***

This section concerns itself with how Owuor in her narrative is able to portray the various characters in the different surroundings they find themselves in and how they are able to fit in, (re) formulate their identities and survive altogether. In Owuor’s narrative we come across disillusionment and pain as a way of critiquing the Kenyan past and present and a pessimistic view of future encounters and deeds in the various space-places the characters find themselves. This is what Gakwandi (1986) refers as a “grim view of a doomed society” (159). Through reading *Dust*, we come across how the author skillfully draws us in as each character’s expedition turns into the observation of citizenry’s struggle and we are not only confronted with their individual pasts and identity struggles but also that of a collective Kenyan past as they are defined and shaped but also as they define and shape the space-places they interact with. The problem of class stratification and social injustice is also

brought to us in the narrative. Tshuma (2015), writing about Owuor's *Dust* notes that the narrative moves in between different realities with the same level of sophistication, the novel evokes Kenya, both on a micro and macro level (31).

This section argues that Owuor's narrative has juxtaposed stories from different facets of Kenya. Kehinde (2004) argues that "African writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment" (228). He further opines that most African writers' texts mostly reflect and refract the socio-political events in their societies. Viewed from this perspective we argue that Owuor, presently, employs the same as a veritable weapon for depicting the post-independence disillusionment in different space-places in the Kenyan state. We come across Odidi and his life in the streets of Nairobi and his eventual death in what can be termed as extra-judicial killing. He goes to take back the vehicle that belonged to him which had been taken away from him when he lost his job at an engineering company. We are told of this encounter that:

Lying on the tarmac, Odidi connects meaning to sounds he hears: a tire squeal, a slammed door, and cut-off words, ricochet shouts of once-a-live friends. They are where they are because of a green Toyota Prado of which they had tried to relieve its current owner. Wasn't stealing. It had been Odidi's car. He bought it, cash. It had been swiped from him. (15)

Odidi had hoped to marry Justina, the girl of his dreams, and there after live a happy and simple life. "After this he would marry Justina. Restart destiny" (15). Raphals (2003) talks of destiny as being a predetermined course of events and that it may be conceived as a predetermined future whether in general or of an individual (538). As destiny would have it, the protagonist comes out as one who cannot escape what lies ahead of him, we see this when he comes face to face with police brutality; something that had become a norm in most urban spaces across the Kenyan state, in the text. Having decided to take on a new status and

identity having lost his job as an engineer, Odidi planned to pay his sister a visit and enjoy life the way they did while still young in the northern parts of Kenya.

It was time to visit his sister in Brazil. There was so much to say and do. This job should have been so easy. Except, after Odidi and his team had struck, and he had been about to drive off in the car, a police execution squad was waiting for them.  
(15)

The killing of Odidi in the streets of Kenya's capital, as a result of him rejecting the "establishment", is symbolic of the many other extra judicial killings that are carried out in Owuor's narrative. Anyone who was seen to "oppose" the system was silenced or just made to disappear. Kehinde (2004), notes that "the Kenyan society has been enmeshed since 1963 in crucible of deaths and births, agony, poverty, dehumanization and starvation despite their differentiating phraseologies, work towards the same objective: the vitiation of human dignity"(229). *Dust*, just like in many African novels, reveals an atmosphere of fear, hate, forms of arrests exile and execution. Looked at metaphorically, we can argue that Odidi is just like Kenya, which at independence promised much, but soon degenerated into something tarrying and completely unrecognizable.

Odidi's death triggers off a chain of events: scrambles his mother's sanity, mutes and confuses his father and opens series of unending secrets. Ajany, Odidi's sister is another character whose life is affected by his sudden death. She travels to Brazil, a place that had promised her so such success but ends in a disaster, to follow her dreams but coincidentally she is implored upon by the father to come back home just when the police are looking for her after she stabs the fiancée to death. At the airport she is welcomed with *karibu nyumbani*, a place where she now feels comfortable and at peace with herself which makes her to start thinking of how to reconcile and reconstitute herself with the prevailing situations. The narrator informs us that:

Here. She could paint this, hold the brush as a stabbing knife. There. Coloring in landscapes of loss. She could draw this for him, this longing to hear his particular voice, listening for echoes of bloodied footsteps, borrowing dead eyes to help her find him again. (18)

Back home, Kenya, Ajany finds solace in drawing and this evokes a yearning for a brother she had long seen and is now dead. “Here. Jagged precipices of wounding and over cliffs, an immense waterfall of yearning” (18).

Aggrey Nyipir Oganda, Ajany’s father, brings everyone together as a father. His journey takes him to Wuoth Ogik in the northern parts of Kenya, a place he sees as being far enough from his ancestral Luoland and the “real” Kenya. Nyipir has been here since the days of Kenya attaining self-rule, he even fought with the colonialists against the Mau Mau and he is later decorated as *shujaa*, considered as a hero and a keeper of secrets and ghosts. We are told that:

Later, Nyipir, like others, marched up to receive his Head of State Commendation. Listened to citations for “Tactical excellence. Intelligence. Agility. Service beyond the call of duty.” *Ushujaa*-heroism. Discretion- which mostly meant, *keep secrets*. (124)

He was also there when the British colonialists handed over political power to the Africans so that they could determine and forge together as a united Kenyan state. However, even with the making of a new Kenyan state, we get to learn that this is a country that has got its own particular histories, most of which having been forgotten, erased, depending on the memories that reveal themselves or remain quiet as secrets. Owuor in her narrative comes out as one who highlights the plight of the common citizenry at the hands of the ruling elite, not only with regard to post-independence Kenyan society, but mainly in connection with the political and social reality of most contemporary African countries. We argue that Owuor’s ultimate goal is to liberate Kenya and its people from the political, social economic

legacy of colonial era, that is, neo-colonialism, oppression, discrimination and corruption of the state's ruling elite. Ngugi (1987) suggests that it is upon the people themselves to rise up and fight for their rights and inclusivity. He argues that:

The solution lies with the people of Kenya...people must have that attitude of mind that is not only aware of the problems, but desire a solution. For Kenya a national culture embracing all can be developed. (25)

Here Ngugi is calling for a political and cultural awakening of the people of Kenya so as to develop a strong national consciousness.

Additionally, when it comes to the different realities and struggles evoked by *Dust*, we come across Isaiah Bolton, an Englishman, who traces his father's colonial footsteps and his family's link to Kenya. Bolton wonders how and what led his father to travel all the way to the northern parts Kenya, leaving behind the wealth in his home country, England. Though he does not like what he sees in the northern frontiers of the country, Bolton vows to find out what had happened to his father. The narrator informs us that:

He will stay. He hates this place, but damned if he will leave without getting what he has come to find. (125)

To Bolton, the truth about the happenings during his father's stay here will bring closure and put to rest so many unanswered questions. *Dust*, with its didactic and political overtones, is ultimately designed to enlighten the Kenyan citizenry about discrimination and alienation by the government of the day and support them in their personal struggles for self-realization and identity creation. Ngugi (1987) commenting on the role of the citizens in standing up for their rights further argues that "democracy and justice can only be achieved when the various interest groups voice their opposition and fight for them" (28). Here he is calling for the awakening of the masses against oppression and discrimination. This is the same feeling that is evoked in the reading of Owuor's narrative even as Bolton is faced by all manner of

obstacles in the northern parts of the country as he tries to locate the last resting place of his late father.

This study notes that the space that a character occupies to a larger extent determines his or her identity and belonging. All the above mentioned characters take on varied identities and character traits due to the space-places they find themselves in and the occupations they engage in. Owuor while talking about Nyipir in the text and about Kenya as a state says, “After Mboya, Kenya’s official languages: English, Kiswahili, and silence...There was also memory” (33). This study argues that language normally affects identity formation. Owuor says that these languages, spoken across the Kenyan landscape, have greatly contributed to the shaping of the space that is Kenya. She goes on to say that Kenyans speak English since it is the colonial language, used for over fifty years of colonial rule. Kiswahili on the other hand was inserted by the postcolonial government as a national language. In speaking Kiswahili Kenyans felt a sense of togetherness and proud of having an African language. This is because Swahili itself is cosmopolitan and a multi leveled language, a thing that made absolute sense during the early post-colonial years. During these early years, Kenyans had so many hopes and aspirations, having gained self-rule. However, there soon came the loss of the dream, the loss of the imagined Kenya, particularly through the series of events that followed soon after. Kenyans soon start to feel a sense of disillusionment and most view the post independent Kenyan state leaders with a lot of pessimism. Merriam Webster dictionary defines disillusionment as “a feeling of disappointment resulting from the discovery that something is not as good as one believed it to be” (296). We find that as the citizenry goes through this process they soon start to be enlightened, human life being a

form of goal-seeking behavior, a majority begin to see the gory inner workings of systems meant to keep them naïve and ignorant. Owuor sums this up when she writes that:

The whole series of events, you know the, the assassinations that took place, of the likes of Pio Gama Pinto, culminated in murder of Tom Mboya. His death meant the coming to end of the *One Kenya Project*. From here the silences came in. (33)

This study argues that based on the many assassinations that took place, most Kenyans became disillusioned and developed a sense of caution with regard to the things that we have to tell or not tell each other, we have to kind of establish, who you are first, before you open your mouth. This helps to show the collective identity of silence and turning a blind eye that Kenyans were made to take on. Kuzio (2002) outlines that “language plays a crucial role both as identity marker and as the medium for national symbols” (21). We argue that it is from this that silence became, in addition to English and Swahili, a Kenyan language.

In Owuor’s narrative, Odidi’s death is paralleled to the assassination of Tom Mboya. Petrus Keya, Nyipir’s former colleague, reflects on “how we lose the country, one child at a time” (275). Odidi’s death catalyses the events of the narrative just as that of Tom Mboya catalysed significant political and social events in Kenya in the late 1960s.

Lentz (1988) states that, “assassinations are a persistent feature of the political landscape” (34). He goes on to say that assassinations affect the intensity of small-scale conflicts. This implies that what would have been resolved easily ends up being blown out of control due to the killings as people always tend to react to such occurrences with anger and a desire to avenge. With effect these political assassinations end up affecting political institutions and conflict; in so doing the killings appear to change the history of individual countries. The personal loss of the Oganda family is looked at from the perspective of a national one. This study sees this death as robbing the nation the national aspirations of forming a united

nation. Owuor calls it, “a microsm of our national dysfunction.” The citizenry’s quest for identity and survival, in the nation state, are therefore greatly influenced by the activities taken both at personal and national levels at a given time and place.

In *Dust* we come across a completely different Kenya from that one that we read in books and newspapers. Waweru (2013) notes that:

What the newspapers indicated was completely different from the conversation in the public open places. There was tension about the things that were not said and the things that were said in silence. (16)

He goes on to add that as a country, we are not good with dealing with the ghosts of the past because we do not have the knowledge of how to deal with it and did not have an outlet to do so, thus the eruption of the 2007-2008 post-election violence. From all these we get to learn the role that silence has in the (re)telling of Kenya’s identity stories and the struggles therein. Kenyans seem to have mastered the skill of keeping quiet over things viewed as “sensitive” and only opening up on the “less sensitive” ones. Paolo (2011) notes “indeed, the changes that the characters undergo in the course of the novel clearly parallel historical changes that were underway in post-colonial Kenya” (4). Looked at this way we note that the characters’ personal experiences are closely linked with public events in their society in ways that make them a symbol of their society and also serve as a reminder that individuals always develop within specific historical, political and social contexts. Owuor in her narrative suggests therefore that the life of the individual, especially in Africa, is closely related to the community. It is evidenced in the narrative that issues to do with ethnicity, tribalism and social stratification have a great influence on how most characters interact and relate with each other. It is on such a backdrop that the 2007-2008 post election violence in

the narrative took place. This study notes that the political, social and historical issues unfolding in the text have an impact on the identity that an individual takes on.

Additionally, in *Dust*, we get to know that there is an alienated and neglected section of the country, the Northern part of Kenya. The narrator tells us that:

They were chance offspring of northern- Kenya drylands. Growing up, Odidi and Ajany had been hemmed in by arid and geographies and essences. Freed from history, and the interference of Nairobi's government. (6)

When Odidi and Ajany become of age, they are taken to a boarding school by their father, Nyipir, down country, south of the Ewaso Nyiro River. This is considered and referred to as the *real Kenya*. The impact of this is that it affects the way the characters interact with each other and how they view themselves; they tend to feel left out of the national progress and development. On admission, the headmistress thinks Odidi and Ajany do not know how to use the toilet and they are warned not to steal, to fight nor politic. This serves to remind them of their position and statuses in this new environment, having come from the alienated northern parts of Kenya, they were to be seen and not to be heard, hence the forlorn figures Odidi and Ajany take on during their stay at the school.

Commenting on aspects of *Othering*, space and place, Anderson (1983) opines that:

Senses of place may be as impassionate and violent as people defending their nationalism. Senses of place often work to provide differences between one group of people and another; these contrasts are complex and can be based on class, gender, race and many other aspects of identity. (64)

This study takes this to imply that the process of *othering*, of specifying where you belong is through a contrast with other places as well with other people.

Those from the northern part of Kenya are always taken as “uncivilized” because of a supposed lack of exposure to modernity. The impact of this is that individuals end up feeling

left out and in essence has a negative impact on the individuals' sense of being. Odidi's teachers and classmates keep on making fun of him just because he does not come from the so called "civilized Kenya." The narrator thus tells us:

They forgot teachers whose lip-curling mouths asked, "*Ati*, from where? Is it on the map?" Drowned out classmates: "You people cook dust to eat" (14).

Their presence in this school comes out as a surprise to many. Even their teachers wonder whether their home is located anywhere on the Kenyan map. So as to forget the daily encounters and dehumanizing treatment in the new places and school surroundings, they turn to music and painting, as these provided solitude from the constant reminders of their "backward" backgrounds and upbringings. The narrator aptly observes that:

Music and painting cancelled memories of annual February humiliations when news stories of northern land famines arrived with portraits of emaciated, breast-baring adorned citizens, and skeletons of livestock. They suffered a flurry of "School Walks" and "Give Your Change, Save a Life" and "Help the Poor Starving People of Northern Kenya" picnics. (14)

A close study of the experiences Odidi and the sister, Ajany, go through at the hands of the school administration and the general public, being viewed as "lesser" humans and ones who can only survive the harsh conditions after public assistance. This has resulted into making them to always pray and wish for the term to end for them to go back to the northern frontiers of the country, where they "belonged" and felt valued and appreciated and not "outsiders" and the *other* lesser tribes. In the narrative it is noted that:

Odidi would sit in the audience with eyes shut, dreaming about end of term, when the blessed migration from this Kenya to theirs, via Nairobi, occurred. Nairobi was the oasis where he and Ajany boarded a dilapidated green holiday bus shaped like a triangular loaf and shuttered along ramshackle roads to the trading center. (14)

The reader is informed in the same scene that sometimes they walked; most of the time they got a ride closer to Wuoth Ogik, and while at home, they purged school from their hearts. This study takes this to imply a sense of shifting identities.

Writing on the aspect and condition of *Othering* Miller (2008), notes that “the condition and quality of Otherness is the state of being different from and alien to the social identity of a person and to the identity of the self” (99). He further argues that the term may also refer to the characteristics of *who?* and *what?* of the Other, which are distinct and separate from the symbolic order of things from the real; from the aesthetic; from political philosophy; from social norms and social identity; and from the self. Looked from Miller’s angle we argue that the condition of *Othering* describes the reductive action of labeling and defining a person as a subaltern native, as someone who belongs to the socially subordinate category of the *Other*. This is the same state that Odidi and Ajany find themselves while in the new school environments they are taken to by their father, as alluded to earlier on.

Closely linked to Miller’s arguments, Ndago (2015) commenting on the Owuor’s text opines that the landscape in *Dust* helps the characters create and re-create their identities. A major part of the narrative is situated in the northern part of Kenya close to the West of Lake Turkana and Mount Kulal referred to as Wuoth Ogik which means journey’s end. He notes that, “This is a hot and dry region which lacks adequate social amenities like hospitals, proper roads and even schools” (37). In addition to these this part of the country experiences persistent hunger, low literacy levels and constant banditry attacks. Most of the residents here engage in pastoralism and greatly rely on livestock as a source of their livelihood. As a result of low levels of development, most residents in this part of Kenya feel as if left out

and therefore not part of the *real Kenya*. While describing Ajany and Odidi, the narrator states that:

They were offsprings of northern Kenya dry lands who had been hemmed in dry arid land geographies and essences. Freed from history, and interferences of Nairobi's Government, they had marveled at Anam Ka'alakol, the lake swallowed three rivers- the Omo, Turkwel and Kerio. (7)

The ethnic communities in the Northern parts of Kenya are semi-nomadic and depend upon their herds of camels, cattle, small stock of goats and sheep for milk, meat and trade. The ethnic cultural loyalties held by these communities do not seem to wane easily but instead seem to grow more salient in the northern frontiers of the country. Langer (2010) examines the importance of different identity markers, especially ethnic markers, in different contexts and concludes that “the relative importance attached to a specific dimension can differ between different groups and/or fluctuate between different contexts” (27). As a result of these individuals think and behave differently in different contexts, cultures and sets of ideas and therefore creating a multiple identity. In *Dust*, in spite of many years and decades of devastating droughts plaguing this region, the characters in these places appear to be resilient, self-reliant survivors who are optimistic about their future because they have maintained their social system despite hunger and drought in their area.

Both metaphorically and literally the northern part of Kenya is a region that is on the periphery of the nation. In the narrative this region appears to be one meant for individuals in exile and the condemned. So as to make to survive in this region, the individuals have to take on new and more enduring character traits and identities. When Bolton fails to do as per the expectations of the colonial authorities, they send him there with the thought that he will resign. When Bolton is sent to the northern frontiers, he moves with Nyipir and sets up his residence which Nyipir names Wuoth Ogik. This place becomes one where they would keep

and bury their top most secrets and stories including cattle rustling, poaching, trade in contraband goods and guns. Langer (2010) opines that, “Individual’s ideas about their self identification are not fixed; but continuously in process, as the boundaries between themselves and others, and between the different parts of themselves are constantly negotiated” (30). Looked at from this perspective, we soon see Bolton getting so much engrossed in the life and traditions of the locals in the new places and spaces he now occupies. In an attempt to save Akai, Nyipir shoots Bolton dead and this is also kept a secret (349-350). Towards denouement, Bolton’s traumatic experiences in these parts of the country result into him taking on a hybrid identity; this soon turns out as a source of constant conflicts between his own self and those around him, to an extent of him trying to kill Akai as a result of their secret love affair that leads to a pregnancy. It is on this backdrop that *Someone Else* becomes the name to refer to Bolton since people felt that mentioning his name would rattle the secrets kept. In addition to this, the colonial government tends to send those individuals found on the wrong side of the law like Aaron to work in this harsh environment as a form of punishment. Significantly, *Dust* reflects and shows how colonialism laid the roots of neo-colonialism in Kenya by creating the country’s systematic exclusions and biased development in different parts of the country. However, Owuor does not propose a solution to such a vast problem, but rather she strives for a political and cultural awakening of the people of Kenya so as to develop a strong national consciousness.

This study argues that lots of elements such as; cultural, genetic, social as well as the built-environment mix together in order to shape identity. This notion is supported by Qazimi (2014), when he writes about sense of place and place identity by noting that, “When the relationship between one person and a place grows, that’s how people start to identify

themselves, in two different scales; larger and smaller” (14) . Here, large scale covers the nation and city whilst smaller scale includes neighborhood, room, school and work place. There is a long standing joke that people from the Northern parts of Kenya ask anyone who has come from the interior, “How is Kenya?” Owuor embeds this idea in her narrative, not as a perpetuation of the norm but as a reflection of this alienation. When Ajany makes her journey to Nairobi to retrace her brother’s steps, we are told in the narrative that her mobile phone clicked to life as if reborn.

The alienation of the northern parts of Kenya is also evidenced in the rather humorous frustration of Aaron Chacha who has been posted at a police post in the northern margins of Kenya. This study is thus informed that Aaron’s cleaning efforts ceased as he retreated into a torrent of regret, self-pity on his heels. He feels neglected by the government of the day as he had been reduced to serving in this wind-wailing blot of landscape (207). The text further narrates to us how Aaron finds himself having plenty of time to regret many things: the absence of regular fruit and few opportunities to speak English and with it a sense of neglect and abandonment (207). All the above experiences serve to highlight how neglected and left behind people in the northern frontiers of the republic of Kenya feel and in essence their sense of belonging and entitlement as citizens in the modern state.

Additionally, landscape is both physical and emotional, and is evident in the characters in the narrative. Ajany and Odidi’s parents, Akai-ma and Nyipir, are hardened by their environment and therefore assume a stoic appearance. Here, their personal and individual identities appear to be affected due to the places and environments they currently occupy. This is seen in the way the narrative describes the face of Odidi. We are told that his face had the shadow of Wuoth Ogik and that his bloodline was evident on his face (162).

The narrator tells us that Odidi's and Ajany's participation in painting and music helped them escape from embarrassing stories of hunger in the Northern parts of Kenya. Said (1993) notes that "domination and inequities of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society" (19). In Owuor's narrative, the picture that has been painted of those from these parts is that of emaciated, breast-baring, adorned citizens, and skeletons of livestock. As a result, Odidi and Ajany are made to suffer a flurry of school walks meant to mobilize funds to "help the poor starving people of Kenya" (16). This study finds that such happenings have an impact on personal identity on the characters as it results to a sense of complete despondency in the characters of Odidi and Ajany.

The narrator goes on to add that Ajany, being reed thin, small, dark and bushy haired with large slanted eyes, would be photographed and the photo used in the school newsletter to report on the hunger campaigns. Abbe (1983) observes that "the bond between and identity can influence social formations, cultural practices, and political actions" (71). We argue that a sense of place identity derives from multiple ways in which place functions to provide a sense of belonging, construct meaning, foster attachments, and mediate change. In the narrative we are told that Ajany and Odidi would always feel embarrassed and hence they would frequently yearn for the end of the term to go back to Wuoth Ogik. All these have had a negative psychological effect on the two and to a greater extent led to their adaptation of varied personalities, identities, depending on the places and spaces they occupy. The reader is informed that "Odidi would sit in the audience with eyes shut, dreaming about end of term, when the blessed migration from this Kenya to theirs, via Nairobi, occurred" (14).

Owuor's narrative brings to the fore the view that place-identity of a person can inform their experiences, behaviors and attitudes about other people and places. The reader is also made

aware of where and why people feel at home as well as why alienation, marginalization and displacement, forced or voluntary, can be very traumatic for individuals and groups. This is evidenced in the manner in which the Odidi and Ajany start acting when around those who view them as being *outsiders*. The narrator informs us that:

Later, they focused on study. Ajany learned to paint, covered shame with vivid colors. Odidi became a grade-three piano student within a year. Music and painting bandaged soul- holes. (14)

The effect that the alienation has had on the siblings can be seen in the efforts they put in activities they engage so as to establish roots in their new *homes*. This study argues that characters turn to escapism as a means of survival. Ajany takes on painting while Odidi joins rugby and playing the piano as a way of forgetting their exclusion and oppression at the hands of their teachers and school mates. In the end they find themselves keeping to themselves and not mingling freely with the rest of the school population, with a view of not being picked out by the others for ridiculing.

The element of leaving home and homecoming resonates throughout the narrative and with it the aspect of belonging and identity. Olonda (2003) writing about literary journeys notes that the physical change of environment is intrinsically valuable to character and that the character journeys for the simple personal ambition into far territories to explore environments and opportunities (22). The journey therefore is a powerful symbol often used to represent a character's adventure leading to an epiphany, or some sort of self- realization or self- discovery. Arabel Ajany Oganda is seen returning from Brazil following the death of her older brother Ebewesit Odidi Oganda. During her leave-taking, Odidi tells her, "This is (*he emphasized*), this is home" (19). Odidi also commands Ajany to "choose" between staying in Kenya or pursuing her dream of leaving Kenya. We are told in the narrative that:

She did. She left Kenya. He had stayed. To live out a belonging to which he had become accustomed. (15)

Now, after an arduous stay away, Ajany comes back home full of nostalgia. Hopelessness and self-pity sets in as she feels that had she been around then the brother would not have been killed in the streets of Nairobi. She sets out on a pilgrimage in search of new and expanded meaning about the self, nature, life and others; especially the late brother, Odidi. Ajany's journey and experiences lead to a personal transformation as she decides to take on a new life of fighting and making right the mistakes committed by the brother. In so doing she finds a sense of fulfillment as she eventually uncovers what kind of life Odidi lived which enables her to come to terms with the brother's death.

There are other journeys chartered in the story. The early arrival of Hugh and Selene Bolton, who leave England's "weary nostalgia for a past that had been burned" (36) to come to Kenya in the 1950s. We learn, in a dialogue between Bolton and Selene that, they, like other white settlers of the time, sought adventure in blank-slate kingdoms where, (they) owned the rules and would make a country in (their) image (37).

In order to fully address the connections between categories of difference and imperialism, in light of the decisions and journeys taken during the colonial period in Kenya, we need to expand the analysis beyond the country's national borders. So as to do this, this study argues that an understanding of power relations that have existed between the west and its various "Others". Of particular importance to this study are the ideas developed by Edward Said (1978) which open up new areas of research into the power relationships behind Western representations of the "Other". Although Said focused on the West's creation of the "Orient", this study finds a lot of his observations that can be applied to how we think about the discursive practices of imperial actors in Sub-Saharan colonial Africa. Of much interest,

here, is Said's notion that "to know the "Other" is to have the ability to better control the "Other" in a relationship of power" (34). This study argues that Said's analysis has an implication of when the observer holds a *descriptive* position vis-a-vis the colonial "Other" and how this bestows the power to describe and define, and consequently, to "dominate". In other words, the ability to categorize and employ simplified knowledge of the "Other" allows for more fluid control and administration of the colony. We argue here that the journeys undertaken by Bolton, his wife and the other colonial powers are quests or treks; toward personal and national conquests, a goal, destination, or understanding.

Additionally, a sense of homecoming is experienced when Hugh Bolton arrives with his bride, Selene, in Kilindini, he allays her panicked need for return to England by telling her, "We are home, my love, we're home" (37). In a way Hugh gets a sense of belonging and a takes on a new identity in the new places he now occupies. Hugh, after much disillusionment with the rest of Kenya ironically establishes himself in the northern territories where he builds himself the house that the Oganda family comes to occupy. In Selene's description of her husband, Hugh, she observes that:

Kenya is seeping into Hugh. His eyes had deepened, gone grayer, bolder and older. His cheeks were sunken, contoured, scarred, tinged with heat and his skin mottled. He laughed, much louder, head thrown back. (124)

Bolton and his wife, Selene, arrive in Kenya in the 1950's and settle in Naivasha. As the Mau Mau insurgency takes place, Selene becomes scared for her life. However, Bolton is determined that the British should keep its Kenyan colony. The obstacles that Bolton faces in his quests tell us a great deal about him and hence exposing to us his self-discovery. When Bolton was transferred to the north, Selene refuses to move with him. Afraid of death, an expectant Selene leaves for England. Bolton however stays on with a view of continuing

the British rule over the Kenyan territory. Kamonji (2019) states that “Africa’s colonization ushered in a period of global homogeneity that solidified a global political, the nation-state and economic, capitalism template that has so dominated the global imaginary of the years there after” (16). Owuor highlights ideas about how the colonial government and settler society in Kenya developed ideological understandings of themselves and Africans, and as an examination of the continuity and change of these conceptions during more than three decades of the Kenyan colony’s history and journey. Bolton’s travelling to the northern parts of the country, from Britain, brings to us a sort of in-between space that reveals and sustains his hybrid identity and varied place attachments. This not only suggests how immigration blurs conventional boundaries of place, but also offers us an insight into shifting places, identities and cultures around the world.

Additionally, on the alienation subject, this study notes that Northern Kenya has been alienated since independence. Gordon Obote Magaga and Jacob Adipo Ogalo (2012) say that:

Northern Kenya was a closed district during the colonial period and was administered by military officers. This had negative effects on social, economic and political development of the pastoral communities. (74)

Even after the attainment of self-rule, the post-colonial government seemed to propagate similar colonial strategies in dealing with the region. The result of this is that the region has continued to lag behind when it comes to development.

The inhabitants of this region, though aware of the existence of a Kenyan government, hardly feel and notice its presence. Such instances make it very difficult to draw a line between lawful and unlawful undertakings in this part off the country. Omondi (2012), comments on the cattle rustling menace by saying that:

Traditionally, the communities living in the northern parts of Kenya observed raiding as a cultural practice. Access to illegal firearms is blamed on the porous Kenyan boundaries in the northern with Sudan; to the east with Somalia; and to the west with Uganda. (175)

The conflicts in the above mentioned countries have continued to encourage the free movement of arms into the hands of the civilians. It is common place to come across residents wielding guns just like one would walk around with a walking stick and wars are a common thing due to cattle rustling which to them is more of a cultural practice and an identity symbol than a vice, and conflict over water and grazing lands. Men, women and even children own guns, as exemplified by Nyipir's family.

Proshansky (1983) correctly argues that "place and identity are inextricably bound to one another". (65) He furthers his argument by noting that the two are co-produced as people come to identify with where they live, shape it however modestly, and are in turn shaped by their environment. Therefore, exploring the relationship between place and identity deepens our understanding of identity formation and the role of place in social and psychological development. When Nyipir reports to Aaron when his livestock is stolen, Aaron tells him to try and find out in the Northern Frontiers Stock Exchange and the narrator tells us that Nyipir was one of the people who would transfer rustled livestock through Omoroto more than fifty years ago (242). Owuor's narrative presents a harsh account of northern Kenya life. In her narrative, a major unfortunate problem of frustration or betrayal is revealed to us. In so doing redress or relief for disillusionment and despair is sought as she portrays clearly what transpired and continue to transpire before and after independence.

The citizens in the northern regions are almost completely cut off from the *real Kenya* as they do not get to know of the daily occurrences in the capital, Nairobi, where much of the country's governance takes place, and the rest of the country. The northern parts of Kenyan

state have been alienated since independence. Magaga and Ogalo (2012) argue that Northern Kenya was a closed district during the colonial period and was administered by military officers. This had negative effects on the social, economic and political development of the pastoral communities (74).

Even after independence, the post-colonial government replicated the same colonial strategy in dealing with the region. When Nyipir asked if there was any news from Kenya, Ajany replied that a president and prime minister had formed a coalition government. This is in reference to the grand coalition government that was formed by Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga after signing the peace agreement, negotiated by Kofi Anan, to end the post-election violence in 2008. When Ali and Ajany arrive in Wuoth Ogik, Aaron asks Ali about the on goings in Kenya.

In narrating to us the personal struggles and experiences of her characters, Owuor relies greatly on the shared memories of these individuals Akoyo (2014) notes that:

Owuor's narrative comes out as an epic one. It covers vast distances, charting wide journeys both in the physical and mental spaces. Some of the widest distances are covered through the use of memory. Memory is unconfined, ethereal, (re)creation. (23)

It is through these memories, of past and current events, that characters are able to define and (re)define themselves at the cultural personal and national levels. Characters recall the past as they think of the present and try to forge ahead with their futures. Nyipir thinks that, "Memories are ghosts" (67). Based on such thoughts, this study argues that memory gives the story movement, psychologically and mentally. Doleres (1995) opines that "place makes memories cohere in complex ways" (296). She goes on to add that peoples' experiences of a landscape intertwine the sense of place and politics of space. In Owuor's narrative, the

author unearths ethicized, classed, racialized and gendered accounts of place in order to reveal how those in privileged positions can bury the truth of oppression of the marginalized societies. Walibora (2012) commenting on remembrance in the post-independence African countries argues that when it comes to the remembrance of the attainment of political emancipation, most African countries have learned “to narrate the official national narrative and to forget other stories since commemoration of the nation’s past almost always goes hand in hand with officially decreed national amnesia” (65). Looked at this way, we note that in most African countries, the story of the nation has to be narrated and remembered by forgetting certain aspects of the nation’s past, the aim being to conceal the truth on what may have occurred to the citizenry. The narrator says that during Odidi’s last breath, his memory ticked as he soared into the desiccated terrain of Wuoth Ogik, the home he abandoned. He then turns down River Road and glances upward, a childhood habit (187).

The first epigraph in the novel, taken from Juan Ruflo’s *Pedro Paramo* (1955), serves as an epitaph for Odidi; “you will hear the voice of my memories stronger than the voice of my death, that is, if death has a voice.” The study argues here that, Odidi, the ghost in the story, is consistently evoked through memory. He is elusive. He is what Akai-ma wants that she cannot have back and what Ajany seeks but cannot find. He is the collective trauma of the story (185). Characters like Ajany, Nyipir and Akai-ma retrospect through memory to reveal their personal experiences. Owuor, through the use of memory tries an attempt of responding to the struggles Kenyan have been going through and keep on enduring. Ndago (2015) opines that:

Owuor delineates a lost and soon to be forgotten history, creating a collective memory in which the current generation is forced to ask: Where did this begin? Where did this wounding start? (17)

This study therefore argues that in retracing the origin of the problems afflicting a majority of individuals we undertake a journey similar to that of Ajany or Isaiah who return to retrace and seek an identity and a sense of belonging. It is also evident that memory plays a role in history making and identity formation. By implication the dual act of remembering and forgetting sets the pattern for how the post-colonial African nation narrates itself in the post-colonial period as portrayed in Owuor's narrative.

Closely linked to identity and belonging is the concept of ownership which we argue cuts across the narrative and almost all the characters seek some sense of personal identity and belonging in the different spaces and places they occupy. Olonda (2003) aptly observes that "identity is possession and possession is identity" (21). The begging question we pose here, with reference to Owuor's narrative, however is, who can lay claim and to what? Hugh Bolton is determined to make Kenya *his* country. To build a life in it for himself and his bride, Selene. He says:

My people created this country. I'll be damned if I'll be forced out. This is my country. My people built this land, named it, toiled, built and died for it. (37)

At the same time Selene becomes increasingly concerned with Hugh's *my's*: My country. My land. My dream. My people. Selene tries to re-own and convince the husband to go back to England with no avail as Bolton decides to take on the native Kenyan identity. With the urgency of sense of belonging and a quest for identity, Isaiah Bolton seeks to (re)claim his father's home and legacy. Ajany on the other hand embarks on a pilgrimage to unearth the evils committed on the brother and eventually lays claim to Odidi's baby that Justina carries, as a piece of her brother. Odidi on his side hopes to claim justice. Nyipir on his part wants to disown his name that has been linked to past evils in the nation state while at the same time to re-unite his family by bringing back Odidi and Ajany home. Premised on the above, this

study argues that through the narrative, the author posits the relevance and necessity of memory, justice and transparency to make Kenya a better place, provided that the ghosts of the past are put to rest. All these experiences and the many others discussed in this section serve to remind us of the personal identity struggles faced by various characters in their day-to-day encounters in the varied spaces and places they occupy or are forced to occupy.

### **3.6 Space-Places and Identity in “The Knife Grinder’s Tale”**

This section argues that an individual character’s identity formation and representation is to a greater extent informed by the spaces and places he or she occupies. It is therefore useful to have a concise understanding of the link between the aforementioned aspects with regards to how Owuor presents them in her narrative.

So as to help the research in understanding the foregoing better, we look at Bhabha (1994), who while commenting on the issue of the *self* and the *other* points out that, “the question of cultural difference face us with a disposition of knowledges in a distribution of practices that exist beside each other that has to be negotiated rather than dismissed” (162). Bhabha’s arguments are key here as they guide us in looking at the prevailing circumstances when it comes to inter and intra-cultural linkages among different characters in different space-places. We are told that the dead son, Otieno, in the “Knife Grinder’s Tale” was aimlessly killed in the streets of Kibera slums for being seen as an outsider to those not familiar with him. Having just sat for his secondary school certificate exams Otieno decides to move to Nairobi in a quest to find a better life, away from his rural Nyabondo village. This is however against the father’s wishes as he, Baba Otieno, would rather have him joining university and take care of the family in case the father passed on. Otieno informing the

father of his decision says, “Baba, I got a job at Mama Lucy Shop” (1). Surprised the father inquires, “And where is this Mama Lucy Shop?” Otieno then goes ahead to say that it is in Kibera and it’s a good place and job. This really angers the father who all along has wanted him to join university. “What about school? What about engineering?” (1) Otieno goes ahead to inform his father all that is now in doubt and that his will is to go to Nairobi and try out his knife grinding skills and earn a living. Later on Otieno flees from home to Kibera with the aim of fulfilling his goal and finding his “true calling”.

Locke (1690) considers personal identity or the *self* as being:

Founded on consciousness and the mind, and not on the substance of either the soul or the body. We are the same person to the extent that we are conscious of the past and future thoughts and actions in the same way as we are conscious of present thoughts and actions. (12)

This study takes personal identity here to be that one that is founded on the repeated act of consciousness over space and time. Otieno has had this great desire to follow his ambitions in life and this can be attributed to his later consequential decisions. The father then embarks on quest journey to trace and find out what actually happened to his son when he learns of his untimely death through mob justice. “Why? Why? Why my son?” (3). On his way to Nairobi Baba Otieno discovers that their capital city and nation at large has become alien and strangely new to him. For this reason he learns that he has to rediscover his own location so as rediscover himself. Jorgensen (1967) talking about self-discovery points out that:

Self-realization has to occur at some point in life. It occurs at a young age for some people; during the middle ages for some others and at old age for others. The inner exploration helps a person to identify his true potential to achieve his goal in life. (56)

According to Jorgensen, purpose pushes the person to the reality which is an inevitable fact that the self has to accept and it forces the self to a complete transformation. To him, this is the transfiguration of the soul which in turn provides wisdom for determination and judgment. Rediscovery therefore comes out clearly as a driving motif in this short story as the individual characters struggle to fit into the new spaces and places they currently occupy.

As Otieno's father goes round looking for the answer to the killing of his son, we the study is made privy to these harsh and rude realities. The narrative takes us through his hustle and bustle in the streets of Nairobi and the slums of Kibera. We are also made aware of the traditions of the different ethnic and racial communities living in his rural lake side village and the slums of Kibera. Characters in the village appear to be welcoming and friendly with each other. When Baba Otieno is about to embark on his journey his neighbor becomes so concerned about his welfare and well-being. He even tries to convince him not to go to the capital. "Please Ogwang, you need not go" (2).

In Nairobi however, the town dwellers come out as uncaring and self-centered. Nobody seems to care about what the others do and instead move on with their daily chores. Skulj (2004), writing on cultural spaces posits that dialogue is not just a simple instrument foregrounding cultural identity; it is a more or less deep – seated structure (8). The study takes this to imply that through peoples' dialogue one is able to learn and appreciate other people's cultural identities and at the same time conflicting ideologies. It is this understanding that makes Baba Otieno to push on with his quest in spite of a myriad of challenges faced.

Having walked and travelled for long and not knowing where to start from in his quest, he keeps on asking the residents for direction but with no success. It is only street the preacher

who offers to assist by giving him the directions to Mama Lucy's Shop though also in a very casual way. "*Enda ivi, alafu apo mbele utaona duka la Mama Lucy*" (7). The preacher tells him. Through the story's plot we are also made aware of the different societal strata in the city of Nairobi as we follow the protagonist on his numerous journeys. Karanchara (2016) aptly observes that:

Accomplishing aims and aspirations has become the priority of life. But realizing the limits of the self, society and the world, it must be reconsidered for the better life of the people. (27)

What this means is that it is through a character's journey of self-discovery that he or she is exposed to the bitter truth that limits and restrictions pacify people to accept reality. The differences between the slums and the well-kept estates and the cultural habits of the residents are also brought out to us, the readers. All the above views and perspectives entrench in a subtle way the multiplicitous nature of urban identities seen from different standpoints: cultural, ethnic, national, political and economic.

In view of the foregoing we argue that an average and often informal urban growth, conflict over resources, as is the case in "The Knife Grinder's Tale", has become a severe source of instability in the Kibera slums. Adam (2009), notes that, "In slum areas, policies intended to alleviate tensions, including upgrading programs, the legal regulation of informal tenure arrangements, and reform of local governance structures, have had the unintended consequence of also spurring violence and conflict" (71). We argue here that over time, these conflicts become closely intertwined with claims of identity and citizenship and apolitical discourse drawn along ethnic lines as is the case when it comes to the killing of Otieno in the slums of Kibera.

Consequently, by way of the short story and Owuor's unique style of narration through the use of the omniscient narrative voice, flashbacks and anagnorisis or discovery; as the protagonist in Owuor's narrative gains an awareness of the real situation when faced by difficulties in the urban surroundings and with it the realization of how things stand, we are able to grasp that the identity of the protagonist is directly tied to the places and spaces he occupies. What this implies is that the places the characters operate are as important in the formation of their sensibilities and organization of their social relations as are the events they are involved in.

By juxtaposing rural upbringing, and the urban setting, he now finds himself in; Owuor's narrative takes us through the people Otieno meets and the places he passes through. Locating urban experiences caught between the attractions of prosperity, the son had sought to get, and the realities of poverty, the ambivalence is interrupted by a more equivocal statement of urban exclusion. While in the slums of Nairobi, Baba Otieno soon becomes more interested in the slum people where the killing of the son happened. "I want to find out why. I want to see the last place he lay" (9). The protagonist is deeply troubled and affected by the death of his son, who he held in very high esteem and even wished for the very best in life. He once told him, "Take it now into the lake. Carrier of my medicine porch, war companion, my dirge singer. Dj, you must follow your shadow. It will lead you!" (2) The clear and outright commentary on social and cultural identities as the characters interact in different places makes Owuor's narrative a good interface when it comes to the field and literary study of identity and spaces.

As the father walks from place to place, the rural setting to the slums of Kibera, the story moves from new faces in the streets to settle on Mama- Lucy's, a less optimistic figure for

the father, who made the son to come and work for her. This study considers “The Knife Grinder’s Tale’s” mobilization of competing representations of Nairobi to reflect and critique contemporary conflicts over the city slums identity, folding together narratives of social mobility with Kenyan’s nationalistic desires for territorial and cultural exclusivity. Commenting on the condition in the slums of Kibera, Zhu (2014) observes that:

There have been high profile attempts to improve living conditions in Kibera like the Kenya Slum Upgrading Program , a collaboration between the government and UN-habitat that began in 2001. But the decanting site completed in 2008, meant to temporarily house slum residents as their areas were redeveloped into modern high-rises, was left empty for over a year and then gentrified as poor coordination and legal opposition from prominent Kibera landlords stagnated progress and created an administrative void. (93)

This study observes that the slum dwellers have tended to capitalize on prevailing poor conditions and confusion with a view of making it difficult for the others they feel , like Otieno in the narrative, have come to benefit from “their” resources. To this end the study agrees that Owuor’s text negotiates the complex overlaps and contradictions between narratives of the slums’ ethnic and economic struggles through issues of space, places and identity. The narrative follows a fraught relationship between the hard- up and bereaving father and a well-to-do Mama- Lucy who, after their encounter, become increasingly dependent upon each other in their attempts to a space of belonging in the slums.

Commenting on the subject-object duality, as an influence when it comes to identity creation, Shields (2015), opines that:

The idea that all things are observable manifestations of an underlying force-conflict and have profound implications for the development of identity. The awareness of the other leads directly to the awareness of the self. This also leads to the distinctions of “subject” and “object” (14).

In other words one becomes one’s Self by not being the *Other* and for this reason; consciousness grows out of previously unconscious activity. This study argues that the

fundamental forces that bring different characters and identities together are attracted by each other. To this end this study notes that Mama-Lucy and Baba Otieno are forced by circumstances, death of Otieno, to interact and hence share in their varied experiences and hence an almost similar identity.

Baba Otieno is a frustrated father in a state of depression having been recently deceased upon the untimely demise of his son. Although somehow settled compared to Baba Otieno, Mama- Lucy faces mental stress of having to explain how, why and where Otieno was killed under her care (10). Discovering that the key to finding what happened to the son, Baba Otieno is forced into a friendship with Mama- Lucy. This eventually leads to the resolution of state of confusion the father previously found himself in and that of Mama Lucy. In a way, by the end of the narrative, they both find closure.

To express what influences the self, this study bases on the social identity theory and identity theory, here, the self is uncontrolled in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. According to Turner and Oakes (1987), this process is called “self-categorization” (15). They add on that one of the most important things that make people distinguishable from other species is the “self awareness” and the power to “act” and “self reflect”. Baba Otieno tries as much as possible to interact with the slum dwellers and communities with the sole aim of finding out the real cause of his son’s death.

It is evident in the narrative that Otieno died as a result of violence meted upon him by the slum dwellers. While writing about violence in the Great Lakes Region Kaldor (2010), argues that there are two forms of violent conflicts which often overlap in African cities; the first one being the violent struggle between organized armed groups within sovereign

boundaries for territorial control, political representation, and public authority. The second one is the “civic conflict” which refers to diverse forms of violence outside “warfare” context, most of the time taking place in urban environments, involving both conventional forces and irregular combatants, such as criminal gangs, militias, terrorists or warlords (58).

All the above tend to display a complex proliferation of violent forms of conflict in the urban centers. The killing of Otieno in the streets of Kibera can be attributed to the criminal gangs that want to control the slums from anybody viewed as not belonging in these socio-special areas and competition for the scarce resources.

Through a flashback we are taken through what happened on that fateful day as young men and a crowd chase Dj down the streets of Kibera and soon descend on him with all manner of crude weapons while shouting that he is a chief. *“Mwizi! Mwizi! Ulikuja Nairobi bila baiskeli na sai uko nayo. Mwizi! Mwizi!”*(10) This is a perfect example of mistaken identity and being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Urban settings in the Great Lakes region, with some exceptions, are as urged by Parr (1998) characterized by “a fast and largely uncontrolled growth, multi-layered urban governance, ethnically fragmented cityscapes, informality, multiple urban cultures and identities, inadequate basic urban infrastructure, unequal access to public goods and at the same time diverse forms of social networks and bottom-up coping mechanisms” (42). All the above, and as presented by Owuor in her narrative, serve to remind us that strained resources and other life restricting occurrences in the urban settings lead to violent conflict between various groupings as they try to out-do each other to survive.

Being a knife grinder, Dj was moving around with a knife, most likely a customer's. On seeing the knife and not knowing him for being new in Kibera, the slum dwellers take it as sign of being a robber. Heidegger (1962), commenting on the concept of place argues that:

Terms such as sense of place or attached to a place allude to the complex relationship between humans and their environment. It is often said that places tell who you are because a place grows on you and a way of claiming people. A place is not only about getting used to it but it is also about creating and developing a strong relationship with that place and that place bit by bit becomes part of who we are and shapes our identity. (307)

Heidegger goes on to state that, “when people travel from one country to another or from their homeland to another country, they often become aware of their own sense of place and identity and begin to realize that atmosphere is different and do not feel “at home””(308).

What this implies is that when a person moves to a new place, he or she gets to encounter various elements such as landscape, the type of houses, cultures and even things like sounds and smells which one is not used to. On the other hand, if somebody decides to move to a new country or place, all these things gradually become familiar; a new sense of place soon develops and eventually becomes part of our identity.

It is this sense of familiarity that propels Dj to start feeling at home in the slums and with it his untimely murder. Dj is killed for not belonging or rather being an “outsider” in the slums of Kibera. Mama Lucy tells Baba Otieno, “It was in the night. There were screams that Dj was *Mwizi*. It was an accident. He was mistaken” (10). His rural upbringing can be cited as a reason for his killing as he does not know the on goings in the city life and how to carry himself around. Homi Bhabha sums this up when he comments that, “stereotypes act as a construction of otherness” (66).

On the other hand, Lilia (2009) talks of the Other by stating that:

The *Other* is an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way. Any stranger becomes the *Other*. The group sees itself as the norm and judges those who do not meet that norm (that is, who are different in any way) as the *Other*. (6)

This study takes Melani's arguments to mean that; perceived as lacking essential characteristics possessed by the group, the *Other, here DJ*, is almost always seen as a lesser or inferior being and treated accordingly. The *Other* In this slum set up Dj has few or no legal right and because he is characterized as less intelligent or as immoral and to some extent regarded as a sub-human as he is eventually alienated and killed on flimsy grounds.

As the narrative progresses and Baba Otieno's tribulations worsen on learning what actually happened to his son, we get to learn of the oral and cultural traditions and practices of the slum dwellers. Writing about the transmission of cultural traditions from one individual to the other, Ki- Zerbo (1990) notes that, "Oral tradition is a form of human communication wherein knowledge, art, ideas and cultural material is received, preserved and transmitted through speech, song, ballads or chants." (54). What this means is that through this process, it is therefore possible for a society to transmit their history or literature or even law without a writing system. In other words this is the information, memories and knowledge held in common by a people, here the slum dwellers believe in the existence of a supernatural being who controls everything happening to them and around them.

Through the narratives and tales of the people in different parts of the city and slums in particular, we are made aware of key motifs that affect citizenry and the nation at large. The street preacher talks of the people's problems and their aspiration and desires, "Despite the draught, I want to thank the government of God. Kibera belongs to Jesus" (7).

Kelele (2017) talks of cultural practices as, “The manifestation of a culture or sub- culture, especially in regard to the traditional and customary practices of a particular ethnic or other cultural group.” (63) We look at cultural practice here as being that which a person manifests any aspect of a given culture at any time. The slum dwellers’ way of life and mannerism attract our attention here. Their discriminatory treatment of those they view as “strangers” and “foreigners” can be attributed to their identity and close-knit neighborhoods and way of life. Societal problems such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, killings, congestion and disillusionment are tackled in Owuor’s tale.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter we began by examining the link that exists between identity, spaces and places. The study then went ahead and did an in depth analysis of how these concepts intertwine in Owuor’s works under study.

As seen in this chapter, the Kenyan landscape presented in Owuor’s texts spans through the country’s historical vicissitudes as portrayed through the struggles and quests experienced by the various characters. As the plots unfold; Owuor’s narration carries us into tumultuous vortex of human frailty, tears, blood, cruelty, corruption, and love and above all the resilience and inextinguishable shimmer of hope that defines the characters’ quest for identity in the different spaces and places they find themselves in.

This chapter finds that, through characters’ harrowing accounts, human experiences, like the ones dealt with in this section, are universalized using the Kenyan history and experiences of the different characters as microcosms of what happens, has happened and can happen anywhere else in the world. Additionally, this chapter concludes that the studied texts appreciate that place and space meanings are significant in the construction of identity

and that it is because of this reason that persons, cultures and nations seek to dominate place. It is the meanings attached to place- identity which denote culture and nationality that determine the type of spaces that the same produce.

Owuor's narratives therefore come out as philosophical since they are about human experience; about what human beings do to each other and how history is a testament of the cords that bind human beings together, irrespective of their color and creed in the various spaces and places they find themselves in. That is, landscape is both physical and emotional as evidenced by the characters in the narratives studied in this chapter. This study therefore concludes that the spaces and places the characters operate in are as important in the formation of their social relations as are the events they engage in and that identities are multiplitous in nature both from the cultural, ethnic, national, political and economic stand points.

This chapter therefore rightfully concludes that there is a very strong link between identity, spaces and places. It has also been observed that a character's identity and to a large extent his or her personality are greatly influenced by the spaces and places they occupy and those they come into contact with in their day-to- day endeavors.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ARTISTIC STRATEGIES IN THE NARRATION OF IDENTITY QUEST STRUGGLES

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the study looked at the link between identity, spaces and places in the selected works of art by Owuor. This chapter deals with research objective three which seeks to evaluate the various stylistic strategies employed by the author in her texts under study in the depiction of identity quest struggles. This chapter therefore furthers the analysis of identity by examining the narrative strategies that the author employs in the portrayal of the various ways the characters designated by the labels of insider, outsider, foreigner, refugee and stranger perceive themselves and others. Of particular concern is to determine the comparable strategies in the texts and how they effectively carry out the functions that Owuor assigns them. The chapter considers how different narrative stances constitute knowledge of the self and, by implication, knowledge of the other.

The study has read Owuor's "Weight of Whispers", *Dust* and "The Knife Grinder's Tale" as typical examples of postcolonial contemporary literature. The texts have been read as an exploration of identity problems in the post-independence modern Kenyan state, where the idea of the autonomous subject has given way to an understanding of subject and identity characterized by instability and complexity. This chapter points out the importance of narratives for characterization in Owuor's literary works. Here, the study analyzes the function of narrative strategies deployed by the author, bearing in mind that characters in a literary text exist through narration which makes it possible for us to perceive the characters as personae. The chapter therefore identifies unique artistic strategies that are evident in Owuor's narratives. The study pays attention on the role artistic strategies like affiliation,

chronology of events, description, the narrative voice rhetorical questions, imagery and stream of consciousness play in the (re)telling of stories of personal, cultural and national identity struggles. The choice of the artistic strategies is informed by the thought that a study of the narrative strategies employed by the author reveal and depict to us characters, that in different ways and on varying levels, struggle to find meaning in what they do and who are forced to explore their identities during their quests, in confrontation with the antagonists of the stories.

#### **4.2 Identity Narration Strategies: “Weight of Whispers”**

This section concerns itself with how the author strings together her narrative and in so doing how she has employed various narrative techniques to create and represent personal, cultural and national identities as exhibited by the characters therein. Talking about the role of African written literature on character formation, Hartmann (1998) posits that:

African literary works of art, especially the written narratives like novels, poems and short stories are a flexible genre, which are rather sensitive to social change and variations of the cultural self-concept, and, allowing detailed character description and context presentation, may support the conveyance of individual and collective sentiments and traits. (128)

This study finds Owuor’s literary work under study, in the Kenyan context, able to convey individual and a group’s cultural traits and unique identities through her choice of effective narrative strategies.

An interesting idea in the study of characters in Owuor’s work is the importance of narration for creating identity as well as for depiction of literary characters. Narrative strategies provide deeper meaning for the reader as they help the reader to use imagination to visualize situations faced by the characters. Warner (2010) talks of narrative strategies as including,

“the setting, plot, theme, style or structure, characters and perspective or voice of the story as literary techniques are best understood in the context of one or more of these elements.

(14) This study argues that there are many literary strategies and techniques; all of which make it possible for the reader to have a clear understanding of the text and with it the character traits of the characters.

### **4.3 Imagery and Character Formation**

When it comes to the narration of identity, then formation and making of the characters visible and accessible becomes very important. For this to happen, the reader must be able to understand the characters and if need be, empathize with them. This is where the use of images gains prominence. Kiri (2014) notes that:

If characters are mainly described or if their presentation is exclusively external, then the focus shifts to the events the characters are involved in, but their motivations remain a matter of conjecture, as their internal worlds are closed up. Of many reasons that may be offered for a narrator’s preoccupation with characters’ external world only, two are relevant in this context and ignorance. (15)

What this implies is that so as not to prejudice their intentions in those instances when the aim is to stereotype a character, the writer and with it the narrator, would be anxious not to expose a character’s mind for this would reveal an underlying complexity that would then subvert the preferred one dimensional image of the character. There is also a possibility that the narrator may not simply be able to understand the internal world of the character, and so finds it safe to stick to the external. This kind of scenarios achieve added importance in the hybrid postcolonial societies where certain group experiences are likely to be construed as exclusive, as is the case in Owuor’s “Weight of Whispers.”

In “Weight of Whispers,” the author employs the use of imagery as a key stylistic device in narrating the haunting story about the Kuseremane’s family. The key details of this family’s frustrating struggles after the happenings in Rwanda are brought to us vividly through use of images. These images make the narrative very evocative acting as intensifiers and reflectors of the characters’ struggles in the new places they find themselves in as refugees.

To subtly delineate the alienation that the refugee who is also haunted by a guilty consciousness feels, Owuor’s narrative uses a play with images which affect the relative marginality or centrality of certain groups in the definitive moments of a character’s experiences. The refugees, for instance, are represented from the outside, there is very little attempt to present their character from the inside. The narrator tells us that:

Now whenever I approach Kenyatta Avenue, they, my people, disperse into shops or avert their eyes. If I open a conversation, there is always a meeting that one is late for. Once on the streets a woman started wailing like an old and tired train when she saw me. Her fingers extended, like the tip of a sure spear, finding its mark. (17)

The effect here is that the refugee as a character remains anonymous and to a greater extent faceless as they appear to lack an identity of their own.

The refugees’ identity is brought to us in oppositional terms, in contrast to the locals, with effect creating greatly reduced images of the refugee. This study can attribute this representation to the inflexible narrative perspective that is strictly located within one group from which it examines the experience of the refugees in relation to the others. This is seen in Agnetha-mama’s experience in Nairobi thus we are told that:

Two days later, Agnetha-mama visited the Jewelry shop downstairs. Not finding anything to suit her taste, she concluded: “Their language and manners are not as sweet and gentle as ours. (7)

The result of such presentations, closed up images of refugees, is the creation of figures, that appear to be undesirable not worth staying in the Kenyan exile they find themselves in. Kuseremane, for instance, is ridiculed and called names by the Indian shop owner who even threatens to call the police on him when he learns that he had been swindled of his jewelry.

He tells us that:

I return to confront the Indian lady, she tells me to leave before I can speak. She dials a number and shouts, high-voiced, clear, "Police." I do not want trouble so I leave the jewelry shop, unable to speak but not before I see her smile. Not before I hear her scold the guard with red-rimmed eyes. "Why you let *takataka* to come in, nee?" (9)

Kuseremane comes out as a cunning individual who is out to steal and therefore portrayed as a dishonest character. The derogatory terms, for example *takataka* above, a kind of both olfactory and visual imagery, he is referred to by tend to illustrate how the locals and Indians for that matter view foreigners. The refugees are portrayed as beings of low social standing in the Kenyan society they currently reside in.

Polkinghorne (1988) talking about representations of characters and humans for that matter says that:

Human beings exist in three realms- the material realm, the organic realm and the realm of meaning. The realm of meaning is structured according to linguistic forms, and one of the most important forms for creating meaning in human existence is the temporal dimension of human existence and configures events into a unity. The events become meaningful in relation to the theme or points of view of narratives. (183)

Throughout Owuor's narrative, representation of identity is a central aspect in understanding the quest for meaning. Each main character tries to re-define themselves, related to the encounters with others who challenge the characters' previous view of themselves. The palimpsest of identity and the importance of narration for a concept of self are here explored

through literary texts. Sociologist Anthony (1991) argues that “a person’s identity can be found in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (54).

Since the refugee characters are few and select, we can reasonably argue that they are representative of their ethnicity, however negatively they are portrayed. The image that forms the character of the refugee affirms the fact he is different from the locals and the author for that matter. The refugee as a character is somehow set aside and excluded with the aim of highlighting his peculiarities as a foreigner. While trying to attain the necessary travel documents, Kuseremane reveals to us, through the use of olfactory imagery, which is the description of smells and odours and tactile imagery used to describe how things feel to the touch, his dehumanizing experiences at the hands of the foreign authorities. He says that:

I cannot believe what this purple hair woman has asked of me.

“What?”

“Bank details...Bank statement...How much money” (9).

The fact that he is a refugee and posses nothing, having left in a hurry during the turmoil in Rwanda, Kuseremane cannot understand why all the documents are being asked for. He goes on to narrate to us how his eyes blinked while his lashes entangled as it now crossed his mind that it is possible for another human being to simply ask over the counter, casually and with certainty of response for intimate details of another person’s life.

I look around the room. Is it to someone else she addresses this question?

“A title deed. Proof of domicile in country of origin...And letter from employer”

Has she not looked at my passport in her hands?

“I’m not Kenyan” (10).

The refugee appears to know his position of being powerless and oppressed. Having known his predicament, the marginalized Kuseremane tries all he can not to annoy those in position

of authority with a view of seeing the next day and surviving the hardships that come with being a refugee. We are informed that:

She folds her papers, bangs them on the table and frown, as if I have wasted her time. She tosses my passport out of her little window into my hands that are outstretched, a supplication on an altar of disbelief. (11)

Because of the above struggles, he does his best to survive in this restrictive environment. Macintyre (1981), links the effect of the failure of narratives to meaninglessness and the obliteration of self by noting that when someone complains that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a *telos* (217).

Kuseremane narrates to us the dehumanizing encounters he goes through, by way of visual imagery, the description of how things appear, he says that:

I must look at the woman again, that purveyor of hope. So I turn. See a stately man, his beard grey. His face as dark as mine. He stoops over the desk- a posture of abnegation. So that is what I looked like to the people in the line. I want to shout to the woman; I am Boniface Kuseremane, a prince, a diplomat. (12)

Kuseremane goes on to tell us that he stumbles because it is here, in this embassy that the fire- streaking specter of the gun, which brought down two presidents find their mark in his soul. It soon dawns on him that just like the eminent- looking man in a pin- striped suit, he is now a beggar. This study argues that Owuor's ability to effectively employ imagery, as narrative strategies in her text, enables us a chance to vividly and picturesquely experience the protagonist's and his family's identity quest struggles. This is because descriptive imagery launches the reader into experiencing the daily encounters of the characters while at the same time availing us the chance to sympathize with them since we are made to imagine having the same experiences.

Besides the use of images, Owuor also employs the use of metaphors to enhance the creation of a strong link between the reader and the narrative as a whole. As a feature of style, Owuor uses metaphors to appeal to all our five senses. She therefore employs acoustic metaphors as a device in narrating to us the experiences of the exiled family. There are various stylistic devices which stimulate the acoustic channel. They include alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia and synesthesia. Alliteration and assonance are at some points combined with imagery and personification, for instance, “tired train” (30) to offer more powerful aesthetic impact. At some point while talking to a long time friend, from their days back in Rwanda, Kuseremane lets us know how people currently treat him on learning what led to his refugee status. He informs Professor George that Kuseremane’s family name is on the list of those accused to having started the genocide, their conversation comes to an abrupt end as the professor quickly retreats from him. The reader is thus told:

With the same agility that the crocodile used to become a log again, Professor George pulls away from the fence. He wipes his hand, the one I had shaken, against his shirt. He steps away, one step at a time, then he turns around and trots, like a donkey, shouting, looking over his shoulder at me. (30)

The metaphorical use of the word log, above, allows the author to convey vivid imagery that transcends literal meanings which in turn activates our imaginations on how circumstances have now become unbearable for the Kuseremanes. From what happens soon after in the text, we get to learn that as refugees, the Kuseremane’s have learnt a key survival strategy; Kuseremane notes that, “The first lesson of exile- camouflage. When is a log...not a log? When a name is not a name” (31). As readers we can therefore, regardless of our background, visualize the quest struggles faced by the protagonist on a day-to-day basis.

Mudimbe (1992) argues that “Black African writers have taught us that we must dance our word, for in human speech as in dance, lies an offering; to speak and to write is also to offer

oneself to the other; it is to be reborn together”(402). This locates African literature closer to the performing arts. According to this statement, African written literature seems to transcend the conventional European conception of writing, which is conceiving literature as something planned and permanent. The idea of a literary performance is that African writing places the author much closer to the story-teller dependent on the audience while trying to keep in touch with them. He goes on to say “African authors tend to aim their participation in the formation of a shared identity” (128). This study argues that by writing about their personal and communal experiences, the African author gives expression to a common consciousness. The protagonist informs us that, “At six p.m. I rejoin a river of workers returning to so many homes. To be one of many is to be, anyway, if only for a moment” (39). This is an illustration of the extremes the protagonist has to go to so as to belong and fit into the new places he finds himself.

A combination of assonance and onomatopoeia further develops Owuor’s style of narration. For example, “clock clicks” (19). Onomatopoeia also appears apart with much frequency as is the case with “cracks knuckles...crack...crack...” (22). In this case onomatopoeia serves to underscore the policeman’s act of superiority and dramatizes as well as emphasizes his deployment of his superiority over the protagonist, eventually harming him. This is one of the many other strategies that Owuor employs to develop her characters as well as the plot of the narrative. On realizing that life is not going to be as easy as he and his family had previously imaged Kuseremane tells us that, “I have woken up to find the world has shifted, moved, aged and I with it. Today I will try to obtain work” (19). He imagines that having a PhD in Diplomacy and a Masters Degree in Geophysics, he will have an advantage over the locals who he feels are not as qualified as he is. However this does not happen, he is left

even more discouraged and disappointed as he ends up being discriminated against for being a refugee. The reader is informed that:

The day flows on. I sit in different cafés, telling the waiters that I am waiting for a friend. Thirty minutes in some cafés. In the more confident ones, the ones which are sure of their identity, I can wait for a full hour before I make a face, glance at my non-existent watch, and frown as if tardy friends are a source of annoyance and exit. (36)

Here the personified presentation of the day and occurrences conjure in us sympathy which makes us to react with pity to the life Kuseremane is made to live while in the Kenyan refuge. Owuor uses the above techniques to evoke the reader's acoustic sensibilities, and in so doing illuminating the varied encounters Kuseremane's exiled family goes through in their identity quest struggles.

Odun (1991), a short story scholar in African literature, argues that oral traditions and the orate nature of the everyday African societies affects the style of written short stories from this societies as well. In "Weight of Whispers" the protagonist takes us through his experiences when he says that:

Today I woke up as early as the ones who walk to work maneuvering the shadows of dawn, crochet covered radios against ears in pockets, or tied to bicycle saddles. Sometimes music, Rhumba. And in the dawn I can forget where I am and let others' footsteps show me the way. (36)

Looked at closely, we argue that it is in the characters' re (telling) his or her personal encounters that we learn of their identity struggles. At the same time we are able to point to the orality of the story and its influences from the oratory nature of the society it speaks about. This is premised on the thought that it is possible for a society to transmit its history and other knowledge across generations through the recording of personal memories and

histories of those who encountered historical eras or events, as is the case with Owour's narrative. Set before, during and after the Rwandan civil war, we find the author's use of the varied narrative strategies indispensable mirroring the protagonist's day-to-day identity and belonging quests and struggles.

#### **4.4 Noise, Silence and Water as Leading Motifs in Identity Narration in “Weight of Whispers”**

There are several leading motifs in Owuor's narrative that play a significant role in the construction of the meaning of the text. One of this is 'silence', which is key in “Weight of Whispers”. For the protagonist, silence is necessary as it aids in him getting the whispers that haunt and link him to the genocide back in his home country.

These whispers signal us to the process and journey that towards the end of the narrative lead to the mental degeneration and development in the character of the protagonist as he eventually descends into guilt. As seen earlier, Kuseremane is a key suspect in the war and genocide that happened in Rwanda, his home country. He is at the moment fleeing to Europe through Nairobi, Kenya, where he needs his travel documents approved. It is through the whispers of his countrymen in the streets of Nairobi that link him to the assassination of two presidents; his own country's and its neighbor's. Kuseremane has also been implicated in the genocide, although the narrative leaves real guilt inconclusive and ambiguous. We look at Owuor's narrative as one dealing with the existential crisis of alienation and identity quest journeys. Silence, in this narrative, therefore offers the protagonist a space to think, to concentrate and wait. Kuseremane informs us that:

I have learned of hidden places; covered spaces which the invisible inhabit...Hard wooden benches, pews upon which a man may kneel, cover his eyes and sleep or cry unheeded before the presence that is also an absence. (39)

It is also evident that silence is employed in the narrative to show and reveal space and time. The narrative has specific details about time; morning, evening, night and so on. This helps us be aware of what is happening to the protagonist and his immediate family since we are shown how fortunes have changed for the previously privileged family. We find Kuseremane eager to get over the troubles that bedeviled them as exiled refugees. Everything here, is attributed to the “weight of whispers” in this story which are these rumors of his improbable involvement in the conflict in Rwanda that filter through to Kenya and that lead to him being ostracized by his fellow refugees and that symbolic act of self-abnegation, to the extent of his inability to utter his own name in public:

I sleep and dream of whispers. They have crossed the borders and arrived in Nairobi. Like many passing snakes. Kuseremane. Kuseremane. Kuseremane. Kuseremane. Kuseremane...Now whenever I approach Kenyatta Avenue, they, my people, disperse. Or disappear into shops or avert their eyes. (17)

Kuseremane’s mind is therefore rendered uneasy and he is forced to maintain his silence as his own people now avoid him and none of them seem eager to talk or even meet him due to the constant accusatory eyes and whispers which in due course lead to the development of his personal identity and sense of being. Cage (1982) talks of silence as being a counterforce to the limits of individual subjectivity and agency. He argues that “the language of silence is one that knows how to listen when the other centers act, so that it can construct itself as a reaction to the other, and not only as the self-determined action of its own talking”(26). For Cage, silence is a force that neutralizes the self as the body is made aware of the noise that fills our preconceptions and histories, and our natural world. Kuseremane acknowledges that, “Whispers like mist floated over the land of hills and nestled in valleys and refused to

dissipate, had in fact given birth to volleys of sound” (11). We argue here that Rwanda’s political scene has been characterized by continued efforts to structure and restructure the country’s political system on the one hand and fight for equality and human rights on the other.

Agwanda (2020) asserts that “Post-colonial Africa has been characterized by socio-political and economic challenges that have in turn led to conflicts across the continent” (10). This study argues that identity issues such as ethnicity, stereotyping, populism and weak institutions are serious threats to the country’s peace; they are attributed to the fanning of hatred which eventually led to the Rwandan genocide and other tribal tensions that continue to plague the African continent at large. This has led to the production of a sense of disempowerment and disillusionment in the citizenry. This is presented to us in Owuor’s narrative through the portrayal of Kuseremane when we see him gradually turning to solitude and silence when faced by all manner of persecutions in the hands of the state machinery and those who view him as not belonging. We take this silence to be a metaphorical representation of the experiences that Kuseremane has been through and a mode of expressing his struggles and pain.

Therefore, silence intensifies Kuseremane’s limited options as a refugee before his eventual despair and resignation into “nothingness”. Kuseremane observes that, “Exile blurs lines” (38). The silence can be seen creating sharp focus and concentration to Kuseremane’s senses.

Agnethe wants to know if the brother-monarchs-in-exile have sent their reply. “Soon.” I say. One morning, in which the sun shone pink, I found that a certain sorrow had become a tenant of my body and weighed it down on the small blue safari bed, at the end of which my feet hang. (17)

Furthermore, the reader is made aware of how the sun had penetrated into his room but it only hovers above his body since it cannot “pierce the shadow covering my life” (18). Kuseremane waits for someone to come and rescue them, but seems to know his family’s fate at the hands of the Kenyan society and former friends who do not know and understand their plight as refugees.

In the narrative, the whispers that keep on being heard cannot be kept away or stripped since they are connected to nature, “the mist that disappears only to return some other day” (20). Through the narrative we get to know of the whispers as being common place among crowds of the protagonist’s countrymen in Nairobi’s exile. Since they come out as being afraid in confronting the reality and truth and in effect discuss about it, they hide their opinions “in the noise” of the busy city (23). Marilyn (2013) opines that “silence as a metaphor acts as a tool for self-reflection and therefore helps in the creation of meanings of happenings around us” (14). The implication here is that silence then becomes important to human development and learning as it gives an individual a critical ability to perceive and weave meaning from the threads of our experiences. Kuseremane is seen to rely on moments of silence so as to reflect on his personal experiences and coming to a realization of who he is as a refugee, what kind of relationships he desires and what values and beliefs about life he should ascribe to.

Additionally, we come across most of the refugees tending to turn into silence as a survival strategy in exile. The reader is informed that:

Agnethe, being a princess, had been unaware that after the two presidents had died, one never asked one’s compatriots where so and so was. If one did not see so and so, one did not ask until the party spoken to volunteered the information of where about.  
(29)

The study is further informed that ever since moving to Kenya, Agnethe had developed the habit of reading nuances, always kept her mouth shut, never spoke unless spoken to and looked to the ground. Therefore, silence is employed to draw our attention to the awareness of the characters to the passage of time and hence creating poignant moments in the narrative. It is through these silences that the minds of the characters are revealed to us and at the same time putting into perspective life and struggles of the refugees. This study observes here that the silence that Agnethe maintains is a condemnatory one aimed at probing the dehumanizing life her entire family has been forced to live in exile. At the same time there are timid silences, for example the kind Kuseremane maintains, that express, without meaning to, the words that he wishes to pronounce but cannot. What we mean here is that silence not only signals the mood of the character but also the family's reprobation or disgust and its modesty or doubt in their existence as refugees.

Commenting on how language can be used to articulate subjectivity in a given locality, Mwairumba (2015), posits that:

Certain language choices, especially in relation to the form of address of self and others, are ideologically involved in the discourse on identity and cannot be read as innocent referents. The most notable of these words are nouns and pronouns which imply inclusion and exclusion. (157)

This study argues that language use is strategic to the construction of identities; the language in which identities are articulated in Owuor's narrative is one of the ways through which the author opens spaces, by posting language as space especially with a link to the negotiating the protagonists' and narrators identity in the matrix of social, cultural and racial borders of the societies of the narrative. In his early days in Nairobi, Kuseremane finds himself at the mercy of the police for not understanding their coded language when it comes to asking for bribes.

“Toa kitambulisho!” I know this to be a request for identification. A policeman, one of three grunted to me. I shivered. “Toa kitu kidogo”. I did not understand the code. Something small, what could it be? A cigarette. One each. It was a chilly evening. The cigarettes were slapped out of my hand. 23

When he tells them that he does not have one, they go ahead to manhandle him. They twist his arm behind his back, hold him by his waist until his waistband cut into him and later frog marched him across town. All these were done with the aim of obtaining a bride from an innocent refugee.

Another leading motif in this narrative is water. Water has always played a key role in literature across cultures and generations. For instance Wolfgang (1951) argues that “William Shakespeare used water imagery to foreshadow death of his characters” (34). The same intention can be found in Owuor’s narrative. Through rain and thunder, a sense of foreshadowing is created as the narrative gets to its denouement. This is brought to us by the protagonist when he says, “the anger with which the rain launches itself upon this land, the thunder which causes floors to creak, sparks a strange foreboding in me” (29) is created in the protagonist as the story gets to its denouement. Kuseremane’s fears from the premonition come to pass when he later on learns that Chi-Chi had to turn to the dehumanizing act of prostitution since their getting tickets to fly out of Kenya to Europe depended on, “a condition from the “medical examination”” (34).

Another interesting attribute of water as noted by Makokha (2011), is that “it reflects its surrounding. Water does not only reflect the outer and inner world of the characters but also their states of mind” (110). At a time when Agnethe is going through psychological trauma while in Kenya, having lost her husband during the coup, we are informed that, “she and Maria stared at Simba, the lion, who stared back at them as if he knew he was being compared to a prince and the prince was increasingly found to be lacking” (30). We argue

here that water can also reflect the characters each to each, when looked as part of the mirror that is their eyes as they sit in silence, the Kuseremanes troubled existence in exile is therefore brought to the fore in the narrative. (29)

Additionally, there are other more overt connections between the aspects of water and metaphorical usage. Rosenholm (2017) opines that the imagery of flowing water is repeated in literature and culture and that “it connotes strength and power” (48). In Owuor’s narrative, this is seen in cases when the elements of water are directly linked to descriptions of humans, for instance, “...the crowds dribble” (22) or “the river of workers...” (32). The author here uses terms like dribble and river, in relation to water, to metaphorically let us into the existing conditions as the characters engage in their routine undertakings in the urban landscape. Rosenholm further argues that literary imageries show the human relationship with water in its different forms and that, “water can also be used to describe human characteristics, for example, to emphasize human strength” (49). Looked at from this perspective we argue that the entire Kenyan state, as a country of exile for the protagonist, is related to water when Kuseremane describes it as, “the watermark of the map of Kenya” (22). Therefore, for Kuseremane to overcome the challenges he experiences as a refugee, he has to do it with a lot of courage since everything appears to be against him.

On the other hand water is given human traits through personification. For example “feeling of anger” (29). In this case, we take it to show Owuor’s intention, which is to highlight the fact that humans and nature do not only influence each other but are directly connected to each other. This is premised on the fact that water is manifest in literature in forms of various metaphors, especially when a person’s inner life is described, for example, thinking “flows” and “still waters run deep”. In such a case therefore water in the form of rain can be

interpreted as a metaphor for sorrow when the protagonist, after another unsuccessful day chasing travel papers to leave Nairobi for Europe together with his family, walked home crest-fallen, as it rains heavily, down River Road.

The narrative informs us that the rain, which ironically should be a metaphor of hope and rejuvenation, “has seeped into his bones and becomes ice” (19). Through this irony we get to learn of the upside down nature of the narrative which enables us to see this tale of a royal family in exile, accused of crimes that no one can prove they committed. The protagonist shares with us this dehumanizing existence when he says that:

The next morning, I left the cottage before sunrise. I have learned of hidden places; covered spaces which the invisible inhabit. The Nairobi Arboretum. The monkeys claim my attention as do the frenzied moaning of emptied people calling out to frightened gods for succor. Now it starts to rain. I walk rapidly, and then start to jog, the mud splattering my already strained coat. (39)

Here water is seen as an element used as a metaphor when it comes to the process of creativity in Owuor’s narrative. When it rains, Kuseremane’s cruel existence in Nairobi is highlighted. Even when he attempts seclusion and solitude, in an attempt to “run” away from his troubled life, he is faced with further problems.

This study therefore argues that the juxtaposition of noise, silence and water as leading motifs in Owuor’s narrative has enabled us to see how for example, water, when used metaphorically can highlight characters’ feelings, inner life and human characteristics. Correct use of language also helps in the construction of identities. Silence on the other hand comes out as an avenue for the troubled refugees to hide away from victimization since it acts as a counterforce to the limits of individual subjectivity and agency and their effective use in Owuor’s text makes it easy for us to learn of the struggles this family goes through in an endeavor to know their rightful position and identity.

#### 4.5 Conversational Discourses and Identity in *Dust*

This sub-section looks at how the author is able to use complex literary relationships as a means of communication. This is premised on the ideas of intertextuality, that there is a cohesive force in literature that connects all the various traditions, past and present, because there is a complicated dependence of literary works on all the literary works on all the literature that has come before them. This is pegged to the fact that people share a wide variety of experiences in literature and that authors tend to use these shared experiences to communicate their ideas with their audience. Additionally, this study argues that as characters interact with each other through conversations and in turn the resultant creation of identities, having in mind that through writing an author always gets into a conversation and at the same time, a text evokes response depending on the stance it takes. The study therefore argues that some literary works of art, here the novel, are not only concerned with the making of great personalities in a nation but also has a role when it comes to the negotiation of cultural and political identities.

Smith (2017), writing about the composition of a novel says that:

The novel is a construction of national heroines, but one that simultaneously challenges the national myth. Cultural as well as political identities are constantly negotiated and rewarded in the cross-national contexts. (2)

Smith implies that through a novel, the author is not only able to create national figures but also negotiate cultural and political identities; both past and present. Owuor's *Dust* comes out to a larger part as relying on the past events in telling of the narrative and retelling of a nation's experiences by way of intertextuality. Owuor uses characters like Odidi, Nyipir, Akai, Bolton and Ajany to bring to the fore the past events. So as to analyze these occurrences, our study looks at how the representation of identity is enacted within

discourses that appear to communicate with each other and this is where intertextuality comes in. Here, the study relies on the argument of Edward Said and Michael Foucault who talk about the inter-textual relationships to demonstrate how by way of their subject matter the texts under study dialogue with each other on the issue of identity among ethnicities and races in a period of Kenya's history and how they can be read alongside each other and other non-literal texts.

The argument is that in writing an author always enters into a conversation and in turn a text also provokes response depending on the positions it takes. Said's (1993) concept of contrapuntal reading, understood alongside that of affiliation, illuminates issues. He argues for reading that recognizes the particularity and sovereignty of a work of art, that no reading, by being too general, should obscure a work's individuality; neither should reading fail to take into account the relationships between the text and others, "It should allow that what was, or appeared to be certain for a given work or author may have become a subject of a disputation" (66). For this reason Said goes on to argue that:

In reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and to what its author excluded. Each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it provoked. (79)

Our study concurs with Said's argument and finds it apt to discuss the most useful manner in which such juxtaposing can be carried out so that it yields the various discourses at play, including the exclusions that result from or occur in spite of the discourses. All the texts under study have the struggle for identity as the common denominator, be it at present in the text or as it relates to the present in the narrative.

In *Dust* the scandal involving Musali and his close friend Odidi, which leads to Odidi losing his lucrative engineering job is narrated to us. This scandal to some level acts as a

representative of other scandals since independence, a clear case of intertextuality employed by Owuor to illuminate the levels to which individuals can go to so as to enrich themselves, with the most memorable ones being Goldenberg and Anglo-Leasing. To contextualize the use of intertextuality between Owuor's narrative and the happenings in the Kenyan state we look at a report chaired by Hon. Mr. Justice Bosire (2005), of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry, on the Goldenberg Scandal which informs us that:

Mr. Pattni directly and through his companies were without doubt the initial recipients of all stolen Goldenberg monies. In his testimony before us he stated that these payments were made during the 1992 General Elections. He alleged that he was closely connected to former President Moi, his personal assistant Joshua Kulei, former Vice-President George and other KANU Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and Party officials spread all over the country. (78)

In the same report this study gets to learn that it was agreed between Pattni and the former President that Mr. Pattni would directly and through his companies finance KANU in the 1992 general elections. A conduit system was then set up whereby Mr. Kulei would write chits at State House. These would be addressed to Mr. Pattni who would then pay money to persons stated on the chits. Kenya as a country, and as portrayed to us in Owuor's narrative, has lost huge sums of money through crazy deals that were meant to benefit few well connected individuals. This is as well documented in the above excerpt, by the Judicial Commission of Inquiry, whose contents were only made public after the citizenry and those in opposition complaining to the relevant authorities in the country who appeared reluctant to do so.

Additionally, Said's idea of affiliation helps us analyze how the text is a voice in a network of dialogic relationship in the representation of the identity quest struggles in a contemporary Kenyan state. This does not however mean that there is only one voice that comes from each text. This study therefore argues that the texts are polyvocal which equips

them with the ability of bringing to the fore the voices therein in the process of intra-textual dialogue so that, for example, the various characters dialogue with themselves and with others in the text with the aim of understanding and locating themselves. We argue that the struggles and confusions expressed by characters, like Odidi, who talk from a particular oppressed and wondering about the government's privileged leaders who can only perceive them from the outside can be analyzed and understood in Owuor's narrative by looking at how effectively she employs intertextuality as a narrative technique. The context of this chapter therefore becomes important with the thinking that through the use of language in the process of identity articulation, which is a dialogic practice in which different characters, occasions and utterances negotiate over word meanings and therefore over identities.

Said (1993), in elaborating his idea of contrapuntal reading says that since no text is bound by its formal historical beginning and ending; it is important to relate literary texts to the eras that precede them and those that come after. (78) While bearing in mind the fact that each text has its uniqueness, we must also realize it is part of a discourse, for example that of imperialism in the case of Western canon. He, for instance adds that visions change so that even those issues that may have appeared plain to an author at a given time may become a subject of contestation. (79) Though Said's arguments were made in relation to the Western Canon, they are equally relevant to the postcolonial and contemporary text, be it by a Westerner or African, especially since, as a way of extending Said's argument, we can say that postcolonial text re-reads imperialism's foundational text.

Similarly Owuor's *Dust* can be said to re-read, revise and re-inscribe other texts in terms of images, of landscape for instance, ideology and character. Odidi can be read as a re-writing

of Meja in *Kill Me Quick* by Meja Mwangi that narrates to us the postcolonial disillusionment.

Odidi is killed while fighting for empowerment of the locals and against the government of the day's corrupt and oppressive nature. The narrator tells us that:

But then came the fear. It split words into smaller and smaller fragments until words became secrets, suffocating, and silent. A new word slithered into the landscape- *Nyakua*: plunder. Possess. Entitled brigandage. But it was cleansed to mean "hard work." In the nation, slow horror, as if all had woken up to a vision of violating, crowning ghouls crowding their beds. (25)

Mwangi on the other hand brings this study's to attention Meja. Mwangi portrays him stereotypically in the realistic details from ordinary life, and the novel chronicles the fate of an impotent silent majority. He has a vision of life as hell. Mwangi's fiction shows him to be a humanist because human concerns like class and gender inequality remain largely foregrounded in the novel.

The result is that Mwangi's novel perpetuates the notion that the postcolonial African state oppressed its own citizenry which led to disillusionment and identity quest struggles. Odidi just like Meja struggles to survive in a bureaucratic state full of oppression, nepotism, classism, and ethnicity. We are informed that:

To protect new post- independence citizen children, like most new Kenya parents denying soul betrayals, Nyipir built illusions of another Kenya, shouting out words of the national anthem when he could as if the volume alone would remove the rust eating into national hopes. (26)

What keeps him going is a stubborn will to succeed and the sense of duty to personal calling, to fight the evil in the modern Kenyan state. Opir, Odidi's former engineering university lecturer, tells Ajany how hardworking Odidi was: "Delirious. Never saw a child

thrive as he did, once given the tools, the time and space. A treasure” (145). This is the will that the father instilled in him when still a young boy.

Owuor’s presentation of the trials and tribulations that Odidi and his family go through shows the complexity of the Kenyan citizenry’s character type. Her intentions not being solely to refute earlier representations of these characters but instead to revise, re-live and re-tell some of the representations and hence deepening them and also opening them up all to have an understanding of what might have transpired in the past. The narrator informs us that:

The national economy of secrets. One night, a human screams, “Am I now the enemy, *afande?*” Nyipir remembered that despised things also cried...it was simpler to obey commands for the good of the nation. No questions asked. (124)

The idea this study gets from Owuor is that there are a myriad of persecutions happening to the ordinary Kenyans and that the state uses state machinery to oppress the ordinary man and corruption comes out as the order of the day.

Bauman (1986) opines that stories are highly agentive speech acts that occur in specific contexts and are constructed by authors and their audience. (45) The study takes this to imply that through storytelling, as is the case with Owuor’s narrative, authors represent and remember past events and offer moral vantage points on them. For this reason, we are made aware of how we should act on or interpret immediate and future events. Apart from the use of intertextuality, the author also employs other narrative strategies for example, the omniscient narrator in *Dust*. The omniscient narrator enables us to look at and get to know of the characters’ past events majorly to do with violence, hardships and personal struggles. Stanzel (1984), talks about the narrative voice and notes that “the most important use of the mediacy of narration is to reveal the biased nature of our experience of reality” (11). What

this suggests is that narrators are subjective and so is the experience that they relate with. Looked at from this perspective, this study may extend this argument by saying that the act of creation of a narrator constitutes a choice of manner of experiencing reality and the fact that this selection is also a movement towards reality, it is simultaneously an adoption of an attitude towards the experience of the narrator and all that the narrator represents. The reflective state such as the one we find in *Dust* positions the process of self-recovery in the sense that the narrator simultaneously recalls, narrates and does an analysis. It is through this process that we are then returned to current events in the lives of characters. In doing so, the audience are given a minimal look into the past events at a time and hence forced, by anticipation, to read the novel up to the end. Odidi's remembrance of the past about Wuoth Ogik is well captured by the narrator when we are told that:

Memory ticks. Odidi soars into the desiccated terrain of Wuoth Ogik, the home he abandoned...He turns down Jogoo Road and glances upward, childhood habit. (5)

Odidi through this flashback, while running along Jogoo Road, reveals to us his origins and background and how he finds himself in the current situation.

Commenting on the relevance of memory and remembrance in a story, Maltingly and Lawlor (2010) say that "Stories can reveal the world as not only vivid and dramatic but also morally complicated" (1). Our study takes this to mean that stories can illustrate and support key cultural categories, but they are equally likely to challenge them or at least blur their boundaries.

Through flashback and remembrance of past events Owuor's narrative opens our eyes to the struggles that the characters go through, including violence, daily atrocities and the quest to belong in a given location and place. Nyipir and Akai are some of the characters who

through various instances of flashbacks the narrator reveals to us the sad reality and bitterness about the past personal experiences. Nyipir vividly recalls how he witnessed and laid to rest Mau Mau rebel fighters. He also remembers how he was tortured upon the killing and murder of Tom Mboya. Nyipir also still visualizes how Aloys Kamau, the Christian priest, was hacked to death. This greatly troubles his mind up to date. The omniscient narrator, talking on how the past violent events affected Nyipir's character and personal peace says that Nyipir could visualize in his mind how the wound inflicted on Aloys Kamau haunted the entire nation-state. He claims that it has seeped, spread and become a subterranean stream of blood of Kenya, it has spread its tentacles and reached even the new-born and no person dares to speak about it (299). The hatred and anger that now characterizes most characters in this narrative is attributed to the past evils committed by the government sympathizers to those who were viewed as opponents, this has continued to bedevil the nation-state. This study argues that such events and occurrences influence the process of nation building and identity formation since individuals are affected by the past events in their lives.

Owuor aptly employs remembrance and memory through the omniscient narrator to better help us understand the present-day elements in the narrative. Based on this argument, it is therefore arguable that through the characters' encounter with atrocities and violence, they have been made to keep quiet and maintain silence or face the same fate that has befallen many others like Tom Mboya, J.M. Kariuki, Pio- Gama Pinto and Robert Ouko. Nussbaum (1986) opines that, "In a narrative, morality is contextualized" (33). This study takes this to be because narratives link beliefs, values and emotions to the concrete and unique situations in which we act. In the narrative the author highlights the moral issues that are meant to

guide individuals' choices and behaviors throughout their life in a community or society at large.

The fact that literature is an object of remembrance and since literary works typically circulate at later points in time, they provide an epoch-making bridge between generations. The research argues here that recollecting earlier experiences is an integral part of cultural remembrance. As a way of protecting and keeping the past engraved and closer to the citizenry, characters like Ajany turned to sculpting and drawing. In it she seems to find solace and closure. Later in life, Ajany sculpts the skull belonging to Bolton. This is based on the memories she has as a young girl. At some point, Akai's drawing done by Bolton resurfaces and when seen by Isaiah, he seeks to know what kind of relationship exists between Bolton and Akai. The answers to these are not provided as suggested by the narrator. The puzzle on how and why Akai became pregnant and subject of Bolton's drawing is not resolved hence affecting how the characters relate with each other.

However, Isaiah, through memory, being observant and keen to detail, is able to conclude that Bolton and Akai had some relationship. Memories come from the historical past but are also formed by social, political and religious undertakings in the lives of literary characters. This to a greater extent helps Isaiah to conclude that Bolton was familiar with Wuoth Ogik. Additionally, this study argues that a people's own memory helps make them who they are. For example, fondly recollecting our childhood events plays a vital role in every aspect of our lives. At the onset of Ajany's journey and interest in art, we see her drawing ghost caricatures, fire markers and a black leopard. At a closer scrutiny and observation of these art pieces, Ajany's parents are able to recognize their past and current enemies and the

difficult pasts they have been through. Memory therefore provides us with a sense of self and makes up our continual experience of life.

Talking about memory and the omniscient voice, which give a narrative a reflective state, Mwairumba (2015) states that, “Just as is the case with autobiographies this supposed recalling is subject to selectiveness, which in turn implies a desire for coherence” (159). Because of this, the selected events and experiences are those that fit the image of the self that the narrator wishes to project or those that can be analyzed in a manner that aligns them with this purpose. The narrator tells as that:

Ajany rubs her eyes. When she left Kenya, she had imagined an amputation from its riptide of murky things. But here they were again, expecting her reply. What was she now supposed to be? A memory. (69)

This study argues that in our own lives, we are often apart of our own individual quest or quests. For this reason, our own personal quests are what drive us to be better and achieve more. Therefore, the narrator always seems to be rarely out of the narrative, as is the case with Owuor’s texts, either spatially or temporally, but the narrations become quests and not closures.

Still on Ajany’s personal identity journey and growth, not aware, as a child, of her parent’s past, Ajany is able to portray and highlight through art, what she saw and experienced. Through the omniscient narrative voice, we are able to understand that there are events and occurrences in the family of the Ogadas and the nation at large that have been and are kept as secrets out of the public scrutiny. Through the omniscient narrator, it is evident that there are stories about individuals and the nation that are to be narrated and remembered while at the same time forgetting certain aspects of the individuals’ or nations pasts. Walibora (2012) notes that, “the dual act of remembering and forgetting sets the pattern for how the

postcolonial African nation narrates itself in the postcolonial moment” (62). Taking Kenya as an example, we argue that the national commemoration of political emancipation from colonial rule tends to silence narratives of oppression, corruption, opposition and political incarceration that emerge in the postcolonial period. The narrator describes to us the illegal activities that Nyipir engaged in. The narrator is also able to look into Ajany’s mind and in turn let us know how she saw the father returning home from journeys that were highly secretive and from which he came back with assorted weapons and livestock in form of gifts. The question we ask here is, are gifts given freely or do they involve some implicit expectations of reward? Osteen (2002) argues that, “all gifts arrive burdened with obligations, and hence a truly free gifts is impossible” (4). The kind of gifts that Nyipir receives can be termed as conditional gifts since he has to perform certain obligations as a way of paying back to his benefactors and that it can be revoked if the recipient does not fulfill the conditions attached to the gift. Nyipir is therefore bound to cover up for the crimes committed by his friends as a way of fulfilling his part of the bargain. The outcome is therefore as Walibora (2012) aptly observes “a remembering-and-forgetting battle” that has implications for how diverse individuals conceive of themselves collectively as a nation and how they forge or fail to forge a coherent collective memory. This study learns that Nyipir’s engagement in such business has led to Ajany questioning his character as the head of the Ogada family. In *Dust*, the events are narrated through an omniscient voice though this voice leaves some room for the characters, through stream of consciousness, to create the scenes in the telling of violence, torture, corruption and disillusionment. In literary criticism, stream of consciousness is a narrative mode, technique or method that according to J.A

Cuddon (1984) “attempts to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind of a narrator” (4).

It is through the employment of stream of consciousness, as a narrative strategy, that we get to learn of Nyipir’s taking part in outlawed acts like cattle rustling, poaching and trading in contraband goods. Ali comes across him and informs him that he will be charged with waging war against the people of Kenya, treason and engaging in activities that jeopardize the lives of the citizens (260). Nyipir introduces Ali into the trade with the agreement that Ali would be getting a quarter of the profits gotten. So as to start this business union, Nyipir gives Ali twenty thousand shillings as a sign of goodwill. Their deeds and actions bring to the fore how corruption is embedded in the northern part of the country. However, most of the talk about corruption is traced to Nairobi. Kempe (2014) commenting on how deep rooted corruption in postcolonial Kenya says that:

The culture of corruption has grown roots in the Kenyan society at large and become endemic. Institutions which are meant to fight the vice are being used instead for the personal enrichment of public officials. (287)

Going by the above we observe that corruption persists in Kenya primarily because there are people in power who benefit from it and the existing governance institutions lack both the will and capacity to stop them from doing so.

In Owuor’s narrative the security agents while carrying out investigations on the crime end up conspiring with the suspects and allow them to continue taking part in criminal activities.

The narrator tells us that:

*An alliance among scorpions*, thought Ali Dida Hada then. Watching for an unguarded moment when one might sting the other to death. But from then on, Ali Dida Hada warned Nyipir about impending military ambushes. He also misdirected government informers, restructured their messages when he dispatched these to

headquarters, and provided cover for unregistered consignments. These activities took precedence over his halfhearted search for Hugh Bolton. (261)

Here the study comes across an example of the author's use of stream of consciousness among the characters; it helps reveal how evident corruption is rampant within Kenya's police. The Kenya National Police Service is ranked as the most corrupt institution in the country, and bribery is reported to be the only way to access the police and expedite services. This study also notes that abuse of public office through corruption for personal gain appears to be the order of the day in Kenya as most of the senior public officers in the government and public service take part in it. *Kenya Corruption Report (2016)* observes that:

Kenya's competitiveness is held back by high corruption levels that penetrate every sector of the economy. A weak judicial system and frequent demands for bribes by public officials lead to increased business costs. (6)

Accordingly, it is evident that widespread tax evasion hinders Kenya's long-term economic growth, and fraud in public procurement is rampant, corruption, active and passive bribery, abuse of office and bribing are rampant in the nation. Owuor in her narrative depicts the nation as a place where the rulers and those in authority have failed to protect the resources of the nation from the devastations of neo-colonialism and globalization.

Chidi (1986) writing about the role of the African writer in literature rightly says that:

The writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it. (78)

In Owuor's narrative it is evident that she does not place the blame for the problems like corruption and misuse of public funds, which has led to disillusionment in the citizenry, on the former colonial master but appears to believe that the neo-colonial indigenous rulers are the once encouraging oppression and discrimination upon the citizenry.

Additionally, in the narrative, the omniscient narrator highlights a scandal that is synonymous with the scandals in the Kenyan republic today. At some point Ajany and Musali meet each other. It is through the dialogue between the two characters that we get to learn of how the culprits come up with schemes to fleece public and national coffers. They either deliver substandard goods and services or nothing at all. The suspects, anytime they are arrested, are released for lack of evidence or they buy their freedom in the courts of law. The result of all these is the recurrence of bitterness against the black African rulers who have betrayed their nations as reflected in the characterization and tone in the narrative. The narrator tells us that:

Why their shilling had plunged, and why there were now multibillionaires shopping for helicopters in their midst. He understood that as long as there was enough to move the day, beyond a grumble, people didn't care to know why their lives had become harder. They prayed. They organized themselves into cooperatives. They prayed. They wanted good things for their children. Worn out. He had tried. (196)

From this and many other instances in the narrative, the author endeavors to show the citizenry's cynicism towards the present landscape and socio-political structures of the nation.

Owuor's narrative looks at the nature, structure and processes of governance and how the same have impacted Kenya's development. Through the omniscient narrator, the author is able to create anticipations which allow the characters to speak for themselves. The study gets to learn that there was a time when short and long rains failed in Kenya and Odidi had maneuvered and been awarded a contract worth two hundred and seventy five million shillings for the repair of dams. He was however asked to take an oath of secrecy. After one week, Odidi received orders to render the turbines incapable of delivering power to the

nation. Talking about the post-colonial landscape in Kenya Shilaho (2008) aptly declares that:

Rather than the problem affecting the country's wellbeing, successive political leaders indulged in a dance of self-deception which exacerbated challenges such as the endemic but mundane corruption that faces the country. (84)

What is evident here is that the ruling elite have continually misappropriated public funds for their own personal gain. This study therefore argues that *Dust* highlights Kenya's current social-economic and political development from a historical perspective. As the story unravels we are informed that the company Odidi was working for would then import generators at an inflated cost and then rewarded with an exorbitant profit. Musali confesses that they knew what was happening and had informed Odidi to back down, as they needed to survive. The study is further informed that Musali together with his colleagues opted to keep their jobs while Odidi took it badly and even went crazy. Odidi's sense of patriotism could not allow him to keep quiet about the scandal. Orwell (1953) argues that patriotism is being, "devoted to a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally" (121). Odidi shows his willingness to sacrifice his own career for the sake of the nation as he is sympathetic and has an understanding of the needs of his society. Odidi is henceforth relieved of his duties and the company re-registered as T.L. Associates Engineering.

The author through the omniscient narrator further informs us that as the managing director held a party to celebrate the earning of his first personal one billion shillings we are told that, "National power shortages worsened. Companies closed down. Utility bills exploded. Citizens paid up" (163). Musali is surprised by Odidi's actions and wonders which Kenya Odidi grew up in. Malleri (2017) says that, "patriotism has always been a complex feeling

that manifests itself differently. The feelings of patriotism can affect others as some feel the need to protect their country, while others feel that protection is not a proactive measure” (34). This study takes this to mean that when feelings of patriotism mingle with one’s own sense of justice, troubles typically arise. The conflict that ensues can be attributed to Odidi’s idealism way of dealing with his desires versus the realism perspective that Musali takes on. The study sees the troubles in the conflict between Musali and Odidi when Odidi’s overwhelming need to be patriotic leads to terrible events; Odidi becomes entangled in his own sense of justice as he tries to cling to his ideas of a patriotic Kenyan citizen while the Kenya that Musali knows is that of selfish interests and lack of patriotism; a country that after one makes money becomes an activist. The narrator further informs us that Odidi was eventually murdered in the streets of Nairobi before achieving his patriotic desires.

Dialogue also comes out clear as a narrative style employed by the author in the story to reveal the aspect of dishonesty and corruption as a trait linked to the Kenyan ruling elite. Petrus when talking to Ali Dida thinks about an analyst, Ali, who was sent to the northern parts of Kenya on a basic salary of a police officer, to find out what occurred to a certain *mzungu*. Dialogue is a way of interaction which involves characters conversing with each other in a work of art. Indangasi (1988) defines dialogue as:

A strategy where characters talk in fiction and the author makes conversation resemble real communication in life...you will encounter features such as false starts, hesitations, held syllables, all manner of intonation and of course oddities such as hyperbole. (117)

The fact that dialogue involves conversation between characters in a work of art, it helps in the revelation of their character traits, their attitude towards each other and their internal tensions and conflicts and in the end how these issues contribute to the thematic concerns tackled in the text under study. The author employs the use of dialogue the narrative and

hence offering us an opportunity to look into and get a better understanding of those around us. In the narrative the study sees, years later, the policeman, Ali, having thirty six million three hundred and fifty-two thousand shillings in six bank accounts, a simple car dealership in Eastleigh filled with cars that never get sold, twelve simple butcheries across the country and three simple lorries that have been hired to transport cattle from the northern part of Kenya (251). Aaron Chacha, another policeman, fined traffic offenders without a receipt book along the Nakuru –Naivasha road. His colleagues got arrested but he escapes and was later transferred to the northern parts of Kenya. He appears to regret many things like the lack of regular fresh fruits. These occurrences and many others in the text have a psychological impact on Chacha and his dealings hence affecting his persona.

Kamonji (2019) commenting on how diverse Africa identity is notes that Africa has impressive political, economic, socio-ecological and cultural diversity. (15) At a time of cultural, political, national and socio-economic crisis, this study is not just about reclaiming identity, but also about regaining footing to create and determine the new space-places and worlds coming. While in Naivasha, Chacha had accumulated huge amounts of money, extended his farm and bought a Chinese lorry. However, in a twist of events, an outright case of impunity, it comes out to us as ironical that when he reports to Nairobi about an attack, he is promoted to be a District Security Officer instead of being reprimanded for his corrupt activities. All these are revealed to us by way of dialogue. Through this the author lets us know how deep-rooted corruption is in the country. To make matters worse, the vice happens in a state agency that is meant to control it.

In another instance of use of dialogue in narrating identities, the reader is taken to the region of Kapedo. In this scene, the author reveals through the dialogue the silent ethnic

stereotyping in the country. Through the notion of *us* versus *them*, that is brought about by stereotyping, this study gets to learn that in some parts of the nation, the uncircumcised are looked down upon and discriminated by being viewed as unable and unjustified to lead. Wimmer (2008) evaluates different forms of ethnicity and argues that boundary-making is a “process of *constituting* and *re-constituting* groups by defining the boundaries between them” (127). This study takes this to imply that identity should not be regarded as fixed but rather as continually evolving depending on the place an individual occupies. A colleague once jeers Nyipir while playing *Ajua*. “*Nyinyi! Mambo bado! Mtaona! Mnacheza na mzee*” (274). It is evident that popular stereotypes have been shaping and continue to shape personal, cultural and to a larger extent the national identities across Kenya. At some other time Nyipir had collected almost all of corporal Gakuo’s seed cows and asked to be given a woman but the corporal had spat at him “*Kihee*” to mean the uncircumcised. Nyipir on his part asks him, “How does a mutilated penis make a man more of a man?” It is after this exchange that Nyipir is discharged from work dishonorably. The eventual turn of events illuminates the fact that identity is a process of change that incorporates tensions between individuals and ethnic pluralism which contribute to post-independence identity ideas comprising a complex, multidimensional citizenship notion.

Yankelovich (1991) considers dialogue as having unique and highly valuable properties. He argues that, “dialogue can “strengthen(s) relationships and trust, forge(s) alliances, find(s) truths that bind us together, and bring(s) people into alignment on goals and strategies” (217). Yankelovich goes on to affirm that in dialogue we reach beyond the confines of self to an authentic encounter with each other. This study undertakes this as meaning that dialogue is a way of being and a way of building relationships since it is an everyday tool

accessible to all of us. What transpires between Nyipir and Gakuo shows us that in the Kenyan nation, depicted by Owuor in her narrative, the uncircumcised men should not take up higher positions of leadership. Nyipir's challenge to Gakuo appears to mean that the uncircumcised had disrespected authority. It is through this dialogue that the concepts of stereotyping and ethnic profiling, in Owuor's Kenyan state, are further highlighted.

Irony is yet another narrative strategy used by the author in highlighting how deep rooted corruption is across the nation. Ellestrom (2002) writes of irony as a situation where the outcome is incongruous with what was expected and that it is more "generally understood as a situation that includes contradictions or sharp contrasts" (51). In an ironical scenario, that furthers instances showing that the police collude with criminals, we come across the OCPD who used to hire Odidi's gun to criminals and get paid on a monthly basis. Ilorah (2014) writing about patronage and favoritism in post colonial African states opines that the leadership in many African countries, with their ethnic diversities, is characterized by discrimination and favoritism, and citizens are thus treated unequally in many respects (156). This study argues that the favoritism experienced in these states breeds resentment and creates conditions for an ultimate rejection of the government agencies by the frustrated masses. It also results to corruption which eventually weakens the ability of the state to function effectively. When Odidi dies, plain clothes police officers came and retrieved a pistol that the police had strapped on Odidi's chest. A post-mortem carried on Odidi's body by Dr. Mda reveals that he was shot dead. Ali confronts the doctor arguing that he is supposed to report that Odidi's death was not a police case (19). Ali wants the police to be exonerated and yet the police were responsible for the killing. By way of irony, we are made aware of the disparity of actions of the security agents and the results which are contrary to

the desired or expected effect as we experience how police cover up murder cases around the country.

The study is also treated to another twist, yet ironical scene, in the narrative when at the start of investigations about Hugh Bolton, money used to be sent to Ali from England. He however closes the investigations when the sending of the money was stopped. Isaiah requests him to re-open the case and Ali hopes that Isaiah would give him money so that he can re-open it. Lucariello (1994) when looking at irony adopts a view of human cognition as a schema-recognition system in which people comprehend events. He argues that “events unfold ironically when some combination of the following four features are detected in a situation; unexpectedness, human frailty, outcome and opposition” (142). Looked at from this perspective we argue that the police, being law enforcers, are not expected to take bribes, but because of their human weaknesses, are exposed to corruption, favoritism and other vices. Ilorah (2014) notes that “favoritism and bias is a product of personalized ties between the groups within the same country, both usually from the same societal setup” (160). Here, just like personalized ties, favoritism and social bias have features like corruption; the behavior of the police and those in power towards others varies depending on whether those others are from the in-group, with whom affinities are shared and who therefore should be treated fairly, or outsiders, who must be socially, economically and politically marginalized. Those who do not belong to the government of the day, like Bolton, end up being oppressed and taken advantage of by the police, just as Ali does in Owuor’s narrative. With effect, police officers, meant to uphold the law, are portrayed as being ready and willing to serve anyone, including criminals as long as they are bribed.

Plot manipulation through the use of, for example anagnosis and analepsis, in the narrative is another strategy used by the author in the narration of identity. Mlambo (2014), in a commentary about *Dust* says that:

The plot is enriched by the fragmentary manner of Owuor's writing which captures the hallucinatory sequences of a memory haunted by history's wounds, hopes, thirstiness and aspirations. (2)

The above is evidenced in the manner in which characters struggle to unravel the truth behind their pasts and current personal situations. Nyipir tries to answer questions concerning Hugh Bolton but does not tell us the truth about how Bolton died. Owuor's manner of narration allows her to introduce a new conflict in the narrative hence bringing another context to the overall plot. The author's orchestration of events in this manner guarantees that the secrets in the story are hidden and not revealed to Isaiah Bolton as doing so would have made Nyipir's hidden hand in the criminal happenings in the northern parts of Kenya be known and hence bring a strain to their current relationship. A complex chain of events in the narrative leads to the revelation of what transpired earlier on in the lives of the characters. To achieve this, the author employs anagnosis or discovery which according to Baldick (2008) "allows the protagonist a sudden recognition of his or her nature" (13). Through this narrative strategy, previously unforeseen character information and traits are revealed to us while at the same time highlighting the personal, cultural and national identity struggles and quests. In a particular scene we come across Nyipir and Isaiah and the study gets to learn about Bolton's character and belongings; his house, books, art and memories. Isaiah is informed by Nyipir that Bolton died of gun accident. The truth however is that it is Nyipir who killed Bolton in an attempt to save Akai who was about to be killed by Bolton. Another twist is brought to us through the narration of the inquiries about the relationship

between Akai and Bolton, which due to too much secrecy, go unanswered. Akai had a child with Bolton but Nyipir keeps it a secret as he is used to keeping secrets to himself. The reason he does this is because letting out the secrets hidden in Wuoth Ogik would make him implicated in the murder of Bolton. Through the author's deployment of anagnosis in this narrative, we are able to recognize the true identities and personality traits of characters like Bolton, Akai and Nyipir and how they relate with each other in their daily engagements.

Mlambo, above, furthers his commentary on Owuor's narrative style when notes that:

Owuor's style makes the novel incoherently lyrical as the narration moves backwards and forward, reflecting the murkiness and fragmentary nature of human thought processes. The intensity with which the novel is narrated gives it a deliberate density, impressionistic tone and ruggedness which set Owuor's style as one of the most rare to come out of Africa. (3)

This study argues that the author brings to us various settings and scenes and therefore capable of highlighting silent stories about the characters' identity and the society's at large. So as to achieve this, the author devices a narrative sequence that best brings out the protagonist's idiosyncrasies. Manfred (2005) talking about narratology argues that there are two basic orders when it comes to the sequence of events in a narrative; chronological order and anachrony. In a chronological order, the presentation of the story follows the natural sequence of events while in an anachrony, the order in which the events actually happen does not match the order in which they are presented in the narrative, and this yields a complex plot (37). Genette (1980) furthers this by noting that "anachrony occurs in two ways; flashback otherwise referred to as analepsis, which means a temporal distortion between the time pattern of the story and the time pattern fibula; and flash forward referred to as prolepsis which is an order in which the narrator anticipates events that will occur after the main story ends" (48). Analepsis also occurs when a character reminisces through a story

or the telling of the story though the story is situated in the present and the events presented in the story take the audience to the past.

Analepsis is evident in Owuor's narration of *Dust* when she reminds the reader of the past occurrences through dialogue between different characters and vivid description. In a dialogue between Petrus, a policeman, and Ajany after the death of Odidi we learn of how he, Odidi, lost his life and how tensed up Petrus was in revealing this to Ajany.

Petrus studies Ajany's bony face, the sunken, dark-trimmed eyes. He resumes his pacing, feeling sweat patches on his body, stopping to touch the wall tiles, then curtains, picking up another magazine. (184)

From the ensuing conversation it is evident that Petrus watched helplessly as Ajany's brother was murdered by the police for being "a key figure in a crime situation" 185. Ajany feels scorned by the way Petrus lightly narrates the events leading to the murder.

Warner (2010) talks of flashback and back-story as being used, "when the author feels it is important for the reader to know something that has happened prior to the actual events described in the narrative" (16). Owuor tends to have sudden and vivid reversion to the past events which surprise the readers, with previously unknown information which allows us to learn of personal identity traits of the protagonist. We are, for example, made aware of the early life of Akai and her roles while growing up.

Scrambling over life's fences, traveling long distances alone to look for and dwell briefly with members of her pastoralist family, Akai erupted without patience into her teenage years. (225)

Through the deployment of flashback the author further informs us of how Akai dutifully took on herding of cattle. She would also be found hunting and challenging young men to wrestling matches. Akai therefore comes out as being brave and determined to engage herself in roles that were previously culturally set aside for the boys and men in this male

dominated society. With effect the author is able to solve various mysteries while at the same time placing the protagonist in a different light and revealing the reason for previously inexplicable occurrences in the nation state. In the narrative we are informed that:

Long before the murder of prophets named Pio, Tom, Argwings, Ronald, Kungu, Josiah, Ouko and Mbae. The others, the “disappeared unknown.” National doors slammed over vaults of secrets. Soon the wise chose cowardice, a way of life: not hearing, not seeing, never asking, because sound, like dreams, could cause death. (23)

Owuor here uses few sentences to explain events that have been kept as secrets by the state. The author also highlight why keeping silent by the citizenry had become the order of the day out of the fear of the consequences while at the same time revealing to us those events that took place over a longer period. She appears to focus on some key events that happened in the postcolonial Kenyan nation-state like the killing of Tom Mboya and mentions others like that of Robert Ouko, Pio-Gama Pinto and J.M. Kariuki. “After Mboya, everything that could die in Kenya did, even schoolchildren standing in front of a hospital that the Leader of the Nation had come to open” (272). The killings and disappearances that were being experienced across the country brings to the fore the reality of how the ruling elite used state machinery to oppress and silence those who dared to question the evil being propagated in the postcolonial Kenya. Shalaho (2008) notes that:

The Kenyatta state (1963-78) muzzled nascent plural democracy a few years into independence. Subsequently, intermittent political assassinations characterized the single-party era. (86)

This study argues that as a result of all these happenings, a system of violence as an alternative to the free trade in ideas eventually mutated into a phase of cynicism, despair and disillusionment.

Furthermore, through the flashbacks, we are able to pay attention to Tom Mboya and how his death affected the ambitions, aspirations and dreams of Kenyans that existed towards and after the attainment of self-rule. Adetuyi (2019) opines that:

Prior to the independence, Africans were hopeful of a better tomorrow when their fellow African men took over governance. However, the reverse stares them in the face as they still suffer penury and pain after independence through social and economic strangulations. (27)

Looked at this way and linked to Owuor's narrative this study argues that African socio-political nature after independence is characterized by social ills, such as: corruption, victimization of political opponents, violence and other undue influences like greed. Based on this backdrop, we therefore argue that African prose fiction is tied to the experiences of the people. This study finds Owuor's narrative as portraying the postcolonial disillusionment across the Kenyan nation-state.

Further still, there were assassinations which have created divisions and more rifts among the citizenry. The reader is informed that:

A central province was emptied of a people who were renamed cockroaches and "beasts from the west". But nobody would acknowledge the exiles or citizens who did not make it out of the province before they were destroyed. (272)

The reader is also told of people of specific tribes taking oaths of profound silences and of secret shots in a slithering civil war. There were also secret deaths of citizens, others were prosecuted and judged at night. The narrator says that:

A train would stop at a lakeside town and offload men, women, and children. Displaced ghosts, now-in-between people. No words. Then one night a government man drove into town from Nairobi. He carried petri dishes of *vibrio cholerae*. (273)

It is further narrated to us that the man went ahead and washed these in a water-supplying dam. Days later, cholera danced violently in the landscape, dragging souls from that earth,

pressing desiccated bodies deep under the earth. This study observes that these socio-economic and political problems have resulted in anarchy across the country. Among those who knew and saw this happen, no one attempted to utter a single word for fear of the repercussions (274). This study argues that Owuor's narrative depicts Kenyan societies that are caught up at cultural cross-roads as both the elite and the masses are unable to provide expedient solutions the challenges afflicting them.

Nyipir watches all these happenings, keeps these secrets silent and hoped and prayed that all these would come to an end sometime soon. "Nyipir knew. He saw. He did not speak. He hoped it would end soon" (273). This research finds the author's strength as lying in the craftsmanship in her narrative; this gives the narrative the ability of portraying the predicaments the individuals go through in their various identity quests while at the same time trying to eke a decent living. The narrative therefore brings to the limelight our awareness of the socio-political and identity struggle issues of our times. This study therefore finds Owuor's manner of writing as being purposive. It is meant to capture and mirror the shattered nature of human life, how unfathomable human thoughts and perceptions are and also how disorienting human history is. Owuor's manner of narration also reveals to us the true identity of the protagonist or the other characters and how they relate with each other, past victims or happenings.

Premised on the above arguments, this study avers that the author's use of various narrative strategies in *Dust* draws our insight into a people's identity struggles, hopes and aspirations. Owuor's narrative for this reason then gives us an insight into what makes us humans and more specifically Kenyans. The author aptly employs the use of intertextuality in showing that narratives are linked to each other, anticipations by way of memory and stream of

consciousness in highlighting how prevalent corruption is in the Kenyan state. She has also extensively used dialogue in narrating and therefore revealing to us the varied identity struggles, characters' idiosyncratic traits and the relationships between different characters. Other strategies employed by the author are irony, plot manipulation through the use of anagnosis and analepsis; they have been used by the author in portraying how the ghosts and secrets of the country's past will always haunt the nation and how these ghosts yearn for a purposeful coming together of truth, justice and reconciliation.

#### **4.7 Narrating Identities in “The Knife Grinder’s Tale”**

This section deals with how the author has been able to fuse together various narrative strategies in her narrative and how they lead to the conveyance of the identity quest struggles in “The Knife Grinder’s Tale”.

Kingwa (2014), writing about Owuor’s life and style of writing opines that:

Flitting across space, countries and continents, the award- winning author is not afraid to face the hard reality and messiness of what it means to be human while at the same time allowing readers to wander into dreams. (17)

So as to achieve this, the author has infused varied themes and a unique style of writing which make her stand out in the literary realm. A story is a creative process that involves the application of various stylistic devices such as dialogue, description, paradox, rhetorical questions, imagery and a host of other aesthetic elements that make up the style. In “The Knife Grinder’s Tale”, Owuor has extensively used various stylistic devices to tell her short story which is the tale of Ogowang, a countryside knife grinder who loses his son to an angry city mob. Not knowing the place his son lost his life; Ogowang sets out on a journey to bridge the distance between love and death in the face of violence.

In this narrative, description, dialogue, imagery and rhetorical questions are prominently deployed by Owuor in the telling of her narrative. The stylistic aspects have been used to explore the issue of personal, cultural and national identity struggles among the characters in the narrative.

To start with, it is evident that dialogue is employed as a stylistic device by the author in the narrative. As the characters converse with each other, they advance the action in the narrative hence the relevance of dialogue in plot development in a literary work such as Owuor's "The Knife Grinder's Tale".

This study therefore analyzes the role dialogue has played in the revelation of how Owuor handles the issue of identity in her narrative. Dj is thrown into the turmoil of identity crisis when he talks to the father in a dialogue. Identity as a motif introduces this study to the major conflict in the short story. In the dialogue, Dj's father's disgust is palpable where he is seen complaining to his son about why he wants to leave home and move to Kibera, Nairobi instead of following the father's wishes of him, Dj, pursuing education and following in his footsteps. Dj informs the father, "Baba I got a job at Mama Lucy's fish shop" (1). The father goes on to inquire where this place is and why not follow his childhood dreams. Dj goes on to inform him that all that is in doubt.

The father asks, "What about school? What about engineering?" (1) Dj responds in the same dialogue, "I doubt baba!" (2)

In the above dialogue the author portrays the boy as not being keen in following the father's wishes and advice, hence a source of disappointment to the father. Psychoanalyst Erikson (1982) refers to this stage of adolescence and youthhood as "identity versus role confusion"

(90). According to Erikson, An adolescent main task here is developing a sense of self. Adolescents struggle with questions such as “who am I?” and “what do I want to do with my life?” Here Erikson is of the opinion that young people try on many different selves to see which ones fit; they explore various roles and ideas, set goals, and attempt to discover their “adult” selves (91). As portrayed by Owuor, Dj seems to have successfully maneuvered this stage and hence coming out as having a strong sense of his own identity which makes him remain true to his beliefs and values when faced by his main obstacle, the father, with his varying perspectives on what and who Dj should be.

Another clue to the protagonist’s identity struggle is when the father wants him to take over as the head of the house in case the father passes on. The father tells Dj that:

Take it. Carrier of my medicine bag. My war companion. You are my dirge singer. Dj you must follow your shadow. It will lead you. (3)

Dj however does not seem so keen to do this but instead insists on going to work in Nairobi. Dj eventually after some disagreement with the father runs away from home without the father’s permission and knowledge. The father later on learns of the son’s death in the slums of Kibera at the hands of a mob. Consequently, he mounts a relentless search for Dj which takes him to Nairobi’s Kibera slums. Through an emotional tone the neighbors try to convince him not to go but he insists on going. “Please Ogwang, don’t go!” (3) The neighbor’s pleas come out as being heartfelt because of the pleading tone and are uttered at an appropriate time period as is the situation Ogwang, Dj’s father, finds himself in. This to a greater extent highlights how welcoming and close-knit the people of the lake side village are. They care and worry about each other’s wellbeing. This study argues that the social setup and life in the rural areas is a direct contrast to that in Nairobi, the characters in the Kenyan capital come out as being capitalists and individualistic in nature. The father

however insists on going. “I need to see the place he last laid. I must go. I need to know!”

(4) To Ogwang, the neighbors are external forces standing in his way of motivations of finding his son. The result is tension and a conflict between Ogwang and his neighbors who are opposed to his desires and actions. The protagonist employs opposition and reversal in this dialogue when he insists on embarking on the journey to the capital, Nairobi. In so doing we get to learn of his unflinching persona, the neighbors thought he would listen to them but he is directed by his personal desires.

In yet another excerpt, the study notices the use of conflict, emotions and opposition flowing in the narrative. The way Dj chooses to live his personal life comes from his belief system guiding him to seek other *better* endeavors away from his rural village. This study sees these belief systems, a burning desire to achieve personal freedom and identity, leading to the conflict between Dj and his father who has a different view point of looking at life as a whole. In the narrative, Dj’s actions are driven by a kind of identity crisis, his personal beliefs and goals which make him to view his father’s personal and cultural beliefs as being inferior to his more *progressive* ones in the country’s capital city, Nairobi. The conflict between father and son is therefore employed to reveal to us the conflicts and identity struggles in the narrative while at the same time highlighting the protagonists’ motivations, values and weaknesses. In so doing the author is able to advance the plot of the narrative by providing tension and revealing the characters that cannot be understood otherwise.

Hopkins (2008) opines that “identities are constructed and contested. This means they may be re-worked to support more inclusive vision of who belongs and on what basis” (365). Hopkins further looks at the endless process of identity construction and reconstruction through the lens of intergroup dialogue and specifically how dialogue is experienced by less

powerful or the minority group. He argues that “the dynamics of dialogue are never power-free” (366). This study argues that through dialogue individuals are able to interact and relate with each other in their day-to-day experiences since identity construction does not occur in a vacuum. In Owuor’s narrative, the ideas and information are expressed with perfect timing as is seen at the time Ogwang gets to Nairobi and no one seems eager to listen to him and tell what could have happened to the son. This has the ability of highlighting to us the city dwellers’ unwelcoming and unfriendly character traits.

In another dialogue with the preacher in the slums of Kibera, Baba Dj is able to know the place his son used to work. Here, the reader comes across the two characters conversing, revealing the conflict, as one asks questions and the other gives answers. Baba Dj asks the preacher and he is readily directed, “*Kwa Mama Lucy ni wapi?*” (Where is Mama Lucy’s place?) The preacher informs him, “*Enda mbele kidogo ivi alafu ugeuke kulia. Utampata apo*” (6) (Move slightly ahead and then turn left. You will find her there). In this dialogue we are able to explore the preacher’s power of apprehension and insight. The preacher conveys a sense of foreboding to the father as he is the only person who willingly and readily assists him.

On arrival at Mama-Lucy’s fish shop, another dialogue ensues between her and Baba Dj. This dialogue helps in amplifying the enthusiasm in the protagonist while at the same time creating and enhancing the conflict, with effect moving the storyline forward. It is from this dialogue that we get to learn of where, how and when Dj was murdered. “I have come to find out where he last laid and why” (7). Mama Lucy responds:

It was night. There was a scream. People thought Dj was a *mwizi*. A thief. It was a mistake. (7)

Through the above encounter the father becomes greatly troubled and taken aback on hearing how his son was killed. He appears to blame himself for not taking charge of his son's life and actions. Only if he could have guided him onto the correct path. All these thoughts haunt him for the rest of his life. "Why? Why my son?" (8) Slowly Ogwang abandons his quest mission, since after the reality hitting him; he is left blaming himself and the slums' environment for the cause of Dj's death.

Through dialogue, the issue of identity struggle and crisis and its centrality in identity formation is brought to the fore. Tajfel and Turner (1979) talk about how individuals seek affirmation of their identity through the process of creating in-and-out groupings; them and us; self and other (84). These aspects are revealed to us as characters participate in the interactive process in the narrative. Sometimes back, just when Dj had left home, the father would call him and brag to the neighbors about his son being in Nairobi and the fact that he was the only one having a smart phone in the entire neighborhood. Through his bragging tone, anytime he talks, Baba Dj comes out as being boastful to the neighbors. He is asked by the concerned neighbor, "Why do you show off so often?" He responds by saying, "My only son has a job in Nairobi. The only mobile phone in the whole of Nyabondo. How else should I talk to him? He is shut down by the neighbor when he is told, "Stop bragging about your expensive mobile phone!"

A part from the use of dialogue, the author also uses description in foregrounding a family's identity struggle journey in "The Knife Grinder's Tale." Description involves the way an author manipulates words to create a setting, a character, and enthrall his or her readers and bring the story to life. Oduor (2012) concurs with the above assertion when he notes that:

When an author describes something or somebody, the author appeals to the senses of the reader. Such description should make the reader see, feel, taste, hear or even smell the thing or person. If the author achieves this then the style is described as vivid, graphic or cinematic description. (22)

From the above statements, it is evident that description appeals to the readers' senses hence their imagination and ability to visualize a work of art in the process of comprehending meaning. In Owuor's narrative, description has been extensively employed to explore various thematic concerns. Dj's search for identity is brought to us through vivid description. A key ingredient to vivid description is the ability to appeal to the sensory details; as humans we explore our world using our five senses and hence it is only natural for authors to use the senses to craft realistic and vivid details that the readers can easily manipulate. Faucher (2007) argues that describing an atmosphere and surrounding can add tension, a sense of urgency, apprehension, excitement, and so on (7). The study sees the author trying to convey a feeling of apprehension and anxiety through descriptive details. Her dominant impression of Baba Dj is one of confusion, fear and foreboding. In the narrative, Dj is seen listening to his father, observing his surrounding environment, thinking about his present and future and his agonizing search for his own identity.

Consequently, Dj is seen describing to the father the place he feels rightly fits him and he should be working at and live, "Kibera. Am a knife grinder Baba. It is a nice fish shop...fulu, mbuta, obambula, nyar are sold there" (2). This description points to a picture of a protagonist who is desperately trying to convince the father to allow him to follow his desires and attaining self-discovery. Dj appears to suggest that this would enable him gain more knowledge and understating of his abilities, character and feelings. He however realizes that it is not easy to do this hence he is forced to flee from home without the father's blessings.

As the setting shifts from the rural area to the city, Kibera slums and the city are brought to our imagination through vivid description. The noises in the streets, the movements and crisscrossing of buyers and sellers in the busy neighborhood and people go about their daily chores are all highlighted. Vasaly (1993) says that “description can be used to promote identification with or sympathy for the actors in a scene for the purpose of justifying some deed and action” (104). She further argues that description may then be used to amplify the narration in order to explain and emphasize important events or circumstances and hence arousing emotions and promoting identification in the narrative. This study argues that description, employed this way, heightens readers’ interest in and feeling about Dj and his father’s atrocities as it creates a sense of immediacy. In the narrative, the author describes the congested nature of the slums; it’s full of humanity, market women, preachers, street children and all manner of citizens (8). For this reason, Baba Dj finds it extremely difficult to get help from the city dwellers.

The above description is important in showing how setting in the narrative changes from rural to urban areas. Beth (1994) says that “description arouses pity and indignation since it alludes to the tenth *locus* designed to stir a character’s examination of everything that took place” (64). The implication of this is that in so doing, the reader seems to see the misfortunes, actions and happenings one by one and is moved to pity by the actual occurrences as if he or she were present, and not by words alone. Owuor’s description therefore comes out as also being a portrayal of many Kenyan peoples’ struggles of identity whenever one moves from his or her rural place to the city and urban-slum setting.

The United Nations Global Report on Human Settlement (2003) states that:

Almost 1 billion people or 32 per cent of the world's urban population, live in slums, the majority of them in the developing world. Moreover, the locus of global poverty is moving to the cities, a process now recognized as the "urbanization of poverty." (6)

This could be taken to show the struggle for existence the slum dwellers go through since according to the same report, "slums represent the worst of urban poverty, inequality and targeted violence and killings" (7).

Psychologists studying violence and alienation have been concerned with the factors that drive a person to attack other civilians. Kruglanski (2011) argues that, "there are three general categories of explanations to such attacks: (i) ideological reasons; (ii) personal cause; and (iii) social pressures" (10). Looking at Kruglanski's explanation of the ideological reasons towards violence, we observe that ideologies constitute belief systems in which some ideal is envisioned and compared with the current status. Kruglanski rightly asserts that, "when a discrepancy between the ideal and the actual status of affairs is perceived, the individual is motivated to reduce it" (11). Based on this, the research further argues that the group carrying out violence must identify a culprit; they must convince themselves through ideological arguments that engaging in violence, oppression and alienation against the *other* would reduce the discrepancy between the actual and ideal conditions. Finally, to carry out the violence and alienation, the ideology must provide a justification for attacking and alienating the *other*. In Owuor's narrative this study discerns such an ideology when it analyzes how the slum dwellers view and treat Dj for occupying *their* space. They feel that this state of affairs should be corrected as they treat Dj as an occupier and hence, in essence, the culprit and victim of the alienation and violence. For this reason the slum dwellers resort to violence as the means for remedying the situation, ultimately hoping to force the *other* to leave *their* spaces. Premised on all these this study

argues that many rural Kenyan's find it extremely difficult to cope in the urban-slum setting due to both culture shock and change in environment. This is seen through the ruthless murder of Dj and the struggles the father later goes through in his quest to find the truth and with it closure.

In addition to the use of dialogue and description, stream- of- consciousness also comes out as a narrative device employed by Owuor in her text in the narration of identity struggles the characters are faced with. Kerouac (1958), talks of stream - of -consciousness as being used to, "record characters' feelings and thoughts in an attempt to capture the external and internal forces that influence their psychology at a single moment" (21). Some parts of the narrative takes place in the mind of Baba Dj. He is a father who is facing harrowing mental trauma as a result of the senseless killing of his son. Furthermore, the study notes that by way of stream-of-consciousness, the author finds it easier in the depiction of the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind of the narrator. To a larger extent, the use of rhetorical questions is a reflection of internal conflicts bottled up in the persona's psyche.

In concurrence with Kerouac's views above, Bayat (2011) opines that, "One of the highly common modes of stream- of- consciousness is the interior monologue representing characters' uttered inner and emotional experiences in different levels of mind, at the pre-speech level" (120). This study argues that in direct monologues the authors are not present, and that characters' inner experiences are transferred to the addressees directly from their minds. Similarly, the *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (2019) suggests that "stream-of-consciousness may mirror all the half thoughts, impressions, and associations that impinge upon the character's consciousness" (563).

So as to easily express stream-of-consciousness in her narrative, Owuor does this by way of rhetorical questions. Here, the study is able to get the characters' thoughts and feelings about themselves and hence made aware of their intentions. In so doing, this technique therefore helps in introducing the characters' mental characteristics to the readers. Licciard's (2003) definition of rhetorical questions notes that:

It is a device used to persuade or subtly influence the audience. It's a question asked not for the answer, but for the effect. Oftentimes, a rhetorical question is used to emphasize a point or just to get the audience- thinking. Sometimes a rhetorical question is asked with the asker already knowing the answer. Other times; the questions are unanswerable. (7)

Going by the above definition, it is clear that some rhetorical questions are mental stimulants since a majority cannot be answered. This study argues that rhetorical questions, when well employed by the author, can be a very powerful persuasion or thought-provoking tool because they are often reflective. Many a times, they are a reflection of the character's thought motif that invites the readers to share in their consciousness, conflicts and the dilemmas that assault them.

In Owuor 's "The Knife Grinder's Tale," Baba Dj is seen posing several rhetorical questions that reflect his internal conflict as a result of the tragedy that befell him. His grim encounter with tragedy is ushered into the text by a set of rhetorical questions. "Why? Why my son? Why?" (8)

The above are the kind of rhetorical questions he cannot out- rightly answer. Baba Dj poses a lot of questions, they are asked with a specific purpose and intensions. He begs to understand why he is treated so cruelly for "not belonging" in the city, because as an *outsider*, he is still human. In an attempt to understand why the slum dwellers project their anger towards Dj and his father, the study takes a look at Sageman (2004) who is of the

opinion that this is due to personal and individual causes. He proposes a plethora of experiences that may include “social rejection and exclusion, personal loss and trauma, humiliation, injustice and poverty, along with many other personal experiences” (6). This, as is the case with the slum dwellers in Owour’s narrative, may predispose and motivate an individual to perceive an injustice and to justify the use of violence against *other* individuals as a means of retaliation.

This study argues that as humans, we are all equals, susceptible to suffering; trauma and eventual death hence no need for one to be treated differently on the basis of where he comes from, gender religious affiliations or even social status. The questions in the protagonists mind in Owuor’s narrative emanate from the death of his son, Dj, in the slums of Kibera. Dj runs away from home with his own vision and goals in life different from those of the father. We see Dj’s father wondering why his son thinks that the only way he can succeed in life is through running away from home and become a knife grinder. The reader is further taken through the thoughts in the father’s mind were he does not seem to comprehend how attractive, as Dj thinks, is the life of a knife grinder (2). The questions posed by Baba Dj are rhetorical since their answers are obvious, presumably to everyone, and also due to the dramatic effect they carry in making the audience think about the nature of the family’s suffering and injustice. Instead of outright answers to all these queries, the result is a resigned and disappointed father.

Dj on the other hand is faced with thoughts of how going to school is going to be of benefit to him as opposed to following his aspirations. From the thoughts in his mind he feels that the only way to be respected by his peers is going to Nairobi (5). According to Dj, his father’s ideas of him taking over the leadership of the house and homestead are outdated,

hence his declining to respect his wishes. Going by the conflict between father and son, it is apt to say that Dj's personal identity crisis and struggle led to his inevitable death at the hands of a gang.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has dealt with research objective three. The study has examined the various stylistic strategies Owuor has employed in the texts under study as she depicts to us the personal, cultural and national identity quests and struggles the characters go through.

The strength of Owuor's texts hinges on their powerful deployment of the chronology of events. In "Weight of Whispers," she has used a narrative strategy that moves from the days of the outbreak of war in Rwanda to the current protagonist's situation as he and his nuclear family contend with the reality of being refugees in a foreign country, Kenya. In order to achieve this Owuor employs imagery, flashback, back-story, the narrative voice and intertextuality and noise, silence and water as leading literary motifs. These greatly contribute to the narration of the theme of identity quest the characters in the contemporary Kenyan society, as presented by Owuor, go through.

The chronology of events in *Dust* appears to move back and forth; from the post-independence days to the present day Kenya. Characters' struggles with their personal, cultural and national identity quests are illuminated by Owuor through her use of imagery, sound devices, and the leading motifs of water, noise and silence. The chronology of events in "The Knife Grinder's Tale," just like the chronology in *Dust*, the events in the narrative move back and forth; from the rural setting to the urban. In so doing, the author is able to

narrate the theme of identity and depict the struggles a bereaved father and the young son go through.

It is also evident that narrative voice is important in prose and the novelistic discourse since it is one of the aspects of form that characterize this genre. In “Weight of Whispers,” the narrative voice comes out as the first person narrator, the protagonist, Kuseremane. “The Knife Grinder’s Tale” also employs this first person narrative voice. When it comes to *Dust*, the voice comes out as an omniscient one. This study observes that stories are better understood from the narrators’ perspective since stories unfold through the narrators’ eyes. Owuor’s texts’ use of narrative voice shows the importance of this device when it comes to telling of identity tales. This is because the narrative voice reflects the problems that bedevil the different protagonists in the texts under study. Closely linked to the above, this study concludes that stream of consciousness, by way of rhetorical questions, allows the study to explore the protagonists’ mental characteristics and personal identity struggles.

Affiliation, closely linked to intertextuality, is also observed as a key strategy employed by the author in narrating to us the identity quest struggles. This is premised on the argument that there is an intertwinement between narratives since a text is a voice in a network of dialogic relationships. Stories also reflect each other and in so doing echo the past and how we interpret the immediate and future events, as is the case with the texts under study.

It is also evidenced in this section that through description of events, the author is able to manipulate words to create an appropriate setting and characters in a given time and period. In so doing we are able to explore and visualize the struggles that the protagonists go through on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, the author has also employed flashback and remembrance to explore the personal, cultural and national identity struggles. Lastly, this

study argues that dialogue has also been extensively deployed in the narration of relationships between characters, their individual unique traits, attitudes towards others and their specific identity quests.

Based on the above and this chapter's findings, this study therefore concludes that imagery, affiliation, narrative voice, stream-of-consciousness, rhetorical questions, dialogue and description are important in capturing the thematic concerns in the narratives. The deployment of these artistic tools further attests to Owuor's creative genius in narrating the theme of identity, both at the personal, cultural and national levels in the contemporary Kenyan society as portrayed by the author's artistic vision draws this study to the conclusion that the effective use of various stylistic devices can be employed to explore the contemporary issues of identity that affect individual characters.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To study the structure of literature is to contribute to the creation of awareness around a particular or specific society and community and its local agents. This research project observes that creative imagination is one of the pathways by which a people or culture presents itself to the rest of the world.

Chapter one gives the introduction on identity as a literary motif. Chapters two and three have examined the conceptualization of identity and the link between space-places and identity respectively. Chapter four has explored the artistic strategies employed by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor in the narration and portrayal of the national, cultural and personal identity struggles in and around the Kenyan nation-state.

I have argued that Owuor's "Weight of Whispers", *Dust* and "The Knife Grinder's Tale" bring to the fore and highlight the theme of identity. Both the personal, cultural and national identity struggles are evident in the texts and these identities influence the selection and treatment of themes in the narratives.

I have also argued that although identity may at times be contested and variable, there are forms of identities with which the characters in the texts studied make sense of themselves and others. The meanings of such identities may change and vary from time to time but when it comes to personal, cultural and national levels, persons perceive of themselves as made up of some common binding ideas at specific times in their lives. This study also concludes that the perception and representation of the *other* is in most cases oppositional and therefore negative.

Additionally this study has found that there is a close link between identity, spaces and places in the Owuor's selected texts. Places and spaces in these texts influence the creation of identity in the characters especially in the contexts of post independent contemporary Kenyan nation-state.

It is evident that places and spaces are instrumental to the conceptualization of personal, cultural and national identities, for even though in practice identities may be delinked from places, discursively they remain the points of reference. It is because of this that persons, cultures and nations conceive of their identities in geographical and historical perspectives. Through the different forms of control over place and space, depicted in the three texts studied, the author is able to bring out how the control of meaning of place is important in the identity formation process. Place and space meanings are therefore crucial to identity formation and creation, especially personal, cultural and national identities. I have argued that places, spaces and identity are inextricably tethered to one another. They are co-produced as characters come to identify with where they live, model it, however minimally, and are in turn modeled by their surroundings; creating unique memories of those places and spaces that shaped their identities. I have therefore concluded that the links between place, spaces and identity influence social formations, cultural practices and national ethos therein. Owuor, in her narratives, has been able to highlight and enlighten us on where and why individuals feel at home, as well as why ethnicity, societal stratifications and alienation can be traumatic experiences to individuals and groups. What comes out clearly is that Owuor's characters are more conscious of their position in the places and societies they find themselves in.

Furthermore, this study concludes that the stylistic devices employed by a writer are significant in the conceptualization of identity. Intertextuality, flashbacks and remembrance, the narrative voice and stream of consciousness, description, use of dialogue and rhetorical questions, when well deployed, can be used to effectively narrate the interweaving of places, spaces and different identities and their formation. This relationship allowed us the ability to access the knowledge about the dynamics of understanding the *self*, varied cultures and how characters understand the *other*. Identity therefore is an attempt to make sense of oneself in relation to one's world and because of this, meanings of the basic terms that describe identity are key as a starting point in the process of self-awareness.

This study concludes that how the texts studied handle the discourses that interact in them is key to their effective representation of identities in the postcolonial Kenyan society. By way of analepsis and plot manipulation, the author is able to bring to the fore past occurrences and spaces the characters occupy. Dialogue on the other hand enables the study in the learning of the personal identities and even cultural differences, since through conversations; individuals and communities can build and forge relationships as they interact with each other. It is also evident that anticipations, memory and use of stream of consciousness have been employed by the author to allow us get an insight into the minds of the characters. This is because stories are better understood from the narrator's perspective, bearing in mind that stories always unfold through the eyes of the narrator.

Additionally, this study concludes that the postcolonial text is an interaction of discourses. Postcolonial and post-structural theoretical ideas are therefore employed with a view of achieving an analysis of the identity quests and struggles the characters experience. Owuor's selected texts are therefore looked at as interlocutors in the ongoing debates about the

meaning of individual, cultural and national identities. The three texts have been studied and understood in the general contexts of the various thematic issues and conflicts that have and continue to preoccupy East Africa. Through these discourses and the author's portrayal of events, an effective representation of personal, cultural and national identities in the postcolonial Kenyan state was realized. The author's effective use of intertextuality enabled us a chance of looking at how stories are linked to each other and hence enabling the study to interpret immediate and future events. Having examined how Owuor deploys a number of artistic strategies in selected texts, it is my conclusion that the texts represent a discussion on the identity quests and struggles, their formation and how individuals and their cultures view and understand each other.

An analysis of the narrative strategies in the three selected texts has revealed the artistic idiosyncrasies and vision of Owuor as an author. For example, the employment of similar narrative strategies such as imagery and description is a portrayal of the author's artistic vision. Owuor in her narratives employs description, dialogue, rhetorical questions, imagery, analepsis, flashback, intertextuality, plot manipulation, anticipations, memory and stream of consciousness to narrate the theme of identity quest and struggles among the characters.

As a result of the above findings, this study makes three key recommendations. To start with, it is felt that there is need for further investigation of the contemporary East African literature and how fiction recalls history to narrate stories of the marginalized societies in the Kenyan nation- state.

Secondly, the study has not exhaustively tackled all the contemporary issues affecting identity since my main focus was on the conceptualization of identity, how space-places affect identity and the narration of identity struggles. In view of this, the study therefore

recommends further research in the field of identity to come up with more issues that affect identity.

The last recommendation is pegged on the fact that this study dealt with only three texts by an individual writer. It is felt that there is need to study how other East African contemporary writers portray and represent the identity issue in their literary works.

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