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(UN)EVEN CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS: (RE)THEORISING SILENCES IN THE KENYAN POLITICAL LIFE WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the Kenyan political self-writing (re)enacts silences while claiming to memorise the country's past. The paper interrogates the self-writings as cultural productions ridden with interested (re) theorisings. The question to be answered in this article regards whether the Kenyan political self-writings, in the quest for nationhood in Kenya, silence particular strands of histories and other equally essential themes in the Kenyan political memory. To answer this question, the discussion was located within the post-colonial theory, with particular emphasis on the strand that articulates resistance as a form of strategic calculation and interrogates the interest that inhabits the production of specific knowledges. The article examined the political autobiography chosen here as located from a place of privilege, often silencing particular themes while amplifying others. The biographical method was used to analyse *Not Yet Uhuru* by Jaramogi Odinga and *The Flame of Freedom* by Raila Odinga. Revealing the "dangers of a single story" (Adichie) in autobiographical works, the article argues that Kenyan political self-writing is imbued with rhetorical performances determined by the need to tell a compelling story. Hiding behind the romantic concept of speaking truth to power and using grandeur themes like nationhood and subalternity as survival tropes, the leaders examined here deliberately and conveniently elbow out other themes that do not serve their interests. *Uhuru* and *Freedom* are, therefore, public performances of deference and loyalty so crucial in power relations, especially in maintaining dynastic life and constructing a flattering self-image of their writers. In the final analysis, *Uhuru* and *Freedom* become cultural constructions, remembering the past with a slant.

KEY WORDS: Autobiography, nationhood, ethnicity and identity construction

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Introduction: Theorising Key Concepts

As could be deciphered from the recent changing dynamics of political leadership in Kenya, the politics of the State must be understood in light of the shifting social formations along ethnic lines. Ethnicity in Kenya is an essential phenomenon around which individuals and communities aggregate for common action. While ethnicity usually refers to a group's shared cultural identity and derives from a common language, nationality, religion or ancestry, its meaning continues to be contested within the social sciences (Thomas-Slayter 303).

Although one of Africa's greatest blessings is a rich and diverse culture based on ethnic variations, in the case of Kenya, this blessing has often birthed ethnic suspicion, ethnic preference, and ethnic superiority. Tribal loyalties have often led politicians and senior government functionaries in Kenya to prioritise what they call 'our people.' This suspicion has been sustained by how we remember and memorise our past. Kenyan political leaders have used their autobiographies as cultural producers to reproduce and prop up this culture of suspicion within the tropes of ethnicity, betrayal and nationhood.

As a modern political occurrence, ethnicity has been productively documented over the past few decades, particularly in the developing world. In Africa, colonial borders divided ethnic groups across states in some cases and included large numbers of ethnic groups within their borders in most cases. Felicia Yieke hints that attempts in the post-colonial period at fashioning supra-ethnic national identities have principally failed, with many African states caught up in ethnic violence and conflict at various points in time (5). Fanon blames the elite bourgeoisie for the incapability of helping their nations fashion national identities because of its yearning to replace the colonial bourgeoisie (148).

One of the most popular perspectives in ethnicity studies is the elite perspective which postulates that ethnicity is an ideology used by the elites to advance their constitutive interests. As Osaghae has argued, although ethnicity is an imitation of an ethnic grouping, it only occurs in the circumstances comprising more than one ethnic group or identity with a clear "us" and "them" differentiation (44). It may be defined as conscious behaviour based on ethnic identity or loyalty in a competitive situation comprising more than one such identity, which aims to further the interests of the individual and/or his group. In political terms, it denotes the ethnic-identity-based behaviour which pursues, in a competitive locale, the seizure of political power (at a micro-level) and state power (at a macro-level). Thus defined, it is clear that even though ethnicity is an offshoot of ethnic pluralism, ethnic pluralism alone does not lead to ethnicity. This article notes that ethnic differences are mobilised and manipulated to pursue personal or group interests. Locating Jaramogi' and Raila's autobiographies within discourses that examine ethnicity in Kenya, this article adds to Yieke' and Fanon's formulations by arguing that the Kenyan elite cannot midwife the formation of national identities because they politically benefit when people are not united. This is within the context of the commodification of ethnicities.

The theme of ethnicity is central to this article because of its use in Kenyan political discourse, especially in the two autobiographies interrogated here. It is within the critique of the presence of negative ethinicity in Kenya in both *Not Yet Uhuru* (here and after *Uhuru*) and *Flame of Freedom* (here and after referred to as *Freedom*) that subalternity and the quest for nationhood in Kenya will be interrogated as survival tropes. It is also crucial to note that Kenya has witnessed governments formed as coalitions of several ethnic groups since 2002. These governments have always faced problems from other alliances formed by numerically small ethnic groups, none successful. Therefore, it is essential to note that one rallying point of these coalitions is ethnicity.

Whereas the coalitions formed by major ethnic groups, which always form the government, use their numerical strength, popularly known as tyranny of numbers (Ngunyi 12) or dynastic advantage, the other coalitions use victimhood or marginalisation as a rallying point. This article argues that using this knowledge, the two autobiographers discussed here (mis)use this victimhood concept to voice the marginalised Kenyan.

It will be recalled that through colonialism, Kenya was anesthetised, and through myth construction, the Kenyan tribes were grouped. But, as Ronald Barthes famously argued, the seemingly apolitical nature of myth, its natural and timeless quality, only functions to naturalise history; in this case, the problematic realities of British colonialism and bundling communities who "shared historical memories" (Barthes 2; Cabañas et al. 2). This is because the myth of a tribe in Kenya was initially based on cultural quicksand, and this article argues that the term 'ethnicity' has conveniently been used to achieve wrong political ends. This has slanted to how political self-writings memorise Kenya's past.

The myth of ethnicity in Kenya, its commodification, and its hidden political claims have become a discourse that influences the writing of many autobiographies in Kenya. *Not Yet Uhuru* and *The Flame of Freedom* are no exceptions. In these autobiographies, ethnic knowledge is continuously refreshed, reinvented and used at particular stages of the nation's growth for political reasons. As these leaders act out the myth of ethnicity, the myth is reinforced and becomes, in a way, a lived reality. Conversely, Deroo argues that Barthes is critical enough to see through part of the myth and denaturalise its seemingly natural qualities (135). For Barthes, "myth is depoliticised speech." (1). As such, instead of simply imbibing what a politician says, people must address the deeper political issues that define the signification of such myths.

One point that comes up, and which this article, while interrogating two political autobiographies, examines, is the concept of memory and how it influences ethnicity and nationhood. Since memory addresses different forms of referencing the past that groups use to identify their distinctiveness, one cannot discuss the nation (and in Kenya, the concept of the nation is first understood from the framework of ethnic nations) without discussing memory. Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" rightly capture how collective memory practices help create and sustain chosen or constructed identities as reference points for a group's sense of place, history, and belonging (1). Without explicitly calling it memory, Weedon and Jordan describe the nation-building process as an attempt to create productive, obedient and responsible citizens by nationalising education, creating official histories of the State, and celebrating national symbols that define what is natural, rational, and normal (143). These traditions, reinforced through the group's moral, cosmological, and historical systems, form people's 'collective consciousness'. As a result, by becoming institutionalised and normalised in public rhetoric, ideas of identity, nation, and self influence people's perceptions and actions (Wang 3139). Politically, collective memory becomes essential to understanding foreign policy behaviour by shaping national interests and intentions.

In general, ideational factors such as memory and identity have often been ignored in ethnicity studies (Cederman 2). But with recent theoretical developments, particularly in the truth and reconciliation literature, memory is slowly becoming integrated into the discipline. As Jeffrey Olick notes, the constructivist position emphasises how categories of thought and action that are typically understood as products of nature are constructed by actors who choose an identity and create differences from others (3). In that case, identity is never constant, and interaction between groups is based on the intersubjective construction of 'self' and 'other' (Dian 3). Once both groups agree to conform to certain expectations or follow specific conditional rules of their

chosen identities, the sense of self and other is reinforced; however, since this identification process is an ongoing project, as groups continually seek out new memories to match their current circumstances, potential insecurity can arise not just from physical threats but from the prospective "developments that call into question a state or group's identity" (Innes and Steele 16). The idea that insecurity can result from a lack of identity or that which enables individuals to maintain a consistent biographical narrative is referred to by scholars as 'ontological security'. This article leans heavily on this formulation of ethnic identity and its relationship to national identity and how the two autobiographers, by playing the tribal card through the claim of common marginalisation, may be political opportunists.

Ethnicity is produced by the context in which identity and subjectivity are constituted. This approach to ethnicity comes from re-conceptualising identity as a process of identification. Identity is not stable but changes depending on historical context. The dynamic moment of the identification process recognises the 'self' through a relationship with the 'other.' As Stuart Hall notes, people have most of their identities not because of something profound inside them but because of how others have recognised them (344).

Being an ideological construct, nationalism encompasses economic, social, and cultural dimensions of anticolonial resistance. After the departure of the colonial power, the post-colonial ruling elite significantly adopted nationalism as 'nation-building' or, to echo Gramsci, a hegemonic project. As this article aims to show, this project interrogates the power struggle among the Kenyan elite and the supposedly subsequent isolation of the champions of the subalterns by the ruling bourgeois elite through the construction and use of historically determined, socially constructed, and convenient community myths. The article digs into the construction of these convenient community myths, primarily mythological creation stories that encourage people to imagine the

ethnic neighbour as an other, to interrogate etymology and use the discourse of ethnicity to advance political interests. Jaramogi Odinga' (here and after referred to as Jaramogi) and Raila Odinga's (Raila) autobiographies become interested cultural producers reifying grand political narratives. The phrase is borrowed from the title of Khamisi's autobiography, *The Politics of Betrayal: Diary of a Kenyan Legislator*, which explores the leadership betrayals that he believes are responsible for the political, social, and economic rot pervasive in Kenya.

The politics of betrayal in Kenya is one of the major themes that have defined the country since independence. According to David Branch and Charles Hornsby, political betrayal in Kenya began before the Union Jack was dropped and the Kenyan flag was upraised at midnight on 12 December 1963. Specifically, Hornsby observes that the narratives of betrayal are discernible when Kenya's alternative history is interrogated. This article will argue that ethnicity provided the historical context that encouraged the rise of what can be considered subaltern political autobiographical writings in Kenya. The argument here advanced is that the discourse that Kenyan nationhood slid into ethnicity after independence found in the avalanche of political self-writings in Kenya should be consumed cautiously. This is because political self-writings in Kenya are cultural productions that produce skewed knowledges by constructing flattering self-images of their writers that help them maintain dynastic rule.

Not Yet Uhuru: Birthing Ethnicity in Kenya

> I dedicate this book, the story of my life and political struggle, to the youth of Kenya, my country. As the spirit of the youth carried us through our hardest days in the fight for independence, so on the youth depends the shape of the new Kenya…
>
> Jaramogi Odinga (xvi)

Jaramogi Oginga Ondiga's autobiography, *Uhuru*, is written within these national fragmentations. It begins with exploring his family lineage, concluding that he spent his formative years at the feet of the village elders. Discipline is instilled in the young Jaramogi by his household and the entire clan. The concept of hard work thrives within the framework of discipline. Jaramogi points out that Whiteman's (mis)treatment of Africans necessitated the fight for independence and his rise to politics. Accordingly, in the first chapter of *Uhuru*, Odinga points out that the Whiteman ruled the locals by instilling fear.

For Jaramogi, the country's salvation lay in the hands of the Kenyan youth, whom he envisioned as free from the burdens of ethnicity. For him, "the spirit of the youth carried [them] through [their] hardest days in the fight for independence, so on the youth depends the shape of the new Kenya" (xvi). Jaramogi's social vision is free from the burden of nationalism and the subsequent slide to negative ethnicity.

Jaramogi's autobiography contests the concept of nationalism, showing the etymology of ethnicity in Kenya, especially in the last chapter, "Obstacles to Uhuru." According to him, "people around Kenyatta sowed the seed of ethnicity" (264). Jaramogi's claim reads into Frantz Fanon's conceptualisation that nationalism provided false hope for post-colonial governance as it was captured by the nationalist elite who advanced neocolonialist ideals (154-55). To identify the promoters of nationalism in the colonial situation, Fanon simultaneously used terms like "national middle class" and "national bourgeoisie," which, in turn, he identified as "the underdeveloped middle class" (149). This class, Fanon argued, never got involved in the production processes (economic sector); instead, they played the role of "intermediaries." (149). Jaramogi's "Obstacles to Uhuru" are brought forth by these 'intermediaries' who were "the people around Kenyatta … people who appeared on a party platform one day to take part in open discussion, but met the next

week in a caucus of their personal or tribal followers to plan counter decisions …." (270). With the underdeveloped middle class looking inward and drawing their power from their tribal followers, the seeds of ethnicity germinated and flourished in Kenya.

In *Uhuru*, Jaramogi has a robust social vision that places the onus of de-ethnicisation of Kenya on the youth, as noted from his introduction. For him, the country's future lay on the youth he describes as being free from the burden of nationalism and ethnicity. However, this article notes that the founding fathers, Jomo Kenyatta and Jaramogi Odinga, laid the foundation stone for negative ethnicity in Kenya. According to Atieno Odhiambo, after independence, Jomo Kenyatta supported the petite bourgeoisie, the propertied and the rich (17). Property had to be protected using political power, and power had to be consolidated. So to Kenyatta, it was best protected within the Gikuyu nation and with the elimination of the Luo and other ethnic rivals. Atieno Odhiambo asserts that "the social struggle for the future was turned around and rebaptised Kikuyu-Luo rivalry as ethnicity won over ideology" (5). Ethnicity became the bedrock on which all the political and economic imaginations within the Kenyan nation were construed. Therefore, the first President and vice president's fall-out was predominantly ethnic. Ideology and politics only played a subsidiary role.

Jaramogi raises questions regarding the kind of betrayal the newly independent State went through. In his autobiography, he observes that after self-government, the scramble for land in the highlands became acute, as the landless squatted, hoping their occupation would be regularised after independence (Odinga 259-60). As a result, economic position declined, farming became increasingly dangerous for white settlers, and farms fell idle during their purchase, differentiation and distribution. In addition, the arrival of the first wealthy Africans (generally ex-loyalists) from the reserves on the newly demarcated large farms also caused resentment amongst the landless

(Odinga 261-5). Jaramogi's autobiography portrays this resentment and sides with the landless, presenting himself as a radical whose interests were to defend the subalterns against the betrayal of the Kenyan neocolonial 'comprador' elite.

The independence party, Kenya African National Union's (KANU) leadership, also contained many more radical individuals who wished to nationalise foreign-owned corporations, seize white settler farms without compensation and follow a more pro-Eastern foreign policy. Although many Kenyans had similar sympathies, they were determined to see Kenya set its direction or look for equity in distributing the fruits of *Uhuru*. Jaramogi Odinga and Bildad Kaggia represented the' radicals', while Jomo Kenyatta and Tom Mboya led the 'moderate' or 'conservative' camp. The Odinga–Kenyatta clash was inevitable, resulting from a deep division that was papered over to secure power transfer.

Poppy Cullen argues that the moniker of 'radical' was not just the British language being applied to Kenyans but a word that particular Kenyans chose to appropriate. In part, this was a way to signal opposition, as being 'radical' meant being opposed, in differing ways, to Kenyatta's mainstream Kenyan politics. Ochieng describes 'radicals' as those "who stood for fundamental changes in the social, economic and political fields." (95) For example, Jaramogi supported redistributing land without compensation, thus rejecting one of the pillars of continuity that encouraged Anglo-Kenyan cooperation. According to Poppy Cullen, "Odinga, for his part, remains something of an enigma. He is probably not a Communist, but an ambitious opportunist, who is glad to dispense the ample funds provided by the Communists and relishes the prospect of buying his way to power" (96). So British diplomats attempted to nuance their understandings. Still, this was perhaps even more damning in some ways: not even a sincere Communist, but an 'opportunist', although the suspicion of communism remained.

In *Uhuru*, Jaramogi comes out from the pages of his autobiography as an unrepentant patriot at heart, a pan-Africanist, staunchly anti-white domination in Kenya's pre-independence politics, and a leader whom we would regret not having. Reading through the text, it becomes clear that Jaramogi seems to be fighting what he considers misrepresentations by scholars. In Uhuru, the author re-writes Kenyan history; the history he portrays is seen as having been meticulously contorted to suit British Imperial propaganda, a history that is guilty of vilifying saints and exalting villains, a history whose dying embers must be rekindled (Odinga 18). In this autobiography, while Jomo Kenyatta monopolises political power to use it for the economic gain of his ethnic group, especially those from his social class, Jaramogi portrays himself as a different person, a nationalist leader who valued people experiencing poverty and landlessness.

However, by writing his autobiography, Jaramogi shields himself from his contribution to the development of ethnicity in Kenya. A critical reader is left to ponder whether Kenya is a country composed of two ethnic groups, the Kikuyu and the Luo. Additionally, nationalism in Kenya was not an enterprise of two leaders, Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga, as the autobiography suggests. Instead, the story of the Kenyan nation has been scripted by many leaders who cut across all of Kenya's ethnic groups. Thus, *Uhuru* is Jaramogi's vendetta against one leader who outwitted him in their collaborative enterprise. Ochieng contends that most people who write their autobiographies tend to be those who fear that they have failed or have not performed up to public expectations and, therefore, must explain their records (95). This point is supported by the fact that the autobiographies interrogated in this paper, oftentimes, lean towards blaming their rivals.

Uhuru recounts that although many of his British-sponsored early scholars (through several church missions) succumbed to the allure of the staggering material wealth, prestige, and promises of overnight riches, Jaramogi remained steadfast in his resolve. The autobiography highlights his

contribution to the welfare of Kenyan scholars by sourcing scholarship opportunities and selling the plight of Kenyans. In *Uhuru*, when James Gichuru (in alliance with Mboya, Moi, and Ngala, through KANU) joined forces with the self-proclaimed settler minority led by Blundell and his friends, it was Jaramogi who remained unmoved about the Kenya African National Union, especially with respect to KANU's demands of 'Kenyatta na Uhuru.' According to Mutie in *Contesting the Subaltern Narrative*, it was Jaramogi who, through endless petitions, conferences in London, trips overseas, and public speeches, engineered the release of the Kapenguria Six (102). These assertions make Jaramogi stand out. They also aim to counter the misrepresentations of the Kenyan past by the mainstream state-sanctioned narrative, which denounces the radicals in KANU, vilifying them as villains of independence. In this regard, Jaramogi's autobiography, as Georges Gusdorf and Mark Freeman have argued, serve the purpose of self-clarification and self-justification (28; 15).

It is noteworthy that in *Uhuru*, Jaramogi amplifies what he has done for the Kenyan nation, his roles, and his sacrifices for the State. In his autobiography, he sacrifices a lot for the sake of Kenyans, and Kenya's unity. In it, Jaramogi ignores countless attempts made by Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) technocrats (on behalf of their Imperial Masters) to wage a rift between him and Kenyatta once the latter assumed office, first as Prime Minister in 1963, then later as President in 1964, and when he could not take it anymore, Jaramogi left KANU without causing a scene (Ogot 198; Odinga 300). In his resignation letter he simply said:

> I have a conscience and this in fact does prick me when I earn public money but with no job to do. I consider this a waste of public money and I am worried lest the future generation questions my sincerity, when they would learn that I allowed myself to hold a sinecure post in the midst of poverty and misery in our country. With this realisation, I cannot continue to hold this position any longer and I hereby tender my resignation. (300)

Although these self-representations are made to mythologise the author, Jaramogi, they can be contested within larger national narratives that portrayed Jaramogi as a self-seeking politician. As Stephen Mutie in *Self-mythologization in East African Political Writings* argues, the rift between Jaramogi and Kenyatta had started a few years into independence (21). Therefore, this article notes that it is illustrative to interrogate the ideological frameworks within which they operated to understand these two leaders' differences. According to Jaramogi, the rift between him and Kenyatta was caused by the Presidency's operatives. This group of politicians opposed him because he had advocated for Kenyatta's release from detention (292). Ideologically speaking, however, Jaramogi and Kenyatta's rift was caused by their differences in their ideological persuasions.

However, David Ndii shows, against the thinking of many Kenyans, how Jaramogi was not a socialist but a wealthy capitalist while "Jomo Kenyatta was a poor socialist" (12). Ndii debunks and shows the falsity of the myth that Jaramogi was a communist. Instead, he observes that "in the transition to independence, left-leaning was the default alignment for African nationalists since the East Bloc supported liberation movements because the colonial powers were their Western adversaries" (12). It is within this context that Ndii argues that the rift between Kenyatta and Jaramogi was caused by the failure of Kenyatta's government to "redistribute land to the people from who it had been taken, a policy that they were all agreed on before, against the 'willing buyer, willing seller policy that Kenyatta government adopted after independence'"(12). Therefore, ideologically speaking, this article argues that both Kenyatta and Jaramogi were capitalists. Although in *Uhuru* Jaramogi presents his difference from Kenyatta as having been brought by his zeal to fight for the subaltern, it is noted here that this was just a default argument to fit with the Eastern Bloc because Kenyatta was already settled as a capitalist.

> In the article on "Obstacles to Uhuru" Jaramogi reiterates:
>
> The allegation 'communism' has always been a convenient weapon. During the colonial times Kenyatta was termed a Communist and the freedom struggle was labelled Communist-inspired. The anti-communist campaign was used as a stick to beat those campaigning for real consultation with the people and against corruption in public life .... (294)

Jaramogi's observation here portrays him as a champion of the subaltern and aims to use Uhuru to portray himself as a leader who defended the right path that independent Kenya was to take after independence. For him, the campaign against communism aimed to derail and isolate the masses from the fruits of independence. Although this rift started ideologically, ethnicity and patronage came as by-products of it.

Jaramogi's *Uhuru* shows how within ethnicity, the first government could not put Kenya on the right path of achieving all-around development. Ethnicity gave rise to the betrayal of the masses by the post-colonial elite in Kenya. This, as Jaramogi suggests, was perpetuated through a calculated move to keep the defender of the masses out of the government. He observes: "It was Achieng Oneko who had been in the dock of the Kapenguria Trial with Kenyatta who came to me, greatly upset, to break the news. 'Kenyatta has agreed to form a government without you'" (231). Jaramogi's betrayal is portrayed as the betrayal of the whole nation. This betrayal achieves a national significance when it is intertwined with that of the landless and the majority of the disgruntled people.

This becomes illustrative when, in *Uhuru*, Jaramogi's critiques Jomo Kenyatta's Independence Day speech:

> Kenyatta's own speech inexplicably made no mention of the people who had laid down their lives in the struggle, the fighters of the forests and the camps who have been in danger in Kenya of becoming the forgotten men of the freedom fight because it suits the ambitions of the self-seeking politicians to divert our people from the real freedom aims of our people…I have written this book because the present generation must learn from the total experience of the *Uhuru* struggle if it to save itself …. (253-4)

Jaramogi's autobiography profiles the author as a nationalist leader who has always been consistent with patriotism. His interests only came after the interests of the nation. At the same time, this profiling points an accusing finger at the other leaders, especially the then President, Jomo Kenyatta, who, as the author seems to suggest, was a self-seeking oligarchic capitalist and a budding dictator (Muigai 204). That he had to part ways with Kenyatta (a fellow Kenya African Union member since the early 1920s, a mentor that he had warmly welcomed in Nyanza years before the State of Emergency in 1952, a friend whom he had consulted about Kenya's readiness for independence), as he portrays in the text, was by no means a product of selfishness, but rather a clear sign that he was not going to renege on his patriotism.

This is because narrative involves selecting events that are considered worth knowing or assigning reported speech or examples to illustrate a point and piecing them together to convey the appearance of coherence. The idea of construction reveals what Jaramogi includes in his autobiography and what he excludes, which is ultimately a conscious decision.

This exclusion and inclusion of events in one's autobiography present this genre as a contested piece of literature. As a genre, an autobiography can construct history, praise the villains and vilify the actual victors. Within this understanding, Jaramogi writes Uhuru to include those aspects of his past that portray him as a champion of the masses and portray Kenyatta and his

friends as villains who did not deserve to lead Kenya. In the text, Jaramogi describes himself as the leader who Kenya deserved but did not have. Michael Angrosino argues that the leader figure shares the same basic conflicts as their fellows but somehow can communicate that their resolutions are fruitful for them all (192). Such a person becomes a leader not so much by transcending the common concerns of the group but by symbolically embodying them in such a way that humbler folk can sense a vicarious resolution. This, according to this article, is done in Jaramogi's autobiography. In it, Jaramogi embodies the betrayals that the nation has gone through since independence.

In conclusion, after careful observation and analysis, Jaramogi, donning ethnic purity, warns that the new rulers would plunge the country into pain and tragedy if they glorified ethnicity. As an opposition politician, he outlines his vision for a united and robust national movement and a government powered by it. However, although this autobiography's uniqueness lies in its reflections on the author's past and its prophetic stance, we also observe that Jaramogi and his political nemesis Jomo Kenyatta jointly planted the seeds of ethnicity. Later, when they broke off, they encouraged the culture of intolerance and ethnic hatred in Kenya by pursuing different political ideologies behind their ethnic support. Jaramogi uses his autobiography to align himself with sulbaltern groups. For him, we argue, subalternity was a survival trope.

***The Flame of Freedom*: Locating The Lost *Uhuru* Dream**

> As I began my campaign for ODM's presidential nomination, my vision for Kenya remained the same as it had always been: finally achieving the dreams of our founding fathers, eliminating poverty, ignorance, disease and bad governance from our society and establishing a viable, democratic state at ease with itself and its neighbours.
>
> Raila Odinga 300

As Jaramogi's autobiography has shown, ethnicity became a framework within which the Kenyan nation was imagined in post-colonial times. In the same analytical terrain, this article argues that the same argument can be raised in regard to Raila Odinga, Jaramogi's son's autobiography, Freedom. However, this article also notes that Raila's autobiography brings a different context to post-colonial Kenya: a struggle for democratisation, an idea popularised in African politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Raila was becoming politically active.

In his autobiography, Raila wishes to be read as a continuation of his father's legacy. One of these legacies was defending the subaltern from the post-colonial elite in the years going as early as the 1960s, President Daniel Moi's era, and President Kibaki's era. *Freedom*, therefore, completes the history of resistance. In it, Raila Odinga chronicles the remarkable journey of one of Africa's leading politicians and statesmen. One of these statesmen he recognises is his father, Jaramogi Odinga. He rebrands his father as a nationalist whose ideals were enviable. His father was the Biblical Moses leading Kenya to true independence who died before Kenya landed in Canaan. According to Raila, the formation of KPU was significant in the way it tried to steer the country back to its independence mantra. He writes:

> The manifesto criticised the ruling class for being 'completely preoccupied in enjoying the pomp and splendour formerly reserved for the colonial master,' which it said would lead to 'a new class of Bundells, Delameres and Briggs, deliberately created.' Instead, said the manifesto, 'the government [should] use its power to improve the lot of the common man'. (41)

Raila Odinga's life story explores the tragedies of Kenya's struggle to entrench democracy and the rule of law into the fabric of the State. It is noteworthy that in the quote above, Raila tries to examine where the rain began to beat the nation. The book is a testament to the continuation of his father's mantra: *Not Yet Uhuru* in Kenya.

From a historical standpoint, Kenya never went through a revolution but instead won liberation through a series of compromises, government power was passed into the hands of the African ruling elite and has never effectively been turned over to the people. Although the first African leaders were elected by popular vote, they strengthened their position by denying Kenyans individual freedoms, such as associating or participating in the political process and perpetuating a one-party system. This continued concentration of power is a form of neocolonialism that impedes Kenya's advance toward true independence.

According to Raila, Jaramogi was an accountable leader who could have made Kenya stick to its developmentalist path. It will be recalled from the discussion so far that Jaramogi had made extensive sacrifices for the country, before and after independence. Raila observes:

> It was the second time Jaramogi had stood back for the good of the country. The first had been shortly before Kenyatta's release, when Renison, desperate to work with anyone but Kenyatta, had summoned Jaramogi to his office and offered him a post of prime minister. Jaramogi selflessly turned down the chance of guiding Kenya into independence, advising Renison instead to release Kenyatta from restriction 'and let him lead the people of this country' (38)

Raila explores these sacrifices to help readers understand the frameworks within which Kenya lost its independence dream. Although the country had been enveloped in ethnic betrayals, those leaders were true to the vision of independence. According to Raila's *Freedom*, Jaramogi was one of such leaders:

> During the LegCo debate, Kenyatta and the others had been referred to as nothing more than common criminals. Jaramogi was incensed… these people, before they were arrested, they were the political leaders of the Africans in this country, and the Africans respected

> them as their political leaders, and even at this very moment, in the heart of hearts of Africans, they are still the political leaders …. (36-7)

According to Raila, Jaramogi's son in *Freedom*, after independence, forces operating in the country set in motion the wheels of ethnicity in Kenya by isolating Jaramogi and the likeminded from the nation's leadership. This political exclusion did not consider Jaramogi's sacrifices for the country. Earlier on, Jaramogi could have been quickly mellowed to the whims of the colonialists and international capital to take over Kenya's leadership when Kenyatta was in prison, but he chose the path of a broader nationalist Kenyan cause. Raila makes this sacrifice look like an epic nationalism in Kenya, exhibited by a leader who was now being sacrificed at the altar of ethnicity:

> Jaramogi was not invited to attend. His passport had been impounded and the rumour mills had been set in motion to disseminate stories that were to dog Jaramogi for much of his political life – especially that he was funded by communist countries that would become Kenya's political masters. The colonial authority desperately sought ways of marginalising Jaramogi and other hard-line nationalists, who were known as 'the Ginger Group' (37)

The reader is astounded to learn that the government would betray a leader like this. Moreover, this betrayal is not one of an individual leader but of the majority of the people, his ethnic nation, camouflaged with the subaltern discourse.

However, from a critical interrogation of *Freedom*, it can be argued that Raila misrepresented several aspects of his life and political involvements. His autobiography fails to consistently show his thoughts, reflections or involvements in important events such as the 1982 coup attempt, the NDP/KANU cooperation and merger, what led to the Narc failure, the circumstances surrounding the 2007 elections and the intricacies, decisions, successes or failures of the Grand Coalition Government, what happened to the Kazi Kwa Vijana (KKV), Maise, how he acquired the Kisumu

Molasses Plant, and other scandalsThe autobiography glosses over these important details that would help form an objective view about the kind of leader Raila is.

In selecting what to amplify and silence, the autobiography denies the readers the opportunity to know how Raila made certain decisions, what and who influenced them and why. Also, there are glaring falsehoods in it. Right from the outset in the Prologue, he cleverly claims that he launched his presidential candidature within ODM in May 2007 when scholars like Miguna think otherwise. According to Miguna, at that time, Raila was in ODM-K. The autobiography does not explain how his political consciousness came about. The claim that he is withholding information because he fears the reaction leaves one wondering what kind of a leader he might be if he could not tell the truth about these details. He also suppresses or tries to undermine other people's contributions to his past political successes.

For instance, he refuses to acknowledge the significant contributions of Rateng' Oginga Ogego before, during and after the NDP/KANU merger. Instead, he props up names like Naikuni, who was not present and made no contributions one way or the other. Surprisingly, he does not even acknowledge Salim Lone in the book. It is all about him and his artificial heroism. The autobiography is involved in hero creation. As Stephen Mutie pointed out earlier in *Contesting the Subaltern Trope*, the self who emerges from the pages of *Freedom* is a cheat and a mythical trickster (98). He is the flame of Kenya's Freedom.

To him, the end always justifies the means. One of the pointers to this pertains to how he magnifies his father's image:

> Jaramogi announced his resignation from the government on 14th April, 1966, criticising his former colleagues for their concentration on personal gain ... things had reached a point of no return. He said that he did not want future generations to question his sincerity or feel

> that he had allowed himself 'to hold a sinecure post in the midst of poverty and misery in our country.' With this realisation, I cannot continue to hold this position any longer and I hereby tender my resignation. (40)

In chapter ten of *Freedom*, Raila recounts the events leading to the coup attempt in 1982. According to the author, the events of 1966–69 were a radicalising experience for many young Luo. It was not a coincidence that the leadership of the 1982 coup attempt were mainly Luo in their 20s and 30s, who had been teenagers during this period and had seen both injustice and the powerlessness of their leaders to respond constitutionally. The ethnicisation of the power struggle of the 1960s also created an association between Luo identity and anti-government protest, which endured through the 1980s and reinforced communal political solidarity that proved more enduring than any other ethnic group. So it was to continue through the lives of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, his son Raila, James Orengo and many other Luo leaders (95-108). The protests are always grounded on the struggle against rampant corruption, tribalism, nepotism, and evils that have made life almost intolerable in Kenyan society.

In *Freedom*, Raila explores the baseness of the elite's post-colonial leadership. One of the leaders he attacks is President Daniel Moi, whom he portrays as a senseless leader, leading a sycophantic and myopic government. He quotes one of the Moi's trusted ministers, Shariff Nassir, as having said: "Hundreds were injured or maimed during secret ballot voting, and that secret ballot would be abolished watu wapende wasipende" [whether people like it or not] (134). By presenting this quote by Nassir, Raila critiques the KANU regime as arrogant and myopic. And in doing so, he contrasts KANU's leadership with Jaramogi' and Raila's wisdom which President Moi had called "'cheap slogans and … outworn dialectic' (Raila, 85).

Aiming to show why he differed from President Mwai Kibaki, Raila's autobiography blames the former President for negative ethnicity: "In particular, we had vowed to end tribalism. However, Kibaki had continued to propagate it, and everywhere I went, I was hard-pressed to explain why most key national appointments had gone to people from just one region of the country" (301). Although Kibaki had come to power riding on a popular vote, according to Raila, he did not deliver the country from the yoke of ethnicity.

Raila's autobiography examines Kenya's former prime minister's struggle to end corruption and bring freedom. It reveals the life journey of Odinga, his family and his political life, and gives an account of how he suffered while inside the government. Similary, in his autobiography, Odinga paints an image of how PNU used every means to frustrate and humiliate him and his coalition party, Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Odinga reveals how PNU associates undermined the ODM ministers. He also indicates how PNU machines used propaganda to kill him politically. It mainly talks about Odinga's time in the coalition government with Mwai Kibaki and the betrayals he underwent to bring him down. *Freedom* thus gives a history of Odinga's challenges since his father's death and how he overcame the obstacles.

Freedom essentially (re)brands Raila as the intellectual custodian of Kenya's pro-democracy struggles and the founding father of democracy. The photographs he selects, the stories he tells, the way he tells them and the stories he does not tell seem to establish Odinga as the authority on the making of Kenya. His story clearly justifies the constitutional changes this country finally made, portraying how he stood tall against the terror of dictatorship where sycophancy, fear and silence reigned supreme. It is an examination of "the government's long vendetta against the Odingas," and how successive governments have successfully isolated the Odingas from power (Nyairo 1). The refrain 'tumeonewa'[we have been ill treated] lingers in the background as one reads through the text.

This is understandable as *Freedom* is dedicated to "memory of my [Raila's] father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, a brave freedom fighter" (iv). It is a continuation of the legacy that his father left. The narrative is the same, and it is that of the lost dream in Kenya. According to him, Kenya as a nation is a narrative that has been constructed on failure. Raila's observation that Kenya has undergone squandered opportunities is in tandem with Wainaina's contention that Kenya has had four conceptions that have produced stillbirths (12). The first miscarriage happened in 1963, with its independence and first republic, then 1992, with the second republic and the reinstatement of pluralism, followed by the exit of Moi and the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) dream of 2002, and, finally, with the new constitutional dispensation of 2010 (Wainaina 12). Although, according to this scholar, all babies die at birth, the political class entrusted to midwife the process of the birth of the modern Kenyan State is too invested in the primitive tribal State to give the new, modern Kenya a chance for survival.

Although Raila wanted *Freedom* to be a serious indictment of the Kenyan post-colonial elite, the article notes that his main aim was to use the autobiography to appeal to the Kenyan subaltern through his critique of the regime. His jail terms are not for the benefit of the self but a form of national suffering. This suffering should be understood as a sacrifice made to the subaltern by a representative leader, a selfless leader. In writing Freedom, therefore, Raila emerges from the pages as a leader who, given a chance, can retrieve Kenya's lost independence dream. Therefore, the four missed opportunities have not been by default but by design. The political class midwifing the process has deliberately strangled the baby to protect the status quo. They have consistently squandered the opportunities for renewal. In most cases, politicians are given the job of midwifing the modern State because people think they are statesmen, not just regular politicians, but these leaders are too heavily and hopelessly invested in politics of ethnicity, impunity, and mediocrity to midwife a modern Kenya.

Holden explores the inscription of the individual into the collective in political autobiographies, the creation of indigenous modernity, and the construction of citizens. Following this view, this article argues that in *Freedom*, Raila is most concerned with the Foucauldian disciplinary mechanisms that inscribed the body into the body politic, transforming colonial subjects into citizens of fragmented but modern non-Western nations. A political autobiography like *Freedom*, whose author is a political leader, can use writing to create imaginary individuals as part of an effort to imagine communities. The construction of the Kenyan State in *Freedom* allows Raila to create a social imaginary to articulate the relationship between his particular imagined community and the Kenyan future when he is allowed to lead.

Freedom is a continuation of a journey that has to end when the Kenyan dream is realised. This dream is tied to the Odinga family. In one of the moving instances in Freedom, Raila writes:

> The task of keeping the flame of freedom burning had been passed to us, and already, down the years, we had fought so hard and come so far. But I knew there was still a long and difficult road ahead. As I spoke on that day in 2007, I rededicated my life to travelling that road so that, one day, the Kenyan dream, in all its glory, would become a reality. It is the dream of a fundamentally transformed society, not only in our land but across the entire African continent. (4)

Although representative individuals write the two autobiographies the article has examined here, Jaramogi representing the old guards, and Odinga standing for the new brand of Kenyan leaders, the two present their authors as leaders who are down to earth, working closely with the masses and leading normal lives. This portrayal is a case of autobiographers presenting only the version of history that favours the subject and erases what is not in their favour. *Uhuru* and *Freedom*, as Muchiri argues, demonstrate the possibility of convenient truths in autobiographies.

By highlighting their efforts in business in their narratives, they camouflage the truth that opportunities are often aided by how close one is to power.

Ethnicity was not the only bane of Kenyatta's administration. Charles Hornsby states that once the struggle for power in 1980-83 was resolved, the Presidency of Daniel arap Moi saw a shift in the balance of state benefit away from the Kikuyu and towards a new and more fragile Kalenjin-dominated pastoralist alliance. Unlike Kenyatta, Moi had to take away before he could give since many of the 'fruits of Uhuru' had already been eaten, and the resultant fracture between the Kikuyu community and the Kalenjin continues to echo through the country's politics to this day. The failed coup attempt of 1982 set Daniel Moi on a path of absolutist control and increasing Kalenjinisation.

Therefore, this article opines that while *Uhuru* critiques the Kikuyunisation [the largest ethnic group in Kenya] of the Kenyan State, Freedom interrogates the seemingly Kalenjinisation [the third most populous community in Kenya] of the State. During the 1980s and 1990s, the government forced a new Kalenjin economic and political elite to emerge. In the multi-party era, ethnic tensions were reinforced by consolidating political party support along ethnic lines. Moi's Kalenjin were always the core of the government, the Kikuyu of the opposition, leaving the Luo community united but uncertain whether to back the Kikuyu or the Kalenjin. Raila Odinga's deal with KANU in 1999 represented a realignment of forces, a Western alliance of Kalenjin, Luhya and Luo, but it fell apart when faced with Moi's preference for an older, more incorporative strategy, choosing Jomo Kenyatta's son, Uhuru Kenyatta, as KANU's presidential candidate in 2002; conversely, Odinga's return to the opposition destroyed KANU (Hornsby 9-10). This can only be interrogated within the politics of betrayal.

Conclusion

This article concludes by submitting that *Uhuru* and *Freedom*, as the representatives of

the political autobiographies interrogated here, are cultural productions whose re-examination of ethnicity in Kenya is ridden with convenient silences. The two autobiographies present the theme of the elite's betrayal of the Kenyan subalterns as occurring within the commodification of ethnicity. While in *Uhuru*, Jaramogi critiques what he sees as the Kikuyunisation of Kenya, in *Freedom*, Raila explores the seemingly Kalenjinisation of the Kenyan State. According to these two autobiographies, therefore, this commodification of ethnicity has held the Kenyan State back.

The article has interrogated how in *Uhuru* and *Freedom,* Jaramogi and Raila, while imagining themselves writing back to the ruling elite, deconstruct, subvert, and construct identities that are consistent with what the masses need in an ideal leader. They present themselves as the best alternatives for leadership, the wisest, most consistent, intuitive, ideologically wealthy and incorruptible option. Yet, as this article has shown, Jaramogi' and Odinga's autobiographies contain survival tropes and makes the genre of political autobiography in Kenya occupy a problematic discursive terrain.

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