

Space Traitors: Revolution, Power, and Subjectivity in African and Caribbean Drama

By

Vincent R. Ogoti

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Luis Madureira, Professor, African Cultural Studies

Ainehi Edo, Assistant Professor, English and African Cultural Studies

Matthew Brown, Associate Professor, African Cultural Studies

Emily Callaci, Associate Professor, History

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For Isabella.

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Abstract

“Space Traitors” studies historical drama that engages the afterlives of rebellions and revolutions in Africa and the Caribbean through the indices of violence, power, and subjectivity. It argues that historical drama portrays unfinished revolutions and opens up alternative sites of social and political existence that signify possible transformations, which may be conceived as fulfilling the revolution’s promise. The project highlights drama’s unique ability to combine diverse spatial and temporal configurations within a single theatrical space, even when these elements seem incompatible. This ability allows historical drama to grapple with the representation of revolutionary events and demonstrate how anticolonial struggles and emancipatory projects have become the subjects around which the postcolony engages in discussions, contests, and fights over its pasts and possible futures.

The first chapter uses the metaphor of “unbreakable bodies” to study Ebrahim Hussein’s *Kinjeketile* (1971) as a counter site for examining how the Maji Maji functions as a marker of decolonization in Tanzania. The second chapter uses the metaphor of “fragmented bodies” to discuss how Hussein’s *Jogoo Kijijini* (Rooster in the Village, 1976) unsettles conventional ideas of revolution. The third chapter reads Hussein’s *Mashetani* (Devils 1977) to capture the anxiety experienced during the transition from the old order to a new one. The fourth chapter, “The Body and the Institution of the Imaginary,” analyzes drama that engages the Mau Mau to demonstrate how the revolutionary events function as the focal point around which Kenya debates its past and future. The final chapter analyzes Aimé Césaire’s *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963) to examine the distinction between good and bad decolonization.

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Introduction

The desire for ‘total revolution’ in cultures with histories of oppression and violence remains an enduring motif in historical fiction that explores anticolonial histories. Total revolution entails a comprehensive transformation of society and its underlying structures and a radical shift in people’s consciousness. It goes beyond political and economic changes to inaugurate a new social order.¹ Revolutionary events, such as the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, or the Chinese Communist Revolution, are commonly acknowledged as total revolutions. However, many anticolonial struggles and emancipatory projects in Africa and the Caribbean are not accorded the same revolutionary status. Instead, they are often labeled as rebellions, insurrections, uprisings, or primary resistances.² Critics argue that these events lack the transformative impact necessary to be deemed revolutionary, failing to bring about significant societal or systemic change.³ The assessment of whether an event qualifies as a revolution is typically conducted retrospectively, involving historical interpretation and scholarly discourse. In this context, examining how we categorize anticolonial revolutionary events such as the Mau Mau and the Maji Maji, which continue to exert political and cultural influence in their respective contexts, becomes crucial. Should these events be

¹ Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

² T.O. Ranger, “Connections Between ‘Primary Resistance’ Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa. Part I,” *The Journal of African History*, 9, no. 3 (1968): 447.

³ See. Ali Mazrui, “On Heroes and Uhuru-Worship and Renan’s What is a nation? *Transition*, No. 11 (Nov. 1963), pp 23-28; Hannah Arendt, *On Revolutions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963); Grace Boggs and James Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Books, 1974).

considered failed revolutions or rebellions, as some studies suggest,⁴ or should they be considered unfinished revolutions?⁵

Drawing inspiration from Kant's discourse on revolution as a sign of human progress, "Space Traitors" asserts that anticolonial revolutionary events function as historical signs encapsulating the past, unveiling the present, and forecasting the future.⁶ The project argues that the significance of such events does not lie in their inherent magnitude but rather in the perceptions and interpretations of current generations, including scholars and artists who can leverage these events to address their present concerns. The project emphasizes that the transformative power of a revolutionary event is not contingent upon its outcome as a success or failure, nor is it measured by grand systemic changes. Instead, what truly matters is the spirit and inspiration the event ignites.⁷

Furthermore, the project stresses that the impact of the revolutionary event extends beyond its immediate consequences. The critical value of an anticolonial revolutionary event lies in its ability to exist as a "permanent virtuality," a concept coined by Foucault and influenced by Kant.⁸ This notion signifies that despite taking place in the past, the event continues to influence the present and future. In this context, "Space Traitors" suggests that the Maji Maji Revolution, the Zanzibar Revolution, the Mau Mau Revolution, and the Haitian Revolution, which serve as the focal points of

⁴ Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary Resistance,'" 451.

⁵ We describe unfinished revolution as events that signify a profound rupture within societal structures. The initial catalyst for change ignites significant disruptions and resistance against oppressive systems. However, the revolution is yet to attain its envisioned outcomes.

⁶ Emmanuel Kant, "The Contest of Faculties," in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 154.

⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College De France 1982-1983* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 18. Foucault's lecture was based on Kant's "the Contest of the Faculties," in which Kant reflects on the idea of the French Revolution and human progress.

the study, have achieved the status of “permanent virtuality.” Consequently, these events serve as vital safeguards against historical amnesia in contexts where they happened.

The question arises: How did these events become “permanent virtualities?” “Space Traitors” contends that postcolonial and post-emancipation societies, grappling with the aftermath of slavery and colonialism, particularly the failures of decolonization, began to view these events as conjectures around which they could debate, contest, and negotiate their pasts and futures. Through this ongoing process of engagement and reevaluation, these events acquired their enduring significance and became powerful touchstones for shaping collective identities and narratives.

To illustrate: In March 2014, students at the University of California, Irvine performed Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo’s play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), which revolves around a fictional trial of Dedan Kimathi, a key figure in Kenya’s Mau Mau movement.⁹ The audience’s experience began as they entered the venue, encountering an atmosphere that resembled a colonial prison. The lobby was transformed with intimidating officers, chains, heavy footsteps, and armed soldiers, while a narrow, dark corridor led them to the theater space designed to mimic a prison. This immersive production aimed to evoke the “irritating reality” of colonial imprisonment’s control over the body and mind. Notably, a member of the audience remarked that although the play was centered on Kenya’s struggle against British colonialism in the 1950s, it resonated as a universal narrative.¹⁰ This remark was intriguing, as it would have been controversial in 1970s Kenya. Ngugi and Mugo’s drama faced numerous controversies within the country at the time.

⁹ Ketu H. Katrak, “The making of the Trial of Dedan Kimathi by Ngugi wa Thiong’o & Micere Githae Mugo at the University of California, Irvine: A personal Reflection.” In Martin Banham et. al (Ed.). *African Theatre 13: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Wole Soyinka* (Boydell & Brewer, James Currey, 2014).

¹⁰ Ibid.,77.

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi delves into the complex and contentious subject of Mau Mau historiography and its significance in the context of nation-building, which has been controversial in Kenya.¹¹ Ngugi and Mugo's play presents Mau Mau as a compelling candidate for a shared glorious past, aligning with Ernest Renan's notion that a nation emerges from a collective history of sacrifices and struggles.¹² They depict Mau Mau and Dedan Kimathi as the central heroes, essential for fostering national consciousness and forging Kenya's identity. However, some scholars challenge this portrayal, arguing that Mau Mau does not represent the only narrative through which Kenya can confront its past and shape its national consciousness.¹³ A crucial question emerges: Was Mau Mau genuinely a national struggle that led to a collective awakening among Kenyans?

The events surrounding the creation and staging of the play provide valuable insights into the challenges faced in establishing Mau Mau as Kenya's national epic. Ngugi's essay, "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space," highlights the difficulties encountered in securing the Kenya National Theater for *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi's* national premiere on October 20, 1976, a significant date commemorating Kenya's heroes.¹⁴ However, the theater was already booked for unrelated European performances, such as Bossman's *Jeune Ballet de France* and City Player's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Despite the play's selection to represent the country at the Second Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77), the government dismissed it. Controversies surrounding the play persisted in the 1970s, with the subsequent regime continuing

¹¹ E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, "The Production of History in Kenya: The Mau Mau Debate," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1991, Vol 25, No.2 (1991).

¹² Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, in Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992. (Translated by Ethan Rundell), 9.

¹³ See. Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale (ed.), *On Mau Mau and Nationalism* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 6.

¹⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space." *TDR*, (1997), Vol. 41 (3), pp. 11-30.

the patterns of Jomo Kenyatta's government. When Ngugi and Mugo were exiled, the prospect of performing the play on a national stage became a feared possibility.¹⁵

Looking ahead to the 2000s, under a subsequent regime in Kenya, there was a notable shift in recognizing Mau Mau as the nation's epic. This shift was reflected in the erection of a monument dedicated to Kimathi on the road named after him in Nairobi—a critical symbol representing a belated acknowledgment of his significance. Furthermore, the Mau Mau movement and its fighters became deeply ingrained in Kenya's popular culture, influencing various forms of artistic expression, including Hip Hop, murals on public transport vehicles (*matatus*), and even political campaigns.¹⁶

“Space Traitors” posits that Ngugi and Mugo’s “problem space” diverges from that of the twenty-first-century audience at the University of California-Irvine, and this distinction in problem spaces underlies the divergent reception of the play over time. David Scott defines a problem space as a historically and contextually specific realm of questions and answers that encompasses ethical, political, and cultural considerations.¹⁷ It is not a physical location or a distinct historical era but rather a discursive domain in which particular issues and debates emerge and are negotiated. This concept suggests that different historical periods give rise to distinct questions, concerns, and debates specific to those contexts. Each problem space has its own argumentation structure, assumptions, limitations, and rules for acceptable dispute. Scott developed this concept based on R.G. Collingwood’s theory of the “logic of question and answer,” which asserts that every statement purporting to convey knowledge is essentially an answer to a question.¹⁸ Collingwood’s theory, as

¹⁵ Oby Obyerodhyambo. “Ngugi wa Thiong’o; The unrecognized Black Hermit.” Unpublished conference paper.

¹⁶ See. Evan Mwangi, “The incomplete Rebellion: Mau Mau Movement in Twenty-First-Century Kenyan Popular Culture.” *Africa Today*, Vol. 57 (2), 2010, pp. 87-113.

¹⁷ David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁸ R.G. Collingwood. *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 29.

reframed by Scott, enables us to comprehend how dramatists employ historical events as sites or catalysts for violence, power, and subjectivity. It also illuminates the notion that the production of historical knowledge entails posing questions about the past and seeking answers through historical evidence. Significantly, these questions originate from the present, as they are not necessarily the same questions that past actors asked themselves but rather inquiries that we find meaningful and relevant from our current perspective.

“Space Traitors” asserts that Ngugi and Mugo’s play was a response to the questions surrounding decolonization and heroism. Consequently, their problem space revolved around decolonization. However, it is crucial for us to examine whether the questions that shaped the dramatists’ work remain relevant in our present time. The project suggests that while decolonization remains a pertinent problem space in the twenty-first century, the focus of the operative questions has shifted. Rather than solely emphasizing decolonization as the liberation from physical oppression and the removal of the oppressor, it now encompasses the comprehensive dismantling of all systems of domination, including the rejection and eradication of one’s own servile tendencies. In this context, decolonization is not merely an isolated event but a series of processes that carry philosophical significance, particularly in the pursuit of self-abolition. Self-abolition entails the rejection of oppressive structures and a collective will toward establishing a shared community. According to Mbembe, this “will to community” represents a manifestation of the desire for life, a drive to thrive, prosper, and assert one’s existence. Ultimately, it seeks to achieve self-determination and create a meaningful legacy and heritage.¹⁹

What kind of criticism is required to make sense of historical drama crafted within the problem space of decolonization yet addressing questions that may not align with our present

¹⁹ Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 2-3.

reality? These questions lay the foundation for my current research project. Two significant events have influenced the trajectory and conceptual framework of “Space Traitors”: the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd, which sparked protests against police brutality in the United States. George Floyd, an African American man, was tragically murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While the Covid-19 pandemic impacted my field research on “performing violence in East Africa,” Floyd’s murder and the subsequent protests prompted deep reflection on the vulnerability of the black body in Africa and the African diaspora, particularly in regions marked by the legacy of slavery.

As a black man, I found myself yearning for an “unbreakable body,” an antidote to the pervasive violence that often targets the bodies of its victims.²⁰ It became evident to me that my research project on “performing violence,” grounded in the materiality of the body as both a theatrical resource and a site of political authority, was still relevant but necessitated a shift in archival focus. This realization led me to explore drama that engages with revolutions and rebellions, where the desire for an unbreakable or indestructible body emerges as a recurring metaphor. I saw an “unbreakable body” as a metaphor for resilience, strength, and indestructibility. In other words, the body signified a condition of being that is impervious to physical, emotional, or psychological harm.

However, the realities of human existence, with its inherent vulnerabilities and limitations, make this condition impossible to realize fully. It seemed then that an unbreakable body is an ideal and desire. It is an ideal that cultures with histories of violence might strive for but never fully reach. As a desire, it is a compelling drive, yet by nature of being a desire, it’s also a state that is not currently possessed and, perhaps, never can be. As I read dramatic texts, such as Ebrahim Hussein’s *Kinjeketile* and Okiya Omtatah’s *Lwanda Magere*, I saw how the idea of an unbreakable body reflects

²⁰ We use the phrases “unbreakable body” and “indestructible body” interchangeably.

the human condition, particularly in societies marked by histories of oppression and violence. The “unbreakable body” symbolized the collective wish for resilience and strength against systemic structures that exert control and harm. Yet the harsh realities of decolonization make attaining this “unbreakable” state difficult. It seems then that the “unbreakable body” represents a persistent, perhaps eternal, striving towards a state of ultimate resilience and strength, an aim that drives progress and resistance even if the goal remains perpetually out of reach.

Surprisingly, despite the centrality of the body in works that engage revolutions and emancipatory projects, few scholars of Africa and the Caribbean have specifically employed the body as an analytical category to study them. Therefore, “Space Traitors” employs the concept of the “unbreakable body” as an analytical category, enabling us to explore two key aspects. Firstly, it allows us to delve into how drama grapples with the representation of revolutionary events, offering a means to reframe and reinterpret the present. By examining how these dramatic works engages the revolutions, we can uncover their potential to challenge prevailing narratives and reshape our understanding of historical events. Secondly, the notion of the “unbreakable body” becomes crucial in examining the postcolonial context, which is marked by remnants, artifacts, and absences that bear witness to unfinished revolutions. Interrogating this postcolonial space requires us to question the assumptions made by dramatists regarding ‘past presents.’ By scrutinizing the problem space within which they reconstructed the past and envisioned the future, we can critically assess the legacies and implications of their work in contemporary scholarship.

The project examines the body in both its material and conceptual forms. On the material level, it focuses on the bodies of revolutionary figures portrayed in various works, such as Kinjeketile in Hussein’s *Kinjeketile* (1971), King Christophe in Césaire’s *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963), and Dedan Kimathi in Watene’s *Dedan Kimathi* (1974), as well as Ngugi and Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976). Additionally, we are interested in the archetypal revolutionary figure

depicted in Hussein's *Jogoo Kijijini* (1976) and *Mashtani* (1971). The concept of the “unbreakable body” serves as a metaphor that invites discussions on the political and cultural connections between an individual body and the collective body politic. In the case of Kinjeketile in Hussein's play, the idea of the unbreakable body operates on two levels. Firstly, as a prophet, Kinjeketile performs rituals intended to transform ordinary Tanzanian bodies into indestructible bodies capable of withstanding bullets. These rituals involve sacred elements such as *maji* and maize flour. Secondly, Kinjeketile extends the notion of the unbreakable body beyond individual bodies, emphasizing the establishment of a shared community—an indestructible body politic. As we explore in Chapter One, titled “The Poetics of Unbreakable Bodies,” Kinjeketile's sacrifice paves the way for the realization of this body politic, which finds its fulfillment when Nyerere and TANU establish the Ujamaa (socialist) state on the ashes of the Maji Maji.

Chapter Two, titled “The Poetics of Fragmented Bodies,” delves into the enduring impact of the Zanzibar revolution by employing the metaphor of the fragmented body. Through a close analysis of Hussein's *Jogoo Kijijini*, we argue that the abolition of slavery and feudalism in Zanzibar represents an incomplete revolution that can only attain fulfillment through a profound reckoning with the lingering effects of its violent history. In this chapter, we argue that Hussein utilizes fragmented bodies as symbolic representations, serving as a means to reenact the destruction wrought by the past. By employing characters with fragmented bodies, the play prompts the audience to confront the absence of “wholeness” (read as an unbreakable body) and raises awareness of the persistent influence of past “sins” that continue to threaten the present.

In Chapter Three, titled “Revolution and Embodied Anxiety,” we further explore the themes introduced in the previous chapter. The focus is on whether the sacrifices made to achieve the initial liberation—specifically the end of physical bondage such as slavery and colonialism—are sufficient to propel society towards total revolution, or what we refer to as “true decolonization” in the final

chapter. Hussein skillfully employs the body of a young man descending into neurosis as a metaphor to depict the anxieties and uncertainties that arise during the transitional period between the initial revolution and the establishment of a new order. The play we analyze, *Masbetani*, was written in the aftermath of the Arusha Declaration, also known as Azimio, which marked the advent of Ujamaa (Familyhood), or Tanzania's unique brand of socialism. This historical event was seen as a social revolution that purported to fulfill the promise of Maji Maji. However, Hussein's play anticipates that this revolution would face challenges stemming from the unaddressed legacy of the Zanzibar Revolution, which had led to the unification of Zanzibar and Tanganyika to form the Republic of Tanzania.

Chapter Four, titled "The Body and the Institution of the Imaginary," delves into the contentious debate surrounding the absent body of Dedan Kimathi. While Kenneth Watene's play, *Dedan Kimathi* constructs a representation of Kimathi based on colonial archives, utilizing this portrayal to shed light on the suppressed violence in Mau Mau historiography, Ngugi and Mugo fashion their rendition of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by drawing upon the memoirs of Mau Mau fighters and the oral narratives from Kimathi's relatives. They present their interpretation of Kimathi as a criterion for determining the true national heroes. "Space Traitors" argues that the disputes surrounding the missing body of Kimathi and the efforts to construct this body on the theatrical stage are fundamentally about the contestation of meaning: the meaning of nationalism and whether Mau Mau can be rightfully regarded as Kenya's national epic of independence and decolonization.

In the final chapter, titled "The Poetics of True Decolonization," we revisit the concept of decolonization and explore its implications for Haiti. Our analysis centers on Césaire's play, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, specifically focusing on Christophe's fixation on "creation" as a means of enacting true decolonization. We argue that while Christophe's intentions aimed to improve his

people's lives, his implementation strategies faltered due to their reliance on the plantation structure of the economy. Instead of inspiring redemptive labor, his actions resulted in the forced servitude of the Haitian population. The imposition of forced labor and the prevalence of violence ultimately fueled resistance among the Haitians, thwarting Christophe's decolonization program. King Christophe's failure to comprehend the evolving dynamics of labor within the plantation economy and a post-emancipation Haiti proved detrimental to his decolonization efforts. Under the plantation economy, labor was predominantly unpaid, and enslaved people were viewed as property, existing solely for work. In the context of a liberated society, Haitians anticipated that their labor would be transformative and empowering, as they would have ownership over the means of production. However, Christophe denied them the opportunity to possess their own land, instead establishing a new class of black landowners while leaving many formerly enslaved people dispossessed and marginalized. By perpetuating a system that deprived the majority of Haitians of economic agency and perpetuated social inequalities, Christophe's actions undermined the ideals of true decolonization and hindered the progress of the Haitian people.

The choice of dramatists for this study, namely those writing about Tanzania, Kenya, and Haiti is purposeful and informed by their profound engagement with historical events that have attained the status of "permanent virtualities" within their specific contexts and within the broader African and Caribbean landscapes. The project delves into the works of dramatists from these regions, recognizing the interconnectedness of African and African diasporic experiences and acknowledging the shared condition of the formerly enslaved and colonized globally. I explore the diverse ways these dramatists grapple with historical events and their impact on collective memory and the cultivation of national consciousness. Therefore, the African and African diaspora connection provides a rich framework for analysis, enabling the exploration of the formerly enslaved and colonized's shared struggles, aspirations, and resilience. The selection of texts under study also

recognizes the importance of understanding black people and communities' historical and contemporary experiences, particularly in the context of colonization, slavery, and ongoing struggles for liberation and self-determination. This recognition includes analyzing dramatic texts written in indigenous and European languages.

I consider the dramatists under study as *space traitors* because their dramaturgy disrupts conventional narratives and normative interpretations of history, especially concerning anti-colonial and revolutionary events. These artists can be seen as traitors to established historical spaces, because they refuse to conform to conventional understandings and instead stage alternative perspectives and interpretations. For instance, they challenge what constitutes a revolution, questioning the dominant criteria that label an event as revolutionary or otherwise. They also probe the narratives of liberation, decolonization, and emancipation, revealing the complexities, contradictions, and unresolved issues that conventional narratives often overlook or oversimplify.

Space Traitor's contributions to African cultural studies

"Space Traitors" aims to make a significant scholarly contribution to the debates surrounding 'modes of self-writing' and the utilization of historical knowledge in postcolonial contexts. By examining anticolonial revolutions and emancipatory projects, the study highlights their pivotal role as the focal point where postcolonial societies engage in critical debates, contests, and negotiations regarding their pasts and potential futures. This interdisciplinary investigation weaves literary analysis, historical research, and postcolonial perspectives to demonstrate how dramatists strategically invent and deploy the concept of "unbreakable bodies." In doing so, they challenge established conventions and paradigms for producing knowledge, ultimately establishing new conceptual spaces from which novel questions about the present can be formulated. The project's integration of diverse methodologies and its exploration of the innovative strategies employed by dramatists contribute to advancing scholarship in African Cultural Studies.

By redefining the understanding of revolutions, examining the multifaceted role of drama in representing history, and shedding new light on the complex processes of decolonization, “Space Traitors” offers fresh insights and methodological innovations. Its focus on the interplay between the body and revolution adds a new dimension to existing scholarship, positioning itself as a critical reference for future studies in postcolonial and theatrical research. The project’s ability to connect past events with contemporary concerns while simultaneously theorizing new analytical categories ensures its relevance not only to scholars but also to artists and cultural practitioners seeking to grapple with the multifaceted legacies of colonialism and revolution.

For instance, the project introduces the concept of “unbreakable bodies” as a metaphor for examining the physical and metaphorical representations of revolutionary struggles. Focusing on the body as an analytical category enriches the discourse around revolutions and rebellions, elucidating how drama can simultaneously depict and challenge prevailing narratives of history. “Space Traitors” boldly argues that many anticolonial struggles and emancipatory projects are unfinished revolutions, countering conventional categorizations that label them as rebellions or uprisings. By doing so, it repositions these events as ongoing processes that continue to shape contemporary political and social landscapes, opening up new vistas for understanding the legacy and dynamics of revolutionary struggles. The project also introduces the concept of “permanent virtuality” to analyze the enduring influence of revolutionary events. By emphasizing how these events continue to shape the present and future, the study highlights their significance as repositories of collective memory and lessons. This contribution illuminates the ongoing relevance and resonance of African and Caribbean revolutionary movements, fostering a deeper appreciation of their historical and cultural legacies.

“Space Traitors” also explores the intersections of decolonization and historical drama, shedding light on how these forms of artistic expression engage with the complexities of postcolonial societies. It underscores the importance of historical knowledge and memory in

decolonization, inviting a critical examination of the narratives and assumptions embedded in historical dramas. This contribution encourages a deeper understanding of how drama serves as a means of reckoning with the past and envisioning alternative futures. The project's exploration of drama's unique ability to combine diverse spatial and temporal configurations enriches our understanding of the representation of history in theater. This emphasis underscores the power of drama to grapple with multifaceted revolutionary events, providing a nuanced understanding of how past, present, and future interact on the theatrical stage. Through its detailed analysis, particularly in the final chapter on "The Poetics of True Decolonization," the project extends our understanding of decolonization beyond mere political independence. It sheds light on the complexities of economic, social, and cultural dynamics that must be addressed to achieve true decolonization. This aspect particularly resonates with contemporary debates on postcolonial studies.

Situating the project within the specific contexts of African and Caribbean drama contributes to the broader field of African and Caribbean studies. It highlights the unique perspectives, concerns, and artistic expressions that emerge from these regions, offering valuable insights into the complexities of postcolonial societies. This contextualization fosters a deeper appreciation for the rich and diverse theatrical traditions of Africa and the Caribbean, challenging Eurocentric perspectives and promoting a more inclusive understanding of global theatrical practices.

CHAPTER 1: The Poetics of Unbreakable Bodies

Introduction

The physiognomy of indestructible, impenetrable, or unbreakable bodies is one of the defining imprints of superhero cultures. Many characters in graphic narratives and films possess abilities—through science, ritualistic practices, technology, mystery, or a combination of these elements—that transform their bodies, imbuing them with uncanny or supernatural strengths. Long before these characters became permanent fixtures of contemporary cultural productions, the Maji Maji War between Africans and German colonial officers in southern Tanzania popularized the phantom of the indestructible bodies. During this war, black African soldiers received *dawa* (medicine) mixed with sacred *maji* (water), which they drank and applied on their skins to make them bulletproof. The history of the Maji Maji War and the ubiquity of unbreakable bodies in contemporary cultural productions portend an unsettling of the dichotomy between the fictive and the real, raising questions about the cultural and historical factors that make the belief in the body's polymorphic abilities, regenerative capacities, and resistance to bullets conceivable. What makes the desire for unbreakable bodies in cultures with histories of oppression intelligible?

We use these questions as a point of departure for examining Ebrahim Hussein's portrayal of the Maji Maji Revolution in his drama, *Kinjeketile* (1969).²¹ The play is named after the leader of Maji Maji, Kinjeketile Ngwale, who was executed by German colonial officers in August 1905.²² *Kinjeketile* illustrates the importance of the Maji Maji Revolution in shaping Tanzania's political and

²¹ Ebrahim Hussein, *Kinjeketile* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1969, 1971). The play was first written in Swahili and translated into English by the playwright. This chapter uses the English translation. We have indicated instances where we use the Swahili version and my own English translation. Maji Maji war of 1905 to 1907 is often referred to as a rebellion. However, in this chapter, we use the phrases, Maji Maji, or Maji Maji Revolution. The emphasis on "revolution" as opposed to "rebellion" is one of the strands of arguments this chapter advances. I capitalize Revolution when referring to the Maji Maji event.

²² Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, v.

social evolution. It dramatizes human subjugation through the body and language, while reflecting on the role of a revolution in illuminating issues of violence and memory.²³ This context enables society to reflect on its past, assess its present, and envision its future. The play's protagonist, Kinjeketile, emerges as a prophetic figure with maji, a unique war medicine composed of maize flour and sacred ancestral water. This maji becomes a unifying symbol and a transformative force that supposedly turns ordinary bodies into unbreakable bodies. Empowered by the protective properties of maji, believed to provide immunity from bullets, African soldiers initiated a comprehensive war against the Germans. However, despite the promises of maji, many Africans lost their lives in the battlefield, and others were executed by German officers.

Kinjeketile grapples with the very idea of revolution, how it differs from rebellions, insurrections, and revolts, and how in the context of the postcolony, this idea resists strict classification. It questions whether we can consider a struggle that fails to materialize as freedom a revolution or whether such a struggle must of necessity be regarded as an unfinished revolution, thus, creating an urgent desire to complete the revolution. We argue that the label of “rebellion,” often ascribed to Maji Maji in various discourses, describes only the initial struggle and overlooks Maji Maji's evolution.²⁴ Maji Maji may have begun as a necessary struggle to restore lost independence on the part of Africans and to preserve their lives—without clear conceptions of the ideas of freedom and the need for a body politic to guarantee the exercise of freedom—but in time developed beyond this initial goal of restoration. However, the Germans crushed Maji Maji before it

²³ The play was first performed in 1969 at the University of Dar es Salaam with Joachim Fiebach, Hussein's colleague at the Department of Theatre Arts, directing. Fiebach, a German expatriate working in Tanzania in the 1960s, would later supervise Hussein's doctoral dissertation at the University of Humboldt. *Kinjeketile* was originally published in Kiswahili in 1969 and translated into English by the author in 1971. I use the name Tanzania throughout the chapter to refer to the territory that was occupied by the German East Africa, and the state that emerged from the unification of this territory with Zanzibar. When the British took the trusteeship of this territory between 1918 to 1961, they referred to it as Tanganyika.

²⁴ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, vii.

evolved into a total revolution. We contend that the events characterizing Tanganyika's struggle for independence after the Second World War and the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964 that led to the unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to form Tanzania, stand in a single continuum culminating in the Arusha Declaration of 1967, which anchored *Ujamaa* (Familyhood) as a social revolution inaugurating the building of a new body politic, thus, completing the unfinished Maji Maji Revolution.²⁵ Therefore, we aim to show how Ebrahim Hussein's theater portrays Maji Maji as unfinished revolution and opens up alternative sites of social and political existence in Tanzania that signify possible transformations, which may be conceived as the fulfillment of the revolution's promise.

Although the "body" as both a conceptual and material object is fundamental to Maji Maji, few scholars have investigated the revolution through the prism of the body as an analytical category. Therefore, this chapter re-centers the "the body" in the study of Maji Maji to argue that: (1) Hussein's dramaturgy depicts the invention of indestructible bodies to underscore how violence as an instrument for physical and linguistic subjugation of Africans creates a desire for unbreakable bodies. (2) The ritual of technologizing ordinary bodies into indestructible bodies reaffirms the African revolutionary spirit and commitment to preserve life.²⁶ In other words, the unbreakable body is an antidote to technologies of subjugation and a technology of purification for which the eventual goal is the preservation of life beyond physical survival. (3) The superposition of the idea of indestructible bodies on two divergent poles, that is, the real and the fictive, allows us to examine

²⁵ Azimio la Arusha (The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance (1967), simply referred to as Azimio is Tanzania's founding document of African Socialism, based on the ideology of *Ujamaa* (Familyhood). Azimio captures TANU's creed, which highlights the principles and objectives of Tanzanian socialist state; the policy of socialism; the policy of self-reliance; TANU's membership; and The Arusha Resolution that set guidelines for political leadership in Tanzania. Azimio was the official political economic and cultural planning document in Tanzania for the most of 1960s to 1990s. (See Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, Nairobi: OUP, 1968).

²⁶ Stephen O. Okafor, "Bantu Philosophy: Placide Tempels Revisited," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 13(2), 1982, pp. 83-100.

how Maji Maji, the historical event, intersects with Maji Maji, the national epic to define the modern Tanzanian state. In this iteration, Maji Maji died in 1907 when the German forces defeated and lynched African soldiers and came back to life in the wake of Arusha Declaration when Tanzania declared that out of the ashes of Maji Maji, a new Tanzanian nation, based on *Ujamaa* would be built.²⁷

We organize this chapter into five sections. The first section historicizes the intersection of Maji Maji, the historical event, and Maji Maji, the dramatic event, in Hussein's *Kinjeketile*. The second section grapples with the ideas of the body, violence, and subjectivity in the colony. The third section examines cracks on the body of Maji Maji and how these cracks accentuate the significance of centering the body in studies that investigate revolutions as events that mark human progress. The fourth section returns to the desire for unbreakable bodies to explore the limits of these bodies and suggest an alternative reading that rethinks Hussein's idea of the body beyond the individual. Finally, the last section grapples with the legacy of Maji Maji in modern Tanzania.

Field, Text, and Maji Maji

This section shows how *Kinjeketile* engages competing colonial, nationalist, and revisionist discourses on Maji Maji to unsettle *givens*, such as the concepts of rebellion, revolution, archive, and maji. It also traces Maji Maji's evolution as a "permanent virtuality" in Tanzania.

Although Maji Maji emerged from a place of pain and grief, it has become an event that calibrates political progress in Tanzania. We read Maji Maji as a symbol, which serves as, to use Kant's vocabulary, a "rememorative, demonstrative, and prognostic sign of a constant progress

²⁷ Cited in T.O. Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa. Part I," *The Journal of African History*, 9, no. 3(1968): 636.

which carries along the whole of the human race.”²⁸ In other words, we read Maji Maji as a powerful and multifaceted symbol that encapsulates what has happened, what is, and what is to pass in Tanzania. Maji Maji, may seem at first glance, to be a common, inconsequential instance of primary resistance.²⁹ However, its true significance does not rest solely on its effectiveness or results. Rather, its importance lies in its existence as a spectacle. That is, “the way in which it is greeted everywhere by spectators who are not participants, but observers, witnesses, and who, for better or worse, let themselves be caught up in it.”³⁰ Following Michel Foucault’s analysis of Emmanuel Kant’s meditation on the French Revolution, we suggest that the relevance of the Maji Maji lies in the consciousness of the contemporary Tanzanian generations, such as scholars and artists who can make the most of the Revolution by deploying it to serve their present needs. In essence, the critical value of the Maji Maji Revolution is its ability to exist as a “permanent virtuality.”³¹

Maji Maji broke out in 1905 and lasted until 1907 in the then southern part of German East Africa, covering about 260,000 square kilometers. It was the first resistance to mobilize diverse ethnic communities, including the Indians and Arabs, from Tanzania’s coastal regions. While some scholars recognize that the movement materialized as resistance to German colonial policies, ranging from compulsory hut tax, the ban on hunting and dancing, forced labor, population transfer, and violence, others, especially Tanzanian nationalist historians and artists, prefer to emphasize the quest

²⁸ Emmanuel Kant, “The Contest of Faculties,” in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 157.

²⁹ Ranger, “Connections Between ‘Primary Resistance’ Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism,” 636.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College De France 1982-1983* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 18. Foucault’s lecture was based on Kant’s “the Contest of the Faculties,” in which Kant reflects on the idea of the French Revolution and human progress.

³¹ Ibid.

for freedom as the leading cause of the Revolution.³² We propose that the debate on whether Maji Maji was a revolution or a rebellion is only relevant to the extent that it illuminates how Maji Maji has become a conjecture through which Tanzania seeks to understand its pasts and possible futures. To grasp the nexus between *Kinjeketile*, the text, and Maji Maji, the historical event, we trace three competing discourses that continue to shape the historiography of Maji Maji and attempt to situate *Kinjeketile* in these discourses. They include (1) colonial discourses, (2) nationalist discourses, and (3) revisionist discourses. Our aim is twofold: to show how a revolution generates competing discourses and how *Kinjeketile*—the dramatic production that privileges *action*—invents unbreakable bodies and uses the bodies to reconstruct Maji Maji as a multimodal event that resists simplification.

Colonial discourses furnish the earliest written records on Maji Maji. The discourses locate the causes and the spread of the Revolution in African superstitions and cult practices. However, as historian Thaddeus Sunseri points out, these discourses feed on “a colonial mentality, which, by the turn of the twentieth century, had become accustomed to seeing anti-colonial resistance movements through a millenarian lens.”³³ At the end of Maji Maji, German colonial officers requested Christian missionaries—bent on discrediting the Revolution’s foundation as an organized resistance that drew support from different African traditions—to write reports on the war. Sunseri writes:

For German officials in the colony at the time of the uprising, there was a conscious effort to disassociate Maji Maji from ‘a religious movement’ as opposed to a localized uprising instigated by sorcerers, because it would imply that the situation on the ground (as the war was still being fought) was well-organized and slipping out of German control.³⁴

³² Thaddeus Sunseri, “Statist Narratives and Maji Maji Ellipses,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33, no. 3 (2000): 567-584.

³³ Thaddeus Sunseri, “Maji Maji and the Millennium: Abrahamic Sources and the Creation of a Tanzanian Resistance Tradition,” *History in Africa*, 26 (1999): 370.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 378.

Colonial officers used evidence selectively to misrepresent the nature of the resistance, downplay the number of African deaths and casualties, and shift the blame and burden of the Revolution to Africans. The reports painstakingly denied the capacity of Africans to organize and sought to portray the resistance as isolated acts of rebellion. However, despite the limitations of these colonial reports, they offered a footing for the establishment of Maji Maji historiography in postcolonial Tanzania.

Nationalist discourses were advanced by scholars, artists, and public intellectuals who saw in Maji Maji a platform for advancing the post-independent Tanzanian state's ideological needs. Internal divisions within the ruling party, TANU, and the need for unity after the unification of Tanganyika and the revolutionary government of Zanzibar to form Tanzania in 1964 called for a national narrative to drum up support for Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* socialist vision. As Nyerere often said, "the major task of the independent government was to build a nation out of motley 'tribes,' and this could only be done by the state, so necessarily, from the top."³⁵ Tanzanians had inherited a state (a body) of more than 120 tribes, and it needed Maji Maji to serve as a soul for transforming the state into a nation. In other words, the fledgling nation-state needed to evoke the spirit of Maji Maji to underscore the national and the collective sense of struggle that had made the state possible. The establishment of the History Department at the University of Dar es Salaam, which kickstarted the nationalist historiography, allowed notable expatriate scholars, such as John Iliffe, Walter Rodney, Terance Ranger, and Joachim Fiebach to launch research projects that propped up Nyerere's socialist ideology. John Iliffe's *Maji Maji Research Project* was one of the most successful programs as it recruited graduate students to conduct oral interviews on Maji Maji in southern Tanzania.³⁶ Many of these graduate assistants, such as Gilbert Gwassa, would later become leading Maji Maji historians.

³⁵ Shivji, Issa, Yahya-Othman, Saida and Kamata, Ng'wanza, *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki wa Nyota, 2020), 2.

³⁶ John Iliffe, *Maji Maji Research Project* (Dar es Salaam: University of Dar Es Salaam, 1968).

Nationalist historiography privileges sources that depict Maji Maji as an organized African resistance against foreign domination, and their narratives feed Tanzania's need for "interethnic unity, precedents for TANU's political struggle for independence, and the search for African heroes of the past and African ideologies of resistance."³⁷ Nationalist discourse assumed hegemony over other competing narratives in post-Arusha Declaration Tanzania, a characteristic that alienated scholars who sought to critique Nyerere's socialist agenda.

Revisionist discourses emerged when new colonial evidence, for example, those that had never been translated from German to other languages, became available. Other forms of evidence emerged from oral interviews conducted in other communities throughout Tanzania.³⁸ Works under these discourses address some omissions in the official and nationalist archives, such as the absence of women's voices in the histories of the resistance, the omission of environmental issues, and the influence of religion, especially Christianity and Islam, in narrating the resistance.³⁹

While the colonial, nationalist, and revisionist discourses are not mutually exclusive and contain overlapping arguments, their critical differences lie in the divergent interpretations they attribute to the idea of *maji* (water) and their conception of the significance of Maji Maji within Tanzania. In essence, the interpretation of Maji Maji hinges on the meaning ascribed by a discourse to the nature of the *maji* ritual and, to a lesser extent, the significance of Kinjeketile as the presumed architect of this ritual. Whereas colonial discourses portray Maji Maji as a "romantic reactionary" resistance in which African soldiers fought against facts and lost, nationalist discourses celebrate Maji Maji as a revolution.

³⁷ Sunseri, "Maji Maji and the Millennium," 366.

³⁸ Jamie Monson, "Relocating Maji Maji: The Politics of Alliance and Authority in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania," *The Journal of African History*, 39, no. 1 (1998): 95-120.

³⁹ Sunseri, "Maji Maji and the Millennium," 370.

Kinjeketile provides a theatrical and cultural lens (which is less concerned with the accuracy of the historical sources) to not only engage the competing interpretations of Maji Maji but also underscore what is at stake when a revolutionary event becomes the conjecture around which a nation's history is debated, contested, and even transformed. Unlike the colonial, nationalist, and revisionist historiographies that tend to constrain the revolution to the historical past—the selected recorded events that happened during the war, *Kinjeketile* takes a broader view, embracing a usable past, or what Hayden White describes in *The Practical Past* as “the past that people as individuals or members of groups draw upon in order to help them make assessments and make decisions in ordinary everyday life as well as in extreme situations (such as catastrophes, disasters, battles, judicial and other kinds of conflicts in which survival is at issue).”⁴⁰ White emphasizes that the past is not a mere collection of disconnected historical facts, but a dynamic resource that individuals and groups tap into to navigate the complexities of their lives. In this kind of past, the issue of the real and the fictive is immaterial. Besides, the act of staging a play implies interpretation, that is, “choosing the right metaphors, describe them, clarify the tale, propose an interpretation of history, a way of thinking, and a way of knowing.”⁴¹

Furthermore, *Kinjeketile* engages in this process of reconstructing a usable past to underscore at least three issues that are less emphasized in other discourses on Maji Maji: (1) The subjugation of Africans through violence as a process of becoming political subjects, (2) the political climate of the colony, and (3) economic exploitation.⁴² Hussein drew from various discourses on Maji Maji without confining himself to any. We seek to demonstrate in this chapter that although *Kinjeketile* is widely

⁴⁰ Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), xiii.

⁴¹ Antoine de Baecque, *Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France 1770-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 7.

⁴² Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, vi.

construed as a nationalist drama, it transcends this classification as Hussein embraces dramatic license to unsettle what appears as *givens* in various discourses on Maji Maji.⁴³ The dramatist accentuates the significance of the body in Maji Maji to demonstrate that singling out the concept of the body as the primary category of analysis will flesh out the mechanisms through which colonial brutality led to the transformation of peasants into political subjects and how we might read the modern Tanzanian state as a body politic that attempts to complete the Maji Maji Revolution. Such a reading may be outside the bounds of colonial, nationalist, or revisionist historiography, but it is within the purview of the literary. Thus, *Kinjeketile's* literary treatment of Maji Maji enriches our understanding of the Revolution as it focuses on the historical events as they appear in different discourses as well as the aspects of the usable past that the historical past overlooks.⁴⁴

Colony, Body, and Violence

This section investigates how Hussein uses the body to show how violence in subordinating ordinary Tanzanians transforms them into political subjects. The section also examines how Hussein centers the body as the political resource that reveals the nature of violence in Tanzania. *Kinjeketile* shows why the discourse on Maji Maji cannot be constrained to its climactic moment: the moment of reckoning when the soldiers realize that their bodies are not immune to German rifle bullets. For Hussein, the discourse must begin by dramatizing the material and affective conditions that make the desire for the indestructible bodies intelligible. Colonial archives due to their insistence on framing the Revolution as a failed rebellion overlook these material and affective conditions. After Maji Maji the governor of German East Africa, was anxious to produce “the most favorable

⁴³ Amandina Lihamba, *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania after Arusha Declaration, 1967-1984* (University of Leeds doctoral thesis, 1985).

⁴⁴ White, *The Practical Past*, xiv.

interpretation of his administration possible in order to save his career.”⁴⁵ Even when a commission set up to investigate the war identified “economic grievances” and “witch doctor conspiracy” (notwithstanding their accuracy) as possible causes, colonial scholarship seemed only interested in advancing the sorcery conspiracy at the expense of genuine economic grievances.

The British Empire, which took over the colony after the First World War, highlighted the brutality of German rule in Africa and propped up the Herero Massacre and the Maji Maji as illustrations of violence that disqualified Germany from holding colonies.⁴⁶ However, after gaining the trusteeship of German East Africa, they renamed the colony Tanganyika and continued with the plantation economy. Nationalist historiography often draws from these colonial archives to reconstruct the past in ways that animate the present. In other words, they acknowledge the recorded conditions that led to the Revolution to the extent that they amplify Maji Maji as a foundation of the Tanzanian national narrative of freedom.⁴⁷

Scholars of Hussein’s *Kinjeketile* often invoke the play’s early scenes to underscore oppression and violence in the colony. Michael Etherton rightly observes that “each scene *in the play* makes a specific point which builds up into the playwright’s argument.”⁴⁸ However, he constrains the play’s argument to “reason and national liberation, and what they can mean today to a Tanzanian audience.”⁴⁹ While this argument is accurate, it is by no means exhaustive. A comprehensive analysis

⁴⁵ Thaddeus Sunseri, “Statist Narratives and Maji Maji Ellipses,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 2000, 33(3), pp. 569.

⁴⁶ Sunseri, “Statist Narratives and Maji Maji Ellipses,” 571. He argues that “While German methods of quelling Maji Maji were brutal and contributed to famine through the use of scorched earth tactics, it is a mistake to view German colonialism in East Africa through the same lens as that of South-West Africa” (573).

⁴⁷ (See Gilbert Gwassa, “Kinjeketile and the Ideology of Maji Maji,” in Ranger and Kimambo, *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 210.

⁴⁸ Michel Etherton, *The Development of African Drama* (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982), 156.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

of *Kinjeketile* should consider Hussein's dramaturgy, especially how he dramatizes the body to reveal conditions that create the possibilities of the figure of Kinjeketile and the desire for indestructible bodies. Arguments that cluster the analysis of the play around Kinjeketile's activities while ignoring or paying insufficient attention to the first scenes of the play lack grounds for articulating the significance of the play in modern Tanzania.

Biodun Jeyifo, in a chapter, "Tragedy, History, and Ideology," conducts a comparative analysis of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Hussein's *Kinjeketile* through the prism of what he calls "three great moments: Aristotle; Hegel; Marx-Engels."⁵⁰ Like Etherton, he begins his analysis of *Kinjeketile* by summarizing the consequences of the German colonization of Tanganyika.

There is an economic exploitation and oppression through taxation and forced, cheap labor. There is the brutality of the Germans and their minions and henchmen, the Askaris (native constabulary), and the overseers: whippings, and the rape of African women and girls. Worst of all, there is the deep spiritual despair of the people, their lack of any will to resistance, and the disunity and traditional regional hostilities which keep them divided and impotent. Against this background emerges Kinjeketile.⁵¹

Here, Jeyifo is primarily interested in the figure of Kinjeketile, whom he contrasts with Soyinka's Elesin Oba in *Death and the King's Horseman*. His Marxist reading makes a distinction between these two heroes, noting that while Soyinka's hero epitomizes the emergence of African 'bourgeois' historical tragedy, Hussein's Kinjeketile epitomizes "realist or socialist African historical tragedy."⁵² For Jeyifo, Kinjeketile is a perfect hero that allows Hussein to "demystify, to clarify, to show the dialectical operations between politics, material existence and the superstructural categories—the

⁵⁰ Biodun Jeyifo, "Tragedy, History and Ideology," in *Marxism and African Literature* (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 1985), 94.

⁵¹ Ibid., 103.

⁵² Ibid., 107.

morality, the myths and the metaphysics of the society.”⁵³ Although Jeyifo does not elaborate on the conditions that give birth to Kinjeketile or how Kinjeketile constitutes himself or is constituted as an ordinary hero, his conclusion is closer to the claims we make. Nevertheless, in our analysis, it is not Kinjeketile that matters most in the play but rather the conditions and processes that give rise to his figure. Indeed, some historians argue that the figure of Kinjeketile did not even take center stage as the leading Maji Maji spirit medium until the 1960s when nationalist scholars began to reconstruct the Revolution to support Tanzania’s socialist agenda.⁵⁴ The accuracy of these claims is beside the point; their efficacy lies in how they push us to reconsider our approach to understanding Hussein’s play and cast our nets beyond the character of Kinjeketile.

As the play unfolds, Hussein immerses the audience in the harsh realities of plantation life, depicting how Africans navigate the relentless challenges of hunger, starvation, and death. By focusing on these experiences, he effectively prevents the audience from perceiving colonialism outside the realms of the body, life, and death. In the colony, Africans have lost autonomy, as they are stripped of their rights over their bodies, land, and individuality.⁵⁵ They exist under complete domination, with their bodies confined to the colonized workers’ quarters, under constant surveillance and control. The value placed on their bodies lies solely in their ability to provide forced labor or, in the case of young girls like Chausiku, serve as commodities in the colony’s sexual economy. In Mbembe’s parlance, the concepts of “biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege” catenate to unleash terror on the colonized.⁵⁶ The colonial government exercises full control

⁵³ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁴ Sunseri, “Statist Narratives and Maji Maji Ellipses,” 578. Sunseri notes that “it was Gilbert Gwassa who gave a name to the Maji Maji leadership by emphasizing the spirit medium Kinjeketile in his oral interviews in the Matumbi region in the late 1960s.”

⁵⁵ Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, 15, no. 1(2003):2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

over the lives of Africans, treating them as mere vessels of labor to fuel the capitalist economy, effectively reducing them to “ghosts of modernity.”⁵⁷ The colonizer has seized control of the Tanzanian landscape, restructuring it into racially segregated quarters. The colonized are strictly prohibited from accessing the colonial quarters, while it is the colonizer and their agents who venture into the colonized areas to abduct young girls. This is exemplified when the overseer kidnaps Kitunda’s daughter, leaving Kitunda powerless to retrieve her. Even if he wanted to, he could not penetrate the German fort and its guns.

The Africans in *Kinjeketile* struggle to understand how the German has become their master.

They try to tell him:

We do not owe you anything. We have no debt to you. If you, as a stranger, want to stay in this country, then you will have to ask us. Then we will ask of you an offering to propitiate the gods. You will offer something, and we will propitiate the gods on your behalf; we will give you land, and you will get a place to stay in. But it is not for us as hosts to give you the offering. That is quite impossible.⁵⁸

This passage portrays the Africans grappling with their perception of the Germans as their masters and struggling to comprehend how this power dynamic has come about. Africans did not understand that German colonial officers and settlers did not consider them civilized people with a predictable order that governed their everyday life. In the absence of a state with instruments like those of European states, the colonial space becomes a place of exception.⁵⁹ In the European political imaginary, the idea of the state was a critical element in mediating relationships. The practice of waging war or making peace was entrenched in the idea of the state as an entity that held oversight powers on the right to kill and to make peace. A war was legitimate to the extent that it

⁵⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 130.

⁵⁸ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, vi.

⁵⁹ Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall, *Agamben and Colonialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 24.

was fought between states.⁶⁰ In this economy, the colonies were “frontiers” inhabited by primitive people without instruments of statecraft. Such people could not negotiate a peace treaty or even fight as organized soldiers. In short, “colonies *were* zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other.”⁶¹ In this space, violence is unleashed for many reasons: to discipline the natives, civilize them, or for narcissistic purposes.

Hussein immerses the audience directly into this landscape, specifically the colonized quarter—a decimated territory that can no longer sustain agricultural production. To use Fanon’s description, “it is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light.”⁶² The first conversation we observe is about hunger, starvation, and imminent famine.

BIBI KITUNDA: And all that work for nothing. Our men work a lot, but they get nothing. We don’t even have food in the house. When my husband comes back from the plantation, I have no food to give him. I have looked for roots, I couldn’t get any. I have looked for cassava, I couldn’t get any. And anyway, some of the roots are most poisonous. Bibi Bobali’s son died from eating some.

BIBI KINJEKETILE: Yes, but what can we do, with such famine as this? You know, I too find it very difficult to get food.

BIBI KITUNDA: I know. Anyway, famine is inevitable. All the men are working in Bwana Kinoo’s plantation and not on their own. So, of course, there must be famine.

BIBI KINJEKETILE: What you say is true. All the men are spending all their time cultivating for Bwana Kinoo, and not for themselves.⁶³

This dialogue broaches forms of violence that act on the physical body, psyche, and social fabric of society. Bi Kitunda and Bi Kinjeketile are afraid of starving to death since their husbands work in

⁶⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and Social Contract* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). He points out that “war is not, therefore, a relationship between man and man, but between state and state, in which individuals become enemies only by accident, not as men, nor even as citizens...” (51). Following Rousseau’s remarks, we can conclude that the Germans did not see a need of engaging Africans on an equal footing as they considered them primitive people with no state or an organized Europeanized form of government.

⁶¹ Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 24.

⁶² Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 4.

⁶³ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 1-2.

plantations for a German settler, Bwana Kinoo, instead of cultivating food for their families. The plantation economy profits settlers at the expense of Africans, forced to abandon their farms to engage in servitude to earn enough wages for hut taxes. This territorial violence of altering landscapes, allocating vast swaths of land to cash crop farming, displaces Africans from their lands and increases labor demand, thus becoming one of the impetuses for the Revolution.

Bibi Bobali's son's death is depicted matter-of-factly, almost as if it has become a common occurrence, prompting concerns regarding the community's sustainability and their ability to survive in the future. The recurring deaths of children and the inability to procreate raise fundamental questions about the society's capacity to defend its existence. With the land no longer capable of sustaining people's livelihoods, Chausiku, the daughter of Bi Kitunda, finds herself scanning the clouds for a smoke signal—a sign that a household might have food to share. It becomes evident that Hussein intends for the audience to grasp that the famine plaguing the region is not a divine act, but rather a consequence of colonial occupation that has fundamentally disrupted people's way of life.

Hussein skillfully incorporates women characters into *Maji Maji* to shed light on the gendered and often overlooked manifestations of violence within the discourse surrounding *Maji Maji*. One notable example of this is the impact colonialism has on the ability of married couples to fulfill their marital obligations and maintain a satisfying and pleasurable sexual life. The women's dialogue in the play reveals that men have lost control over their own bodies. The plantation system, in its exploitative nature, has drained them of their capacity to engage in pleasurable or procreative activities. Given the deaths of children, famine, and absence of sexual intercourse, the question arises: How can this society ensure its survival?

FIRST WOMAN: How many days are left before our turn to work in Bwana Kinoo's plantation is over?

SECOND WOMAN: Two days to go, and then another village will relieve us. That is something to look forward to. Our men will have some rest. They really work them hard. When my husband comes back, he is so tired that he can't do a thing.

FIRST WOMAN: Ah, so he doesn't turn towards you!

(*She laughs mischievously.*)

SECOND WOMAN: I don't mean that! But he does come back very tired. He immediately flings himself on the bed and sleeps like a log. Even if there is something to eat, he doesn't want it.⁶⁴

We learn about hunger and the inevitable famine through Bi Kitunda and Bi Kinjeketile's dialogue and become aware of the conscious efforts on the part of the colonizer to inflict violence and pain on Africans. For instance, archival evidence shows that in 1898, a few years before the outbreak of Maji Maji, an eighteen-year-old girl from Chiwata in southern Tanzania wrote: "our news is this, that the Germans treat us badly and oppress us much because it is their will."⁶⁵ Nine years later, towards the end of Maji Maji, this girl, now a married woman, wrote:

We and all the people in our village are in the same condition, we are suffering from famine. Since my birth I have never seen such scarcity. I have seen famine but not one causing people to die. But in this famine, many are dying, some are unable to do any work at all, they have no strength, their food consists of insects from the woods which they dig up and cook and eat. Some they eat without cooking. Many have died through eating these things from the woods and wild fruits. Some do not die at once but when they taste good food, at once their bodies swell and they feel ill and die.⁶⁶

This account demonstrates how colonial officials planned and executed schemes that condemned scores of Africans to starvation and death.

In the play, the SECOND WOMAN compares her husband's body to a log, that is, a body that "sleeps like a log" and does not do anything. In short, it is like a corpse or a thing (log). The idea of the body as a thing reveals how violence transforms men into what Mbembe calls

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁵ Agnes Achitinao to Rev. C.C. Child, from Chiwata, 15 March 1898, USPG Archives (London), UMCA A/5 (quoted in G.C.K. Gwassa and John Iliffe, *Records of the Maji Maji Rising* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 1.

⁶⁶ Agnes Sapuli to Rev. C. C. Child, from Mwiti, 28 Feb. 1907, UMCA A/5. (Quoted in G.C.K. Gwassa and John Iliffe, *Records of the Maji Maji Rising* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 27.

“neuroeconomic subjects,” to describe people who appear to function as humans or animals (are expected to desire sex and have a need to reproduce) but are also absorbed by “thingness (as a subject to other’s enjoyment of the things of this world).”⁶⁷ The other is the colonizer who reaps from the labors of the neuroeconomic subjects. This element of thingness as an attribute of the African body is significant in *Kinjeketile* as it reveals how the body (the working body) is at the center of the African’s existence. In other words, the “thing” comes alive when it is working and is sustained as long as it works. In the context of the colony, the African body has no meaning beyond working. As Mbembe writes, “strictly speaking, within the drama of life, the body itself signifies nothing in itself. It is an interlacing, a bundle of processes that in and of themselves have no imminent or primordial meaning.”⁶⁸ This portrayal of the body as a log or a corpse perhaps constitutes the reason Africans desired an indestructible body, a body that withstands the forced transformation into thingness. Indeed, as we will see in later sections, *Kinjeketile* was worried that their victory against the Germans might be short-lived if they ended up falling into the hands of the Sultan of Zanzibar.⁶⁹ *Kinjeketile* wanted an unbreakable body that could withstand all sorts of subjugation and not limited to physical violence.

In the colony, laws are suspended; not even the children are spared. This is exemplified in the plight of Kitunda’s daughter, Chausiku, who, unlike her parents, does not engage in plantation work. However, the colonizer still manages to ensnare her within the plantation economy. The overseer approaches Kitunda and proposes a disturbing exchange: trading his own daughter, Chausiku, in return for a brief respite from the grueling labor on the plantation. In this harrowing

⁶⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 143.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 143. (See also Aimé Césaire’s equation: “Colonization = thingification” in *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42.

⁶⁹ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 16.

scenario, the overseer devalues Chausiku's body, perceiving it as a mere form of currency, a tool for bartering between the colonizer and the colonized. Consequently, at a tender age, Chausiku is tragically stripped of her bodily rights and dignity. This struggle for the domination of the African body reaches a climax when the overseer and his Askari forcibly seize Chausiku. This pivotal scene unfolds in the evening within the confines of Kitunda's home, where a small group of workers have convened to strategize resistance against their oppressors. The overseer (Mnyapala), accompanied by a policeman, implores Kitunda to trade his daughter for a two-day break from work.

MNYAPALA: Bwana Askari, and even Bwana Akida-Thabiti, have agreed to this...Yes—as I was saying...Bwana Askari says you can rest tomorrow...

(Uncomfortable silence)

You can rest for two days if you like.

...

KITUNDA: And what do I have to do to earn that?

MNYAPALA: Hm...you can lend us your daughter.

*(He looks at Chausiku.)*⁷⁰

A fight ensues between Kitunda, the overseer, and the police officer. Hussein's description (stage directions) provides a vivid image of the event:

They roll on the ground. Mnyapala's friend comes to his aid. He gets his chance and uses his whip on Kitunda's back. Bibi Kitunda and Chausiku take hold of him in an attempt to get the whip from him. But he turns around and whips Chausiku, who writhes with pain. The man grapples with Bibi Kitunda. They both fall on the ground. Seeing this, Kitunda leaves Mnyapala to go to the rescue of his wife. He pounces on the man. But Mnyapala hits Kitunda from behind with a stick. Kitunda falls unconscious. Bibi Kitunda rushes to look at her husband. The man gets up. Mnyapala drags away Chausiku, who is struggling hard and shouting for help.⁷¹

In a powerful and distressing scene, Kitunda finds himself wounded, while his daughter becomes the target of a heinous act of abduction with the intention of sexual assault. Hussein presents this gripping sequence as a physical confrontation, akin to a boxing match, emphasizing the contestation

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁷¹ Ibid.

of bodies. The events unfold with a rhythmic focus on the fight and the accompanying violence, temporarily shifting the attention away from Chausiku, until the pivotal moment when Mnyapala forcibly removes her from the scene. Although the scene is undeniably violent, with the deployment of weapons and the utilization of physical force to subdue the opposition, the portrayal of violence in the play does not explicitly leap off the pages. Rather, we are plunged into what Walter Benjamin, in a discussion of Brecht's theater, calls an "experiment" to describe how epic theatre sets up elements of reality as an experiment with conditions at the end of the experiment.⁷²

We observe two parties fight with each other over Chausiku, but we are not aware of the outcome. Hussein employs a dynamic wrestling vocabulary and rapid descriptions that blend together, denying us the opportunity to firmly take sides or passively consume the barbarity unfolding before us. It seems as though Hussein intends to keep us engaged in the raw brutality of the situation, where a father is coerced into compromising his daughter's dignity in exchange for relief from labor. Therefore, when Mnyapala forcefully drags Chausiku away, it serves as a moment for us to catch our breath, process the initial shock, and ultimately make sense of the events as Kitunda and Chausiku's plight become apparent. The incident becomes a frozen moment with a clear beginning and ending, a moment that we can revisit to reflect on the cruelty of colonialism.⁷³ This scene potentially appeals to the audience's sense of reflective judgment, which Lara Pia describes as the moral filters that enable us "to interpret what is at stake when we find the connection between a specific violation to the integrity of a human being and a powerful way of describing it through disclosive (i.e., expressive) means."⁷⁴ Exercising this judgment enables us to

⁷² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 4.

⁷³ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁴ Lara Pia, *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 10.

consider why the men in the bush failed to come to Kitunda's aid and why the overseer, a black colonized person, participates in deflowering black female children.

The FIRST WOMAN laments that the overseer steals maidens for the Askari to spoil: "Chausiku—poor girl! (She shakes her head.) And this Mnyapala, of all the things to do! Why did he have to procure Chausiku for the Askari, a young and green maiden like that?"⁷⁵ Hussein's Swahili version uses *mbichi* (unripe or raw), an adjective that applies to fruits and other green farm produce to mark growth. The woman employs the adjective to underscore the intensity of violence meted out to Chausiku. That is, the violence not only steals her right to dignity but also spoils (defiles) her. Her name, Chausiku (for the night), sums up her fate as one who is *used* (circulates) at night and unacknowledged during the day. Her life embodies the trauma of inhabiting what Frantz Fanon calls a "zone of nonbeing" to describe the space where the colonized is forced to occupy.⁷⁶ It appears, then, that Hussein strategically utilizes the bodies of female characters within the play to accomplish two primary objectives. Firstly, he employs these characters to illustrate various manifestations of violence within the colonial setting. Through their experiences and conversations, the audience is able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the oppressive conditions endured by individuals living under colonial rule. Secondly, Hussein underscores the importance of recognizing and analyzing the materiality of the body when examining acts of violence. By placing emphasis on the physicality and corporeal existence of these women, he brings attention to the tangible and visceral impact of violence on individuals' bodies. This approach prompts a deeper exploration of the consequences and implications of violence beyond mere theoretical or abstract considerations. Thus, Hussein's portrayal of women characters serves to both illuminate specific forms of violence in the

⁷⁵ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 11-12.

⁷⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1956), xii.

colony and emphasize the critical role of the body in understanding how violence subjugates Africans.

In *Kinjeketile*, violence is not an abstract or faceless process with intangible consequences. It is tangible and affective. However, the depiction of violence does not rely on gory or voyeuristic elements. Hussein intentionally avoids graphic uglification of violence in favor of depicting linguistic violence. Through carefully crafted dialogues that are imbued with poetic language, he invites both spectators and readers to engage in contemplation about life within the colony. This aspect of Hussein's dramaturgy is particularly exemplified in the narration of Kitunda's whipping:

FIRST MAN: He straightened up, to ease his back a little. The overseer slashed him with a whip. Kitunda wrenched the whip from the overseer, and immediately, the headman was called in, who ordered Kitunda to be whipped some more.
MNYAPALA: Quiet, there! No talking, or there'll be trouble.⁷⁷

Kitunda's whipping is a tale, retold at home—outside the context where it happened. The stage directions describe an injured Kitunda being carried home by his fellow workers. His wife asks: “What happened?”⁷⁸ FIRST MAN uses words to paint a picture for the audience. The Swahili version is more graphic than the English translation: “Kitunda aliinuka kunyosha mgongo.”⁷⁹ [He straightened up, to ease his back a little.⁸⁰] The verbs “aliinuka” and “kunyosha” are simply translated as “straightened” and “ease,” respectively. *Aliinuka* tells us what Kitunda did and reveals two presuppositions: Kitunda was digging and (invisible to the overseer), but the action of rising (*kuinuka*) made him visible. In his bent status, Kitunda is an invisible laborer who is in rhythm with the rest of the workers. His individuality is inconsequential. However, once he rises to fulfill a human need,

⁷⁷ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

“kunyosha mgongo” [to ease his back], the act announces his presence; he becomes visible. This act of rising is a form of protest that must be suppressed. “The overseer slashed him with a whip.”⁸¹ Here, Hussein’s English translation is more violent than the Swahili version, “Mnyapala akampiga kiboko” (the overseer whipped him). The verb “slash” conjures up an image of cutting something, somebody into pieces. Kitunda “wrenches the whip from the overseer.”⁸² Again, Hussein’s English version evokes graphic violence more than the Swahili version. “Kitunda hakukubali; alikikamata kiboko” (Kitunda caught the whip).⁸³ “Wrench” signals a violent act, which accentuates Kitunda’s protest. Hussein dramatizes Kitunda’s pain to reaffirm that revolutions often emerge from a place of pain and grief. He seems to suggest that this pain prompts individuals and groups, particularly those at the receiving end of violence to rise and proclaim their existence. As Alain Badiou writes on resistance:

We used not to exist, but now we exist, and we can determine the history of the country. This subjective fact is endowed with extraordinary power. *The inexistent has risen*...people were lying down, submissive; they are getting up, picking themselves up, rising up.⁸⁴

Badiou ascribes extraordinary power to this subjective fact of existence. The act of rising up from a state of passivity or submissiveness is portrayed as a powerful and empowering act of resistance. People who were once lying down, symbolically representing their marginalized or oppressed status, are now standing up, asserting their presence, and taking control of their own destinies. The phrase “the inexistent has risen” encapsulates the transformative nature of this resistance, where previously overlooked or silenced voices emerge and demand recognition and change. Hussein demonstrates this idea through the creative use of language instead of staging actual violent scenes. He “simply sets down what happened,” not to mobilize the audience to empathize with Kitunda, but rather,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 4.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Alain Badiou, *Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, (London: Verso), 56.

following Brecht's dramaturgy on alienating the audience, to unsettle them "to think for themselves."⁸⁵

In *Kinjeketile*, subordination is predominantly enacted through the physical body, and many of the acts of violence depicted in the play are primarily somatic in nature. These forms of violence become apparent when we adopt what Russell West-Pavlov terms a "paradigm of proximity."⁸⁶ This perspective goes beyond the familiar Brechtian alienation effect often employed in Hussein's plays. It centers on the immediate and intimate connection between affect and the body, serving as a persistent reminder of the embodied experiences of the writer, the reader, and the text itself. This paradigm underscores the ongoing immersion of the body within the obstinacies and rhythms of the world, encompassing both its rejections and invitations.⁸⁷ By focusing on the proximity and immediacy of these bodily experiences, the play offers a vivid portrayal of the somatic manifestations of violence and its impact on individuals within the narrative.⁸⁸

Hussein's dramaturgy focuses on the characters' bodily desires and appetites, such as hunger, famine, rape, and sexuality, which are presented as dynamic elements that contribute to the

⁸⁵ John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 15.

⁸⁶ Russell West-Pavlov, *Eastern African Literatures: Towards an Aesthetic of Proximity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5. In the context of West-Pavlov's analysis, the concept of proximity is characterized by four key features. Firstly, proximity activates a mode of semiosis, which refers to the process of creating meaning through signs and symbols, which is primarily somatic. This means that the generation of meaning is rooted in bodily, visceral, and material experiences rather than being purely representational or abstract. Secondly, proximity operates within a dynamic or economy of affect. This suggests that it functions based on the interplay of emotions, feelings, and sensations, influencing the ways in which individuals engage with and respond to their surroundings. The affective dimension plays a significant role in shaping the experience and perception of proximity. The third aspect of proximity is the condition of spatial contiguity. Spatial contiguity refers to physical proximity or closeness in space. The physical closeness between entities or individuals is crucial for proximity to be established and for its effects to be felt. Lastly, contiguity defines the modes of agency that proximity facilitates. The close spatial relationship enables and shapes the possibilities for action and agency. It establishes the parameters within which individuals can interact, engage, and exert influence on one another, creating opportunities for various forms of agency to manifest. West-Pavlov's identification of these features of proximity underscores the embodied, affective, spatial, and agentic aspects that are integral to the experience and dynamics of proximity.

exploration of landscapes of violence. However, we suggest that his intention is not to generate definitive truths or provide explicit criticism. Rather, these elements serve to offer glimpses into the multifaceted nature of violence without aiming to establish fixed truths or deliver overt critique. By adopting this approach, Hussein challenges traditional expectations of historical representation and invites the audience to engage with the complexities of violence and its impact on individuals and societies. His emphasis on nonlinguistic behaviors and bodily dynamics adds depth to the portrayal of Maji Maji, offering a more nuanced understanding of the events while avoiding the constraints of producing a singular and definitive historical account.

The effectiveness of this somatic theatricalization lies in its emphasis on the body as the primary vessel of experience and meaning. By prioritizing the body as the raw material through which experiences are filtered, Hussein's approach creates a powerful and immersive theatrical experience. The body becomes the central focus, allowing the audience to engage with the characters and their stories on a deeply embodied level. This privileging of the body as a source of meaning enhances the impact of the performance, as it taps into the visceral and sensory aspects of human existence. By exploring the physicality, gestures, and sensations of the characters, the somatic theatricalization invites the audience to connect with the narrative in a profound and immediate way. This aspect of Hussein's dramaturgy acknowledges the significance of the body in shaping our understanding of the world and highlights the potential for embodied experiences to convey meaning and evoke emotional responses. As Ghanaian dramatist Joe De Graft underscores:

What makes drama unique as an art form is that not only is it capable of drawing on all life for its raw material, but also it does and must utilize the pulsating raw material of actual human bodies, attributes, and behaviors as the *sine qua non* of its very medium of expression. It is for this reason that drama is closer to life as men actually live it than any other form of artistic expression.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ J.C. de Graft, "Roots in African Drama and Theatre," in Harrison, Paul Carter, et al. *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in The African Diaspora* (Temple University Press, 2002), 20.

The intrinsic connection between drama and the physicality of human existence sets it apart from other forms of artistic expression. By utilizing the pulsating raw material of human bodies, attributes, and behaviors, drama becomes a dynamic and vivid reflection of real life. It has the power to delve deep into the complexities of human existence, engaging with the emotions, struggles, and relationships that define our daily lives.

Kinjeketile attempts to embody the material world of the colony beyond simple representations on stage. However, it is important to acknowledge that without direct experience of an actual stage performance, our analysis here remains speculative. Nevertheless, we can speculate on certain aspects, such as the portrayal of a body driven by hunger, which suggests the contours of a strained environment incapable of adequately sustaining its inhabitants. The famine that threatens characters like Bi Kitunda and the other women is not a sudden, isolated event but rather a manifestation of what Rob Nixon terms as “slow violence” to describe types of violence that affect the environment but go unnoticed in the short-term.⁹⁰ This form of violence is deeply ingrained in *Kinjeketile*’s landscape, often escaping recognition unless one closely observes the bodies of the colonized, particularly the starving children and women. By directing attention to the bodies affected by the famine, the play prompts the audience to confront the subtle, yet profound violence embedded within the colonial context. As the archival sources about the eighteen-year-old girl from Chiwata demonstrates, starvation during Maji Maji was a slow and deliberate process.

Our argument thus far posits that Hussein employs graphic violence at the beginning of *Kinjeketile* to highlight the subjugation of Africans through linguistic and bodily violence. This subordination, however, simultaneously constitutes them as political subjects. While some discourses on Maji Maji touch upon the forms of violence explored in this chapter, they often neglect to delve

⁹⁰ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2.

into the notion that inherent in the power that oppresses Africans lies the potential for resistance. Hussein acknowledges that Maji Maji, like other African revolutions, is intertwined with violence, and any examination of the Revolution must involve an exploration of violence and its various manifestations. Hannah Arendt's assertion that "violence is incapable of speech...speech is helpless when confronted with violence"⁹¹ captures the inherent challenge in studying violence. It resists easy categorization or analysis through conventional means of communication. However, violence remains a persistent and integral aspect of both the colonial context and the Revolution itself. This raises the question of how we can effectively study violence when it resists being articulated through speech.

Hussein endows his characters with the capacity to convey embodied violence in ordinary body language that is familiar to the audience. His dramaturgy is unique in how it uses the body in the discourse on Maji Maji to not only reveal the manifestation of slow violence but also to highlight the necessity that makes the idea of indestructible bodies intelligible. He draws from the historical record for his raw material and employs (creatively and imaginatively) the "pulsating raw material of actual human bodies."⁹² Thus, the early scenes of *Kinjeketile* do not adhere to a conventional logical and causal plot structure. Instead, they invite the audience to actively engage with the narrative, allowing them to participate in constructing the story through their perceptive, associative, and imaginative faculties. This interactive aspect of the play empowers the audience to contribute to the unfolding fables, bringing their own perspectives and interpretations to enrich the experience."⁹³ The next section of this chapter delves into the politics of creating indestructible bodies.

⁹¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolutions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 18.

⁹² De Graft, "Roots in African Drama and Theatre," 20.

⁹³ Joachim Fiebach, "Brecht: Gestus, Fable, Attitude-cum-Stance." *Modern Drama*, 42(2), 1999, pp. 207-213.

Cracks on the Body

While in the early scenes of the play, Hussein depicts Africans in the process of discovering themselves, reckoning with the choice between servitude and death, and the absence of paths to redemption, the remaining scenes of the play, beginning from the introduction of *maji* (water), portray Africans in the process of constituting themselves into new subjects: fighters. The bodies we encounter in the early scenes of *Kinjeketile* are starved, beaten, raped, and sexually deprived. These broken bodies cannot even agree on a timeline and best approach for launching a war against the Germans. The central problematic in these scenes revolves around the idea of life and how to preserve it.

We aim to show that contrary to discourses that advance “unity” as the idea that makes Kinjeketile’s *maji* (water) and the desire for indestructible bodies comprehensible, it is the inevitability of violence and the need to preserve life that makes the desire for indestructible bodies intelligible. In *Kinjeketile*, preservation of life is not necessarily an act of securing freedom; if anything, it is closer to the idea of liberation from physical bondage—the need to restore life to its pre-colonial base—than it is to gaining political freedom and establishing a body politic. Although liberation is often a prelude to freedom, it does not automatically lead to freedom.⁹⁴ In their book, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (1974), Grace and James Boggs argue that a rebellion aims at liberation from whatever issue that oppresses people while a revolution goes beyond liberation to involve “a projection of man/woman into the future.”⁹⁵ For Hannah Arendt, a revolution not only centers freedom as an end, but also seeks to establish institutions to safeguard or guarantee freedom. Maji Maji is often discussed in academic literature as a rebellion—a war in which

⁹⁴ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 29.

⁹⁵ Grace Boggs and James Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Books, 1974), 19.

the German colonial officers crushed with Africans and defeated them. None of the competing colonial, nationalist, and revisionist discourses discussed in this chapter claim that the men and women of Maji Maji conceived the resistance as a revolution that would eventually lead to something new: freedom and the establishment of a body politic to exercise freedom. However, we suggest that *Kinjeketile* portrays discourses that reveals Maji Maji's preoccupation with both liberation and freedom. Although the majority of scenes in the play concentrate on establishing the necessity of liberation from physical violence instead of mapping paths for attaining freedom and establishing political institutions to safeguard freedom, the last scenes after the war offer glimpses of how Kinjeketile conceptualized the idea of freedom beyond the emancipation of Africans from physical bondage. Hussein elaborates these concepts in his later works, such as *Mashetani*, *Jogoo Kijini*, and *Ngao ya Jadi*.

There are at least two types of discourses that address the intelligibility of indestructible bodies, and they all hinge on the critical role of Kinjeketile's *maji* (water) in the resistance. These discourses probe the foundational role of *maji* in mobilizing or uniting people to fight against German colonialism. Although these discourses primarily emphasize the “why” aspect—preferring to explore the motivations behind the Revolution rather than its execution—*Kinjeketile* provides a platform to scrutinize the “how” facet of the Revolution, permitting a detailed observation of people's lives as they strategize and mobilize for the war. While Hussein's interpretations of archives seemingly celebrate the ideological utilization of *maji* as a unifying tool, he complicates the debates by showing us how necessity (read as the drive to preserve life and to restore lost independence) serves as one of the foundational elements that create the need for the unbreakable body.⁹⁶ The meaning of the body here is confined to the individual physical human body. However,

⁹⁶ Stephen O. Okafor, “Bantu Philosophy: Placide Tempels Revisited,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 13(2), 1982, pp. 83-100.

in subsequent sections, we will explore how Kinjeketile expands this idea of the indestructible body to articulate a body politic, such as the one established after independence. The significance of exploring discourses about the intelligibility of indestructible bodies lies in how they reveal Maji Maji as both a revolution—a war for the decolonization of Tanzania and the establishment of a new body politic—and a rebellion (or unfinished revolution) that can only find relevance in a post-independent Tanzania, keen on completing the unfinished revolution.

The first discourse identifies cult ritual practices as spaces that gave birth to *maji*. This discourse draws from narratives of missionaries and colonial officers working in East Africa to argue that Kinjeketile was a charismatic and revolutionary leader who appealed to an established religious system of African communities in southern Tanzania to mobilize people to fight against the Germans. As Terence Ranger notes:

Many African societies of East and Central Africa had religious systems in which specialist officers played an institutionalized prophetic role, speaking with the voice of the divine either through possession or through a dream or oracular interpretation.⁹⁷

Since Kinjeketile's claim to leadership is not founded on hereditary or established bureaucracy, his emergence is construed as a revolutionary event. Both colonial and nationalist discourse attest to Kinjeketile's humble and ordinary beginnings. However, discourses that center Kinjeketile as the linchpin of the revolution run the risk of erasing people's experience before and during the struggle or representing the rebellion as a millenarian movement. *Kinjeketile* establishes that long before Kinjeketile rose with his message about *maji*, people were committed to finding means to fight the Germans.⁹⁸ Kinjeketile may have accelerated the resistance or made it possible, but this does not invalidate the idea that violence constituted Africans into subjects who sought to emancipate

⁹⁷ T.O. Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa. Part I," *The Journal of African History*, 9, no. 3 (1968): 447.

⁹⁸ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 3.

themselves. Moreover, studies that advance Christian and Islamic motivations for the revolution contest discourses that depict Kinjeketile as the main force behind the Revolution.⁹⁹ Instead, they show that Christian and Islamic teachings influenced the Revolution.¹⁰⁰ For these discourses, the idea of *maji* mirrors religious rituals of baptism.

The second discourse, advanced mainly by nationalist historians, considers *maji* as an ideology of unity. Gilbert Gwassa's article "Kinjeketile and the Ideology of Maji Maji" is one of the earliest works that attempt to read Kinjeketile's teachings about unity as an end in itself. The article claims that "for people politically divided and used to fighting limited defense wars, it was necessary to unite and take the fullest advantage of numerical superiority if victory over the German was to be assured."¹⁰¹ Gwassa's argument fails to acknowledge that although there were fewer Germans in Tanzania compared to Africans, they had superior weapons. Hussein's *Kinjeketile* is instrumental in challenging the claim that unity was the most fundamental element Africans needed to defeat the Germans. To trace the need for unity and how Kinjeketile's *maji* addresses this need, Gwassa invokes Father Placide Tempel's concept of "vital force" to explain *maji* logic in southern Tanganyika. His interpretation takes away the people's agency to determine their lives. In other words, he suggests that it was not the ordinary people who wanted to fight to end their bondage but the ancestors who command them to fight. Gwassa extrapolated Tempel's problematic arguments about African cosmology and ontology, referred to as "Bantu Philosophy," which many scholars critique for coalescing all African experiences into a single denominator: "vital force."¹⁰² Gwassa's

⁹⁹ Thaddeus Sunseri, "Maji Maji and the Millennium: Abrahamic Sources and the Creation of a Tanzanian Resistance Tradition," *History in Africa*, 26 (1999): 370.

¹⁰⁰ Hussein Bashir Abdallah, *Jihadi Kun ya Maji Maji 1905-1907* (Dar Es Salaam: Islamic Sites Conservation, 2011).

¹⁰¹ Gilbert Gwassa, "Kinjeketile and the Ideology of Maji Maji," 202.

¹⁰² Okafor, "Bantu Philosophy: Placide Tempels Revisited," 86. In Bantu thought, as presented by Tempels, this vital force is a dynamic spiritual power that infuses all aspects of life. It's perceived to be present in everything, including

obedience to Tempels is perhaps only legible within the nationalist narrative that he was eager to advance. He saw in Maji Maji a platform for ideological elaboration. Tempel's' hierarchized taxonomy of gods—Supreme Being—gods—spirits—ancestors—elders—people—augments some of the oral evidence Gwassa collected from Maji Maji witnesses and informants in the late 1960s.¹⁰³

Of this hierarchy, Gwassa comments:

Kinjeketile's message combined the 'vital force' of the Creator, who had commanded the War' of the ancestors, who were to return to assist the living warriors; and of the living war leaders who were accepted by their followers at the ceremonies at Kinjeketile's pool.¹⁰⁴

The implication is that people listen to Kinjeketile because of his position in Tempel's taxonomy. In other words, he has more "vital force" than the rest of the people. In his view, Kinjeketile's teachings were accepted for their consistency with familiar metaphysics.¹⁰⁵ For Gwassa, unity was achieved through Kinjeketile's deployment of war medicine. That is, "Maji as a war medicine was not to be found of or for any single group, clan or ethnic identity, but of and for all people; his was a universal medicine having a universal appeal."¹⁰⁶ As one informant in Msongazi, one of the regions that participated in Maji Maji, elaborates:

Magic and medicines were rife in the pre-Maji Maji times. There had been no important cults or magicians at Msongazi itself, but people could seek help in their problems from cults or magicians or medicine men who lived afar. They could obtain a medicine called *Taga*, which was used in detecting coming invasions. There was also medicine for averting such invasions. This was called *Mbale*. In case it was necessary to fight, a kind of medicine called *Nguga* would be used for making people bullet or arrow-proof. This was not the same as that of Hongo (*Kinjeketile*), which was brought during Maji Maji. *Nduga* would make bullets and arrows bounce and drop when touched any person in the battlefield. Another medicine used

people, animals, and even inanimate objects. Vital force is hierarchical, according to Tempels. The amount of vital force a being or object possesses determines its place in the cosmic order. Tempels' interpretation of Bantu philosophy and the concept of vital force has been critiqued and is seen by some as an oversimplification or even a misrepresentation of diverse African philosophical and religious systems.

¹⁰³ Gwassa, "Kinjeketile and the Ideology of Maji Maji," 202.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 204.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 202.

¹⁰⁶ Gwassa, "Kinjeketile and the Ideology of Maji Maji," 204.

in battles was *Mbayu Mbayu*. This made warriors untouchable by bullets or arrows. Thus, before Hongo brought his Maji, the people of Msongozi knew of war medicine. This was one of the reasons for their readiness to take Hongo's medicine, which was felt to be superior to those they had known before.¹⁰⁷

This reasoning has increasingly influenced many nationalist interpretations of Maji Maji and contributed to superficial readings of *Kinjeketile* to extrapolate themes on unity.

We do not reject the idea of unity as a fundamental element of Maji Maji. Indeed, even Hussein himself appears to be captivated by the potential unity of Africans as an objective of Maji Maji. He seems to subscribe to the unity narrative, insofar as it provides a platform for him to incorporate the notion of the body politic into Maji Maji discourses. However, Hussein's conceptualization of unity in Maji Maji diverges from its heightened portrayal in nationalist historiography. He presents contradictory dialogues about "unity" to underscore how the concept of unity is not (should not be) be read as the end goal of the Revolution. For instance, he creates characters that are constantly debating whether unity should be a precondition to fighting the Germans or whether they needed to fight the Germans to attain unity.¹⁰⁸ The ambiguities inherent in these debates invite us to rethink hegemonic nationalistic narratives that view Maji Maji from the exclusive standpoint of the concept of unity. While this view sits well with the concerns of a divided Tanzania, which was attempting to fashion a nation out of many tribes, it overlooks essential lessons about Maji Maji. That is, the interpretation of *maji* should not be constrained to an ideological or technological tool to deploy arbitrarily. In its broader articulation, *maji* is a catalyst of a ritual that produces indestructible bodies for which the eventual goal is the preservation of life and the founding of a body politic to guarantee freedom. Thus, unity should be subsumed in this process of preserving life—not as an end goal. Africans wanted to fight because, for them, the colony signified

¹⁰⁷ *Maji Maji Research Project*, No. 1/68/2/1.

¹⁰⁸ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 7.

death. They wanted to fight the Germans to liberate themselves, to be restored. An analysis of Kinjeketile and Kitunda's activities elaborates on these concerns.

Kinjeketile's message is fourfold: (1) People will unite to form one body like a human body. (2) Africans will fight and defeat the Germans. (3) The ancestors have given people water, which confers power and creates indestructible bodies. (4) He (Kinjeketile) is a messenger from the ancestors in Kolelo, the land of the dead.¹⁰⁹ Kinjeketile appears to hierarchize this message as he prioritizes the creation of indestructible bodies as a means of achieving unity as opposed to the development of indestructible bodies as a weapon for fighting the Germans. However, his priorities differed from those of other Africans. Whereas he wanted Africans to take *maji*, unite, train hard as soldiers, and only then fight the German, for the majority of the people, the war was more important and could not be delayed. Many Africans could not understand why they needed to unite first or train as soldiers when they possessed the power and strength of *maji*. Therefore, if Kinjeketile's goal was to use *maji* to unite people while expecting them to train as soldiers and defeat the Germans on their strength, he was mistaken. And here is where we find cracks in his message. Hussein creates these cracks to interpolate his perspective on unity. Kinjeketile delineates the benefits of *maji* as follows: (1) It will give people power.¹¹⁰ (2) It will provide immunity against bullets. He said, "he who partakes of this water no harm will befall him. No bullet will penetrate his body."¹¹¹ "This water will make your bodies unassailable by bullets. It will make you an invincible army."¹¹² (3) The water will create unity. He said, "this water will bind together the roots of love and

¹⁰⁹ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 19.

affection...we will be one people.”¹¹³ These messages reveal that Kinjeketile conceived *maji* primarily as a weapon of war and as a means for achieving unity. Although it is the first primary goal that became popular to Africans, Kinjeketile’s speeches allow us to conclude that unity was a prelude to forming a body politic, an idea that was not necessarily a priority for the majority of people under the German rule.

We will unite, and we will be one body. And as it is in a human body, when a toe gets hurt, the whole body feels the pain. When a Mmatumbi gets whipped, it is the Mzaramo who will feel the pain. When a Mrufiji gets tortured, it is the Mngoni who will cry out. When we reach this stage, then we will be united. We will be one people.¹¹⁴

While the body politic language sits well with the goals of the modern Tanzanian state, which saw in Maji Maji a platform for building Tanzania’s revolutionary credentials as a nation with a history of mobilizing people for a common cause, it had failed to convince the men and women of Maji Maji—people who had been preparing for war from time immemorial and were impatient with Kinjeketile’s delay tactics. Whereas at the beginning of the play, people were afraid to fight against superior weapons, they now possessed what they assumed was a much superior weapon: an indestructible body. Why, then, should they wait any longer?

The breakdown in communication between Kinjeketile and the people emerges from two divergent views on the goals of Maji Maji. For the people, Maji Maji was a war of liberation driven by necessity—the need to preserve their lives. One informant describes the war as a “struggle for the country’s lost independence.”¹¹⁵ Independence is framed as a time before colonialism when the people enjoyed the fruits of their labor, did not pay taxes, were not flogged, or starved to death. Thus, the people conceived Maji Maji as a struggle to restore this way of life. While it is difficult to

¹¹³ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁵ *Maji Maji Research Project*, No. 1/68/2/1.

conclude definitively whether the initial goal of Maji Maji was not freedom, Hussein provides enough information to underscore the idea of “necessity” as the driving force for the rebellion. The people wanted to restore their lives. However, it seems that for *Kinjeketile*, restoration of pre-colonial life was inadequate as it fell short of freedom. *Kinjeketile*’s position appears to echo Arendt’s argument that “liberation *from violence* may be the condition of freedom but by no means leads automatically to it; that the notion of liberty implied in liberation can only be negative, and hence, that even the intention of liberating is not identical with the desire for freedom.”¹¹⁶ However, as Hussein shows towards the end of the play, the men and women of Maji Maji did not lose the hope of gaining freedom. They may have been defeated in the physical fight with the colonial officers, but they became more aware of their predicament and discovered ideals greater than the simple restoration of the lives they lost with the advent of colonialism.

Scholars focusing on Maji Maji often overlook the nuanced differences between the concepts of liberation and freedom, as well as rebellion and revolution. They tend to interpret liberation and freedom as interchangeable terms, similarly treating rebellion and revolution as equivalent. This approach, however, risks distorting the true nature of the struggle. Hussein endeavors to rehabilitate this image to reveal the contours of the rebellion, especially the cold reality that if the aim of a revolution is freedom, then Maji Maji, the war fought between 1905 and 1907, was not a revolution in the strict sense of the word. The broader implication of this analysis is that revolutions are bound with the notion of new or the foundation of a new body, which means that revolutions “are more than successful insurrections.”¹¹⁷ None of these claims suggest that the men and women of Maji Maji were incapable of conceiving a body politic. On the contrary, *Kinjeketile* is a

¹¹⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 29.

¹¹⁷ Ali Mazrui, “On Heroes and Uhuru-Worship,” *Transition*, No. 11 (Nov. 1963), pp 23-28.

testament that the spirit of revolution often emerges from the action of liberation. The liberatory goal of restoring or renovating a life that has been usurped can go beyond the need to become “the supreme sovereigns of the land” to founding a body politic to guarantee the exercise of freedom.¹¹⁸

Kinjeketile’s statement about Seyyid Said, entangled in his speech about unity and *maji*, casts doubt on the efficacy of his teachings. He suspects that he is being manipulated by Seyyid Said, the Sultan of Zanzibar and that Hongo (spirit medium that possessed Kinjeketile) may not have been his benefactor. While in a trance, Kinjeketile proclaimed that: “When we are united, we will be free. We will be the children of Seyyid Said.”¹¹⁹ Considering that Said’s sultanate was notorious for enslaving Africans, why would Africans fight Germans only to be dominated by the Sultan? This single statement buried in a page-length dialogue that calls for unity compels us to re-evaluate the goals of Maji Maji as captured in various discourses. Kinjeketile believes that Seyyid Said is far more dangerous than the Germans because he (Said) “could with our consent enslave us body and mind.”¹²⁰ Thus, for Kinjeketile, liberation without total freedom is inadequate as it does not sustain the revolutionary spirit that will enable people to wade through storms of domination.¹²¹

Hussein’s insertion of Seyyid Said in Kinjeketile’s speech changes the course of the play as Kinjeketile is no longer confident whether he was indeed possessed by Hongo or given *maji* by Hongo. These doubts encroach on Kinjeketile’s mind and put him on a trial that lasts throughout the play. The trial (or dilemma) unfolds in many stages, and it hinges on the legitimacy of *maji*, which presumably rests on four pillars: (1) Kinjeketile derived his authority from the ancestors. “These are gifts given us by our ancestors and our spirits...do not fear, for our ancestors support *the war* and are

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 37, 40.

¹¹⁹ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 16.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹²¹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 12.

behind us.”¹²² (2) He performed or claimed to have performed miracles using *maji*. “Did you not see—two days ago—two lions became tame and powerless in my hands?”¹²³ (3) Kinjeketile stayed in the water for a day, and not even his garments became wet. “He who stays under water without getting wet, that same is Kolelo, no other.”¹²⁴ (4). Finally, people believed in Kinjeketile because of the promises of *maji*. They wanted the power to create indestructible bodies. This last pillar was perhaps the most important as it satisfied a pressing need in society. With an indestructible body, Africans could fight the Germans and liberate themselves from colonialism. However, Kinjeketile’s doubts threatened the legitimacy of *maji* and the promise of the much-needed unbreakable bodies.

Kinjeketile’s doubts about *maji* are reflected in his conversation with Kitunda, whom he had appointed to “build an army, to teach our young men how to fight.”¹²⁵ Kitunda and his soldiers failed to understand Kinjeketile’s need for military training when they possessed a weapon that makes their bodies indestructible. He was eager to start the war, but his path was blocked by Kinjeketile, who challenges him: “how do you know that it was Hongo and not another spirit” that gave me *maji*?¹²⁶ Kitunda continues to press for war and even threatens to reveal Kinjeketile’s doubts to the soldiers. Kinjeketile’s dilemma is this: He can reveal his doubts about *maji* and watch the men disappear from the training ground, where they are drilling and preparing to fight the Germans, or he can stand by his teachings and the power of *maji*, claims that can potentially lead to loss of lives. His conversation with Kitunda reveals that he is aware that people are not ready for war:

¹²² Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 17, 19.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹²⁵ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 19.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 28.

No, you are not ready to fight! What you mean is, you are confirmed in the belief that the water and the spirits will fight the war for you. You are depending on water. Remove the water, and you will have a war—amongst yourselves, tribe against tribe.¹²⁷

Both Kinjeketile and Kitunda understand the risks of sending people to face the Germans and seem to abhor shedding blood—“(Kinjeketile) can’t you see that thousands and thousands of them may die if we are not certain,” yet they fail to stop people from starting the war.¹²⁸ Whether Kinjeketile believed that *maji* would make the bodies of Africans indestructible or unbreakable, or whether this was a ruse to get Africans to commit to fighting the Germans as a prelude to establishing an indestructible body politic, is difficult to tell. However, we know that the presence of Seyyid Said in his prophetic message compelled him to amplify the need for unity at the expense of the promise of *maji*. His dilemma emerges from the larger-than-life role he had assigned to *maji*, presumably or erroneously believing that it will play second fiddle in his broader scheme of constituting Africans into a body politic. Unfortunately, the promises of *maji* trumped all other goals and became the main attraction of the resistance. The idea that *maji* transformed people’s bodies, imbuing them with immunity against bullets, was the desire of the ages.

Hussein acknowledges this tension between Kinjeketile’s desire for a body politic and the individual needs of Africans—urgent needs that rose out of the necessity to preserve their lives. Even before Kinjeketile showed up with *maji*, people had begun to explore the possibility of going to war. Kinjeketile rightly observed that people were divided along tribal lines, but he ignores the fact that unity could be forged through means other than *maji*. The first two scenes of the play reveal that necessity—the need to avoid bodily violence and secure basic needs for families—had begun to unite people under a shared cause and a common enemy. If Kinjeketile’s *maji* appealed to people, it

¹²⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 36.

was not for its ability to unify but for its power to confer immunity against German bullets. The idea of building a body politic did not hold sway for people who were frequently beaten, raped, humiliated, and on the verge of famine. They understood that theirs was a confrontation against “naked violence,” violence against violence.¹²⁹ These men and women, who for long had been beaten, were eager to carve out a new path for themselves in the form of a violent liberation. They had spent many hours learning, preparing, and anticipating this moment. They were determined to overthrow the Germans, wrench them from their forts, and rid the country of the Red Earth.¹³⁰ It appears, then, that extending the goals of *maji* beyond the unification of Africans allows us to identify Kinjeketile’s commitment to establishing an indestructible body politic. Indeed, we can argue that the idea of an indestructible body was a symbolic reference to an imminent body politic that became possible with the Arusha Declaration of 1967.

The Limits of Unbreakable Bodies

In many revolutions people confront the choice between liberty and death, but Maji Maji did not seem to fit this criterion. Africans trudged forward, knowing that they had conquered death with their indestructible bodies. The only lives on the line were those of Germans and their stooges. Although Hussein refrains from portraying battlefield violence on stage, his use of language in the last scene of the play conjures up bloody images of violence: kill, destroy, blood, harm, cut, and slay:

All at once, we wanted blood, we wanted to kill, we wanted to destroy. We did not think, but we were suddenly seized by vengeance. We wanted payment—to harm as we had been harmed, to kill as we had been killed. In this tumult of blood, we started the war.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 23.

¹³⁰ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 39.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

This chain of raving verbs and adjectives offers us a glimpse into why people embraced *maji* and its presumed power. They had bottled up pain and rage and could no longer wait for Kinjeketile's signal. They refused to listen to Kitunda's warnings that some people had died from gunshots despite having partaken of *maji*. Instead, they threatened Kitunda with violence. They were on the road and could only move forward towards the German guns; they trudged on. Kitunda narrates:

Suddenly it started spurting bullets, and all the while Ngulumbalyo and his men marched right on chanting, "Maji!" "Maji!" "Maji!" and being mown down by the thousand. Kibasila, on hearing the chant, also got possessed. His people forgot our war strategems, and took up the chant, "Maji!" "Maji!" "Maji!" and rushed towards the fort. I sent soldiers to curb this madness, but it was no use. I personally went, but there was not a sane man among them, and nobody would listen.¹³²

Bullets from German machine guns ripped through their flesh and bones as *maji* failed to confer them the much-promised immunity. Kinjeketile either fabricated his claims about *maji* or erred in his interpretation. If we are to believe that his message came from the ancestors at Kolelo, we are obliged to believe in the efficacy of *maji*. However, Hussein appears to advance the idea that Kinjeketile's notion of the indestructible body referred to an entity that was yet to exist—one that would be established when all Africans unite to fight colonialism. Unfortunately, Kinjeketile failed to develop a consciousness for this kind of body. Instead, he succeeded in creating an illusion of an unbreakable body that can withstand bullets to address people's immediate need of protection from colonial violence.

The utopianism of developing natural indestructible bodies trumped other significant interpretations of the concept of unbreakable bodies. However, after a bloody and gruesome defeat, Kinjeketile was determined more than ever to advance the promises of a body politic—one that transcends individual bodies. In the last scene, German officers torture him to make him retract his

¹³² Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 48.

words—to tell people that *maji* was a lie.¹³³ He refuses to recant his words. He feared that the moment he retracts his words, “the people in the north, south, east, and west will stop fighting.”¹³⁴ He clung to *maji* as a unifying force that will eventually lead people to freedom and chose his own death and that of the soldiers whom his confession would have spared. Kinjeketile looked into the future, believing that keeping the hope of a body politic alive was worth the lives of the many men the Germans executed that day. Are these, then, the ashes on which Tanzania wanted to create a state?

The Maji Maji war of 1905-1907 failed to liberate Africans from colonialism as the Germans clamped down on the resistance and hanged many African fighters. The scorched earth policy ubiquitous in the German military tactics in Africa caused famine, which claimed more African lives than were lost in the battlefield. If violence against the Germans was meant to restore the independence of Africans, it failed. However, Hussein is keen to demonstrate that even though Maji Maji entered the colonial lexicon as a rebellion owing to colonial obstinacy to recognize the struggle as a revolution—the desire for liberation and the need to establish a body politic to guarantee freedom—the struggle was not in vain. On the contrary, Maji Maji is portrayed as an unfinished revolution, and Kinjeketile’s dying words attest to this stance:

Do you know what they will say tomorrow? The officer will say that we were wrong. He will tell our children that we were wrong in fighting him. He will tell that to our children, Kitunda. That to fight him was wrong! That to fight for one’s country is wrong!¹³⁵

Kinjeketile resolved to deploy his body as the ultimate weapon, and with his execution, he became a martyr. He achieved his martyrdom through transforming his body into a weapon akin to a suicide

¹³³ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 51.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 53.

bomber, who casts *their* body into “a mask that hides the soon-to-be detonated weapon.”¹³⁶

However, unlike conventional weapons, the body as a weapon is concealed from the enemy in a form that is ordinary and present—yet cannot be identified without prior knowledge. This weapon is “so intimately part of the body of its bearer, who carries with it the bodies of others when it does not reduce them to pieces.”¹³⁷ Kinjeketile’s decision not to recant his words condemned many African soldiers to death. It did not matter that the soldiers begged him to retract the words to spare them death. Kinjeketile appeared disinterested in preserving his body and those of the condemned soldiers as he focused on the future—on what could be gained. The call of death gave him glimpses of what life could not, that the idea of an unbreakable body is more important than the lives that will be lost by his obstinacy to renounce the power of *maji*. His death kept the revolutionary spirit to inspire future generations to fight for liberation. Indeed, Maji Maji was the beginning of a long match to a total revolution.

The Germans may have put down the initial resistance and even believed it had died when they executed the main participants. However, like a zombie, the revolution came back to life to haunt both the Europeans and Tanzanians. We explore this aspect of the revolution in the next section, where we will focus on two primary points: how Maji Maji shaped British response to Tanzanian’s agitation for independence and how Tanzanian nationalist leaders navigated the complicated legacy of Maji Maji during the struggle for independence and after independence, especially in the wake of the Arusha Declaration, which ushered in Ujamaa (Familyhood) as a social, political, and economic order in Tanzania. Although the link between Maji Maji and the establishment of the modern Tanzanian state is difficult to codify, nationalist historiography has

¹³⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 14.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

forged a strong connection between these two events without considering the four-decade hiatus between them. In our view, such omissions can only be legible in a cultural production, such as Hussein's *Kinjeketile*, which focuses less on the actuality of Maji Maji as a historical event, and more on the reconstructive possibilities the revolution provides for re-imagining the construction of the modern Tanzanian state.

Exorcising Maji Maji Sensationalism

Maji Maji was a traumatic event in the history of Tanzania. The treatment of African soldiers and captives in the hands of German colonial officers terrified any would-be revolutionaries. The officers executed many Africans who participated in the war, confiscated their properties, and meted collective punishments on villages that harbored the so-called rebels. The Africans who surrendered and turned themselves in at the German Boma (headquarters) were forced to pay exorbitant fines in addition to regular taxes. Colonial officers humiliated Africans and bent their will to ensure that they would not attempt another uprising.

An order was issued that the natives should capitulate because they could not fight the Europeans. Some agreed to surrender and went to Kibata. Their guns and spears were destroyed, and they were given pieces of white cloth to be used as the flag of peace. The white flags were to be fixed on the tops of their houses or in the ground before their homes.¹³⁸

Despite this, a significant number of African fighters did not surrender. Instead, they sought to kill those who had capitulated too soon. Thus, even though the war had been declared over in 1907, African soldiers continued fighting until the Germans intensified punitive measures. Africans embraced guerrilla tactics making it difficult for colonial officers to respond militarily. The Germans resolved to starve Africans to death to force their surrender. They scorched nearly all food crops

¹³⁸ G.C.K. Gwassa and John Iliffe, *Records of the Maji Maji Rising* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 22.

and made it impossible for Africans to plant new crops. Captain Wangeheim, in a letter to Graft von Götzen, wrote:

In my view only hunger and want can bring about a final submission. Military actions alone will remain more or less a drop in the ocean. The people will be compelled to abandon their resistance completely only when the food supplies now available have been consumed, their houses have been destroyed by constant raids, and they have been deprived of the opportunity to cultivate new fields.¹³⁹

Many scholars note that hunger and starvation claimed more African lives than the fighting did.¹⁴⁰

Unlike in other African societies, such as Kenya, where the collapse of primary resistances did not deter Africans from launching other forms of resistance, such as Mau Mau, the men and women of Maji Maji never attempted to launch another violent liberation struggle as the memories of Maji Maji haunted them throughout the first part of the twentieth century. For instance, when Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, began building the Tanzania National African Union (TANU), he realized that the ghost of Maji Maji still haunted many Tanzanians, making them reluctant to join TANU for fear of being dragged into another Maji Maji.

Memories of the Hehe and Maji wars against the German colonialist, and their ruthless suppression, were deeply ingrained in the minds of our people. The people particularly the elders, asked 'How can we win without guns? How can we make sure that there is not going to be a repetition of the Hehe and Maji Maji wars?'¹⁴¹

In a speech delivered at the United Nations Fourth Committee in 1956, Nyerere explained Tanzania's transformative journey towards self-determination and pointed out that Africans in Tanzania launched resistances against the Germans as early as 1885 but it was not until the early

¹³⁹ Capt. Wangeheim to Graft von Götzen, from Kilosa, 22 Oct. 1905, printed in *Central Africa*, vol. 24 (April 1906), p. 88 (quoted in G.C.K. Gwassa and John Iliffe, *Records of the Maji Maji Rising* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 27.

¹⁴⁰ (See the introduction to Hussein's *Kinjeketile*, Gwassa and John Iliffe, *Records of the Maji Maji Rising*, and Thaddeus Sunsari, "Statist Narratives and Maji Maji Ellipses).

¹⁴¹ Julius Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1952-65* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 2.

twentieth century that their efforts culminated into an organized resistance: Maji Maji.

Unfortunately, the “Germans with characteristic ruthlessness, crushed the rebellion, slaughtering an estimated number of 120,000 people.”¹⁴² Nyerere points out that Maji Maji setbacks coupled with violent world wars that saw many Tanzanians fight in struggles that were never about African interests, cultivated in the minds of Tanzanians a strong aversion to violence. “The struggles against the Germans proved to our people the futility of trying to drive out their masters by force.”¹⁴³

Arguably, Nyerere adopted nonviolence rhetoric as a strategy to appear moderate and gain favor from Western imperial powers that disdained violent anti-colonial struggles.¹⁴⁴ Nyerere was apt to associate TANU with nonviolent struggles and to distance it from Maji Maji narratives for fear of being associated with violence or worse, being compared with the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, which the British had slapped onto the tag of ‘terrorist movement.’ Nyerere considered Mau Mau a violent movement that might jeopardize TANU’s credentials as a peaceful party.¹⁴⁵ He argued that his people still suffered from the trauma of Maji Maji violence, and thus, will likely shy away from any violent campaigns for independence.¹⁴⁶ His strategy paid off as the British hastened to put Tanzania under his leadership as a moderate president with no ties to violent movements opposed

¹⁴² Ibid., 45.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴⁴ His biographers have noted that the British preferred Nyerere for his moderateness. They hastened Tanzania’s independence to ensure that Nyerere was at the helm of the country. [See Shivji, Issa, Yahya-Othman, Saida and Kamata, Ng’wanza, *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki wa Nyota, 2020)]

¹⁴⁵ A British writer in an attempt to name and interpret Mau Mau in 1950 made connects to the Maji Maji Rebellion. He wrote: “the term (Mau Mau) has an affinity with the name of that other extensive revolt, the Maji-Maji rebellion in the south of German East Africa in 1905-1906. That term is commonly explained as having to do with a water magic which sought to change the German Rifle bullets into splashes of water... Swahili expression *Kunywa Maji*, literally ‘to drink water’ but essentially ‘to go on strike, disobey, rebel’ (cf. Standard Swahili-English Dictionary, London, 1939, p. 255). In the same way the literal meaning of Mau-Mau could be rendered as: ‘to urinate, to pass water...but with a purposively hidden essential meaning: to revolt’ (See Prins, A.H.J., The Meaning of Mau Mau, *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 54, 1954, p.16).

¹⁴⁶ Nyerere would later say that non-violence for him was more of a strategy for winning independence as opposed to a principle such as the one espoused by Gandhi.

to British imperial policies. However, after independence Nyerere's TANU revived Maji Maji and transformed it into a national epic.¹⁴⁷ This valorization of Maji Maji reached a climax during the Arusha Declaration in 1967, when a local daily editorialized: "on the ashes of Maji Maji, our new nation was founded."¹⁴⁸ With this declaration, Maji Maji gained a new vitality in the Tanzanian social imaginary.

Nyerere embarked on projects that sought to fulfill Kinjeketile's quest for unity among different tribes in Tanzania.¹⁴⁹ As the president of TANU, Nyerere spent the first years of post-independence period refashioning a state from a multitude of over a hundred tribes.¹⁵⁰ We have argued that contrary to interpretations that read Kinjeketile's promise of the indestructible body as a promise for individuals—a tool for soldiers to wield in the battlefield—his was a prophecy for a coming body politic that would be too strong for any imperial or internal powers to break. Kinjeketile died to protect this idea—the promise that if the people of Tanzania united, they would drive away colonial officers and settlers, and build a body politic to guarantee their freedom. Nyerere saw TANU as a vehicle for fulfilling the promise of building a new Tanzania. Thus, he wrote various positional and policy papers to drum up support for a socialist state.¹⁵¹

Nyerere recognized that Tanzanian's past would constitute the foundation upon which TANU will build a body politic. He realized that the traditional order was dying, and a new body

¹⁴⁷ Tanzania African National Union (TANU) was a major political party in Tanzania. It led the country to independence, launched the *Ujamaa* policy, and eventually became the only party during the one-state party system in Tanzania.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in T.O. Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa. Part I," *The Journal of African History*, 9, no. 3 (1968): 636.

¹⁴⁹ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Jannik Boesen, Birgit Madsen, and Tony Moody, *Ujamaa—Socialism from Above* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977), 12.

must be built in its place.¹⁵² The state he inherited from the British was an artificial creation that pulled over a hundred tribes into a fellowship that Tanzanians did not know how to advance. Nyerere recognized that this fellowship, however imperfect, was his chance for fashioning an indestructible body.¹⁵³ However, the question that was yet to be answered was, “what will be built on our past?”¹⁵⁴ His response was an African socialist state, founded on the idea of *Ujamaa* (familyhood). As he argued:

Socialism involves building on the foundation of our past and building also to our own design. We are not importing a foreign ideology into Tanzania and trying to smother our distinct social patterns with it...we are doing this by emphasizing certain characteristics of our traditional organization and extending them so that they can embrace the possibilities of modern technology and enable us to meet the challenges of life in the 20th-century world.”¹⁵⁵

He invoked the state of nature as a force that made the family unit critical to the survival of people in traditional African societies. Nyerere’s idea of the state of nature departs from Hobbes’ state of nature, which is characterized by chaos and violence that made the desire for a sovereign intelligible.¹⁵⁶ It is perhaps closer, but not analogous, to John Locke’s idea of the state of nature in which man is in a “state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature.”¹⁵⁷ Nyerere’s biographers indicate that he was familiar with these scholars’ ideas, including Rousseau’s concept of the social

¹⁵² Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 6.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁵ Nyerere, *Nyerere on Socialism*, 28.

¹⁵⁶ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁷ John Locke. *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University press, 2003), 101.

contract.¹⁵⁸ Whether Nyerere fashioned his ideas on these European thinkers is beside the point.

What interests us is his insistence on the African tradition, particularly the African family, as a model of establishing an ideal body politic. He argued:

As nature could not be controlled, so the family created out of itself a social unit which was strong enough to withstand all the disasters, and which accepted the necessity for social stability so that the struggle for food and shelter could go on under conditions tolerable to human beings. And social stability was achieved by the establishment of conditions which allowed for individual freedom in the context of social unity, and necessarily on the basis of fundamental equality of membership.¹⁵⁹

Nyerere's argument fleshes out the individual body and the body politic as two fundamental ideas that would later dominate Ujamaa debates. The interplay between these two bodies brings out some of the complications of building the Ujamaa state. It questions whether the family can indeed serve as a basis for building a body politic. Both Nyerere and Kinjeketile appealed to the idea of the body—the anatomical and cognitive unity of a human body and the functioning of a family unit as states of nature that highlight how a body politic can function. Kinjeketile pronounced:

We will unite and we will be one body. And as it is in a human body when a toe gets hurt, the whole body feels the pain. When a Mmatumbi gets whipped, it is the Mzaramo who will feel the pain. When a Mrufiji gets tortured, it is the Mngoni who will cry out. When we reach this stage, then we will be united. We will be one people.¹⁶⁰

Nyerere echoed these words in 1962: “Umoja wa kundi lo lote ni sawa na umoja wa viungo mbalimbali vya mwili au mtambo.”¹⁶¹ [The unity of any group is like a human body or parts of a machine.] He envisioned a new state that fulfills Kinjeketile's vision of unity. In other words, he pushed for a united body politic to guarantee the exercise of freedom in a fast-changing world.

¹⁵⁸ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁹ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 16.

¹⁶¹ Nyerere, *Tujiabibishe*, 3.

The metaphor of the body provides a new lens to comprehend the political landscape of modern Tanzania, particularly in relation to the ideal state as envisioned by Julius Nyerere. This body metaphor encapsulates three distinct but interconnected levels. At the foundational level, the body represents individuality, emphasizing personal autonomy and unique identity within a wider societal context. This view acknowledges each citizen as a vital and distinct component of the societal structure. The second level extends this metaphor, envisioning the community as an organic whole akin to a body, much like a family unit. The third and final level portrays the movement of individual bodies within a larger collective, illustrating a dynamic and unified body politic. This notion underscores the pluralistic nature of society, where the corporeal reality exists simultaneously as singular (individual) and plural (collective), fostering a relationship that is both harmonious and complex. This three-tiered conceptualization of the body thus provides a profound understanding of Nyerere's Ujamaa state, an ideal that combines individual identities, community bonds, and collective political action. It highlights the balance between individualism and collectivism, underlining the interconnected nature of society in Nyerere's vision of a unified Tanzania.

Kiswahili became a *lingua franca* and a basis for uniting disparate tribes in Tanzania.¹⁶² *Kinjeketile* prefigures this fundamental significance of a standardized language. Kinjeketile is a member of the Wamatumbi tribe, but whenever he spoke with people from other communities, particularly when in a trance and speaking as a messenger of the ancestors, he addressed people in standard Swahili. However, his speeches with his kinsmen were in a Swahili dialect appropriate for his tribe.¹⁶³ The other values that became the pillars of Nyerere's body politic include equality, human dignity, freedom, development, and national ethic. These values converged in Nyerere's belief that "the

¹⁶² Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 2.

¹⁶³ Hussein, *Kinjeketile*, 21.

purpose of society is man—not the nation, the flag or even God.”¹⁶⁴ Here Nyerere put the man at the center of the body politic and made him the rationale for the state’s existence.¹⁶⁵ He saw the state as an instrument for the development of man and as a convenient administrative division.¹⁶⁶ The new body politic sought to address the social question through upholding human dignity and fostering equality. Nyerere reasoned that these goals could be achieved by eliminating poverty, hunger, and diseases. If the 1950s and early 1960s were a period of building unity in Tanzania, the post-Arusha Declaration (1967) period was considered a period of economic development. As Nyerere reasoned, “development brings freedom provided it is development of people.”¹⁶⁷

Freedom, a concept that was not fully developed during Maji Maji, became a core idea in the Ujamaa state. Nyerere saw the idea of freedom as an umbrella term for other values such as unity and equality. He wrote:

There must be freedom, because the individual is not served by society unless it is his. And there must be unity, because only when the society is united can its members live and work in peace, security, and well-being.¹⁶⁸

He argued that alleviating economic and social inequalities through a reasoned production and distribution of commodities. He critiqued those who valorized the market and cautioned them against manufacturing desires: “there is no virtue in creating a market for something which people have never thought of wanting and have no need for, but which someone hopes to make a profit by producing.”¹⁶⁹ The idea of creating desires for commodities, especially non-essential commodities,

¹⁶⁴ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Nyerere, *Nyerere on Socialism*, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Nyerere, *Man and Development*, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 8.

¹⁶⁹ Nyerere, *Nyerere on Socialism*, 36.

was one of the primary consequences of colonialism. Achille Mbembe, invoking Fanon, characterized colonialism as “a prodigious machine for the production of desires and fantasies.”¹⁷⁰ Colonialism introduced material commodities and resources that seeped into the African lives, becoming objects of ostentation and markers of class.¹⁷¹ Colonialism endeavored to tempt the Africans into embracing “new idols, the law of new commodities, the price of new values, a new order of truth.”¹⁷² The Africans are gradually inured to property and wealth and their limitless capacity to define life.¹⁷³ The meaning of property or commodities is not inherent in these things; it is rather generated locally but within the rubrics of the colonial economy. Thus, “if there is a secret to the colony, it is clearly this: the subjection of the native by way of desire.”¹⁷⁴ Nyerere understood the challenges of convincing Africans to liberate themselves from the secret—the desire of European materialism. He anchored Ujamaa on the ideals of equality and human dignity and centered ‘man’ in the Ujamaa state. He argued that “the idea of society is based on human equality and a combination of the freedom and unity of its members.”¹⁷⁵ He sought to redefine the idea of desiring individuals by framing them as beings in need of human dignity.¹⁷⁶

The last scene of *Kinjeketile* foreshadows the figure of Nyerere—one who would unite various tribes in Tanzania and establish an indestructible body politic. We argue that the events following the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964 and the Arusha Declaration of 1967 shaped Hussein’s perspectives

¹⁷⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 113.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 114.

¹⁷² Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 114.

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹⁷⁵ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 8.

¹⁷⁶ Nyerere, *Nyerere on Socialism*, 37.

in the last scene of *Kinjeketile*. Like many scholars of his time, Hussein was familiar with TANU's national project to unify the country and introduce socialism as an organizing philosophy. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Hussein's engagement with nationalist discourses was measured as he drummed up support for the Arusha Declaration while at the same time critiquing TANU and Nyerere's policies that appeared to contradict the self-proclaimed goals of Ujamaa. More importantly, he grappled with the very idea of a body politic anchored on Ujamaa ideology. His other plays, such as *Masbetani* (The Devils) and *Jogoo Kijijini* (The Rooster in the Village), delve more into this critique and will be discussed in the next chapter. Hussein's critique of Ujamaa is anchored in his dramaturgy, which blends aspects of Brechtian epic theatre with Aristotelian conventions of theatre.

Joachim Fiebach, who directed the first performance of *Kinjeketile* in 1969, wrote an article about the performance, which captures the complexity of Hussein's dramaturgy to his primary audience in Tanzania:

The first night took place in the big multipurpose Nkrumah-Hall on the Dar campus. A huge white banner had been put up at its rear wall, in front of which a flat platform was used as stage. The banner carried slogans by Nyerere, Lenin, and Nkrumah on different aspects of anti-colonial and revolutionary activities. It was to comment on the acted-out scenes from different perspectives, thus relating them to contemporary historical process.”¹⁷⁷

Fiebach writes of how a journalist covering the performance thought that the banner was from a different political event; that it should have been removed from the stage. The journalist could not conceive the banner as part of the performance—as a prop that conveys “the contradictions and problems” of modern Tanzania, which was transitioning from colonialism into a socialist republic.¹⁷⁸

Nkrumah was the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana and a pan-Africanist who had been

¹⁷⁷ Joachim Fiebach, “Ebrahim Hussein's Dramaturgy: A Swahili Multiculturalist's Journey in Drama and Theatre,” *Research in African Literatures*, 28 no. 4 (1997): 30.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

overthrown from power three years before the performance of *Kinjeketile*. Lenin was a Russian revolutionary, political theorist, and politician who served as the founding leader of soviet Russia. Both Lenin and Nkrumah fashioned their political ideologies on Marx. Hussein puts Nyerere in conversation with Lenin and Nkrumah because their socialist ideas converge in many ways. However, Nyerere rejected arguments that associated Ujamaa with Marxism or Leninism or other labels, such as Scientific Socialism or African Socialism. His primary claim was that Ujamaa was inherent in traditional African life and owed nothing to European ideologies.

Nyerere traces this reasoning from Maji Maji, as he claimed in a speech to the United Nations in 1956, Nyerere claimed:

There were no nationalist movements, no nationalist agitators, no westernized demagogues, or subversive Communists who went about the country stirring up trouble against the Germans. The people fought because they did not believe in the white man's right to govern and civilize the black. They rose in a great rebellion, not through fear of a terrorist movement or a superstitious oath, but in response to a natural call, a call of the spirit, ringing in the hearts of all men, and of all times, educated or uneducated, to rebel against foreign domination.¹⁷⁹

Nyerere's speech invalidates arguments that show that although the men and women of Maji Maji may not have subscribed to any European ideologies of liberation, they were an organized resistance with a clearly defined liberatory goal. Whether the goal of restoring their lives and gaining the right to self-determination aligns with typical goals of revolutions is beside the point. At stake is Nyerere's claim to a single narrative about Ujamaa as he rejected any attempts of comparing Ujamaa with similar ideologies that were popular in Africa. He wrote, "there is no theology of socialism," and thus, people should refrain from establishing a religion of socialism itself.¹⁸⁰ While this assertion is reasonable to the extent that it privileges novel African ways of ordering society, it limits Tanzania's

¹⁷⁹ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 40-41.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

capacity to accurately reflect on the practicality of Ujamaa as a basis for a new body politic. The ignorance of the journalist—a member of the elite—points us to unsettling conclusions about the efficacy of Ujamaa as a foundation for the new Tanzania.

Whereas Nyerere rejected the idea of class in African societies, Nkrumah identified class struggle as the primary problem in Africa. He wrote:

For too long, social and political commentators have talked and written as though Africa lies outside the mainstream of world-historical development—a separate entity to which the social, economic and political patterns of the world do not apply. Myths such as “African socialism” and “pragmatic socialism,” implying the existence of brand or brands of socialism applicable to Africa alone, have been propagated; and much of our history has been written in terms of socio-anthropology and historical theories as though Africa had no history prior to the colonial period. One of these distortions has been the suggestion that the class structure which exists in other parts of the world does not exist in Africa.¹⁸¹

Here, Nkrumah disagrees with Nyerere’s argument that the word class did not even exist in African languages. Nyerere doubted that “the equivalent for the word ‘class’ exists in any indigenous African language; for language describes the idea of those who speak it, and the idea of ‘class’ or ‘caste’ was non-existent in African society.”¹⁸² Nkrumah argues that although independence struggle united different classes against colonialism, these classes did not dissipate as they became pronounced after independence. “Class cleavages which had been temporarily submerged in the struggle to win political freedom reappeared, often with increased intensity, particularly in those states where the newly Independent government embarked on socialist policies.”¹⁸³ Nyerere’s rejection of ‘class struggle’ is touted as one of the pitfalls of Ujamaa—a primary reason why it may have failed as a philosophy for organizing the new Tanzania.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Nkrumah, *Class Struggle*, 10.

¹⁸² Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 11.

¹⁸³ Nkrumah, *Class Struggle*, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Jannik Boesen, Birgit Madsen, and Tony Moody, *Ujamaa—Socialism from Above* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977), 16.

While Nyerere's brand of socialism has many similarities with Lenin's thoughts about socialism, they differ on how to interpret the role of the state in a socialist country. Lenin's ideas about the state, articulated in several writings and presented as the accurate reading of Marx and Engels, advance the idea of the proletariat's smashing the bourgeois state, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, and letting the state to wither away.¹⁸⁵ Nyerere, unlike Lenin, did not conceive the state as an entity that will wither. On the contrary, Nyerere considered the state and its bureaucracy as a significant element for securing and maintaining unity in Africa.¹⁸⁶

Hussein and Fiebach put Nyerere, Nkrumah, and Lenin on stage (background) and assumed that the audience was equipped to carry out Bertolt Brecht's "complex seeing." That is, to practice critical detachment from the characters and exercise reflective judgement. In this case, the audience could have grappled with Azimio and its promises and attempt to locate it within similar socialist experiments in the world. However, it seems that they were incapable of complete detachment or chose to ignore the intentions of the playwright and the director. A banner with messages about Nkrumah, Lenin, and Nyerere should be an interesting object in a country that was trying to figure out how to implement *Ujamaa*—a philosophy that is closer to many brands of African socialism. The last scene in the play functions as a "*baltung*"—"a posture-cum-attitude, stance or bearing."¹⁸⁷ In other words, it invites supposition and triggers critical thinking. It can potentially lead the audience to draw "a specific conclusion which then would activate the spectator as to forming an attitude or opinion and thus influence his future behavior versus society."¹⁸⁸ This last scene reveals

¹⁸⁵ V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 11.

¹⁸⁶ Shivji, Issa, Yahya-Othman, Saida and Kamata, Ng'wanza, *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki wa Nyota, 2020), 3.

¹⁸⁷ Joachim Fiebach, "Brecht: Gestus, Fable, Attitude-cum-Stance," *Modern Drama*, 42, no. 2 (1999): 2017-213.

¹⁸⁸ Carl Weber, "Brecht's Concept of Gestus and the American Performance Tradition," In Carol Martin and Henry Bial, *Brecht Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000), 42.

contradictions in the play and clarifies Hussein's goal for the play. First, we learn that *maji* failed to create indestructible bodies, but Kinjeketile wanted to keep it as a symbol for unity. Second, we learn that Kinjeketile's focus was on the body politic as opposed to individual bodies. Third, people are angry at Kinjeketile for misleading them, and they want to kill him, a factor that shows that people needed time for self-reflection to understand the significance of a revolution and the idea of establishing a body politic.

In *Kinjeketile*, Hussein shows that historical drama can serve as a transformative space from which meaningful struggles can be launched to complete unfinished revolutions. He has engaged different discourses on Maji Maji to show the complexity of the war and trace its influence in the Tanzanian social imaginary. Maji Maji may have started as a war of liberation to restore the pre-colonial lives of Africans, but in time it transformed into a revolution, albeit an unfinished revolution. Whereas conventional historiography shies away from reconstructing the war to reflect its continued significance in Tanzania, Hussein succeeds in showing that Maji Maji prefigures the Arusha Declaration—the declaration is an attempt to complete an unfinished revolution.

Conclusion

Fanon's ideas on violence, particularly anti-colonial violence, show that the goal of anti-colonial violence is twofold: first, it aims at overthrowing the colonizer, and second, in the process of anti-colonial struggle, this violence allows the oppressed to retrieve his or her dignity, subjectivity, and identity. This process of retrieval remakes the world of both the colonized and the colonizer. As Pramod Nayar comments:

If instrumental violence seeks to re-establish the cultural identity of the natives, which the colonial situation had erased, absolute violence seeks to retrieve a Self that has been buried under the humiliations of the colonial master. The liberated Self with its new subjectivity marks the moment where 'new men' emerge. When such 'new men' gather as a collective, it generates a total rupture in the world.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Pramod Nayar, *Frantz Fanon* (London: Routledge, 2013), 84.

Here violence presumably scaffolds the oppressed, cultivating him into a new man. However, neither Fanon nor his interpreters reveal the constitutive attributes of violence that bestow it the capacity to transform individuals. Whereas it is plausible to understand instrumental violence—its goals and means are discernible—it is difficult to map out the transformative ‘actions’ of violence. *Kinjeketile* portrays this tension between violence as a reasonable response to an oppressive system of colonialism and violence as a tool for reconstructing Selfhood. Nevertheless, Hussein creates a battlefield that reinforces Fanon’s reasoning that anti-colonial violence emerges from colonial violence but denies this violence the transformative quality that Fanon bestows on it. The only path Hussein carves out for violence is victory, or as presented in the play, total annihilation of the colonizer. However, even in this, he does not allow the men and women of Maji Maji to win the war. Africans lost the war due to the German’s superior weapons and the failure of *maji* to withstand bullets. If victory in anti-colonial struggle is a prerequisite for activating the second goal of violence—reconstructing Selfhood—it appears, then, that the surviving men and women of Maji Maji left the battlefield worse off than when they entered it.

Although Maji Maji happened long before Fanon formulated his theories about violence and despite the fact that Fanon wrote his theory from the context of Algeria and in a struggle that arguably Algerians won, Hussein shows a familiarity of Fanonian thinking about violence, especially the idea that colonial violence attempts to annihilate Africa’s present, past, and future.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Hussein does not attribute any redeeming power to violence. Instead, he portrays the destructive nature of colonial violence, but in the last scene of the play, he refashions *Kinjeketile* as a

¹⁹⁰ Fanon, “Why we use violence,” in Jean Khalfa and Robert Young, *Alienation and Freedom: Frantz Fanon* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 654.

martyr who dies for an idea. The idea of unity and body politic. It is this idea that makes *Kinjeketile* meaningful.

CHAPTER 2: The Poetics of Fragmented Bodies

Introduction

The search for “wholeness” is a fundamental quest in postcolonial literature. The quest manifests in projects that actively advocate for a return to the origins, or conjure the past, not only as an imaginary space but as the *sui generis* on which a new era must be established. In Hussein’s *Kinjeketile*, we saw how colonial struggles transformed the Maji Maji Rebellion into a national epic that reinforced Tanzanian’s claim to a shared history that allowed Nyerere and TANU to constitute a nation out of 120 motley tribes and launch a socialist revolution.¹⁹¹ Three significant events happened in Zanzibar and Tanganyika in the 1960s that allow us to grapple with the idea of “wholeness” in the discourse of body politic. The events include (1) the Zanzibar Revolution that deposed the Sultan of Zanzibar and promised a socialist economy that would end feudal and capitalist practices in Zanzibar; (2) the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania with Julius Nyerere as president; and (3) *Azimio la Arusha* (Arusha Declaration) of 1967, which was considered as Tanzania’s socialist revolution.¹⁹² We discuss these events within the rubric of the extension of the revolution, particularly whether a revolution is a momentary or permanent event.

We draw from Walter Benjamin’s concept of “messianic time,” a perspective that offers a poignant critique of traditional understandings of history and time to argue that Hussein’s plays, *Jogoo Kijijini* (The Rooster in the Village, 1976) and *Mashetani* (Devils, 1971), unsettle conventional ideas about revolutions, shedding light on the inherent anxieties in “post-revolutionary” Tanzania. Benjamin argued that revolutions act as profound ruptures, akin to divine shocks that open a

¹⁹¹ Shivji, Issa, Yahya-Othman, Saida and Kamata, Ng’wanza, *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki wa Nyota, 2020), 2.

¹⁹² Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar Es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968).

gateway for the “messiah” to enter, disrupting the linear progression of events. In this light, he challenged the common perception of history as a continuous, progressive narrative akin to an unbroken chain of events. Benjamin found this portrayal of history overly simplistic and biased, as it typically reflected the victors’ perspectives, often at the expense of the experiences of the oppressed, marginalized, and defeated. In his conception, history was imbued with “messianic time,” moments filled with the potential for redemption rather than being a homogenous, empty continuum. These moments were pauses where time appeared to stand still, offering opportunities for radical breaks with the past and significant disruptions of the status quo. Seen in this way, the Zanzibar Revolution becomes a form of divine violence, a messianic rupture disrupting the continuity of historical progression, thus paving the way for new possibilities.¹⁹³

Benjamin expounds his ideas of “messianic time” in a discussion of Paul Klee’s painting, “Angelus Novus” (New Angel), which he refers to as “Angel of History:”

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skywards. This storm is what we call progress.¹⁹⁴

Benjamin’s interpretation offers a stark critique of a linear, progressive understanding of history. It emphasizes that history is often a series of catastrophic events, especially for the marginalized and the oppressed, and that this reality is ignored or overlooked in a forward-looking, progress-oriented worldview. Benjamin’s interpretation is illuminating in the context of the Zanzibar Revolution and its unification with Tanganyika to form the United Republic of Tanzania as an act of radical

¹⁹³ See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253-265. Translated by Harry Zohn. Ebrahim Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini and Ngao ya Jadi* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), *Masbetani* (Nairobi: OUP, 1971).

¹⁹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 258.

decolonization. Conventional scholarship often views this decolonization and resultant nation-building efforts under Julius Nyerere as progressive—a clean break from a painful past, much like the Angel of History propelled into the future. Yet, as Benjamin might argue, these struggles and revolutions often carry the wreckage of the past with them. We view the Zanzibar Revolution as having been caught in the same storm that drives the Angel of History, carried forward by a vision of progress yet burdened by the debris of colonial structures, economic systems, social hierarchies, and cultural dislocations. We attribute the failures of this Revolution to the inability to sufficiently address or overcome the inherited wreckage.

Azimio (the Arusha Declaration), Tanzania’s official stance on African socialism, founded on the idea of *Ujamaa* (Familyhood), was more than just a political stance; it was a revolutionary project aimed at constituting a new Tanzanian social formation. Julius Nyerere, the brainchild of *Ujamaa*, saw it as a way of life rooted in the ethos of the conception of the body politic in African traditions.¹⁹⁵ Traditional African societies, according to Nyerere, functioned as a body with a logic that structured multiple organs to work for the good of the body. He advocated for this concept of corporal harmony to be applied to the Tanzanian State, likening its various social groups to body parts, each having a role vital to the normal functioning of the whole. If one part fails in its duties, the entire body suffers; likewise, for the Tanzanian State to function optimally, every sector must adhere to the principles of *Ujamaa*.¹⁹⁶ Thus, Nyerere saw *Ujamaa*’s task as what Mbembe, drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy, calls “disenclosure” to refer to the idea of lifting closures to allow “the advent of something new.”¹⁹⁷ Mbembe uses the concept of “disenclosure” to address the need for creating

¹⁹⁵ Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 3-4.

¹⁹⁶ Nyerere, *Tujisahibihe*, 1962, 1.

¹⁹⁷ Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 61.

new forms of thought, action, and social organization in societies that were formerly colonized. This includes the act of breaking free from the confines of colonialism, its legacy, and the ways it has shaped understandings of identity, culture, and society. The process involves both a critical reassessment of the past and a creative envisioning of the future.

As Ujamaa became the structure underlying Tanzania's political and economic progress, many scholars became eager to support the ideology not only for its potential to transform the State but also for its presumed roots in what they regarded as authentic African culture, a reflection of indigenous systems and traditional values. This authenticity was especially appealing in the era of decolonization, when the reclamation and assertion of indigenous identities and systems were a powerful counter-narrative to colonial impositions. Nyerere envisioned traditional African life as a space of "wholeness" and authenticity, a time prior to the onslaught of slavery and colonialism, when Africans presumably lived in egalitarian societies. He argued that societal growth should be nurtured from our authentic roots, not through the grafting onto those roots of something alien to our society.¹⁹⁸ Locating the idea of "wholeness" in African culture elucidates Nyerere's relentless passion in distinguishing his brand of socialism from the existing variations of socialism founded on Marx, Engels, and Lenin's writings.¹⁹⁹

This era of Ujamaa marked a significant break for Ebrahim Hussein, as he tried to navigate his position as a poet, playwright, and theatre critic in the wake of the Arusha Declaration. The Declaration led to the emergence of a national cultural consciousness rooted in the political ideals of

¹⁹⁸ Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 92.

¹⁹⁹ Euphrase Kezilahabi's play, *Kaptula la Marx* (Marx's Shorts, 1999) employs the metaphor of oversized shorts to discuss the contradictions and ambiguities of Ujamaa. The fictional president in the play, Rais Kapera, asks his ministers "Nitazameni! Mimi ninafanana na nani? Nitazameni!" [Look at me! Who do I resemble? Look at me] (36). The ministers give different answers ranging from Ho Chi Minh, Mao, and Marx. The president refutes the answers until one minister responds that not even Ho Chi Minh is Ho Chi Minh or Marx is Marx. The president accepts the response and emphasizes that *Ujamaa* (socialism) politics in Africa is not patterned on any country.

self-reliance. The gist of literary productions and criticism during this period is captured in Amandina Lihamba's *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania after the Arusha Declaration 1967-1984*, which discusses the twofold Tanzanian reality after the declaration:

The reality engendered by the struggle to make Ujamaa a dominant factor in social practice and the reality which is the result of a conflict between this struggle and inhibiting factors in social practice which have worked against the attainment of Arusha objectives."²⁰⁰

In its early period, Ujamaa appeared to co-opt artists into its service, as many of them created works that propagated the Ujamaa ideals. Early works in this tradition became incorporated under different genres, such as *njogera*.²⁰¹ Initially, *njogera* was a poetic form that allowed dialogue between two or multiple people reciting verses in turns, but it later developed into a form even novelists employed for didactic and pedagogical uses, especially teaching social principles and Kiswahili. Therefore, in the wake of the Arusha declaration, *ngonjera* became a dialectic technique for espousing the Ujamaa principles. Its performance often involved two characters—with varied interpretations of Ujamaa principles—debating on the meaning of Ujamaa. The character with the correct interpretation wins over the one whose meaning contradicts Ujamaa ideals. Alain Ricard writes that the genre transformed into “a dramatic performance and became a type of drama: *Hussein's contemporaries*, such as Penina Mhando, composed *ngonjera*, as did poets and novelists, such as Euphrase Kezilahabi.”²⁰²

In a way, the dialectic of *ngonjera* mirrored the nationalism debates raging in Tanzania in the late

²⁰⁰ Amandina Lihamba's *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania after the Arusha Declaration 1967-1984*, 59. Doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds, 1985.

²⁰¹ Alain Ricard, *Ebrahim Hussein: Swahili Theatre and Individualism* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki wa Nyota, 2000), 25. *Ngonjera* originated among the Wagogo community, who used it to teach moral lessons and learn Kiswahili.

²⁰² Ricard, *Ebrahim Hussein*, 25. Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Gamba la Nyoka* (A Skin of a Snake, 1978) is one of the notable novels that employs *Ngonjera*. In this text, two young people: Mambosasa and Mamboleo, university graduates, work in their village to implement Ujamaa's policy of villagization. They have different perspectives on what Ujamaa stands for and how it should translate in the daily lives of the villagers. One young man has the correct interpretation of Ujamaa, and another has an idealistic perspective that does not align with TANU's policy. It is up to the youth with the correct version of Ujamaa to educate the ignorant one.

1960s and early 1970s between the so-called “modernizers” and “radical nationalists (African socialists, Ujamaaists, or Marxists.”²⁰³

Modernizers argued for the transformation of the ‘economies of affection,’ that is, rural economies devoid of the will to entrepreneurship, as they were mainly subsistence and backward to the extent that they lagged behind technologically and in productivity. Radical nationalists, on their part, challenged the modernization paradigm, arguing that development was not a matter of propping up the rural economy but rather a process of decentering, that is, decoupling the national economy from exploitative systems. They framed development as a function of class struggle and pointed out that: “the traditional was not quite traditional, nor the modern quite modern, rather both belonged to the system of international capitalism which reproduced development at the center and underdevelopment at the periphery.”²⁰⁴ Nyerere’s Ujamaa, designed to achieve what Mbembe calls, “the will to community,” was reliant on the colonial structure of the State inherited at independence. To many radical nationalists, the State was not only a given but also the primary instrument for attaining a complete social revolution in Tanzania.²⁰⁵ However, these scholars did not theorize the idea of the State within Ujamaa. Instead, they invoked the State as a given and proceeded to articulate it as an instrument for progress.

Whereas many scholars and writers analyzed Tanzania’s problems as challenges of nationalism, Hussein sought to offer an added layer of interpretation, one that grapples with the entangled history of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Hussein was against a social formation that had evolved and embraced a rigid narrative on what literary and cultural productions should aim for in

²⁰³ Issa Shivji, *Accumulation in an African Periphery*, 4.

²⁰⁴ Shivji, 6.

²⁰⁵ Shivji, 7.

Tanzania. It was an environment where artists censored themselves in the name of nation-building. Embracing what appeared as a monologue, a departure from *ngonjera*-like creations, Hussein presented the complicated history of Tanzania in three works published in the 1970s, that is, *Mashetani* (Devils 1971), *Jogoo Kijijini* (The Rooster in the Village, 1976), and *Ngao ya Jadi* (The Shield of Tradition, 1976). Hussein's critics accused him of obscurantism despite his use of Kiswahili, a lingua franca in East Africa.²⁰⁶ Some critics engage the works as three distinct creations with different messages. However, we argue that this kind of reading ignores significant elements of the texts, which locates them in a trinitarian system of ideas that are not amenable to a linear or chronological reading. Instead, we suggest a reading that considers the works as pieces of a puzzle. Indeed, Hussein crafted two of the works as riddles performed in a traditional setting and within the conventions of Swahili traditional storytelling sessions.²⁰⁷

Although the works are theatrical, only *Mashetani* is clearly a play, but one that employs African oral tradition and is outside any strict conventional classification, such as Aristotelian and Brechtian. *Jogoo Kijijini* and *Ngao ya Jadi* are constituted as African oral performances (poetic theatre).²⁰⁸ While many critics read these works as oral narratives or poetic dramas, this chapter does not make any strict genre distinctions as we argue that Hussein was interested in unsettling radical narratives predicated on rigid genre assignation. He delved into traditional Swahili performances to evolve a platform that complicates histories often taken for granted. Thus, this chapter considers these works as both literary texts and performances. We suggest that the creation of these works—

²⁰⁶ (See Mtebi Mukobwa, *Maendeleo ya Maudhui Katika Tamthilia Tano za Ebrahim Hussein*, Nairobi. Unpublished Master's thesis, 1985; Sengo, T.S. *Ebrahim Hussein, Mwandishi wa Michezo ya Kuigiza* (Dar Es Salaam: University of Dar Es Salaam, 1976); Sengo, T.S and Kiango, S.D. *Ndimi Zetu: Uchambuzi wa Maandishi ya Kiswahili* (Nairobi: Foundation Books, 1975).

²⁰⁷ Amandina Lihamba describes the storytelling technique in *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania after the Arusha Declaration 1967-1984*, 147.

²⁰⁸ Alain Ricard, *Ebrahim Hussein*, 72.

their architectonics—in and of itself—constitutes their core message. For instance, in *Jogoo Kijijini*, Hussein uses different Swahili words scaled diagonally to show the intensity of the violence different characters suffer:

Na Mkunazi-Rahmani
 Ulitetemeka
 Ulitikisika
 Ulitapatapa
 Katika homa ya mauti.²⁰⁹

[And the Jujube tree
 Shivered
 Shook
 Trembled
 During the fever of death]

The three words that describe the tree's state connote the same meaning in Swahili and can be used as synonyms (ulitetemeka/ulitikisika/ulitapatapa). However, Hussein uses them to show the intensity of suffering the tree underwent. He also employs similar textual designs throughout the text to emphasize ideas and illuminate instances of violence.

Hussein wrote at a time when Tanzania's ruling party, TANU, constituted a committee to find ways for theatre to function "within national perspectives," which translates to finding a means to co-opt theatre into propagating Ujamaa ideology.²¹⁰ A local daily called for theatre to "become a part of the struggle for economic and social development."²¹¹ Hussein's theatre did not heed this call, at least not in the manner expected, that is, to support the aesthetic regime of Ujamaa or even oppose it. Instead, Hussein created works that sought to transform the very medium of theatre and unsettle the dominant paradigms that were used to articulate the Tanzanian society in what they considered a post-revolutionary moment.

²⁰⁹ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 14.

²¹⁰ Lihamba, *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania*, 81.

²¹¹ Ibid.,

Unlike his contemporaries, Hussein's preoccupation was not to critique the implementation of Ujamaa policies or offer political and social solutions that challenged beleaguered Tanzania. Instead, his works peer into the past, where ruins have piled up and are speeding towards the present moment. We argue that Hussein employs the metaphor of the fragmented body to show how revolutionary events far from announcing redemption can fragment bodies and unleash anxiety. At the core of fragmentation is the pull towards disunity—a catastrophic boundless storm that rages even into the realm of the imaginary and shatters symbolic images of wholeness and the codes through which a society defines itself and finds meaning. However, despite the violence and brutality of fragmentation, which often manifest themselves as dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and busting open of the body, Hussein, as an artist, attempts to pose questions to enable us to grapple with the absence of wholeness and our quest for it. This chapter is organized into three sections, titled “text and violence,” “text as fragmented body,” and “insufficiency of sacrifice.”

Text and Violence

Jogoo Kijijini is a tale that explores the intersection of individuals and ideas, portraying how such encounters can lead to fragmentation, subjectivity, and the transformation of landscapes into arenas of violence, ruin, and redemption. The narrative thrives on the anxiety of destruction and redemption, reminiscent of the Sword of Damocles, hanging perilously over the United Tanzania during the peak of Ujamaa in the 1960s and 1970s. At the heart of the narrative is an idyllic village anchored around an extraordinary jujube tree, “Mkunazi-Rahmani,” which possesses the divine ability to imbue love, compassion, and kindness in those who consume its fruits. The villagers built their homes around this tree, crafting a protective circle that nurtured their community over what seemed an eternity. This peaceful ambiance allowed the community to grow and prosper.

However, tranquility was shattered when maggots infested the jujube tree, leading to the souring of the villagers' hearts. A potent fever swept through the village, weakening the once robust

tree. Yet, it recovered, its fresh sprouts emerging from the ruins of bloody leaves, symbols of the lives lost to the fever. The crowing of a rooster heralded a new day and signaled the arrival of a character named MTU. As villagers watched, MTU journeyed towards the village, only to stumble and fall in the sand before reaching their destination. Where MTU fell, Kijana (a youth or young person)—it remains unclear whether this youth and MTU are the same individual or different people—made a dramatic entrance into the village. The youth approached the front door only to find it consumed by ants. Opting to sit on the verandah, the youth gazed upon the spot where Mkunazi-Rahmani once stood. They peeked through a window and in the dim light saw an old woman seated in a corner. All the while, the rooster roamed the compound, showing signs of anxiety about the upcoming conversation between the old woman and the youth. Intellectuals mocked the rooster for its concern, but it remained unbothered, focused on its mission: to discern whether a new dawn was on the horizon.

The old woman shared with the young person the history of her people and their migration to the village. In her youth, they had embarked on a journey, following *njia* (a path) that led them to the village. Initially, the village had been secured by a ring fence, but the arrival of her people, and the path they traversed, cleaved the ring, introducing a fever that plagued the village. Blinded by their pride, her people forced the local carpenters to construct an exquisite, large door for their new house. Unfortunately, their pride prevented them from noticing they had built their home atop an anthill, a natural formation that had previously shielded the village. A ferocious storm later ravaged the village, sparing only a single jujube tree. Following the conclusion of her tale, the old woman passed away. At that moment, the rooster crowed, breaking the silence that had seemingly oppressed the villagers. This crowing marked the advent of a new order—perhaps a sign of upcoming liberation or a resurrection of the paradise lost. Having listened to the harrowing “truth,” the young person resolved to bear the burden of the path’s sins, offering themselves as a sacrifice to purify the

village. This chorus raises the question of whether the young person's self-sacrifice could be the enactment of a new life? In other words, is the sacrifice sufficient to wash away the "sins" of *njia* (path)?

In a colloquy in East Germany, Hussein indicated that the source of the narrative was a story, "a story of a village to which strangers come from very far away."²¹² Although he does not give the origin or title of the story, in a different interview, discussing *Ngao ya Jadi* (The Traditional Shield, 1976), a work based on a Buganda Tale, Hussein discusses the idea of retelling familiar tales. He combines African traditional oral storytelling techniques and puzzles to craft a performance that appeals to a broad spectrum of audiences. Hussein's riddles engender the compositional rhythm of the performance, which is not organized around explicitly identifiable theatrical scenes that proceed linearly and within any conventional dramaturgy. Instead, it is organized around four riddles leading up to a primary puzzle centered around the idea of *njia* (a path). Narrative techniques such as calling for responses from the audience and invoking narrative time indicate transitions and add additional layers to the story. They also enable Hussein to insert his authorial voice into the narrative.

Robert Philipson's Marxist critique of the work considers it a product of "articulation." He describes articulation as the "co-existence and symbiosis" of different modes of production, e.g., traditional modes of production and capitalist modes.²¹³ Amandina Lihamba reads the work as the story of colonization and locates the setting as Zanzibar. While the cues in the narrative points to Zanzibar as the setting, coalescing its thematic concerns around colonization limits the multiple meanings of the work and consigns it to a specific time and place, which we believe contradicts Hussein's dramaturgy. We concur with Philipson's analysis that *Jogoo Kijijini* "is more polysemic and

²¹² Hussein, "Tale-telling as Performing Art." In *Theatre and Social Reality: Colloquy for Theatre People of the Third World from 13th to 27th June 1976*. Ed. Joachim Fiebach. Berlin: International Theatre Institute, 1977, 50-59.

²¹³ Philipson, *Drama and National Culture*, 181.

open to interpretation than any of Hussein's writings," and that "an attempt at exhaustive interpretation would prove a long and arduous task *considering that* the power of *Jogoo Kijijini* lies in the fecundity and suggestiveness of its images."²¹⁴ We argue that the text's form constitutes the core message of the narrative. Unfortunately, critics rarely focus their inquiry on the structure of the text beyond pointing out its oral dimensions.

Text as Fragmented Body

The narrative unfolds in two distinct episodes. The first revolves around Mkunazi-Rahmani, an entity whose spatial and temporal dimensions constitute the riddle of geography. The episode is structured around three moments we categorize as paradise, fever, and famine. The second episode introduces the character MTU, a name translating to "person" or "human" but not necessarily denoting a specific individual. MTU's fragmented, ectopic body challenges conventional definitions of humanity. Viewed as a distant traveler making their way towards the village, MTU never reaches their destination, collapsing instead by the ocean. The mystery of this figure, which is one of the riddles Hussein poses, is not only in their fragmented body but also the idea that the village expected this visitor. Our analysis shows how this figure embodies the status of suffering in history and the idea of history as a sacrificial process full of anxieties. We analyze the main fragments of the text and offer a reading that suggests how the pieces can be sutured into a body.

The first fragment of the text we analyze is Mkunazi-Rahmani (Jujube tree). The idea of the village as paradise is centered around the tree. Its name, Rahmani, which means merciful in Arabic, communicates its qualities. As the story unfolds, the narrator identifies the tree as the most significant landmark in the village, one that organizes everyday life. In the first episode, the tree structures the critical moments of the narrative: paradise, fever, famine.

Na kila aliyeonja Kunazi-Rahamani

²¹⁴ Ibid., 185.

Moyo wake ulingiwa mahaba, huruma na ihsani.²¹⁵

[And anybody who tasted the fruit of the tree
Their heart became loving, compassionate and kind.]

People partook of the fruits, married each other, and multiplied. A peaceful community developed around the Mkunazi-Rahmani economy. Unfortunately, maggots infested the tree and poisoned it. The tree became toxic as it spread the poison in the community. A deadly fever found a home in the village, causing the tree to suffer and stop producing fruits. Consequently, a great famine affected many lives in the village. In this scene, the tree functions as a perfectly healthy body, which supplies the village's needs and enables people to fulfill their "will to community." Maggots eviscerate the tree as they take away its vital role—supplying love, compassion, and kindness. Thus, the tree begins to dish out poison to the entire village. The tree catches a fever that spreads throughout the village and piles up the people's misfortunes. Hussein does not give exact timelines of when these events transpire. However, he anthropomorphizes the tree to show how the tree's suffering, that is, the gradual processes of eviscerating and fragmenting the tree, signifies the significant catastrophes that struck the village.

Examining the tree's life enables us to understand the violence of eviscerating and fragmenting a body. The tree is one of the few images in the narrative through which we experience the actual process of dismembering a body. We meet bodies already fragmented and hanging by a thread in other scenes. The suffering of the tree happens within an extended period ranging from the infestation of maggots to the period of strange visitors to the village. Arguably, the tree was one of the significant reasons that compelled the visitors to hang onto the village instead of following *njia* (path) to other areas. The value of the jujube tree overwhelmed the visitors, and they resolved to invade the village.

²¹⁵ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 14.

The next scene in the narrative constitutes the central point of the performance. It is a mystery of a figure the narrator calls MTU. Hussein puts up Mtu as a signifier, which means that Mtu does not represent any individual subject. Mtu's body is strange. The "ear" and "foot" are ectopic as they do not perform conventional roles. The foot is at the nape of the neck and can speak while the ear is arrogant, oppressive, and can refuse to hear. Mtu, ear, and foot appear interchangeably in place of 'human.'

Mtu
 'Nyayo kisogoni
 Jicho aridini
 Ulimi kinywani
 Ukihisabu hatua za hatima.²¹⁶

[Foot on the back of the neck
 Eyes on the ground
 Tongue in the mouth
 Counting the steps of fate]

The ear and foot appear to possess cognitive functions and do not depend on other organs to communicate. The power relations are skewed to the ear's favor, and it has exercised them to imprison the foot in a shoe. The foot complains of pain and the inability to experience the dawn of a new day whenever the rooster crows.

Mimi mahabusu dhalili
 Mfungwa wako akili
 Akili nisiyo ikiri
 Wala nisiyo ikubali nafsia.²¹⁷

[I am a weak prisoner
 A prisoner of your ideas
 Ideas I don't recognize
 Or welcome in my soul]

²¹⁶ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 15.

²¹⁷ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 16.

If the logic of ‘human’ is predicated on wholeness, then the ectopic and fragmented body parts presented by Hussein can scarcely be considered human. Is MTU a human, a fragmented body, or a person in the sense of the body of Amos Tutuola’s Complete Gentleman in *Palm Wine Drinkard*? The Complete Gentleman is assembled from body parts. He rents the body parts, which he then sutures into a unified body, enabling him to venture into the marketplace to bewitch women:

As they were traveling along in this endless forest then the complete gentleman in the market that the lady was following, began to return the hired parts of his body to the owners and he was paying them the rentage money. When he reached where he had hired the left foot, he pulled it out, he gave it to the owner and paid him, and they kept going; when they reached the place where he hired the right foot, he pulled it out and gave it to the owner and paid for the rentage. Now both feet had returned to the owners, so he began to crawl along on the ground...²¹⁸

The figures Tutuola and Hussein refer to as the Complete Gentleman and MTU respectively, are fragmented. Tutuola’s figure is located in a capitalistic economy of renting body parts that allow them to acquire parts and constitute themselves into a unified body (human). Tutuola makes this economy intelligible within the forest imaginaries he crafts.²¹⁹ Hussein’s figure derives its intelligibility from the idea of absence—absence of wholeness. The dismembered figure embodies the desire for a unified body. Mbembe discusses a similar figure he categorizes as “rag-human.” Drawing from Sony Labou Tansi’s novel, *Life and a Half* (2011), inspired by Tansi’s experience of bloody military and political violence in Congo. In this novel, enemies are threatened with violence and dismemberment:

The Providence Guide got really angry now, slashing the rag-father’s upper body in all directions with his gold-sparking saber. He tore apart the thorax, then the shoulders, the neck, the head. From there was nothing left but a crazy tuft of hair floating in the bitter emptiness.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Tutuola, *Palm Wine Drinkard*, 59.

²¹⁹ Ainehi Edoro Glines. *Spaces of Order: An African Poetic*. (Durham: Duke University, 2016), 26. Unpublished doctoral thesis.

²²⁰ Labou Tansi, *Life and a Half* (cited in Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 134.)

Mbembe describes this rag-human whose body has been disfigured as “what has been but no longer is” because it is fragmented beyond recognition.²²¹ The rag-human is “infrahuman” caught between humanity to the extent that it has a semblance of some human attributes and inhuman qualities. Whether we read MTU as Tutuola’s Complete Gentleman or Mbembe’s rag-human, we see them as a product of violence which has fragmented the body. We read the figure as embodying the disassembled elements of history that allow for reconstruction. The first time we encounter Mtu, we do not experience them as a unified body. Instead, we observe a foot and an ear operate as if they possess full cognitive abilities to play roles not conventionally attributed to either the foot or the ear. In the few instances where the narrator represents Mtu as a functioning human, we learn about their will and desire to live in freedom. As Mbembe writes, in the presence of suffering, “speech remains, the last breath of a pillaged humanity, which all the way to the doorway of death refuses to be reduced to a pile of meat, to die a death it does not want.”²²² The foot desires freedom, and it constantly begs the ear to release it from the darkness.

Hussein meticulously paints Mtu’s fragmented image detailing minute instances of their suffering. We read this figure as an image from the past—embodying the sins of the path— that can only make sense from the vantage point of a redeemed society. In other words, a post-revolutionary society is well suited to understand this fragmented figure from the past. This society, being free from the shackles of its past, can look back and understand the suffering and fragmentation of MTU. The image does not tell us exactly what transpired in the past. However, to use Walter Benjamin’s language, the past cannot give us a full picture or a precise account of what

²²¹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 134.

²²² *Ibid.*, 135.

transpired. Thus, we should “seize hold of its memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”²²³ These flashes are crucial instances where the past intersects with the present, providing opportunities for radical change and interruption of the status quo. These moments, according to Benjamin, can be catalysts for transformation and redemption. Therefore, historians of revolution—those who recognize that “every generation is endowed with a weak messianic power” must seek to rescue the past from the enemies, particularly those who preside over victory.²²⁴ In *Jogoo Kijijini*, victory is yet to come, as the figure who offers to sacrifice himself to cleanse the village is yet to arrive.

If Mtu represents a figure from the past, why does he appear in a fragmented and dismembered state? We propose that Hussein employs this figure to symbolically reenact the destruction of the past. Through this lens, fragmentation takes on a positive role. Art Historian Linda Nochlin, in her book, *The Body in Pieces* (1994), traces this positive role of fragments to the French revolution, when artists became interested in the idea of the fragment as a metaphor for modernity. She writes that “the imagery—and the enactment—of destruction, dismemberment and fragmentation remained powerful elements of revolutionary ideology.”²²⁵ The increased interest in fragments and dismemberments was precipitated by an absence: wholeness. Helaine Posner, a curator of a 1992 exhibit, *Corporal Politics*, wrote: “We may long for the secure ideals of beauty and wholeness embraced by past generations, but experience tells us that this worldview is obsolete...wholeness is compromised; the fragment is all.”²²⁶ This reorientation towards

²²³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragments as a Metaphor for Modernity* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 10.

²²⁶ Helaine Posner, cited in Margaret Owens, *Stages of Dismemberment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 11-12.

fragmentation provides a more nuanced and contemporary perspective on past events and characters, such as Mtu. In other words, the character of Mtu, arriving in a fragmented and dismembered state, can be viewed as a symbol of a society shattered by the oppressive forces of its past. This fragmentation, while initially appearing negative, actually acquires a positive role by embodying the disassembled elements of history that allow for reconstruction.

The ubiquity of violence, oppression, and social injustices that have fragmented society and disfigured lives, creates a longing for wholeness. For instance, Ngugi's early works ranging from *Weep, Not child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *This Time Tomorrow* (1970) attempt to recreate a Gikuyu world defined by wholeness. The idea of wholeness is fundamental to Ngugi as he experienced the state of emergency in Kenya when "corporeal disintegration" was a reality.²²⁷ In *The River Between*, Ngugi writes about a landscape of two significant ridges and a river flowing "through the valley of life."²²⁸ The ridges slept the deep sleep of their creator like lions that never woke. The ever-freshwater river was called Honia, "which meant cure, or bringing back-to-life."²²⁹ The river connected the ridges and infused life to the community and its inhabitants. However, colonization splits this landscape, creating divisions between Christians and traditionalists. Ngugi describes the tension between those invested in the new ideas of Christianity and those bent on restoring the culture they lost. This tension is mainly played among Waiyaki, Chege, Muthoni, and Nyambura while their parents act as catalysts. Ngugi's sympathies lie with those set on recouping the "perfect" past. It is not the mere idea of violence that separates the fragmented world from the whole but the logic that structures a society. For instance, in Chinua

²²⁷ We discuss this corporeal disintegration in the context of the Mau Mau in Chapter Four.

²²⁸ Ngugi, *The River Between* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1965), 1.

²²⁹ Ibid.,

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo lives in a patriarchal society characterized by practices we will construe as violent. However, violence has a place in the order of this community that separates it from sheer chaos. This order makes the death of Ikemefuna—a death that other societies will consider murderous and barbaric intelligible. When a new order fragments this world, Okonkwo cannot bear to be part of it anymore; he commits suicide.²³⁰

Hussein's text aligns with Ngugi's works to the extent that it employs fragmented bodies to underscore the absence of "wholeness." However, his project differs from Ngugi and writers subscribing to the "return to the origin" trope because he resists romanticizing the past or recreating images that align with radical cultural consciousness that valorizes tradition. Therefore, we view his task as that of the figure Walter Benjamin designates as the "angel of history." In *Jogoo Kijini*, the past appears complicated and cannot be invoked blindly to serve as a model for a new society. Long before the first visitors arrived in the village, the Jujube tree, a central symbol of the village's unity and prosperity, is beset by a maggot infestation even before the first visitors arrive, suggesting that the village's troubles and complexities existed prior to external influences. The past, rather than being a pristine, untouched model for society's reformation, is a complex, nuanced entity shaped by various internal and external forces over time. It seems then that Hussein unveils instances of fragmentation to unsettle the trope of a perfect past and show that the past can destroy the present, particularly when victors inscribe silence into this past. Though the narrative does not explicitly refer to any specific historical period, contextual clues and aspects of the story allow for conjecture that the "complicated past" in question likely alludes to either the era of slavery in Zanzibar or the period of feudalism. If then this history is an accumulation of ruins, as Hussein's Mtu and *njia* (the path) show, how can they be prevented from flying off into the present?

²³⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London, Heineman, 1958).

Insufficiency of Sacrifice

The idea of the sacrifice in *Jogoo Kijijini* is centered around the figure of Kijana (youth or young person) and their subjectivation.²³¹ The character's life story begins when Mtu collapses; thus, we are ignorant of his past. Unlike Mtu, Kijana catapults himself into the village, and he becomes a witness to the old woman, who narrates the village's history. The history Kijana learns begins from the encounter between the old woman's people and the village's inhabitants. This encounter, marked by intense violence and disruption, caused a rift within the village and gave rise to social stratification. The old woman tells Kijana that her people followed *njia* (a path) that took them through forests, mountains, and valleys until they arrived at the village. They sighted the village with its huts forming a ring with a Jujube tree at the center. The sheer profusion of fruit was an overwhelming spectacle for them:

Na kati upenuni
 Yalistawi kitongojini
 Matunda ya ngingi thamani
 Ya huo Mkunazi unaousikia.²³²

[And the center of the courtyard
 The village flourished
 Fruits of high value
 From the Jujube tree.]

Njia (the path) is the chord that weaves the different trajectories of Mtu, the old woman, Kijana, and the village. Amandina Lihamba describes *njia* as a road and points out that it is “a symbol of both destruction and the continuity of class divisions.”²³³ Robert Philipson also discusses *njia* as a road—“a metaphor for the history of East Africa's successive invasions and a spatial reference to the

²³¹ We use Kijana, young person, and youth interchangeably.

²³² Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 25.

²³³ Lihamba, *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania*, 153.

creation of class divisions.”²³⁴ We use “path,” a general English translation of *njia*, which incidentally opens up more layers of interpretations. We propose that the path is not only the road that brought the old woman’s people into the village, but also their way of life, or an aspect of it, which we interpret as “slavery” Here, slavery functions as an underlying structure that organizes their lives.

The villagers rejected the path of slavery that had brought the old woman’s kin into their midst, leading to deep societal divisions. This discord effectively split the village into two halves, injecting an infectious fever into the fabric of the community. In their blindness to the existing village customs, the old woman’s people drastically reshaped the landscape, introducing an unfamiliar way of life. They began by clearing trees and compelling local carpenters to construct a large door for them. They erected a house upon an anthill, oblivious to the fact that this very anthill served as a protective talisman for the village. These newcomers treated the villagers inhumanely, disregarding the foundational customs that held the village together. In an ironic twist of fate, the path of slavery that led them to the village eventually brought about their downfall. This path, having emerged from the Ocean, ascended and sprawled across mountains, valleys, and rivers. The path was a brutal, violent force, leaving indelible marks, blemishes, and wounds on every landscape it traversed. Neither rain, flood, nor sea rise could erase the scars it inflicted.

Hussein elucidates the old woman’s people and the villagers’ different worldviews in this verse:

Lakini ile njia iliotuleta
 Ile njia tulioifuata
 Hiki kijiji kiliikataa
 Na kijiji
 Baadhi mbili zikatokea.²³⁵

²³⁴ Philipson, *Drama and National Culture*, 185.

²³⁵ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 25.

[But the path that brought us here
 the path we followed
 this village rejected it
 And the village
 Became divided into two parts.]

As the story unfolds, the narrator describes Mkunazi-Rahmani as an anthropathic body, well-integrated within the community. It provides villagers with love, compassion, and kindness to conduct their social lives smoothly—they marry, give birth, and constitute a harmonious society. However, the first time the old woman’s people see Mkunazi-Rahmani, they become overwhelmed by its potential value and devise a plan to co-opt the village into a new way of life that will allow them to exploit the tree. The village rejects this worldview, which leads to a conflict that splits the village and introduces the fever of class and animosity.

The path destroyed life as the villagers knew it and plunged them into the “zone of non-being.”²³⁶ It fragmented their land, creating new geographies of segregation, introduced forced labor (it could be read as serfdom or slavery), and redefined the right to look. Hussein describes the old woman’s people as having eyes on the crown of their heads, walking briskly on the road as they throw mud at the villagers.²³⁷ The path is presented as a “space of appearance,” where lives that matter can appear, be grievable, and count for something.²³⁸ However, in the village context, this space is colored with histories of inequality and injustice. The most devastating consequence of the path is not necessarily the deprivations individuals suffer but the severing of the threads of interrelationships that constitutes village life. Thus, the perfect village we met in ‘episode one’ has been replaced with a new way of life that has also become a network grafted on the idea of a

²³⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1956), xii.

²³⁷ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijini*, 26.

²³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 199.

passageway stretching over mountains, valleys, and seas, spreading the visitor's way of life and splitting other communities in its wake.

After many years, the old woman's people realized they had built on anthills, and their house was collapsing. As Hussein writes, the path destroyed the village and those who brought it into it.²³⁹

Hatukujua aslani
Kuwa ile nyumba thamani
Ilijengwa kichuguuni
Makao ya uchwa 'naowasikia.²⁴⁰

[But we never knew that
That valuable house
Was built on an anthill
You hear people talk about]

The old woman's people realized too late that the landscape they had manufactured testified to the oppression and degradation of the village. In *Jogoo Kijijini*, violence made it difficult to distinguish the suffering of the old woman's people and the villagers. The new way of life—the path that had disregarded the pillars that supported the village—destroyed them. She was the last one of her kind in the village, and she did not live long as she died after narrating the story. The old woman's account is painful but equilibrated and archaeological, as it gives testimony to what the path had done to the villagers. However, since she could not bear the heavier burdens of the path, as she died after narrating the story, Kijana offered to carry the sins of the path.

Kijana kuusikia ukweli
Hata hakuhuzunika asili
Mabega yake wasaa mawili
Yalibeba madhambi ya ile njia.²⁴¹

[The Youth having heard the truth
Did not worry]

²³⁹ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 26.

²⁴⁰ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 26

²⁴¹ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 28.

His two shoulders
Carried the sins of that path.]

Kijana felt that reparations were required, and they became a sacrificial calf to cleanse the village.

Was their sacrifice necessary? Could it be sufficient?

Sacrifice, according to Rene Girard, is “an act of violence without risk of vengeance.”²⁴²

Girard’s description is founded on the idea that sacrifice finds meaning in its ability to mediate or divert violence and prevent conflicts. In other words, restore peace in society. In addition, sacrifice is anchored on the idea of substitution; that is, a community diverts violence to an object outside themselves—an object without a capacity to retaliate:

The victim is not a substitute for some particularly endangered individual, nor is it offered up to some individual of particularly bloodthirsty temperament. Rather, it is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself.²⁴³

A sacrifice is then conceived as a necessary violent event to end all violence and make vengeance impossible. The sacrificial victim, according to Girard, is a foreigner, enemy, or one who has been set aside for that very purpose. Their position in society precludes them from integrating into the community.²⁴⁴ Hubert and Muss’s field-defining text, *Sacrifice* (1898), offers relevant ideas on sacrificial ceremony, particularly the process and the parties involved. We draw from these aspects to discuss how Hussein constitutes Kijana as a sacrificial victim. To Hubert and Muss, sacrifice is a religious practice conducted in a religious environment by religious actors. However, they note that

²⁴² Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), 7.

²⁴³ Ibid., 8.

²⁴⁴ In other communities, the victim is not necessarily a foreigner. Ghanaian dramatists Joe de Graft describes a Voodoo substitution sacrifice in which the victim (a girl) is from the community. However, in this ceremony, a lamb is substituted for the girl at the point of cutting the body. J.C. de Graft, “Roots in African Drama and Theatre,” in Harrison, Paul Carter, et al. *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in The African Diaspora* (Temple University Press, 2002), 20.

at the beginning of the ceremony, “neither sacrificer nor sacrificer, nor place, instruments, or victim, possess this characteristic to a suitable degree.” They argue that “the first phase of the sacrifice is intended to impart it to them. They are profane; their condition must be changed...rites are necessary to introduce them into the sacred world and involve them in it, more or less profoundly, according to the importance of the part they have subsequently to play.”²⁴⁵ Girard, Hubert, and Muss describe the process of sacrifice as incorporating three parties: the sacrificer (the one who benefits from the sacrifice), the sacrificer, and the victim. However, in *Jogoo Kijijini*, Hussein does not make this distinction. There is no priest or elder who presides over the sacrificial ceremony. Furthermore, the sacrificer is not explicitly identified, but we can argue that the villagers—those who have suffered the wounds of the path—are the chief beneficiaries. But how can we account for Kijana’s victimhood? Have they not borne the wounds of the path like other villagers? It seems then that Kijana occupies both the position of the sacrificer and victim.

As a foreigner, Kijana qualifies as a sacrificial victim, which could partially explain why the old woman narrates the story of the path to them and not any other villager. However, the chorus questions their motives and ultimate goal, which gives us glimpses of Kijana’s suffering:

Masikini Kijana masikini
 Masikini lahaula masikini
 Haya yote yanajilia nini?
 Hata ye kujifanya ng’ombe alia.²⁴⁶

[The poor, poor youth
 The poor, poor youth
 What has it come to?
 To turn himself into a heifer]

²⁴⁵ Hubert and Muss, *Sacrifice*, 20.

²⁴⁶ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 28.

Here, Kijana was a traveler and must have suffered the sins of the path. Thus, this is an extraordinary sacrifice in which the victim of violence is simultaneously the sacrificial victim. However, the chorus also questions whether the sacrifice is necessary. They wonder why the young person went through the trouble of traveling to the village only to become a calf for sacrifice.²⁴⁷

Ng'ombe wa surat al-bakari
 Ambae aso na dosari
 Au wa Keats mshairi
 Endae machinjoni huku alia.²⁴⁸

[The heifer of the Baqara sura
 On which there was no blemish
 Or that of the poet Keats
 Who went while lowing to slaughter]

The intertextuality of this stanza, which we regard as an authorial intrusion into the narrative, provides the key that ties Kijana's sacrifice to Hussein's message. Surat-al-Bakari is the second chapter of the Quran referred to as "the Cow or the Heifer." This chapter covers issues ranging from law, theology, metaphysics, and cosmology. This longest chapter in the Quran, revealed during the Medina period, details the history of the Children of Israel, focusing on God's blessings and mercy despite disobedience from Israelites. The critical sections of the chapter that are significant to our analysis include the events at Mt. Sinai, the sacrificial cow (Baqarah), which gives the chapter its name, and bringing a corpse back to life through touching it with a piece of the sacrificial cow.

And when Moses said to his people, "God commands you to slaughter a cow," they said, "Do you take us in mockery?" He said, "I seek refuge in God from being among the ignorant." [67]

They said, "Call upon your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what she is." He said, "He says she is a cow neither old nor without calf, middling between them: so do what you are commanded." [68]

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 28.

They said, “Call upon your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what her color is.” He said, “He says she is a yellow cow. Bright is her color, pleasing the onlookers.” [69] They said, “Pray for us to your Lord, that He may clarify for us what she is. Cows are much alike to us, and if God will we will surely be guided.” [70]

He said, “He says she is a cow not broken to plow the earth or to water the tillage, sound and without blemish.” They said, “Now you have brought the truth.” So they slaughtered her, but they almost did not.²⁴⁹ [71]

Some Quran commentators interpret these verses in relation to the Bible’s Book of Numbers chapter nineteen, where Moses commands the Children of Israel to cleanse themselves of corpse contamination. Their interpretation is based on the story of a rich man whom his heir secretly murdered. God tasked Moses to learn the identity of the killer. After the debate over the cow, they slaughtered it and used its limb to strike the corpse back to life to identify the killer.²⁵⁰ While Amandina Lihamba’s interpretation is consistent with this commentary,²⁵¹ Robert Philipson concentrates on Numbers 19 to argue that the heifer signifies “sterile obedience.”²⁵² His reading allows him to question whether the young man’s sacrifice is a futile endeavor. If such an interpretation can be held, Philipson argues that it will insert Hussein himself into the narrative. In other words, “*Kijana* is Hussein himself, sacrificing his aristocratic patrimony to the new dawn of *Ujamaa*.”²⁵³ Philipson’s reading is intriguing, especially since it brings out Hussein’s anxiety about establishing an egalitarian society following the Arusha declaration. However, we argue that the most significant aspect of sacrifice described in the Quranic verses, which reflects the young man’s

²⁴⁹ *Quran* Ch. 2: 67-71.

²⁵⁰ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *The Study Quran* (New York: Harper One, 2015), 146.

²⁵¹ Lihamba, *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania*, 159.

²⁵² Philipson, *Drama and National Culture*, 189.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 190.

sacrifice, is silence. It is the deafening silence of a wrong committed—bloodshed—that compels Moses to demand a sacrifice of a cow without blemish to bring the dead back to life to testify.

The chorus also invokes John Keats' poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which reinforces the ideas of silence, memory, and history.²⁵⁴ Keats poem, completed in 1819, describes a Grecian urn with reminiscent images of pastoral and village life in ancient Greece. The speaker considers the urn an unadulterated partner of quietness and the embodiment of silence and extended lengths of time. He wonders what stories the urn's decorative images tell and whether the images are forms of frenzied revelry. The lines that concern us are in the fourth stanza:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.²⁵⁵

This stanza captures the image of a ceremonial progression with a priest leading a cow bellowing to the heavens and covered in flowers and ceremonial silks. The speaker wants to know where the people in the procession have come from. He wonders which town by the river, seashore, or mountain has fallen quiet because they have left on this solemn morning. He speaks openly to this unknown town, recognizing that its streets are frozen forever in silence. There is no person left to testify why the town is empty. Towards the poem's end, the speaker notes that the urn will outlive everyone in his generation. "When old age shall this generation waste//Thou shalt remain, in midst

²⁵⁴ William T. Arnold (Ed.) *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co, 1884), 235.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

of other woe.”²⁵⁶ This means that the urn will become an object of art for other generations to interpret. The urn is a contradiction of mortality, an image that occupies the speaker, as it survives the beauty transfixed on its surface—beauty and vibrance that may never come to fruition because it is frozen. The urn, an object holding the ashes of the dead, is the only object of contemplation in the poem. Death and the precarious nature of life are depicted from the beginning. The speaker casts their nervously changing thoughts about mortality onto the urn, which appears to stand for both life and death simultaneously.

Like the images in the Grecian Urn, Hussein’s heifer, Kijana, is also frozen in time. However, through the oral narrative, the silence of the sacrifice is broken. Some critics have argued that the youth who fought in the Zanzibar Revolution, including its leader, John Okello, were migrants to Zanzibar from the mainland and other towns in East Africa.²⁵⁷ Unfortunately, after the Revolution, when leaders of the Afro-Shirazi party came to power, many of these youths were either jailed or killed. It could be that Hussein’s heifer is a commemoration of these youths, an attempt to immortalize them in history, seeing that “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.”²⁵⁸ However, it is not clear why Hussein had to appeal to ideas in western traditions that may have been unfamiliar to his audience to highlight the suffering of revolutionaries. Be that as it may, such an allegorical reading of these images does not alter the message or affect the structure of performance in *Jogoo Kijijini*. We learn that the young person’s sacrifice plunged the village into tragedy and a new dawn, and when the foot is finally set free, the chorus asks whether it will step on

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ See Amrit Wilson, *The Threat of Liberation: Imperialism and Revolution in Zanzibar* (London: Pluto Press, 2013); John Okello, *Revolution in Zanzibar* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967); Don Patterson, *Revolution in Zanzibar: An American’s Cold War Tale* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002); Michael F. Lofchie, *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

²⁵⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

the blood of the young man. If the fall of Mtu was a sign of the coming darkness to the villagers, is the sacrifice of the young person a sign of freedom—a new dawn? Hussein does not give any easy answers to this riddle. The audience asks the narrator for an answer and even offers to pay the traditional prize for such performances. However, the narrator does not offer them any interpretation.²⁵⁹

Jogoo Kijijini's structure discourages straightforward interpretations that search for continuities, for instance, attempting to read the performance as the linear progression of Zanzibar or Tanzania's history. Amandina Lihamba's 1985 doctoral dissertation—the earliest work in English to consider Hussein's oeuvre—advanced such a connection and became the foundational text for subsequent critics. Robert Philipson's doctoral thesis, *Drama and National Culture* (1989), acknowledges the limitations of Lihamba's reading. He analyzes the text through the prism of Marxism, which focuses on the reproduction of relations of production, but ignores how the form of the text lends itself to multiple interpretations. Alain Ricard's *Ebrahim Hussein: Swahili Theatre and Individualism* (2000) discusses the text as a political allegory.²⁶⁰ His analysis identifies Zanzibar as the setting and then reads events in the narrative from this vantage point. He treats Mtu and Kijana (the young person) as a singular character, an error that emerges from reading the text as a continuous narrative with a linear plot. Since Hussein's text is an oral narrative structured as poetic theatre, the performance tradition allows the narrator to perform the story in single or multiple sittings. In its verbal form, such a performance does not necessarily follow a strict plot during every single performance. Therefore, the written text freezes the narrative, making it difficult for readers to identify how the different episodes make up the entire performance. The challenge of considering Mtu and Kijana as the same character lies in the single narrative such an interpretation generates.

²⁵⁹ Hussein, *Jogoo Kijijini*, 31-32.

²⁶⁰ Ricard, *Ebrahim Hussein*, 112.

Hence, Ricard's analysis ignores Hussein's presentation of the body as a metaphor for reading violence, the absence of wholeness, and the quest for a complete peaceful landscape.

Our view is that various performance elements lend themselves to multiple readings. For instance, as demonstrated, *njia* (the path) can be read as a road that facilitates mobility, a way of life (read ideology) that employs violence to fragment a village, or slavery. Whether this village stands for Zanzibar or Tanzania, or any country in East Africa, is beside the point. What interests us is the ubiquity of fragments, the expectation of a savior, and the process of ceremonial sacrifice to redeem the village. Hussein's time is neither temporal nor a linear passage of time that aligns events in a chain of causality. In other words, we should not look for causality structured around the chronological passage of time in the few events Hussein describes. Hussein was keen to avoid a mechanistic conception of history, which takes critical events as markers of historical time, and thus liable to non-critical reception of givens, such as the State, as an inevitable product of progress. In a mechanistic approach to the history of Africa, Mbembe argues, "causality is attributed to entities that are fictive and wholly invisible, but are nevertheless said to determine, ultimately, the subject's life and work."²⁶¹ Hussein deliberately refrains from explicitly referencing slavery and colonialism in the narrative, thus shifting our focus from the events per se to the 'genetic power' emanating from encounters that spawn violent histories. This power emerges as "a wound whose meaning resides in the realm of the unconscious."²⁶² Here, the emphasis is on the memory of suffering and how it manifests in the present.

Jogoo Kijijini is a lamentation of a village's fragmentation, suffering, and despair. Hussein creates episodes around four central figures (Mkunazi-Rahmani, Mtu, Kijana, and Ajuza) but does

²⁶¹ Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture*, 14(1), 2002, pp. 243.

²⁶² Ibid., 260.

not weave the episodes into a coherent narrative. Instead, he organizes the episodes into *kitendawili* (riddle). We argue that Hussein rips the story into different parts that can only make sense in analysis or interpretation to highlight the textual violence of a social formation that demands unwavering support to dominant ideologies. Therefore, Hussein approaches his work as one of mourning. He reaches into the past to show that society cannot be whole unless it has dealt with the fragments and violence of the past. Veena Das writes that “in the work of mourning in many societies, it is the transactions between language and body by which antiphony of language and silence recreates the world in the face of tragic loss.”²⁶³ Whereas in *Kinjeketile*, Hussein shows us how imagining a post-revolutionary Tanzania includes appropriating bodies as objects on which the aspirations of a new nation could be inscribed and a memory for the future made, in *Jogoo Kijijini*, he shows how bodies (fragmented bodies) give us glimpses of the piling ruins that are yet to be reckoned with for a society to enter into a new era.

A path towards healing demonstrates how “transactions between body and language lend to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again.”²⁶⁴ Hussein achieves this feat by fictionalizing realities that are not easy to discuss as they involve “contact zones.” Mary Louise Pratt describes these zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures met, clashed, and grappled with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.”²⁶⁵ These

²⁶³ Veena Das, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain.” *Daedalus*, Winter 1996, 125(1), pp. 67-91.

²⁶⁴ Das, *Language and Body*, 67.

²⁶⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Palgrave, 1992) 4. Martinican poet Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 33, advances the idea that colonization was not the appropriate way for cultures to encounter each other.

spaces are difficult to theorize as they involve transformation of life—killing the old way of life and birthing a new way. This transformation can complicate the very idea of “wholeness,” especially when invoked to perform “restoration or resuscitation” that is, returning to an imagined or real place and time when a people considered themselves whole. Radical nationalists invoke the place before “contact” as a space of wholeness, and argue that this space must be the foundation of new society. However, this reasoning is problematic as it ignores the transformations that have shaped the present—transformations that implicate the nationalists in re-writing history. Thus, *Jogoo Kijijini* renders the existence of a perfect past spaces problematic. The idea is not that these spaces do not exist at all, but their invocation complicates the present and diverts attention from the salient issues that affect the daily lives of Zanzibaris and Tanzanians. That is why the narrative in *Jogoo Kijijini* highlights the ruins of the past but accentuates the sacrifice of redemption. If the path functioned as a means of dispossession, the question we ought to ask is whether the young person’s sacrifice is sufficient to reconstitute an egalitarian society.²⁶⁶ The chorus expresses anxiety that the young person’s sacrifice might be insufficient. We examine this anxiety in Hussein’s *Mashetani* (Devils, 1971).

²⁶⁶ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 53.

CHAPTER 3: Revolution and Embodied Anxiety

Introduction

In 1964, the Zanzibar Revolution ousted the government of the Sultan and instituted policies that were far more socialist than those implemented on the mainland. The revolutionary government nationalized plantations and properties that had hitherto belonged to wealthy farmers and foreigners. Three months later, the island and the mainland were united to become the United Republic of Tanzania, and this union may have influenced Tanzania's internal and external policies after the Arusha Declaration, as the republic moved quickly to nationalize banks, insurances, trade, import-export companies, and acquired majority shares in several manufacturing companies and plantations.²⁶⁷ However, if the Zanzibar Revolution and the Arusha Declaration were geared toward eliminating the gap between the haves and have nots, particularly the classes of the Europeans, Arabs, and the Asian minorities who controlled most of the country's wealth, the contradictions and confusion that ensued after the revolutions, as individuals struggled to make sense of the prevailing ideology and the principles it purported to represent, attests to the anxiety that Hussein writes into KITARU, one of the characters in *Masbetani*.

Although Hussein sets the play in 1964, immediately after the Zanzibar Revolution, it was written and published in the wake of the Arusha Declaration of 1967, an event the play identifies as a moment of awakening and uncertainty. Hussein returns to the Zanzibar Revolution to show that the challenges that bedeviled the island after the revolution were rife in post-Arusha Declaration Tanzania. For instance, many families that lost their property during the Zanzibar Revolution moved to coastal cities, such as Dar es Salaam, Mombasa, and Tanga, to rebuild their wealth. Among these is JUMA's family, which moved to Dar es Salaam, where Juma becomes Kitaru's friend. While

²⁶⁷ Lihamba, *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania*, 73.

Juma's family belongs to the dispossessed group—those who lost their lands and left the island to the coastal towns to try their luck again, Kitaru's family epitomizes the petty bourgeois class that rose in Tanzania after independence. This group, which Hussein has dubbed “Black Europeans,” is western educated and prefers life in big cities like Dar es Salaam, where they take advantage of the Africanization programs to enrich themselves. The tension between Juma and Kitaru's families—portrayed by Juma and Kitaru's role plays—depict the pitfalls of violent revolutions in nation-building.

Amandina Lihamba reads *Mashetani* as a critique of neo-colonialism. She argues that the play's central idea is that “the eruption of neo-colonial exploitation, greed and oppression resides in the perpetuation of colonial structures which independence was unable to break.”²⁶⁸ She sees Hussein's *Mashetani* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I will Marry When I Want* as plays in a singular continuum—works that portray the absurdity of independence in East Africa. In her iteration, both plays single out the legacy of imperialism as a quagmire in the postcolony. As she notes, “what bothers both Hussein and Ngugi is that few leaders have taken any steps to rectify the situation in which the KIO's and the BABA KITARU's have entrenched themselves in political and economic power.”²⁶⁹ Bertoncini Zúbková concurs with Lihamba, as she reads the first part of the play—an enactment of the “Devil's Play,” in which Juma plays the Devil, and Kitaru plays Man—as a representation of colonialism. In this part of the play, she argues, “The Devil wants to be worshipped by Man after impressing him with power, but Man eventually rebels and kills him.”²⁷⁰ In her reading, the second part of the play represents neo-colonialism.²⁷¹ S.D. Kiango and T.S.Y. Sengo

²⁶⁸ Lihamba, *Politics and Theatre in Tanzania* 133.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 135. [Kio and Baba Kitaru are happy to collaborate with foreign corporations to exploit peasants.]

²⁷⁰ Bertoncini Zúbková, *Outline of Swahili Literature*, 199.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 200.

argue that *Mashetani* is “an allegory that follows the course of colonialism from conquest, to internalization through education, to the throwing off of its political forms, to the hegemonic recreation of its values in the formerly colonized.”²⁷² Although *Mashetani*’s setting and the ensemble of characters can support an analysis that considers the play within the context of colonialism and neocolonialism, such a reading limits the play to an interpretation, which ignores the complex issues Hussein fleshes out in the play. Furthermore, many *Mashetani* critics lament the obscurity of the play’s language and do not comprehensively engage with Hussein’s use of language and dramaturgy. It seems then that if Hussein is obsessed with language and staging, as these scholars observe, it is because these features are at the core of his play and must be part of any analysis of the work.

Robert Phillipson begins his examination of *Mashetani* by delving into Marx and Engels’ concept of ideology as “false consciousness, either a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or a system of illusory beliefs which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge.”²⁷³ The trouble with Philipson’s definition of ideology is its non-critical adoption of classical Marxism, in which the prevailing ideology is defined as the ideology of the dominant class.²⁷⁴ Philipson uses Shetani (Devil) as a signifier to explore the role signifiers of a dated ideology have to play in contemporary Tanzania. He begins his investigation by establishing *shetani*’s status as a cultural referent within Islamic culture and its Swahili subculture and then proceeds to locate the word within the Arabic language and Islamic religious tradition. In his allegorical reading Philipson does not explain why he considers Swahili as an Arab subculture instead of a Bantu subculture from which it derives a significant influence and linguistic belonging. When he discusses the Devil’s

²⁷²Sengo, T.S and Kiango, S.D. *Ndimi Zetu: Uchambuzi wa Maandishi ya Kiswahili* (Nairobi: Foundation Books, 1975), 114

²⁷³ Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, 127.

²⁷⁴ Won Choi, *A Structuralist Controversy: Althusser and Lacan on Ideology*, 2012.

abilities, he singles out two terminologies, *roho* and *nafsi*, and reads them through what he calls traditional Swahili culture without elaborating what he means by traditional Swahili, considering the complexity of Swahili and its location in a multifaceted contact zone. In his iteration, Phillipson reads *roho* as the Christian soul and *nafsi* as self (I myself).²⁷⁵ He attributes these qualities to a “summation of the *shetani* that make it a metaphor for neo-colonial hegemony: ‘The *shetani* can appear in any form, and it can enter any person.’”²⁷⁶

Philipson is not alone in considering Shetani as a cultural referent derived from the Arab conceptualization of the Devil (Shaytan). Emiliano Minerba’s reading of the play as a horror story traces Shetani to the Quran and Arabic language to summon the evil characteristics of the religious Devil, which he then employs in reading the elements of horror in the play.²⁷⁷ To his credit, he shies away from superimposing these elements on the political developments in Tanzania. Be that as it may, privileging the figure of the Devil or attempting to trace its origin constrains our understanding of Hussein’s project. First, the distinction between the singular Shetani (Devil) and Mashetani (Devils or Demons) plays a significance role in the play, as we will demonstrate in subsequent sections. Second, tracing the origin of the Devil presupposes his existence (givenness) at the beginning of the play. We argue instead that the Devil emerges from Juma and Kitaru’s *mchezo* (play) and has no existence prior to the performance. If Shetani has a meaning, it should be sought in the social formation of the Tanzania of the 1960s and not in religious literature. Interestingly, Philipson goes to great lengths to show the difficulties in establishing the definition of “shetani” within the Swahili cultural context but nevertheless mobilizes missionaries’ writings (Ludwig Krapf and J.

²⁷⁵ Philipson 134-135.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. 134.

²⁷⁷ Emiliano Minerba. “A Frightening Play: The Element of Horror in Hussein’s Mashetani.” *Swahili Forum* 24 (2017): 37-61.

Spencer Trimingham), whose writings on Swahili were heavily influenced by their Christian missions in Africa. These missionaries used words such as *majini*, *mashetani*, *wazimu*, and *pepo* to describe phenomena within African communities that they did not understand or wanted to condemn. To them, any forces outside Christianity that shaped the lives of Africans were lumped into any of those previously mentioned categories. The uptake of the word “mashetani” within the African culture may have been mainly as a reference to forces that influenced people to depart from custom. Despite hailing from a Muslim family, Hussein remained decidedly secular in his works. Granted that the Islamic culture is presented in his writings, but it would be an error to assume a religious lens or perspective in interpreting his works. The significance of this argument will become apparent in our discussion of ideology.

The subtle arguments we advance in this chapter go as follows: In the Devil’s drama (Mchezo wa Shetani), which opens the play in Part One, Hussein maps the ubiquity of *Ushetani* (Satanism), a power that transforms individuals into subjects through interpellation, in the Althusserian sense and through discursive productivity, in the Foucauldian sense. We investigate how Hussein uses language and the body to portray how power forms the subject through subordination. The focus here is on how the Devil (*Shetani*) subordinates Man (*Binadamu*) and transforms him into a subject through this process of subjection. Judith Butler refers to this process as the “paradox of subjection,” as it expresses indirectly “the paradox of referentiality: namely, that we must refer to what does not yet exist.”²⁷⁸ In other words, that which subordinates Man, causing him pain and suffering, becomes the very condition of his existence. If, indeed, this power of subjection is the very same power that sustains Man’s existence, can it also serve as the condition of possibility for Man’s resistance? How does this possibility manifest itself in Hussein’s drama?

²⁷⁸ Judith Butler, *the Psychic Life of Power*, 4.

Following Butler's reading of Foucault, we discuss subjection as the process of formulating or producing a subject.

Becoming Man, Becoming the Devil

In the first part of the play, Hussein goes to great lengths to portray how Man is constituted as a subject through a violent process of subjection. As the play unfolds, we meet Juma and Kitaru, family friends, and university students. Juma introduces the "Devil and Human" drama to an audience, stating that he will play the Devil and Kitaru will play the Human (or Man).²⁷⁹ The announcement suggests that the play's performance is a regular event. The scene is a baobab tree with a massive hole in it. Juma runs into this hole and stays inside it for quite some time. A sweaty man emerges from the hole, assuming an intimidating demeanor. He introduces himself as the Devil and describes his traits, such as his irreducibility to a ghost, a priest, or the Devil's servant.²⁸⁰ He is the Devil himself because his skills are infinite, his kindness is limitless, and his atrocities are uncountable. He constructs, demolishes, praises, elevates, and humiliates.²⁸¹ The Devil takes on different forms to show off his abilities. He morphs into a bird, wind, and soul to show that he can move anywhere and live inside other bodies. He can also work wonders, such as turn trees into furniture.²⁸² Hussein is keen to underscore the Devil's power over Man, as this aesthetic choice allows him to portray how Kitaru becomes Man through interpellation in the Althusserian sense and his subjectivity is continuously rearticulated through violence that acts on his body. Man's becoming

²⁷⁹ I translate the Swahili word *Sbetani* as Devil in English and *Binadamu* as Man. While Binadamu can also be translated as "Human," I avoid the use of human for epistemological reasons. Julius Nyerere, the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania and the architect of Ujamaa (Tanzania's socialism) invoked Binadamu in the Fanonian sense of a new humanism. Thus, I use Man (proper name) as the name of the character of the play Juma and Kitaru stage to distinguish it from Human, which pertained to Nyerere's project.

²⁸⁰ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 1.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Hussein, *Masbetani*, 2.

and existence are intertwined with his subordination, which unfolds schematically. First, as we have seen, the Devil demonstrates his superiority over Man by delineating his powers. Second, the Devil hails Man in the Althusserian sense.

Njoo hapa! (*Binadamu anakuja.*) Sivyo, sivyo, sivyo! Sivyo hata kidogo. Jaribu tena. We, njoo hapa. (*Binadamu anakuja mbio.*) Ah, sivyo hata kidogo. Jaribu tena. We, njoo hapa. (*Binadamu anakuja mbio. Akifika karibu, anakuja kwa kukwawa.*) Hebu tujaribu tena. We, njoo hapa. (*Binadamu anakuja mbio. Akifika karibu anakwawa. Anasujudu.*) Ndiyo, sasa sawa: Hivi sawa sawa.²⁸³

[Come here! (*Man approaches.*) No, no, no! Not that way. Try again. You, come here. (*Man runs.*) Ah, not that way. Try again. You, come here. (*Man runs and then crawls upon approaching the Devil.*) Try Again. You, come here. (*Man runs, crawls, and then prostrates before the Devil.*) Yes, that is correct: This is good.]

Third, the ritual of interpellation proceeds through linguistic subordination in which the Devil flaunts his language as superior to Man's and then declares, on account of his newfound friendship with Man, to teach him the Devil's secret language—a language that will enable Man to enter into communion with him. The secret language is encapsulated in a single word, which the Devil whispers to Man and commands him to repeat aloud. The theatricality of this process, which I describe as “Man's ritual of becoming,” a rhythmic aural performance that mimics repeated stabbings, reveals the paradox of subjection as the process depicts how Man's subordination is simultaneously his moment of becoming. Hussein frames this moment as rebirth in which one life enables the existence of another, albeit hierarchically with the new life (if we are to believe the Devil) occupying a privileged position.

The Devil goes into what appears as ‘birth labor’ and immediately whispers the word to Man. His labor pains end when Man emerges as a new being. The events play out as follows: The

²⁸³ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 3.

Devil asks Man, “liseme neno nililokufunza.”²⁸⁴ [Say the word I taught you.] Man responds, “Gashalazeritwas.”²⁸⁵ This word does not exist in Swahili or any known language. Scholars who attempt to unravel its meaning place the word within the sphere of colonialism. For instance, Richard Wafula, writing on theatre criticism in Africa, speculated that the word could mean “Gush it all as it was” and links the meaning to the practice of priming the colonial subject to accept the culture of the colonizer.²⁸⁶ For our project, the word's exact meaning is inconsequential as our interest lies in its performativity rather than its denotative or connotative meaning. We read the word as a form of verbal vampirism, a word that drains and maims a person. The Devil compels Man to utter the word, and the word hurts Man, makes him bleed, destroys his liver, and takes over his soul.²⁸⁷ The word eventually destroys Man's body.

SHETANI: [...] Liseme neno nililokufunza. BINADAMU: Gashalazeritwas.

SHETANI: Sema nikusikie.

BINADAMU: Gashalazeritwas.

SHETANI: Sema kwa dhati yako.

BINADAMU: (anasema kwa dhati) Gashalazeritwas.

SHETANI: Sema acha likuumize.

BINADAMU: (linamuumiza) Gashalazeritwas.

SHETANI: Likutoe damu.

BINADAMU: (linamtoa damu) Gashalazeritwas.

SHETANI: Sasa likuvunjevunje maini.

BINADAMU: (linamvunjavunja maini) Gashalazeritwas.

SHETANI: Liache likuingie ndani ya nafsi yako.

BINADAMU: Gashalazeri... t... was

SHETANI: Ndani ya hali yako.

BINADAMU: Gash... Gasha... aah. (Anatapatapa kwa maumivu. Kimya. Kazirai. Shetani huku anakenya. Anamnyoshea mikono Binadamu kwa huruma.)

SHETANI: Rafiki mpenzi, rafiki mwandani. Rafiki wa milele, rafiki wa daima. Ninakupokea. Ninaifurahikia leo, siku ya uzao wako. Kutoka katika tumbo la giza jeusi, kuingia katika ulimwengu wa nuru nyeupe.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 4.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.,

²⁸⁶ Wafula, Richard Makhanu. *Ubakiki wa Tamthilia. Historia na Maendeleo Yake*, Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2003.

²⁸⁷ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 4.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

[DEVIL: Say the word I taught you.
 MAN: Gashalazeritwas.
 DEVIL: Speak so I can hear you.
 MAN: Gashalazeritwas.
 DEVIL: Speak sincerely.
 MAN: (He speaks sincerely) Gashalazeritwas.
 DEVIL: Speak, let it hurt you.
 MAN: (It hurts him) Gashalazeritwas.
 DEVIL: Let it bleed you.
 MAN: (It makes him bleed) Gashalazeritwas.
 DEVIL: Now let it destroy your liver.
 MAN: (It destroys his liver) Gashalazeritwas.
 DEVIL: Let it inhabit your soul.
 MAN: Gashalazeri... t... was.
 DEVIL: Your personality.
 MAN: Gash... Gasha... aah. (He wallows in pain. Silence. He faints. Meanwhile, the Devil is scratching the ground. He gives Man his hand with pity.)
 DEVIL: Dear friend, true friend. Forever friend, always a friend. I receive you. I rejoice for today, the day of your birth. Coming out of the womb of black darkness, coming into the world of white light.]

The Devil and Man contort their bodies as if they were in labor and about to give birth.

While the Devil's speech allows us to learn that Man has given birth to a new man with the attributes of both the Devil and Man, Hussein does not show explicitly whether the Devil gives birth to anything. However, since the Devil goes into labor simultaneously with Man and his agony comes to an end when Man delivers, his acts might as well be a mere *couvade* or constitute the core element of Man's subjectivation. The Devil presents Man's rebirth—a process in which Man is both the child and mother—as a gift that has liberated Man from the womb of darkness into the world of light. The Devil, then, encourages the new man to be happy and proud since the child is always better than the parent. That “*Kilichozaliwa ni kizuri Zaidi kuliko kinachozaa.*”²⁸⁹ [What is born is better than what gives birth.] He commands Man to stand, but he cannot do so because he has just given birth (as a mother) and is also a new being (as a child.) In other words, Man is a tired mother

²⁸⁹ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 4.

who is still in pain and a child who lacks completely developed limbs to enable it to stand. The Devil mocks him: “Simama katika uzuri wako.”²⁹⁰ [Stand on your goodness]. Man faints. The Devil laughs and then hides. Man’s failure to stand amplifies his humiliation, but he cannot understand what transpired and how the Devil has transformed his body.

Althusser stated that ideology’s primary goal is to constitute concrete individuals as subjects through hailing or interpellation. Ideology, in this case, pervades our world to the extent that it appears “true” or “obvious” to us. As he writes, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation of interpellation or hailing.”²⁹¹ In this sense, ideology is usually expressed through activities, such as rituals and conventional conduct, which are “inserted into practices.”²⁹² For instance, the Devil seems to operate within these rituals of ideological recognition when he hails Man “njoo hapa,” [Come here] or “liseme neno nililokufunza.”²⁹³ [speak the word I taught you.] Thus, in Althusserian parlance, Man cannot ignore the hail because, despite the temporality of the summons, he is already a subject long before he is born. However, if, as Althusser maintains, an individual is always a subject, how can we account for the Devil’s persistent subjugation of man? Are the painful bodily processes necessary if all that is required is to bring Man to recognition and acceptance of his self-constitution? If Althusser’s articulation of ideology and the composition of the subject is based on Lacan’s notion of reality—the world we create around ourselves after entering the symbolic order—what are some of the limitations of Lacan’s theorizations that seep into Althusser’s formulation of ideology and

²⁹⁰ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 4.

²⁹¹ Althusser 1269.

²⁹² Althusser, *Lenin*, 114.

²⁹³ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 4.

subjectivity? For instance, how can we employ Althusser's concept of interpellation, despite its decentering of the subject, to make sense of the idea that the Devil's subjugation of Man is, at the same time, to borrow Butler's framing, "the process of becoming a subject"?²⁹⁴ Furthermore, since subjectivation in *Masbetani* takes place linguistically and through acting on the body, does this subjection lead to the constitution of a new subject? If so, how does subordination through the body intersect with Althusser's interpellation?

The a priori conception of the Devil as a power raises questions that Hussein does not bother to address in the play explicitly, as he is concerned with the dynamic of Man's subjectivation. However, a careful study of *Masbetani* shows that Hussein is aware that the power that subordinates Man as well as becomes the condition of Man's existence cannot be taken for granted or, to use Foucault's idiom, conceived as always already there, a phrasing Foucault used to refute the reasoning that one can never be outside power.²⁹⁵ The idea of power in *Masbetani* goes beyond its repressive attributes or what Foucault characterizes as the "instance of negation" to underscore power's interpretation in negative terms. To circumvent this often-held image of power, Hussein tweaks his dramaturgy to embrace a play within a play. Indeed, the title *Masbetani* might as well refer to the play between the Devil and Man staged at the beginning of the play. Although William Shakespeare popularized the theatrical device of a play within a play, notably in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark*, Hamlet himself asks some strolling players to perform the *Murder of Gonzago*—with action and characters mimicking parts of *Hamlet*—designed as a mousetrap to "catch the conscience of the king," whom Hamlet suspects of having killed his father. Hussein's dramaturgy, on the other hand, is more aligned with Bertolt Brecht's use of a play within a play as a technique of reminding the audience of the artificiality of drama. By framing the central events in

²⁹⁴ Butler 2.

²⁹⁵ Foucault, *Power Knowledge: Selected Interviews*, 141.

Mashetani within a fictional violent contest between the Devil and Man, Hussein's goal is to deprive his target audience of the enticing power of realistic drama by concentrating their attention on the collective societal concerns and the idea that "relations of power," to invoke Foucault, "are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role."²⁹⁶ The significance of this technique lies in how it reduces the emotional reaction from the audience, who would possibly react differently to events between the Devil and Man from how they would react to the same events between Juma and Kituru, who play the Devil and man respectively, and in how a familiar spectacle recognizable in post-independent Tanzania and post-revolutionary Zanzibar is made strange when couched in fiction. This strangeness reminds the audience that they are seated in a theater and enables them to focus on the social implication of the spectacle before them.

In his review of Brecht's epic theatre, Raymond Williams remarked that Brecht established a dramatic style in which men (sic) were depicted constituting themselves and their circumstances. He writes:

To show men in the process of producing themselves and their situations, as opposed to discovering themselves in a given situation, Brecht developed methods of writing, producing, and acting which embodied a critical detachment: hopefully...in the spectator, but more radically in the immediate nature of the play.²⁹⁷

Here, the critical detachment was calculated to inculcate "complex seeing," an expert detachment that would allow spectators to identify contradictions in social life. If we accept William's argument, we can in no way construe the Devil in *Mashetani* as a given. Although he manifests himself as a power that subjugates Man, his emergence is predicated on his relations with Man. Thus, like Brecht, Hussein is interested in depicting "men producing themselves and their situations" to capture the

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 140.

²⁹⁷ Raymond Williams, *Drama: From Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Hogarth, 1988), 279.

ambivalence inherent in postcolonial Tanzania. For instance, as the play unfolds, the Devil leads man into affirming his powers through call and response.

SHETANI: Unaniogopa?	DEVIL: Do you fear me?
BINADAMU: Ndiyo.	MAN: Yes.
SHETANI: Unanicha?	DEVIL: Do you revere me?
BINADAMU: Ndiyo.	MAN: Yes.
SHETANI: Unaninyenyekea?	DEVIL: Do you worship me?
BINADAMU: Ndiyo. ²⁹⁸	MAN: Yes.

It seems then that the Devil's emergence as a subject is reaffirmed linguistically, a process that the Devil perfects and deploys in the interpellation of Man into what he ironically calls "*nuru nyenye*" (white light), but which we discuss below as *Ushetani* (Satanism) to generally describe a situation (that can be read as a social formation) that characterized the Tanzania of 1960s before the Arusha Declaration.²⁹⁹ In the Althusserian interpellation, it is assumed that concrete individuals can understand the language of hailing, as the subjection of the subject happens linguistically. For instance, Althusser's example of a police officer hailing a person in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" is intelligible to the extent that the officer and the subject can connect linguistically, and the individual's response is prefigured. After all, as Butler asks, why would the subject turn towards the voice—accepting their subjection—unless "the inculcation of conscience already has taken place," which means that the subject has internalized the regulatory conventions of the authoritative voice? The Devil's subordination of Man seems to proceed according to Althusser's script up until the Devil introduces "Gashalazeritwas," a word unknown to Man. Nevertheless, the violence of this word acts on Man's body and catalyzes his becoming. In other words, Man's

²⁹⁸ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 3.

²⁹⁹ *Ushetani* (Satanism) comes from *Sbetani* (Devil). We do not strictly read Ushetani as a dominant ideology or indeed as a social formation as the foregoing discussion may have implied. A clearer interpretation of Ushetani is perhaps a way of life that valorizes economic vampirism without regard to the lives of the victims. Ushetani simply captures the period after Tanganyika's independence and after the Zanzibar Revolution that brought the unification of the two states into Tanzania. The period was characterized by the end of the old order and before the establishment of a new order. It was a period that inspired Nyerere to come up with Ujamaa as a new order.

subordination is accomplished through linguistic technology of the body (language techniques and strategies that create docile bodies suited to the demands of the modern society), which points to the Devil's mastery of the direct violence that language can exert on Man's body. Thus, Hussein's portrayal of the ritual of rebirth demonstrates that the subject is not spoken into existence as Althusser would have us believe. In other words, linguistics is relevant to the extent that it violently acts on the body to subordinate man. Althusser would argue that Man freely submits to his subjugation because "there are no subjects except by and for their subjection,"³⁰⁰ which suggests that his response to the Devil's commands inaugurates him as a subject, that is, subjection constitutes the conditions of his existence. As Butler writes, "within subjection the price of existence is subordination. Precisely at the moment in which choice is impossible, the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence."³⁰¹ While Hussein does not delve into Man's desire for survival in the play's early scenes, he fleshes out this desire in the last scenes, where Kitaru battles confusion, contradiction, and neurosis. It seems then that Man's desire for existence, which apparently the Devil can confer, compels him to submit freely to the dictates of the Devil, even when they cause him more pain. The argument that "individuals are always already interpellated by ideology as subjects" neither seems to exhaustively account for Hussein's use of 'Gashalazeritwas' as language, which is foreign to Man, nor does it explain the verbal vampirism (e.g., the Devil's secret language consumes Man) this word performs.

Throughout the play, characters constantly use language to subordinate the Other's body. However, the deployment of language in this regard goes beyond the Saussurean conceptualization of language as a total system that regulates the experiences speakers can produce, a postulation that

³⁰⁰ Althusser 1272.

³⁰¹ Butler 20.

allows Lacan to argue that “there is no language (*langue*) in existence, for which there is any question of its inability to cover the whole field of the signified.”³⁰² In his discussion of the symbolic order—the social realm of linguistic communication, intersubjective relationships, recognition of ideological norms, and acceptance of law—Lacan argues that language forms subjectivity and also points out that there is a divide between “the subject that speaks and the subject who is spoken.”³⁰³ The underlying idea here is that the subject is not the same as the person speaking. In other words, the “I” in speech has no specific referent as it could stand for many things. As Lacan shows, it can be a subject, ego, or unconscious. This idea, while not new since it had been conceptualized by linguist Emile Benveniste, who termed the “I” a shifter, enables Lacan to point out that the structure of language mediates our speech or conversation. Thus, “it’s the structure of the language that speaks the subject and not the other way around.”³⁰⁴ Althusser’s formulation of ideology draws from this Lacanian formulation to suggest that due to our reliance on language to establish reality, ideologies are representations of our social and imaginary reality as opposed to the Real itself. However, Hussein’s use of language in *Mashetani* appears to flip this Lacanian and Althusserian logic of language as he seeks to demonstrate language’s capacity for subjectivation without necessarily

³⁰² (Lacan, 1131). While Saussure and Lacan concur that a language system determines the experiences one can potentially articulate, they assign different values to the foundational linguistic concepts of the signifier and the signified. For Saussure, the signified is the most important component of meaning-making. In this iteration, a sign (**signified**) **does not** refer to a particular object but rather to another sign, which in turn refers to another sign and so on. Although Lacan embraces Saussure’s signifier and the signified, which indicate that words do not refer to specific things or concepts and that the relationship between words and things or concepts is arbitrary, he departs from Saussure as he questions the privileging of the signified in the process of meaning-making. For Lacan, signification is a chain process and “it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning ‘insists’ but that none of its elements ‘consists’ in the signification of which it is at the moment capable” (Lacan, 1134). This elevation of the signifier as the prime of signification process allows Lacan to argue that meaning cannot be fixed, a priori, in a particular signified or sign. Instead, the meaning is located in the relation between signifiers. Thus, even though we are born into language or what Lacan terms as “the discourse of the circuit” and are subjected to its structure, we are not always cognizant of this structure or its impact on the formation of our subjectivity.

³⁰³ Homer 2005, 45.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

presenting it as a totality. For Hussein, the language that creates and destroys characters does not have to be intelligible to the characters. What then imbues this language with the ability to destroy or create? We argue that power here does not manifest as a “speech-act,” that is, “enunciation of law, discourse of prohibition” along the lines of “thou shall not.” Instead, power manifests as relations that “play a conditioning and a conditioned role.”³⁰⁵ Man’s desire to be and to survive lures him into the Devil’s orbit, for “existence is always conferred from elsewhere; it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be.”³⁰⁶ Thus, the Devil uses Man’s need for existence to subjugate him. For example, While Man is reeling in pain, the Devil mocks him, “simama katika uzuri wako.”³⁰⁷ [Stand on your goodness.] Man makes an attempt to rise but collapses and passes out. The Devil chuckles at him before disappearing.

How can we then account for Man’s resistance? Does Man’s desire to kill the Devil count as resistance or is it simply a means of eliminating the Devil without necessarily tackling the power that subordinates him? Proper resistance will lead Man to rearticulate the terms of his subjection.³⁰⁸ However, this does not happen in *Masbetani* until the last scene when Kitaru asks to play the Devil instead of Man, thus flipping the power relations between him and Juma. To underscore the futility of resistance without rearticulating terms of subjection, consider Man’s desire to kill the Devil. After regaining consciousness, Man resolves to kill the Devil, but this desire becomes another opportunity for the Devil to orchestrate Man’s continued subordination. The debate is whether the Devil succeeded in ‘possessing’ Man, that is, engraving his personality on Man’s soul. Man proclaims that

³⁰⁵ Foucault, Interviews, 140

³⁰⁶ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 21.

³⁰⁷ Hussein, *Masbetani* 4.

³⁰⁸ Butler, 88.

his desire and commitment to kill the Devil is proof enough that the Devil failed to interpellate him into *Ushetani*. He says:

BINADAMU: Na wewe vile vile uliitumia siri hiyo kunidhuru mimi-kunikatakata maini, kunigawanya, kuutoa mwili wangu katika nafsi yangu. Ile haikuwa siri au hidaya; ile ilikuwa sumu. Ile ilikuwa nafsi na roho yako uliyotaka kuipuliza katika hali yangu.³⁰⁹

[MAN: You also used the secret (language) to hurt me—shredded my life, broke me, separated my body and soul. That was not a secret or gift; it was poison. That was your personality and soul you tried to breathe into my body.]

The Devil laughs mockingly at man's insistence that he failed in subordinating him—transforming him into a subject. A possible approach to reading this speech is to consider Ushetani as being structured like a language, that is, it structures individuals' lives without them ever recognizing it. Indeed, the Devil tells Man from his hiding spot that Man can only feel his presence but cannot see him. Furthermore, the events that transpire in the scene appear to support such a reading, which depicts Ushetani as being structured like a language. For instance, the Devil promises to come out of hiding, submit to Man, and consent to be killed, provided Man fulfills three conditions. First, the Devil wants to pose a question: “have you ever seen anybody butcher themselves?” Second, he wants to celebrate his death before it happens. Third, he wants Man to choose how to celebrate his death. Man grants the Devil these conditions and selects a waltz to celebrate the death. They dance as if they were friends, and then the Devil tells Man that it is time for him to die and hands him a knife. They embrace and smile at each other as two loving brothers. Man stabs the Devil repeatedly, and for each stab, the Devil laughs mockingly. However, if the death of the Devil is framed as Man's resistance to subordination, then Man's failure to kill the Devil suggests that he is yet to grasp the gravity of his subjection. If the Devil knows that he will not fall on the knife—as he regards man's attempt to kill him as a joke—does this, then reinforce the idea that Ushetani is structured like a language and that Man can only operate within the limits of

³⁰⁹ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 7.

Ushetani? Is Hussein suggesting that only the deployment of language and technologies that subdue the body can inflict violence on Man or the Devil? But how is Ushetani to be comprehensible to Man if its language-like structure is alien to Man? We argue that although Hussein appears to portray Man and later Kitaru's family as figures within a structuring ideological formation, he casts his gaze on Man's subjectivity and generally foregrounds Subjects in a manner that is contrary to Althusser's. Ushetani does not appear to be the dominant ideology in the play, as subsequent 'plays' between the Devil and Man illustrate how *Mashetani's* social formation was in the making. Man does not seem to possess the Devil's powerful language, and if he does, he lacks the knowledge to subordinate the Devil. What can he then do to get to the Devil's body? A knife has zero impact on such a body, which accounts for the Devil's laughter and Man's anxiety. Hussein is not keen on portraying power as an instance of ideology as this would suggest a presupposed subject, such as the Devil or Man. Instead, Hussein draws our attention to the effects of power on the body before turning to the effects of power on the idea of Ushetani. Ultimately, Hussein wants to underscore the idea that Man must rearticulate the terms of his subjection to tip the power relations in his favor. In a broader framework, until Tanzania rearticulates its terms of subjection, the Declaration of Arusha may not lead to the establishment of an egalitarian society.

Man's subordination, to follow Butler's iteration that "a subject is not only formed in subordination but that this subordination provides the subject's continuing condition of possibility,"³¹⁰ is the chief reason he submits to the Devil's torture. This claim makes the Devil's question whether a person can butcher himself intelligible. "Umepata kumskia nani akajichinja mwenyewe?"³¹¹ [Have you heard of a person slaughtering himself?] In other words, Man's desire to

³¹⁰ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 8.

³¹¹ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 7.

kill the Devil—the power that sustains his formation as a subject is tantamount to annihilating himself. Man, consistent with Foucault’s hypothesis that “there are no relations of power without resistances,”³¹² appear to resist the logic of subordination that sustains his existence. For example, when he regains consciousness, he questions his reality.

Ina maana kuwa huu wote ulikuwa mchezo tu. Stihizai. Shere. Ngoja, ngoja. Hebu jidhubutu kwanza. Weka akili yako juu ya kitu kimoja—Kisu! Kweli kisu kanipa yeye. Lakini kanipa kwa sababu alikuwa hana njia ila anipe tu. Kama hangenipa, alijua, ningekichukua kwa nguvu. Ndiyo maana kanipa. Hapana! Hakuniingia katika nafsi yangu. Wala kifo chake hakikuwa stihizai. Yeye amekufa, nimemuua. na mimi niko hai, nimejidumisha. Mimi ni mimi, mimi mtupu wala si mimi ganda, au kiti cha Shetani, hata kidogo. Mimi siyo kivuli, wala sanamu, wala bandi, bali mimi ni mimi mtupu—ngozi, damu na mfupa.³¹³

[Does it mean it was just a game? Mockery. Joke. Wait, wait. Calm down. Focus your brain on the issue—the knife! True, he gave me the knife. But he did it because he had no other choice. If he had not given me the knife, he knew I would have wrenched it from him. That is why he gave it to me. No! he did not penetrate my personality or my soul. Nor was his death a mockery. He is dead, I killed him. I am alive, I survived. I am what I am, I am whole and not a part, or a stool for the devil, in any way. I am not a shadow, statue, or fake; I am whole—skin, blood, and bones.]

This speech reawakens the longing for completeness. Man rejoices because he feels he has slain the Devil, who attempted to control him, take over his personality, and dehumanize him in every way. Man rejoices in the fact that his body is complete. Through a victory song, he proclaims that he is no longer reliant on the Devil, that the oppressor has been crushed to death and can no longer wield influence over him. He laughs and dances till he becomes inebriated. However, when he learns that the Devil may not be dead, he is overcome with ambivalence. Initially, he blames the Devil for his demise but subsequently admits his role and declares that he cannot continue to blame the Devil. He reasons that if he concludes that the Devil is the one who drags him down, that he is the one who causes him difficulties and punishes him, then he must also believe other things; he must believe that he is not human but a fake, a shadow, a skin. He must also think that his actions were a mockery.

³¹² Foucault, *Power Knowledge*, 142.

³¹³ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 9.

Ultimately, Man analyzes his situation and concludes that he is responsible for his failure.

“Nimeanguka kwa sababu nililewa.”³¹⁴ [I fell because I got drunk. I was drunk, and I wanted to climb a high level. It could not work.] “Ulevi pamoja na fikira ya ushindi ndiyo sababu ya kuanguka kwangu.”³¹⁵ [Drunkenness and my desire for victory are reasons for my failure]. He concludes that although a mistake has happened, there is hope in the imminent Arusha Declaration that will usher in *Ujamaa*. “Kosa limefanyika. Sasa liliobaki ni azimio; kosa hili halifanyiki tena, wala halitafanyika tena. Kwa hivyo nina haja ya vitu vitatu—bidii, ari na ukweli.”³¹⁶ [The mistake has happened. What remains is the Declaration; this mistake will never happen again, and it will never happen again. I desire three things—hard work, willpower, and truth.] For Man, the mistake was believing that the Devil was the cause of his misery. However, as we demonstrate in this chapter, Man is yet to grasp the reality of his subjection, and until he does, he cannot mount any meaningful resistance. Some scholars have read this scene as the moment of Tanganyika’s independence and the poor legacy of the Zanzibar Revolution, which promised an egalitarian society but failed to deliver. They see the killing of the Devil as an enactment of the events leading up to Tanganyika and Zanzibar’s independence from Britain, which was nonviolent compared to that of neighboring Kenya, which was entangled in the Mau Mau Rebellion. These scholars, together with Nyerere, envisioned the Arusha Declaration as the fulfillment of true freedom. Our view is that if there was a mistake, it was the propensity for Man to imagine that his existence was a given and that resistance necessarily led to freedom. We see here a form of resistance that reaffirms subordination more than it leads subjects to freedom. As we will demonstrate, the foundation upon which Man wants to build his life—“bidii, ari, na ukweli” [hard work, industry, and truth]—requires further technologies of

³¹⁴ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 11.

³¹⁵ Ibid.,

³¹⁶ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 11.

subjection. True resistance will only begin when Kitaru understands the truth—that the past haunts the present and that no progress can be made unless the terms of the past are rearticulated. In other words, the demons of the past must be exorcised.

The events shown in this first part of the play, which is staged as a play within a play, reenact the Zanzibar Revolution's failure to redeem the island and establish an egalitarian society. Initially, we see the Devil as the embodiment of Ushetani, a familiar social formation that mimics *njia* (path) in *Jogoo Kijijini* (1975) and colonialism in *Kinjeketile* (1969). However, any attempt to view Ushetani as a symbol of slavery, colonialism, or neo-colonialism misses the point of the play. What matters is how the characters of the Devil and Man reenact the process of Man's subjectivation and the opportunities and difficulties of resistance. If, as Hussein suggests, what appears as resistance does not necessarily lead to redemption or the establishment of an egalitarian society, how can we read Kitaru's pronouncement of a coming society characterized by hard work, industry, and truth? In short, on what foundation will Nyerere build Ujamaa? Kitaru's pronouncement is a segue into the rest of Hussein's world in *Mashetani*. Our argument for the rest of the play unfolds as follows: (1) We show that the central problematic in the play--depicted as the search for truth--is the place of history in Tanzania's nation-building. Hussein demonstrates how the past and the present gravitate towards each other, raising worries and anxiety about Tanzania's imminent future under Ujamaa. As Juma tells Kitaru at the end of the last scene:

"Wewe unaishi leo. Mimi ninaishi jana. Tutakuwaje marafiki? Na kila leo yako ni kidato cha kesho yako. Mimi, kila leo yangu ni kidato cha jana zangu. Na kila nikienda huko, nikirudi ninarudi na hadithi ... hadithi za mashetani."³¹⁷

[You live in the present. I live in the past. How can we be friends? Each day is a step towards your future. Each day is a reminder of my past. Every time I delve into the past, I return with stories...stories about the Devil.]

³¹⁷ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 56.

Juma categorizes his relationship with Kitaru as that of two people on a ladder, one climbing and the other descending: they cannot hold hands. The second part of the play, which takes place in Kitaru's mind, and to some extent, the third part of the play, portrays this conception of time as moving in different directions for Juma and Kitaru's families. (2) We demonstrate that Hussein's dramaturgy constitutes the core message of the play. That is, he shows that drama and art in post-revolutionary and post-Arusha Declaration Tanzania were a hindrance as much as they were a platform for advancing ideals of the coming egalitarian society. Theatre's co-option into the nationalist project of Ujamaa silenced the past and sought to rewrite it to fit the rigid narrative that anchored Ujamaa. Hussein adopts a distinct dramaturgy that draws attention to the fragments of Tanzania's past and how these fragments have gathered like a storm raging into the future. If *ngonjera*, functioning as Ujamaa's primary genre, sought to clear up contradictions within different interpretations of Ujamaa, Hussein's dramaturgy, seeks to identify and emphasize the contradictions in Ujamaa as a threat to establishing an egalitarian society. This dramaturgy employs aspects of epic theatre and the ancient ring compositions, especially its chiasmic structure, the use of parallelism, and the location of the meaning of a composition in the middle to discourage linear reading and to emphasize a pivotal central point. The aspects of a ring composition that are of interest to us include Hussein's structuring of the first and last scenes. That is, the first and the last scene are structured in the same way and deal with a single thematic concern. In short, they are the scenes that structure the play as a ring, whereby the last scene comes back to the beginning. When the play unfolds, Juma and Kitaru are staging the Devil and Human play under a baobab tree. At the end of the play, Juma and Kitaru return to the same tree to stage the same play. Thus, the first and last scenes employ the technique of a play within a play to highlight the central problem in the play and attempt a solution at the end of the play. However, while in the first scene, the Devil subjugates Man, in the last scene, Man

attempts to subjugate the Devil, and the tension that ensues directs us to the play's middle part, where Juma, alone in a restaurant, delivers a monologue that lays out Hussein's project in *Mashetani*.

Education and Subjectivity

Education was a core component of the Arusha Declaration. In a policy publication titled "Education for Self-Reliance," Nyerere wrote that the purpose of education is to "transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership in the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development."³¹⁸ Nyerere pointed out that colonial education in Tanganyika and Zanzibar disdained African values and trained Africans to serve the colonial state. The colonial government's interest in the education of Africans lay in their need for local clerks and junior officers. Thus, they emphasized an education that focused on "subservient attitudes and white-collar skills."³¹⁹ This form of education departed from the communal existence of the African people as it encouraged individualism and promoted the strive for individual material wealth. Nyerere further argues that colonial education "induced attitudes of human inequality" and valorized competition, pitting the weak against the strong.³²⁰ This education reinforced the transformation of Tanzanian society into a colonial society, which was hierarchized racially. After gaining independence from Britain, Tanzania sought to increase access to education throughout the country, abolished racial distinctions, and introduced more Tanzanian content.³²¹ However, these changes did not revolutionize the education system. Thus, in the wake of the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere posed the

³¹⁸ Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 45.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

³²⁰ Ibid., 47.

³²¹ Ibid., 49.

question: “What is the educational system in Tanzania intended to do—what is its purpose?”³²² In other words, what kind of educated person did the post-revolutionary Tanzania need? Since Ujamaa was an attempt to build a society anchored on “equality and respect for human dignity; sharing of the resources which are produced by the people’s efforts; work by everyone and exploitation by none,” an educated person in Tanzania was one who above all actively promoted the establishment of an egalitarian society.

Hussein was interested in the question of education, and he sought to provoke *Mashetani*’s audience and readers to think critically about the complexity of attaining an ideal education in post-Arusha Tanzania. The discourse on education plays out in Part Two and Part Three of the play, but it is Part Two, which is set in Kitaru’s mind, that directly confronts the ideals of education in Tanzania. Juma visits Kitaru at his home and finds him reading *Outline of African History*. When Juma inquires about the author, Kitaru dismisses the author as lazy and does not provide a name. Then Juma recommends *The Essence of Colonial Heritage* as an excellent book that Kitaru must read, and he promises to lend him his copy. To the best of our knowledge, neither book existed in circulation at the time of the play’s publication. Why then does Hussein invoke these fictitious texts? Is there anything in their titles that might enable us to grasp the play’s intent? From their titles, we can deduce that the two essential ideas in the books are “African history” and “colonial heritage.” Following Hussein’s introductory essay to the play, in which he describes Juma’s family as remnants of the Zanzibar Revolution—those who were dispossessed of their properties and had to flee to mainland Tanzania—and Kitaru’s family as “Black Europeans,” that is, the African elite and beneficiaries of the Africanization initiatives, we can begin to understand how these two books mirror Kitaru and Juma’s complicated friendship. In other words, the ideas of African history and colonial heritage are at the core of the debates raging in post-revolutionary Tanzania. Furthermore,

³²² Ibid. 50.

if a book's title can give glimpses of its thematic concerns, Hussein's aim is perhaps to complicate any education conceiving colonialism and Africa's history as separate spheres.

Although there is no evidence to suggest a divergence of views between Kitaru and Juma's idea of history, we learn in subsequent scenes that Juma's preoccupation is partly to subject Kitaru to a silenced past in contemporary Tanzania. He conscientiously plunges Kitaru into situations that amplify his ignorance of this past and its implications for their friendship. Their differing perspectives on the purpose of education constitute a rift in their understanding of history. Kitaru, for example, regrets studying law and wishes he could transfer to the history faculty, as reading history texts has broadened his worldview in ways that law does not. Juma chastises Kitaru for mocking historians and draws his attention to the privileges of a law degree, such as higher status in society and large salaries. For Juma, history is about stories, and even his grandmother can tell stories.³²³ Kitaru refutes Juma's claim and accuses him of mockery. There is laughter. Hussein uses laughter in *Mashetani* to draw the audience's attention to what Joachim Fiebach, in a reading of Brecht's drama, describes as a "complex set of mutually contradictory and self-contradictory sequence of events."³²⁴ The sequence of events unfolds as follows: Juma insists that university education is essential to the extent that it would enable them to earn huge salaries. He rejects Kitaru's argument that if wages are what matters, they need not have wasted time at the university as they could secure jobs after high school. Juma contends that while that is possible, even an ignorant person knows that those with degree certificates will always receive higher wages.

KITARU: Sikubali hata kidogo. University siyo *factory* inayotoa vipande vya kupatia mshahara mkubwa au inayotoa tikiti ya kuingia katika nyumba ya ubwana. University ni mahali pa elimu, pa ujuzi. Ukitaka kujijua hasa ...

³²³ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 16.

³²⁴ Joachim Fiebach, "Brecht: Gestus, Fable, Attitude-Cum-Stance." 207.

[I disagree completely. University is not a factory that gives a passport for obtaining huge salaries or a ticket to elitism.]

JUMA: Sasa unaniambia nini. Hujaniambia kitu. Kweli inauma bwana. Ukweli ... acha yote hayo. Ukweli bwana, degree inakupa tonge ya wali na mchuzi, tena mchuzi wa kuku, badala ya tonge ya ugali na maharagwe.³²⁵

[Now, what are you telling me? You have not said anything. Truth hurts. Truth...let us forget all of it. Truth, man, a degree provides you a meal of rice and stew, a stew of chicken instead of ugali and beans.]

KITARU: Acha maneno yako. Maneno ya kishetani. [Stop your arguments. The Devil's arguments]³²⁶

They pause briefly before bursting into raucous laughter that drowns out the other stage laughs accompanying their debate. Juma and Kitaru's debate jumps off the page of Nyerere's "Education for Reliance." It appears then that Hussein wants the audience to think critically about the purpose of education in post-revolutionary Tanzania.

Kitaru's argument about education is consistent with Nyerere's idea that education should produce critical thinkers as opposed to "robots, who work hard but never question what the leaders in government or TANU are doing and saying."³²⁷ What does critical thinking entail? An enquiring mind with the capacity to learn from others and to adapt to local needs. However, unlike Kitaru and Juma, Nyerere did not appear to privilege any text as a political 'holy book' that can presumably address all Tanzania's challenges and problems. Instead, he called upon people to critically think about what their leaders and scholars espouse and connect these ideas to their own experience to arrive at solutions that advance Tanzania. As he noted, "only free people conscious of their worth

³²⁵ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 17.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 54.

and their equality can build a free society.”³²⁸ Consequently, Nyerere condemned elitist education, which he described as focusing on the interests and needs of a small population of people with opportunities to pursue formal education. This type of education privileges white-collar employment, comfortable wages, and life in the cities. More importantly, it creates a superior vs. inferior mentality in the larger Tanzanian society. As he wrote, “it induces a feeling of inferiority among the majority and can thus not produce either an egalitarian society we should build or the attitudes of mind which are conducive to an egalitarian society.”³²⁹ Instead, such education leads to a class society. On the surface, it appears that Nyerere’s thoughts adjudge Kitaru’s arguments as correct and condemn Juma’s idea of education. However, as we will learn shortly, Hussein introduces situations that contradict Kitaru’s stance on education. Both Juma and Kitaru are not preparing to contribute to Tanzania’s rural economy. They are located in the city and have no opportunities to learn about their communities or how the rest of the Tanzanian population lives. Regardless of their different views on education, their discussion is still within the framework of elitist education. Perhaps the major downside of their education is how it prepares them as workers detached from the local and immediate needs of the majority of the population.

Nyerere critiqued the privileging of books and educated masters as sources of knowledge. He contended that the current Tanzanian education encouraged students to learn only from books and educated people without any regard for indigenous knowledge, which is often useful to rural society. The valorization of the degree certificate and formal education contributed to losing key resources that could be gained through informal learning. As Nyerere wrote: “Everything we do stresses book learning and underestimates the value to our society of traditional knowledge and the

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Nyerere, 55.

wisdom which is often acquired by intelligent men and women as they experience life, even without their being able to read at all.”³³⁰ Indeed, both Juma and Kitaru’s education is reliant on books and the institution of the university with its specialized faculties. It seems then that the central idea in Juma and Kitaru’s debate is not whether they can recognize the true purpose of university education but rather whether they can recognize how such debate is possible. In other words, what makes such a debate intelligible? Their debate masks the political dimension of education in Tanzania and the idea that education constitutes the apparatus that seeks to order life in Tanzania. Nyerere conceptualized education as neutral and divorced from politics, but his educational policies were put on trial with the Africanization program that privileged race in allocating government employment resources. As much as Ujamaa sought to build a non-racial society, some of TANU’s political decisions had huge implications on how such a society would be shaped. For instance, the debate between Juma and Kitaru is possible because of their divergent stories of origin and how these stories continue to shape the future. It appears then that education in *Mashetani* functions as a technology of subordination since it is posited as a power that circumvents the transgressive terminology but becomes adept at regulating people in ways that fit our definition of subjection.

Unmasking Resistance/Undoing Man

The economic differences between Kitaru and Juma’s families are not what shapes their lives but rather their positioning in history, specifically as victims of oppression. Man, after stabbing the Devil in Part One, celebrates in a song whose verses underscore the burden of history. Man sings:

Wako wapi waliokuwa juu jana? [Where are those who were at the top yesterday?
 Sasa twawataka. [We want them now.]
 Wako wapi waliokuwa juu jana? [Where are those who were at the top yesterday?]
 Sasa twawataka. [We want them now.]
 Tumekwisha waangusha [We have already pulled them.]
 Waangusha. [Pulled them down.]

³³⁰ Nyerere, 57.

Tumekwisha wasagasaga.³³¹ [We have already ground them.]

Hussein does not project Man's violence as liberatory. If the Devil's subjugation of Man robs Man of his sense of self, then Man's decision to kill the Devil fails to usher in self-realization and self-refashioning, to use Fanon's parlance. His song is a chant fit for a hunter as opposed to a revolutionary. If there is any redemption for Man, it lies in his realization that the killing of the Devil has not improved his situation. A truly liberated Man should have rejected the Devil's tactics and rejected the knife as a weapon of liberation. As Fanon pointed out, the truly liberated postcolonial would transform Europe's humanism, which seeks to dominate the other.³³² In other words, the point of a revolution is not to topple the oppressor and replace him but to be self-aware of how the destiny of mankind can be redefined. While we acknowledge that Man's motivation to kill the Devil stems from his need for self-preservation, his desire to enthrone himself as the new man at the top does not necessarily liberate him or the Devil. The dynamic of their power relations, as the Devil testifies, did not even shift—a realization that drives Man deeper into depression. Only when Man realizes that he cannot go on blaming the Devil for his fall does he finally begin to believe in his humanity.

“Nikiamini kuwa Shetani ndiye aliyenianguka, naye ndiye anayenipa taabu na kuniadhibu, basi lazima niamini mengine; niamini kuwa mimi si binadamu bali ni bandia, kivuli, gamba lake. Niamini vile vile kuwa kitendo changu kilikuwa stihizai.”³³³

[If I believe that it is the Devil who pulled me down, that he is the one who caused me trouble and punished me, then I have to believe other things as well; I have to believe that I am not human but a fake, a shadow, a skin. I have also to believe that my action was a mockery.]

³³¹ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 10.

³³² Fanon, *Wretched*, 143.

³³³ Hussein, 11.

Man, then proceeds to analyze his situation and concludes that he is responsible for his failure.

“Nimeanguka kwa sababu nililewa.”³³⁴ [I fell because I got drunk.] He was drunk, but he wanted to climb to a high level and failed. “Ulevi pamoja na fikira ya ushindi ndiyo sababu ya kuanguka kwangu.”³³⁵ [Drunkenness and my desire for victory are reasons for my failure]. Man concludes that he should own up to his mistake instead of seeking sympathy from people who also think that the Devil is oppressing him. He recognizes that although a mistake has happened, there is hope in the impending establishment of Ujamaa.

Kitaru and Juma’s argument about cowboy films is another instance that demonstrates the desire of the oppressed to dominate the oppressor. Kitaru remarks that he does not like cowboy films because they have a predictable plot. “Cowboy atawaua Red Indians wote peke yake. Mimi, mchezo ukaonyesha ugomvi au mgongano baina ya mwenye nguvu na asiye na nguvu, siupendi.”³³⁶ [Cowboy will kill all Red Indians on his own. For me, I do not like a film that portrays a conflict or tension between the powerful and the weak.] There is laughter to underscore a contradiction. Clearly, Kitaru locates himself on the side of the oppressed. Consequently, he remarks that he detests the idea that the oppressed never have a chance to also oppress.³³⁷ The precariousness of oppressed incenses Kitaru and drives his actions. He cannot detach himself from his role as Man in the drama of the Devil and Human, in which he sought to kill the Devil for subjugating him. Although his reasons for disliking cowboy films resonate with the ethos of Ujamaa, his motive undermines the very spirit of Ujamaa, as the idea of substituting oppressors does not necessarily lead to the establishment of an egalitarian society. Kitaru and Juma accuse each other of harboring

³³⁴ Ibid.,

³³⁵ Ibid.,

³³⁶ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 18.

³³⁷ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 18

something that sucks the other's blood. They both advise the other to curse the Devil. Kitaru feels that they are unknowingly acting in a scripted drama, a drama that has awakened him to something he cannot articulate. He describes these feelings as akin to Africa gaining independence and being on a ship with her name but without a captain. Kitaru's feelings signal the anxiety about the impending Declaration that promises freedom, prosperity, and equality.

The pitfalls of national consciousness, to use Fanon's terminology, cast a shadow on any new initiative that promises a better society. Kitaru's father has embraced the lifestyle that led to the Zanzibar Revolution, in which Juma's family's properties were confiscated by the state. Hussein juxtaposes Kitaru's home to Juma's to show how the difference between these households reveals a silenced history. Juma's house is small and can barely accommodate him, his parents, and his grandmother. They do not have a servant or a thriving business with workers. Juma's parents rely on him to assist with household chores and business as they cannot afford paid assistance. Juma's grandmother laments their condition and displays bitterness for losing their plantations and servants to a socialist revolution. However, she is optimistic that once Juma completes his university education, he will secure an excellent job and move to *Uzunguni* (the English quarter). Apparently, language and education have reterritorialized the Dar Es Salaam landscape into two quarters: Uzunguni and Uswahilini (for the low-income people). Kitaru's family lives in Uzunguni and has a big house for a three-person family. They have a servant who runs errands and takes care of all chores. While Kitaru's mother runs a laundry business, the father has a thriving set of businesses and has a huge appetite for acquiring more businesses. How can such an environment of competition and capitalism give in to Ujamaa's communal policies meant to reflect an equal society?

Kitaru is uneasy that Juma turns down an offer to ride in his father's new Mercedes Benz. While Kitaru cannot account for this feeling, his father's celebratory song sheds light on why such an acquisition would prick Kitaru's soul. The father sings in English repeating a set of words, that is,

“I like some money/ I like some honey/ A very good life/ A very beautiful wife.”³³⁸ He praises himself for his hard work and industry: “Mali yangu, Jaso langu.”³³⁹ [My wealth, my hard work.] Although these songs mention aspects of hard work and self-reliance that are espoused by the policies supporting the Arusha Declaration, they mask a critical quality of the Ujamaa Revolution. That is, Baba Kitaru’s acquisition of the car does not contribute to the kind of society Ujamaa envisions. If anything, it shows that Kitaru is an elite member of society. His lifestyle aligns with Juma’s argument that the university is a gateway to better jobs and social mobility. Kitaru is shocked that these lessons, which he sought to shoot down when Juma brought them up, are embodied in his household. This realization constitutes the early stages of his descent into neurosis.

Man’s Descent to Neurosis

Kitaru’s constitution as a subject is a slow and painful process, which drives him into neurosis. The process begins in a drama—the play of the Devil and Human—in which he plays Man (human). Through the subjugation of his character (Man), he becomes aware of the futility of violence as a form of resistance in ideological struggle. As the Devil quipped, how could he hope to defeat a force that implicates him? In other words, Man’s attempt to stab the Devil was akin to annihilating himself as the Devil is the power that sustains his existence to the extent that Man as a Subject comes into being through subordination. In other words, there is no Man prior to interpellation. This drama awakens Kitaru to the contradictions in his life—as a university student, a son of a wealthy African, and a friend of Juma, whose family suffered during the Zanzibar Revolution. At the beginning of Part Two, both Kitaru and his mother appear to treat Juma as one of their own— a family friend and a peer in an egalitarian society. However, this view falls through the cracks when Kitaru becomes aware of the tension between him and Juma, a tension that

³³⁸ Hussein, *Masbetani* 21-22.

³³⁹ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 22.

becomes apparent in their discourse. Hussein portrays this tension as a series of performances designed to reveal contradictions in Kitaru's life. To begin with, Kitaru argues that the purpose of education should be sought outside its role as a force for social mobility. However, his father storms into the house with a new Mercedes Benz singing praise songs in English, an act that reveals the painful reality that Kitaru's father—an educated African and a beneficiary of the Africanization programs—validates Juma's claim that university education in Tanzania is only relevant to the extent that it delivers higher wages. Kitaru frames his refusal to watch a cowboy film in the binary terms of the oppressor and the oppressed. He claims that the plot of such films is predictable as it follows only one pattern in which the cowboys always kill the Red Indians. Thus, the Indians never had a chance to reverse their allotted role as the oppressed. Kitaru's father contradicts these remarks as his life testifies to the very act of flipping roles, that is, he has become, in Hussein's words, a "Black European." Although these acts reveal patterns that begin to awaken Kitaru to contradictions in his life, it is the place of Mfaume, a servant in his household, that drives him into neurosis. He observes his mother summon and instruct Mfaume to execute tasks sixteen times in a single dramatic scene. Mfaume's only language in this scene is "Yes, Memsahp." He does not utter any other words. Although these observations pain Kitaru deeply, he does not seem to grasp their implication, that is, that his family is implicated in the very life that Juma's family was accused of during the revolution. How can it be that a revolution that was meant to usher in an egalitarian society ends up recreating the very conditions of its existence? As if to test whether his observations are real, Kitaru summons Mfaume:

KITARU: (*Anaita*) Mfaume eh.

MFAUME: Naam. (*Anakuja mbio na anapomuona anaziba macho na kurudi nyuma*) Je baba! vipi?

KITARU: Rudi basi. (*Mfaume anaondoka pole pole. Anarudia kazi yake. Kitaru anabaki peke yake. Hofu imemjaa.*)

[KITARU: (*Summons Mfaume*)

MFAUME: Yes. (*He runs to Kitaru and when he sees him he covers his eyes and retraces his steps*) Hi Boss!

KITARU: Go back. (*Mfaume leaves slowly. He goes back to his work. Kitaru is shocked.*)

Kitaru's realization that he too is a power that subordinates Mfaume drives him into neurosis. He breaks down completely, and his parents go through a series of doctors to heal him in vain. None of the doctors can even diagnose Kitaru's sickness. Kitaru's mother rightly observed that he is suffering from anxiety and that his anxiety began with doubts. However, she cannot explain the doubts beyond attributing them to the Devil. Kitaru's father castigates her for harboring such nonsensical thoughts and reaffirms his faith in western medicine. The doctor complains that Kitaru's inability to discuss his symptoms has impeded a diagnosis. He thinks Kitaru is suffering from neurosis, which for lack of a better explanation in Swahili, he describes as a condition brought about by the coalescing of the real and the fictive. That is, Kitaru cannot distinguish between reality and illusion. The trouble with Kitaru, as the doctor sees it, "hasemi ukweli wake." [He does not speak his truth.] That Kitaru cannot articulate his symptoms or even identify them. For a medical science predicated on a linguistic exchange, this is a great impediment as Kitaru can only regurgitate whatever the doctor wants to hear. In other words, he wants the doctor to identify the symptoms and then give a diagnosis. The doctor suspects that Kitaru is more afraid of anxiety than any disease. "Anaogopa kuwa katika haki ya wasiwasi. Sijui; labda kwake yeye, ninavyofikiri mimi, wasiwasi una hatari zaidi kuliko ugonjwa."³⁴⁰ [He fears anxiety. I do not know. Perhaps to him, I think, anxiety is more dangerous than any disease.] In the absence of a diagnosis, the doctor recommends psychiatric treatment.

What is this anxiety that terrifies Kitaru? Is it the idea that even though he plays Man in the drama between the Devil and Human, he cannot distinguish himself from the Devil? That he too may be a Devil? Although Juma understands Kitaru's anxiety, he wields this knowledge in ways that

³⁴⁰ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 34.

appear at first as a deliberate mechanism of torturing Kitaru. However, in a later scene that takes place in a restaurant, we learn that Juma is caught up in a dilemma of his own—about whether he should reveal to Kitaru the intricacies of the past and how they threaten to catch up with the present. Juma has observed that Kitaru’s family embodies the very conditions that brought about the revolution that dispossessed them of their properties in Zanzibar, yet Kitaru is ignorant of this “truth,” and Juma doubts he will ever understand it.³⁴¹ To a large extent, the drama between the Devil and Human, in which Juma plays the Devil as a power that subjugates Man, is designed to torment Kitaru and perhaps to lead him to the discovery of the truth. Hussein wrote *Masbetani* at a time when the theatre had been coopted into the Ujamaa project and could not be counted to stand for any truth outside Ujamaa politics. The play is then Hussein’s way of resisting the reigning form of theatre in Tanzania to show that art as a platform that outlives man, at least according to the last line of Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” need not kowtow to the government of the day. Indeed, it is in theatre that eventually Kitaru finds “truth.”³⁴²

Dreams, Drama, and Truth

Hussein transforms the theatre into a platform capable of revealing the truth. Both Kitaru’s anxiety and awakening begin in the play between the Devil and Man. Kitaru muses that it is a wonder how one learns more truth in dreams and drama than in real life. He claims that he has become self-aware and learned a lot more about Juma in drama and dreams than in real life. He has become aware of Juma’s plays as experiments of some sort but cannot yet grasp their import in his

³⁴¹ During the restaurant scene, Juma muses about Kitaru’s anxiety and ignorance. He confirms that his grandmother’s stories and his skits are perhaps the causes of Kitaru’s anxiety—they have awakened Kitaru to contradictions in his life and caused him pain. He resolves not to tell Kitaru the truth because he is not sure whether he will understand. In this, he was wrong as Kitaru did finally learn the truth.

³⁴² Hussein, *Masbetani*, 47.

life.³⁴³ However, Juma's complaint that he does not understand the relationship between dreams, drama, and truth or their relevance to their lives points out his own anxiety that Kitaru is on a path to unraveling Juma's pain. Juma's grandmother communicates this pain to Kitaru through stories, but it does not appear that Kitaru is capable of interpreting the stories. Whether Kitaru's parents can understand these stories, as Hussein at some point appears to suggest, is not emphasized in the play. Perhaps Hussein's preoccupation is whether Kitaru, on his own, can articulate his conditions and seek to transform them. Nevertheless, Juma's grandmother is a key figure who allows us to grasp an aspect of Juma's ambivalence. She describes their pain, the pain of dispossession as follows:

Nani walikuwa watu kama sisi? Tulikaa vizuri, tulikaa kiwatu na mahadimu wetu. Wakitupenda tukiwapenda. Tukipendana. Mara tukanyang'anywa mali yetu, ikagawanywa. Wakapewa wao (servants) bila kutaka. Bila kutaka. Wakawa wanaona haya hata kututazama usoni.³⁴⁴

[Are there people who were like us? We lived well; we lived like people with our servants. They loved us, we loved them, we loved each other. Then our properties were confiscated and distributed. They (servants) were given the properties even though they did not want them. They did not want them. They were ashamed to even look at our faces.]

While the grandmother emphasizes the privileges they lost, Juma's pain seems to lie elsewhere: the failure of the revolution to lead to an egalitarian society. Juma does not seem to care about the affluent life and its trappings, such as good cars, servants, food, and pursuing glamorous careers he lost. In fact, he resists overtures to participate in luxurious activities and elects to keep his own company. Juma is obsessed with the truth and whether people like Kitaru are capable of understanding the truth. However, his obsession borders on desperation as he constantly pushes Kitaru into situations in which he questions reality and comes close to figuring out the nature of the tension between him and Juma. It seems then that Juma is caught up in a dilemma concerning

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 38.

whether to assist Kitaru in discovering the truth or to let him wallow in darkness for fear that this discovery may transform him as well. As he reasons:

Labda nimueleze Kitaru. [Perhaps I should explain it to Kitaru.]
 Alewe wapi? [Can he understand?]
 Hata akiweza kuelewa [Even if he can understand]
 Sitamwambia. [I will not tell him.]
 Katu sitamwambia. [I will never tell him.]
 Kidonda cha mti kinasikikana harufu tu [A tree's wound is only known through its smell]
 hakionyeshwi. Aibu, aibu kubwa.³⁴⁵ [It is not visible. Shame, what a shame]

Juma's anxiety rests on whether Kitaru can truly understand the extent of his wound, which is not apparent in the Tanzania of the 1960s, whereby new classes of the population were amassing wealth and broadening inequality. The word "truth," although mentioned throughout the play, is never defined. Hussein does not attempt to define or describe it, at least not until the end of the play, where a fight between Juma and Kitaru enables us to deduce that the truth in question rests on the idea of victimhood and bearing witness. In the play, "truth" often emerges as a desire that the characters pursue a desire that plunges them into chaotic and confusing contexts. For Kitaru, confusion appears to reign supreme in his life. Whether he is acting as the Devil in a play or conversing with Juma, he constantly portrays himself as a victim. As a result, he sees his existence as a struggle against characters like Juma, who forces him into a state of doubt and fear. We learn the most about Kitaru's fears and thoughts about Juma from his dream about feathers, which incidentally drives him closer to loosening the tension between him and Juma.

In the dream, Kitaru realizes that his entire family has grown feathers, which develop into wings, propelling him into the sky. The family enjoys the power of flying at first but then develops fear. Kitaru attempts to pluck off his feathers, but more kept developing, growing bigger than those he plucked. He started to question his humanity and wondered whether he was anything but a bird. His parents sought medical help, but the doctor, whose feathers outnumbered Kitaru's, could not

³⁴⁵ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 44.

identify the disease. He claimed Kitaru was wracking his brain and that if he continued to have doubts, he would suffer a stroke. The word stroke sapped Kitaru's energy, and he saw himself falling from the sky helplessly. Although his mind was active, his body was incapacitated. He therefore made a declaration to rid himself of doubts as they were more troubling than the feathers or anything. "Nikajifunga, nikaazimia lazima nitoke katika ugonjwa huu."³⁴⁶ [I vowed and declared that I must get rid of this disease.] While for Juma, feathers represent something good, luxurious, soft, and much more, in Kitaru's dream, feathers appear scary.³⁴⁷ This divergent view of what the dream means, coupled with the fact that Juma appears in the dream as a doctor, compels Kitaru to inquire as to whether Juma improvises or scripts the plays about the Devil and Human they have been staging. Kitaru wants to figure out Juma's place in his subjectivation. Could it be that Juma is the cause of his pain and a source of his subjectivation at the same time? Juma protests that Kitaru is overanalyzing his actions, but Kitaru complains that Juma keeps appearing in his life in different shapes, and no matter the shape, he is always superior to him, and in no shape is he inferior to Kitaru.³⁴⁸ This is perhaps Kitaru's first moment of recognition that his relationship with Juma is defined by a power relation that goes beyond the transgressive nature of power to encompass other ways in which power subjugates individuals. Juma asks him to curse the Devil, but Kitaru complains that he cannot get rid of a Devil who surrounds him.

KITARU: "Azma itakujaje ikiwa mtu ana shaka? Azimio haliji kabla ya shaka kutoka. Lazima iondoke shaka kwanza, halafu ndiyo lije azimio."³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 50.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Hussein, *Mashetani*, 52.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.,

[How can you have a purpose when you have doubts? A declaration does not happen before getting rid of doubts. Doubt must be resolved before a declaration comes]

We read the declaration here as the Arusha Declaration of 1967, which is at the center of Hussein's play. The question Hussein poses here is whether Ujamaa can thrive amid the doubts that bedevil the Tanzanian nation. Can TANU build an egalitarian society without addressing the ghosts of the past? In other words, how will the events of the Zanzibar Revolution and its aftermath shape the Arusha Declaration? What is the point of another revolution when the earlier one failed to bring forth the changes that made its existence possible?

While dreams are fundamental to Kitaru's subjectivation they do not enable him to find the truth. Instead, they drive him further into neurosis. He begins to doubt his existence and question everything. Juma suggests that education and experience can help him get rid of doubts. However, Kitaru, despite his earlier talk about the purpose of education in society, does not appear to know the difference between experience and education. Juma explains that experience is superior to education as education constitutes experience. In other words, although education encompasses learning and words and language, experience incorporates, filters, and follows these components with actions. This framing allows Kitaru to realize that since his doubts began in the drama between the Devil and Man, he may find truth in this drama. He requests Juma to stage the play despite the lack of an audience. Kitaru insists that he cannot live with doubts all his life and that he must play the game to know the truth.³⁵⁰ But what truth does he seek? Regardless, Juma does not believe that Kitaru can find any truth in drama. Kitaru then proposes to play the character of the Devil, but Juma refuses, arguing that they did not agree to take turns.³⁵¹ They pull each other vigorously, each

³⁵⁰ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 53.

³⁵¹ Hussein, *Masbetani*, 55.

one of them wanting to play the Devil by occupying the hole in the tree. After a long fight, Kitaru starts to laugh loudly. While throughout the play, laughter was directed at Kitaru, this time, he laughed, for he had become aware of the truth. Juma leaves, but Kitaru hails him asking him to stay. Juma asks why he should stay since Kitaru has found the truth he was looking for. Kitaru responds that he does not laugh out of happiness but because he does not want to cry. “Kumbe hatujasahau?”³⁵²[So, we have not forgotten] Here, he is referring to the Zanzibar Revolution that dispossessed Juma’s family. How can Juma forget when Kitaru’s life constantly reminds him of what he lost and what might come to pass with Arusha Declaration. It appears then that doubts and anxiety are not the preserve of Kitaru, if anything Juma harbors deep anxiety as well. *Mashetani* ends as it started, with a play within a play, thus, underscoring one of Hussein’s goals of redefining theatre in Tanzania in the 1960s.

Juma’s refusal to allow Kitaru to play the Devil enables us to understand his pain. Since his family belongs to the dispossessed plantation owners, he had higher expectations of the Zanzibar Revolution as a possible means of establishing an egalitarian society. His family does not necessarily share his thinking. More than anything, his grandmother hopes that upon completing his university education, Juma will find a decent job with higher wages to establish a home in Uzunguni, the affluent quarter of Dar es Salaam. Kitaru’s family, as Hussein describes in the introduction, are beneficiaries of Africanization initiatives that have accorded them privileges they lacked under feudalism and colonialism. Nyerere and TANU recognize the inequalities that characterize the Tanzanian society and have proposed the Arusha Declaration as Tanzania’s socialist revolution that will finally usher in an egalitarian society built on principles of equality, freedom, and human dignity. Hussein’s anxiety is about whether such an initiative can succeed when the past, described in dark colors, threatens to catch up with the future. It seems that every revolution can only manage to

³⁵² Hussein, *Mashetani*, 55.

usher in a new class of oppressors instead of restructuring society. *Mashetani* is a wake-up call that Tanzania needs to acknowledge its complex past and seek to learn from it. If theatre practitioners walk blindly in the service of the state, what will be the place of truth in society?

Conclusion

In *Jogoo Kijijini*, Hussein describes a society reckoning with a violent past that threatens to annihilate all lives in the village. The main question in the play is whether the young man's sacrifice—his blood—will be sufficient to redeem society. The chorus questions the young man's resolve to travel to the village to become a sacrificial lamb. At the end of the play, we wonder whether a revolution is sufficient to suture fragments into a whole. In *Mashetani*, Hussein depicts a society in transition. The revolution has happened, and its aftermath does not align with the promises of redemption. The very conditions of inequality and exploitation that made the revolution possible in the first place have taken center stage in the Tanzanian political sphere. Will another revolution finally lead to the establishment of an egalitarian society? Hussein suggests that unless Tanzania rearticulates the terms of her subjection, no amount of revolution can bring significant change. Rearticulation, here, departs from the incessant cycle of the oppressed becoming the oppressor. It rather points out a self-aware society that privileges community.

The process of building such a community can begin with theatre as a medium that marks human progress and drives society toward the truth. While Juma reasons that he cannot collaborate with Kitaru as their pasts locate them in different spatial and temporal localities in Tanzania, Kitaru is optimistic that through theatre, they can bridge the gap in their perspectives and contribute to the building of the new Tanzania. *Mashetani*, then, is as much a play about the ambivalence inherent in Tanzania in the wake of the Arusha Declaration as it is a reaffirmation of the power of theatre to transform society.

CHAPTER 4: The Body and the Institution of the Imaginary

Introduction

If, as E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo argues, the Mau Mau rebellion “has been the conjecture around which Kenya’s pasts and possible futures have been debated, contested, and fought over,”³⁵³ then the body in its material and conceptual form is fundamental for understanding these pasts and futures. Yet it has thus far been undertheorized within the Mau Mau scholarship. This chapter foregrounds the Mau Mau Revolution to trace the “aesthetics of embodiment” and the transformation of the body as a signifier of meaning and fundamental political resource in both colonial and postcolonial Kenya.³⁵⁴ The history of the body in the Mau Mau movement and its use in rewriting Kenyan nationalism allows us to challenge some of the paradigms that dominate the Mau Mau historiography and the production of knowledge in postcolonial Kenya. The historical representation of the body in Kenya highlights not only the practice of power and subjugation but also the struggles against domination, exploitation, and subordination.

The bodies that concern us are those of the Mau Mau fighters, especially that of Dedan Kimathi, and to a lesser extent, the bodies that were caught up in the war. We particularly focus on the theatrical representation of the body in select works that engage the aftermath of the Mau Mau War to highlight (1) the desacralization of the body during the state of emergency, (2) the reconstitution of Kimathi’s body as nation-building, and (3) memorialization of the Mau Mau and its uses in postcolonial Kenya. We contend that the works of Kenneth Watene, namely *My Son for My*

³⁵³ E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, “The Production of History in Kenya: The Mau Mau Debate,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1991, Vol 25, No.2 (1991), pp. 300.

³⁵⁴ We draw the phrase “aesthetics of embodiment” from Peter Brook’s *Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). The phrase captures how meaning is etched on the body.

Freedom (1973)³⁵⁵ and *Dedan Kimathi* (1974),³⁵⁶ as well as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976)³⁵⁷ by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo depict the body as the arena through which the contests over the meaning of Mau Mau and decolonization in the Kenya postcolony play out. We particularly focus on how the dramatists' depiction of the body unsettles conventional conceptions of violence, death, and Dedan Kimathi as the embodiment of Kenya's national revolutionary epic. These dramatic texts give us glimpses into how theatre practitioners grapple with historical events to raise fresh questions about the present.

My Son for my Freedom dramatizes the origin of the Mau Mau crisis, which split the Gikuyu family, forcing members to choose sides in the war, and grapples with the very idea of an uprising and what ethics, if any, must the African fighters uphold in their quest for freedom. It raises the question of the conception of the 'enemy' and the (sovereign) power that decides on the exception: who is identified as the enemy that must die and whose life must be preserved. The play puts Gikuyu traditions on trial as divergent views emerge among community members, exacerbating a violent conflict.

Dedan Kimathi springs from this earlier Mau Mau crisis and extends the analysis into Mau Mau's major battlefields to interrogate the ideas of heroism and hero-worship. In a newspaper interview, Watene remarks that at the time of writing the play, African politics was full of hero-worship, and he wanted to examine the idea of the hero. He says, "I thought, let me ask about a hero, but a hero that is dead. Was he really a hero? Must we make him a demi-god?"³⁵⁸ Watene saw

³⁵⁵ Kenneth Watene, *My Son for My Freedom* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973).

³⁵⁶ Kenneth Watene, *Dedan Kimathi* (Nairobi: TransAfrica Publishers, 1974).

³⁵⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1976, 2014).

³⁵⁸ Joyce Nyairo. "Kenneth Watene: Man of Theatre, Song, and Trade." *The Daily Nation* published 23/08/2013.

in Dedan Kimathi a figure that would allow him to explore the question of heroism. He foregrounds the forest as the most significant battlefield for investigating Kimathi's heroism and centers the ideas of the body, preservation of life, and death as paradigms for understanding how the men and women of Mau Mau thought about the Revolution and its heroes. Watene's Dedan Kimathi is, therefore, a product of his battles and any attempt at analyzing the figure must pay attention to the spaces (e.g., the forest) where Kimathi's actions mattered the most. In other words, the forest as the space that gave birth to the figure of Kimathi and conferred on him the title of 'Field Marshal' becomes a significant arena of meaning-making about the Mau Mau.

Dedan Kimathi received hostile criticism from Ngugi wa Thiong'o and other radical nationalist scholars for reducing an African hero to a coward with no respect for women. For Ngugi, Watene had imbibed colonial narratives about Kimathi and reproduced them in his play. Ngugi argued that instead of celebrating Kimathi, Watene constructed him as a tragic, scandalous, schizophrenic, and murderous figure akin to what Ian Henderson's *Man Hunt in Kenya* (1958) details. Henderson was a colonial officer tasked to capture Kimathi. His memoir opens with an image of a condemned Kimathi, whom he compares with Hitler.

Like Hitler, he had to wait until the fabric of society broke around his head, but then he was able to exploit the convulsion with throbbing, burning oratory. Financial chaos and the threat of Communism gave Hitler his chance. The corruption of the Gikuyu tribal customs by Mau Mau and the flight to the forest gave Kimathi his opportunity.³⁵⁹

As we will demonstrate in our analysis, this depiction of Kimathi and the Gikuyu in general is consistent with the British colonial government's rhetoric about Mau Mau as a "disease" of the body and mind. Although Watene, to some extent, relies on Henderson's memoir as source material, we suggest that Ngugi and Mugo's criticism was unwarranted as Watene's Kimathi serves a different role from that of Ngugi and Mugo. Whereas Ngugi and Mugo create a messianic-like Kimathi who

³⁵⁹ Ian Henderson, *Man Hunt in Kenya* (Hauraki Publishing, 1958), Chap. 2.

transcends trials and tribulations to defend his people's cause, Watene creates a tragic Kimathi who transacts in death as a means through which he understands Mau Mau's cause and preserves his life.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (hereafter *The Trial*) is an attempt to create a usable past through which to examine the Kenya of the 1970s. The dramatists criticize Kenyan historians and artists for writing history that downplays poor people's violence and oppression. They lament:

There is no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination, a resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15th and 16th centuries when Kenyans and other East African people first took up arms against European colonial power.³⁶⁰

The Trial is, therefore, Ngugi and Mugo's attempt to reclaim and rehabilitate what they perceive as distorted and forgotten Kenyan history. Ngugi, writing elsewhere, sees rehabilitating this history as a pre-condition for the African Renaissance.³⁶¹ The plays we analyze in this chapter are thematically connected as they deal with the intersection of Mau Mau and power's subjugation of the Gikuyu through the body and language. They also explore the unsettling of the Gikuyu concepts of 'life' and 'death' in making sense of Mau Mau and the idea of freedom.

We organize the chapter into five broad sections. The first section historicizes the Mau Mau movement, focusing particularly on how the body became the signifier of meaning in the war. A key component of the section is the presentation of the "oath" as a political sacrament that assigned people exclusively to the categories of revolutionaries, rebels, or loyalists. The second section provides a reading of *My Son for My Freedom* to interrogate how a Gikuyu village grapples with a life-changing event that promises freedom for the blood of their loved ones. The third section gives a reading of *Dedan Kimathi* to discuss how Watene constructs Kimathi as a figure who transacts in

³⁶⁰ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, ii.

³⁶¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009).

death but fails to master his own death, causing a lot of pain and suffering and bringing about his downfall. The fourth section analyzes *The Trial* to demonstrate how Ngugi and Mugo invent Kimathi as an indestructible figure and the hero of Kenya's revolutionary epic. The final section returns to the conceptualization of the body during Mau Mau War. It captures the ways in which the three plays resonate to highlight how the contests over the meaning of Mau Mau in the Kenyan postcolony and its implication for the production of knowledge and history should be treated as an ongoing process.

Desacralization of the Body: Colonialism, Mau Mau, and the Oath

The body, as a producer of knowledge, was at the core of the interpretation of the Mau Mau movement right from its beginning before the declaration of the emergency in 1952 that led to widespread violence pitting the Mau Mau fighters against the Kenyan colonial forces and their African supporters. If Mau Mau was the greatest horror narrative of the British Empire in the 1950s, as David Anderson suggests,³⁶² this horror was etched on the bodies of the men and women who participated or were caught up in it. Although the Mau Mau conflict did not formally begin until 1952, the uprising had started slowly with a succession of local clashes between Black Africans and White settlers. By the time Kimathi was executed in 1957, at least 2,000 civilians had been slain by Mau Mau combatants, and hundreds more had vanished without a trace. Kenyan colonial archives place the number of Mau Mau fighters killed in combat at 12,000, although the actual number is estimated to have exceeded 20,000. Furthermore, the British detained close to a hundred thousand suspected Mau Mau sympathizers in detention camps, and the rest of the Gikuyu population was confined in reserves.³⁶³

³⁶² David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of the Empire* (New York: Norton and Company, 2005), 33.

³⁶³ Ibid., 38.

While Gikuyu politics during colonialism was a battlefield of complex, intricate conflicts between conservatives, who were predominantly Christians, chiefs, and headmen considered gatekeepers of the colonial state and epitomized by figures such as Chief Waruhiu wa Kungu, and moderate nationalists, who were mainly the first batch of educated mission boys who saw old conservative folks as barriers to development and wanted to replace them with leaders like Jomo Kenyatta; it was the militant Gikuyu nationalists who launched the Mau Mau campaign. The nationalists rallied around the issues of the status of Gikuyu tenants in European farms, the problem of land within the reserves, and the poverty and disaffection of the teeming Gikuyu population of Nairobi's African quarters.

Watene shows in *My Son for My Freedom* that the militants advanced various oaths to bind the Gikuyu in political solidarity. Due to their elaborate somatic rituals, these oaths constituted the first bodily acts in Mau Mau.³⁶⁴ The oath became (1) an instrument of strength as it (re)constituted individuals into the House of Mumbi and (2) a tyrannical weapon of dominance and destruction.³⁶⁵ This chapter shows how these two roles transformed the oath into a “political sacrament” that subjugated most of the Gikuyu population through the body and constituted them as Black political subjects. In other words, the oath was an instrument that remade the Gikuyu society by placing bodies on one side or the other of the line that separates the House of Mumbi from the enemy. The oath's power lay in its capacity to sanction death, thus, putting death at the core of discourses about the Mau Mau.

³⁶⁴ For information about the oaths, see Kenneth Watene's *My Son for My Freedom*; Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama's *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1966); Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee: The Account by a Kenya African of His Experiences in Detention Camps 1953-1960* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1963), and Mickie Mwanza Koster's *The Power of the Oath: Mau Mau Nationalism in Kenya, 1952-1960* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2016)

³⁶⁵ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 43.

Although Kenyan colonial archives detail contested accounts of the actual contents of the oaths the Gikuyu administered to themselves during the Mau Mau War, all the accounts, regardless of whether it is a voluntary confession by an ex-Mau Mau combatant or a coerced testimony secured under torture, underscore death as a penalty for violating the oath. Even when the colonial government devised its own counter-oaths as a strategy to defeat Mau Mau's mobilizing efforts, they centered death as the only sanction for violating the oath.³⁶⁶ While Jomo Kenyatta was the first Gikuyu writer to account for the place of oaths in the Gikuyu way of life,³⁶⁷ it is Karari Njama's memoir, *Mau Mau From Within* (1966), which is perhaps the most popular source of information about the oaths, which has become the basis of subsequent scholarship on Mau Mau oathing ceremonies. The significance of Njama's account does not lie only in its authenticity, owing to Njama's participation in Mau Mau as a top leader, but also in the thick description of the oathing

³⁶⁶ Ironically, the oaths also became the very means for the British to reassert their sovereignty in Kenya. As part of the anti-Mau Mau campaigns, the British launched a series of oaths to purge the effects of the Mau Mau oaths. The performance of these cleansing oaths mirrored the Mau Mau oaths, as both relied on putting one's life at stake. The very linguistic violence the British accused the Mau Mau of committing was employed in their counter-oaths.³⁶⁶ The British oathing ceremonies appropriated the use of a "Githathi Stone," a powerful Gikuyu symbol that promised to cleanse people. The British also ensured the presence of prominent Gikuyu elders, bolstered the counter-oathing project, and threatened the strength of the Mau Mau as many people started to recant the Mau Mau oaths. Arguably, the success of counter-oathing ceremonies led to the first batch of Mau Mau killings. Archival documents show that in January 1953, the District Commissioner of Fort Hall, wrote to his counterpart at Thomson's Fall briefing him of the progress of the oath of allegiance. He writes that all African civil servants are mandated to take an oath of allegiance to the government in a properly stipulated ceremony. As he describes, the oath should be "sworn by each man individually on the Githathi Stone," and that a senior Gikuyu chief should be in attendance to attest to proper ceremony.

³⁶⁷ Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's founding father, described the Gikuyu oaths in his anthropological study, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1958). He discusses the oaths within the juridical system—as a means of identifying criminals and ensuring a fair trial. He identified three types of oaths differing in the gravity of the crime committed. The first, and lesser oath was *muma* and was taken on minor disputes. The ceremony employed a lamb, herbs, water, and animal blood, banana leaf, and a hole in the ground. The oath takers had to verbally declare: "If I tell a lie, let this symbol of truth kill me. If I falsely accuse anyone, let this symbol of truth kill me. If the property I am now claiming is not mine, let this symbol of truth kill me" (224). "The symbol of the second oath is *karinga thenge* (to swear by killing a male goat). This form of oath was administered in a big case with a lot of property, involving more than one or two persons. And the third form of oath is *gethathi*; this was taken mostly in criminal cases such as murder or stealing. The symbol of this oath consisted of a small red stone with seven natural holes on it" (224). A common feature of these types of oaths was the use of symbols and the death sanction for violators.

ceremonies and their context, which allow us to map out different ways in which the oath functioned as a power that subjugated the Gikuyu population through the body and language.³⁶⁸

Njama narrates that the ceremonies targeted volunteers, but it was common for any Gikuyu to be cornered or harassed into taking an oath. Indeed, this was the case of Njama as he was tricked into taking a warrior oath, and he only submitted to save his life. The fate of those who refused to take the oaths was death. Thus, the exclusion of the middle ground demarcated bodies exclusively as members of the House of Mumbi or enemies. Njama's memoir was the significant source material for Watene's *My Son for My Freedom* and Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial*. For instance, the scene in *My Son for My Freedom*, where Maina, Gaceru's son, is forced to take the oath and refuses, mirrors Njama's own experience.

1ST MAN: We have been sent to you to inform you that the cause [Mau Mau movement] demands that your son's head shall be cut off, and that you are to abide by the oath by which you swore to fight for and defend your soil, no matter what the cost.³⁶⁹

The irony is that Gaceru, Maina's father, is the leader bestowed with the power to decide who must die. His attempt to save his son is repudiated by Mau Mau soldiers, whose allegiance to the oath trumps individual lives.³⁷⁰ Theatre practitioners have been reluctant to stage an oathing ceremony partially because of the practical difficulties of staging contested accounts of oathing and partially due to the ethics of staging a traditional practice that still constitutes an important part of the Gikuyu culture. However, we believe it is fundamental to grasp the oathing process as it is implicated in the processes that constitute heroes in the plays under study. For instance, in Watene's plays, the oath is so powerful that many characters cannot conceive subjectivity outside its

³⁶⁸ Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee's* also contains a chapter about the Oath of Unity, whose aspects are consistent with what Njama describes in his memoir.

³⁶⁹ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 71.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.,

parameters. Although neither Ngugi nor Watene reveal the full content of the oath on stage, events in their plays are structured to reveal the relations of power the oath enables and how power is deployed to govern the Gikuyu populations. For example, in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, Rhino laments that some of their revolutionary actions are contradictory, yet they perpetuate them for fear of violating their oaths. He remarks:

Even though we know it to be wrong,
Have to kill our brothers and sisters
While yet we suffer for them,
Living like beasts of the forest.³⁷¹

Rhino's recognition underscores that the oath has become the prison of the Mau Mau soldiers.

During the Mau Mau war, oathing ceremonies could only take place at a member's home who had taken at least one oath. Nighttime was preferable to avoid the prying eyes of British loyalist chiefs and their officers, and this choice of time did not signal any sinister motives, as the colonial authorities alleged. Oathing was structured like an initiation ceremony to transform an ordinary Gikuyu into a member of the House of Mumbi. This transformation relied on concrete bodily demarcations, symbolic gestures, and oracular performance. While the oath's bodily acts were to forge a connection with land and ancestors through blood, its linguistic content was to conjure up a spiritual reawakening and to arouse a revolutionary fervor. Both acts constituted the initiates into members of the House of Mumbi. At the beginning of the ceremony, the initiates were marched into a makeshift shrine with a banana arch marking a symbolic transition from individual freedom to a social body bound by blood. Njama recalls in his memoir, "right in front of us stood an arch of banana and maize stalks and sugar cane stems tied by a forest of creeping and climbing plant. We were harassed to take out our coats, money, watches, shoes, and other European metal we had in

³⁷¹ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 10.

our possession.”³⁷² Getting rid of these material objects was the first form of purification, and it demanded the initiates’ symbolic severance from European objects of desire and ostentation, such as apparel and jewelry that categorized the Gikuyu along economic lines.

The oath administrator assumed a priestly role, painting his face to dispel ordinariness as he claimed divine authority to administer oaths on behalf of the House of Mumbi, the eponymous founders of the Gikuyu nation. The first part of the ritual was a symbolic gesture that tied individual bodies into one. As Njama writes, the oath administrator “put a band of raw goat’s skin on the right-hand wrist of each one of the seven persons who were to be initiated. We were then surrounded [bound together] by goats’ small intestines on our shoulders and feet.”³⁷³ Once they were joined into a single body, they were sprayed with beer and a mixture of finger millet thrown at them as a sign of blessing.

The second part of the ceremony was meant to bind them through blood. The oath administrator pricked their right-hand middle fingers with a needle and smeared the blood on the chest of a Billy goat. Next, the administrator took a Gikuyu gourd containing blood and made a cross on the initiates’ foreheads while pronouncing, “may this blood mark the faithful and brave members of the Gikuyu and Mumbi Unity; may this same blood warn you that if you betray our secrets or violate the oath, our members will come and cut you into pieces at the joints marked by this blood.”³⁷⁴ To signal their collective sense of responsibility, they licked each other’s blood and swore that if they should reveal “this secret of Gikuyu and Mumbi to a person not a member, may this blood kill me. If I violate any of the rules of the oath may this blood kill me. If I lie, may this

³⁷² Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 117.

³⁷³ Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 117.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

blood kill me.”³⁷⁵ Thus, death was the only penalty for violating the Mau Mau oath. The prohibitions of European products and way of life inherent in the oaths pointed more to a war strategy than they did to racism and atavism, as settlers and the colonial government alleged. Furthermore, the oath’s oracular performance mirrors Agamben’s argument that “an oath is a verbal act intended to guarantee the truth of a promise or an assertion.”³⁷⁶ However, unlike Agamben’s postulation that “the oath does not create anything, does not bring anything into being, but keeps united and conserves what something else, the citizens or the legislator has brought into being,”³⁷⁷ we argue in the next section that the Mau Mau oaths reconstituted the Gikuyu into political subjects.

Towards a Political Sacrament: *My Son for My Freedom*

Although Njama’s autobiography highlights the oathing ceremonies and describes their effects on the Gikuyu community, it is Watene’s plays that adequately capture the politics of oathing and how they affected the Gikuyu family. We analyze Watene’s *My Son for my Freedom* because it puts the oath and death at the center of an impending war to interrogate how a Gikuyu village grapples with a life-changing event that promises freedom for the blood of their loved ones and fellow villagers.

Kimathi’s march into the forest began in the village, where micro-wars were fought long before the declaration of a state of emergency in 1952.

First performed at the Kenya National Theatre in 1973, *My Son for My Freedom* depicts the oath as a technology for governing populations. It narrates the events leading up to the outbreak of the Mau Mau war in a village in Central Kenya. Watene organizes the play as a battle of wits between Mwaura and Gaceru. While Mwaura is depicted as a strong advocate of the oathing ceremonies and

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archeology of the Oath* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 18.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 3. Also, Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* does not depict the oath as bringing out anything new. Instead, he presents the oath as an institution that preserved Gikuyu values. Therefore, the Mau Mau oath was an invention of its time.

supports a violent rebellion against the colonial government and its African supporters, Gaceru is portrayed as a reluctant rebel who abhors shedding blood and believes that oaths can only create deeper divisions among the Gikuyu.

Gaceru is a family man whose tragic life is caught up between diametrically opposed forces. The first force calls for a violent revolution to get rid of the colonial government and its supporters, including people occupying neutral positions due to religion or personal beliefs, while the second unsettles his conscience to question the very act of killing as a practice of freedom. Gaceru understands that the political transition in the country will be bloody, and the absence of a middle ground between the House of Mumbi and those identified as enemies troubles him. He attempts unsuccessfully to sit out of the conflict, if only to keep his family intact and alive. He laments to NEIGHBOR:

You will be forced to take
Your sword and fight
Either for the Government
Or for the House of Mumbi.³⁷⁸

Such a statement amplifies Fanon's reflection on how the struggle for national liberation inflicts "grave traumatism upon the family group,"³⁷⁹ or kinship ties, in the case of the Gikuyu society.³⁸⁰

The play opens with a depiction of a looming tragic event signaled through changes in nature and human actions that seek to upend the order of life in the village. The opening scene portrays a village politically divided between elders opposing colonialism—foregrounding injustice, violence, and land inequality as catalysts of the conflict—and the Kenyan colonial government,

³⁷⁸ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 43.

³⁷⁹ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 99.

³⁸⁰ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 27.

which considers the elders as rebels and terrorists that must be punished.³⁸¹ However, of utmost importance to us is Gaceru's initial liminality—he occupies the space between the government (and its allies) and the Mau Mau movement—and propulsion from this 'middle ground' to the domain of sovereignty, where he becomes the figure who decides on the death of the other. In other words, the figure of Gaceru allows us to move beyond the simplicity of categorizing the Mau Mau oaths as atavistic practices of primitive people to understanding how the oath acquired its power and how it was deployed to govern the Gikuyu. Thus, Gaceru's life trajectory enables us to map out how power relations functioned to subjugate people through their bodies to the extent of threatening to annihilate them. It also allows us to locate spaces of resistance within the Mau Mau movement.

Mwaura, who is also Gaceru's brother-in-law, argues that the colonial government has put their manhood on trial—they have been forced to abandon their weapons and can no longer fight. He fears they cannot even draw their swords during the day as the Gikuyu nation is divided, that “loyalists keep track like hounds,” tracking the so-called terrorists and hauling them to the gallows.”³⁸² Thus, Mwaura sees violence as the only way to reclaim their personality and consciousness. He laments:

We have been made to crawl on our knees
While the whip of the overseer cracked on our backs
And bitter sweat trickled down our brows.
At times we have even shed tears
Before our women, degrading the status of our manhood.
We live like slaves in our own land.³⁸³

Here Mwaura captures colonial violence's attempt to annihilate the Gikuyu ways of life: First, it has taken their land, denied them access to their own bodies, and finally, destabilized their culture. In

³⁸¹ Ibid., 43.

³⁸² Watene, *My Son for my Freedom*, 11.

³⁸³ Ibid., 12.

other words, Mwaura understands how violence has transformed the Gikuyu into colonial subjects and then kept them off their land, without which they can no longer keep their Gikuyu identity.

Jomo Kenyatta captures these sentiments about the place of land among the Gikuyu in his anthropological study, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938):

The Gikuyu consider the earth as the “mother” of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. Thus, the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it.³⁸⁴

Mwaura sees violence as an appropriate response to the colonial incursion into their ways of life.

The colonizer’s taking of the land is a symbolic penetration of their mother, an affront to Gikuyu manhood that Mwaura is keen to correct. Although his reasoning on the use of violence mirrors Fanon’s meditation that “colonialism is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence,”³⁸⁵ his use of force, as portrayed in various scenes, does not point to violence’s liberatory role, that is, retrieve the colonized’s dignity, a sense of self, or overthrow the colonizer. His violence is directed against his fellow Gikuyu, whom he considers British loyalists. Mwaura’s black-on-black violence is what troubles Gaceru and creates a desire for a middle ground that will unsettle the rigid conceptions of politics that assigns people exclusively to the side of life or death with their bodies bearing witness to the outcome.

Members of the House of Mumbi attribute Gikuyu disunity to eroding morals and traditions, exacerbated by the spread of Christianity. To Mwaura, Christians are a thorn in their village for several reasons, namely: (1) they have shunned Gikuyu traditions, such as female circumcision; (2) they work with missionaries suspected of working with the colonial government; (3) they preach

³⁸⁴ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Mercury Books, 1938), 21.

³⁸⁵ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 23.

peace, and (4) believe in a salvation that precludes violence.³⁸⁶ He sees Christianity as establishing a new way of knowing that is diametrically opposed to the House of Mumbi's values and seeks to eradicate them.³⁸⁷ Christianity seeks to redefine the Gikuyu society by proposing an alternative truth that has nothing to do with land and freedom, which are at the core of the Gikuyu's fight against the British. To the House of Mumbi, Christianity promises a false redemption—"a set of ideas that, because of their ability to enchant, could be defined as magico-poetic."³⁸⁸ These ideas peddled by the converted and the mission centers in the village appear foreign as "they call the colonized to the ways of the white man,"³⁸⁹ and aggressive due to their insistence on "a universe with a single meaning."³⁹⁰ Wanjiru, Maina's girlfriend, embodies these ideas as she is indifferent to Maina's warning that the Mau Mau movement will kill her family. When Maina reveals that the movement is bent on scattering and killing "those that call themselves children of the lamb because they are the ones that pollute the traditions of the people,"³⁹¹ Wanjiru recites, "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,"³⁹² and tells Maina that God will give her courage in times of despair. She asks Maina to

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁸⁷ Carol Sicherman in *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The making of a Rebel* (1990) captures the Creed of Gikuyu and Mumbi as follows: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Gikuyu and Mumbi, the ones to who He portioned out this land, our parents; And that they began to be prosecuted in the time of Waiyaki, Cege [Mugo wa Kibiro] and Wang'ombe; And that they were deceived and the land and government of this country was stolen from them and they were scattered; And that they were enslaved and left with nothing. Their children are not afraid, they are waking up from sleep, and they will restore those of old to their seats. Now they wait trusting in the true right hand of God, and they pray to the Almighty Father, the defender of the present generation of the Gikuyu, that He may drive out those who stole our inheritance, the inheritance of those who are alive, of those who are dead, and of those yet to be born. I believe in the holy sacrifices of Gikuyu and Mumbi; In the leadership of Kenyatta and Peter Koinange; in the true politics; In the fellowship of all black people; And in the eternal Gikuyu (359).

³⁸⁸ Achille Mbembe, "On the Power of the False." *Public Culture*, 14 (3), pp. 629-641.

³⁸⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 7.

³⁹⁰ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 215.

³⁹¹ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 34.

³⁹² Ibid.

convert and believe in God to receive the assurance of deliverance from the Mau Mau and sins.

Wanjiru's response affirms House of Mumbi's fear that the realization of the Christian life and the idea of resurrection calls for the abandonment of tradition and customs that underpin the Gikuyu tradition. Furthermore, Wanjiru's call to Maina to give up self and erase his individual identity and embrace the catholicity of Christianity demonstrates why Christianity appeared to the Gikuyu as a project similar to colonialism, as they both presented themselves as universal projects.

Mwaura and Gaceru's disputations rest on the question of whether shedding the blood of the "othered" is indispensable for liberating one's country. While Mwaura sees the enemy's blood as necessary for the struggle, Gaceru argues that identifying the enemy who must die is difficult as tomorrow's enemy is one's brother today.³⁹³ Mwaura does not seem to recognize this ambiguity of who is (or becomes) classified as the enemy. He envisages the oath as the instrument that will shift the burden of choosing enemies. In other words, those who participate in the oath will become members of the House of Mumbi, while those beyond the limits of the society can therefore be annihilated. While Mwaura's actions in the play reveal that he did not conceive death as anything beyond an event that annihilates the enemy, Gaceru's existential reasoning that death is not the end of the enemy, and that the enemy's death signals their (House of Mumbi) own death reveals Mau Mau's dilemma to justify black-on-black violence. The suggestion that for the colonized, violence is a mode of self-realization and self-fashioning does not seem to operate in the context of Watene's drama, where the fight is seldom between the British and the Gikuyu but among the Gikuyu themselves.³⁹⁴ Indeed, it appears that Watene's intent is to draw the audience's attention to the question whether Mau Mau was a civil war or a revolution against colonialism. This observation

³⁹³ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 17.

³⁹⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 21.

draws from the nature of the war, particularly Mau Mau's targeting of the loyalists and those they called betrayers more than the British. While we do not necessarily share these views, we acknowledge that the Fanonian conceptualization of violence as a means for self-realization does not operate in Watene's *My Son for My Freedom*, for Fanon did not accentuate violence for its own sake, but rather as a restitution and liberatory force through which the colonized could express themselves.³⁹⁵

Mwaura's need for violence to refashion the Gikuyu does not necessarily lead to a "new human," as Fanon theorized. For him, violence emerges as a means of survival but not quite a mode of creating agency. To constitute subjects that can readily embrace the weapon of violence and purge the enemies of the Gikuyu, he advances the oath as the sacrament of power that will establish the House of Mumbi. Indeed, it is the politics of the administration of the oath and its power to sanction death that is at the center of Watene's play. The battle among the Gikuyu centers on how their future might be determined. Although Mwaura and some characters take Gikuyu unity for granted, presenting it as a force that has always existed and was only disrupted by colonialism, Watene establishes through characters, such as Gaceru, Maina, Neighbor, and Karanja that the push to spread the oathing ceremonies in the land demonstrates that Gikuyu nationalism is not a *given*, and that contrary to Agamben's argument that the oath does not constitute or give birth to a new thing, it was precisely for constituting the Gikuyu nation that the oaths were initiated.³⁹⁶ Thus, we cannot strictly discuss Gikuyu nationalism as pre-existing the Mau Mau war as Ngugi and Mugo do in *The Trial*—they, too, take Gikuyu unity as a *given* as opposed to the Kenyan nationalism, which the reinvention of Kimathi is calculated to forge.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*, 3.

Mwaura sees the oath as an instrument that will help the movement to identify betrayers of the House of Mumbi as “it will distinguish our men from the rest of the treason-mongers,”³⁹⁷ prevent defections from those losing courage, sustain people to go through physical pain and maintain patriotism as they “can’t run the risk of fighting side by side with men not bound by a solemn oath,” who will lack the spirit to fight when their love fails them.³⁹⁸ The oath will also create a bond among the fighters and help them mobilize more people to fight “by force if need be.”³⁹⁹ Mwaura’s reasons preclude grounds for the individual agency as one is either a member of the House of Mumbi or an enemy who must be annihilated. Indeed, Gaceru’s attempts to dissuade Mwaura that he is “calling on death too soon” are rebuffed with warnings that he is endangering his life.⁴⁰⁰ What Mwaura envisions as an instrument of unity, recreating the House of Mumbi, is perceived by others as the weapon that wreaks havoc in the community. For instance, NEIGHBOR laments to Gaceru that the oath has brought division and suspicion, that friends can no longer even share greetings for fear of disclosing one’s status—greetings contain jargon (and special gestures) that reveal whether one has taken an oath.⁴⁰¹

Beyond splitting the community, the oath reconstitutes the Gikuyu, effacing the elder society that ordered everyday life among the Gikuyu families.⁴⁰² The oath destabilizes this imaginary elder

³⁹⁷ Watene, *My Son for my Freedom*, 23.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. 26.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁰² In *Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), Paul Ocobock claims that British colonial officers organized the Kenyan state along the existing, invented or imagined notions of age relations among the various communities in Kenya. In other words, the British fashioned the Kenyan state as an elder with attributes commonly associated with the elderly, which include heading a homestead and socializing children into adulthood. Ocobock’s argument hinges on the dynamics of “uncertain age,” that is, the age between childhood and

society to reveal tensions between the elders and the youth. For instance, Gaceru is under the impression that he has so much sway in the affairs of his sons that he freely counsels them that the country is changing and that they should exercise caution about the looming changes, which is to say that they should not rush to take the oath without consulting him. He does not even bother to discuss the oath with his wife, as he does not foresee any scenario where she acts without confabbing with him. Gaceru, to use Fanon's language, gives his family "the impression of being undecided, of avoiding the taking of sides, even of adopting an evasive and irresponsible attitude."⁴⁰³ However, unlike Fanon's Algerian family that evolves to take up the challenge of national liberation in productive ways—the sons leading fathers, girls stepping out of traditionally assigned roles, women rising to take up the mantle of revolutionaries—the oath and Mau Mau movement creates a quandary for Gaceru's family, immersing them in dangerous war games.⁴⁰⁴ For instance, we learn that Gaceru's wife is not only eager to take the oath but also conceives the act to compel him to do so as well. She reasons: "If he comes not, I shall go it alone, then shall I have the courage to push him with a pole, for he must go in with our great house, the house of Gikuyu, our great elder."⁴⁰⁵ The splitting of the Gikuyu family and the rising irrelevance of the elder society patterned on patriarchal structure undermined the efficacy of the House of Mumbi's aim to unite the Gikuyu and constitute them as revolutionaries to redeem the land and gain freedom.

The oath breaks Gaceru's family into separate units, and he is forced to constantly negotiate between the demands of the movement and his desire to protect the family. His wife follows

adulthood. He coalesces this liminal age group, which is often conceptualized differently depending on a community, into a single phenomenon that is studied through a particular lens: masculinity.

⁴⁰³ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 100.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 102, 105, 111.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 30.

through with her plan and takes the oath without the husband's knowledge and reveals the information later to coerce him to take the oath as well. To his considerable sorrow, Mwaura learns that his two eldest sons have also taken the oath, and his youngest son, Maina, is dating Wanjiru, a Christian girl. At this point, Gaceru realizes that resistance is futile as the oath is already running his household. He takes the oath, and he is surprised at the village's decision to elect him as the leader with the power to decide who must die or live. He says,

I am to say who is to die
In our village and further beyond
Three streams to the north and south.⁴⁰⁶

The gravity of Gaceru's powers terrifies his wife, who, up to this point, did not consider membership in the House of Mumbi as anything serious. The realization that her husband wields power to decide on the exception—on who must die or live—brings the reality of Mau Mau closer to home. She cries to her husband, “you must not let their blood rest upon us.”⁴⁰⁷ When Gaceru complains that he did what the wife wanted, she remarks that she did not think that “he will be responsible for other people's deaths.”⁴⁰⁸ The idea of taking the other's life terrifies Gaceru's wife to the extent that she advises him to defy the oath, a violation that incurs a death sentence. Here, Watene underscores the complexity of life under the regime of oaths, particularly how scores of Gikuyu participated in the oathing ceremonies without ever thinking deeply about how the oaths would impose new ways of being.

The power to decide between life and death becomes the proverbial straw that breaks Gaceru's back. The cries of the people whose deaths he sanctioned haunted him—he could hear

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁰⁷ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 51.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 51.

women and children's screams for help—but he did not waver from his duties as the arbiter of life and death. However, when Mwaura and the elders mark his son Maina as an enemy of the House of Mumbi and Gaceru is asked to sanction his death, he becomes aware of death's finality. Maina has openly rejected the oath and shown sympathy to Christians, and the movement wants to kill him. His father must give permission or be condemned to die alongside his son. Gaceru refuses to sanction his son's death *for his freedom*. Indeed, as Emmanuel Levinas points out, "it is in relation with the other that we think death in its negativity."⁴⁰⁹ Up to this point, Gaceru has been sanctioning the deaths of people far removed from him, but his son is the other that is more familiar and implicated in his *self*. What will his son's death mean to him? In Levinas' words, "death is the irremediable gap: the biological movements lose all dependence in relation to signification, to expression. Death is decomposition; it is the no-response [*sans-réponse*]."⁴¹⁰ While in Heideggerian parlance, one cannot experience death from the death of the other,⁴¹¹ for Levinas, "the other who expresses himself is entrusted to me (and there is no debt in regard to the other, for what is due is unpayable: one is never free of it). The other individuates me in the responsibility I have for him. The death of the other who dies affects me in my very identity as a responsible "me."⁴¹² Following Levinas, we argue that for Gaceru, the anticipation of the death of his son becomes the means for him to experience genuine freedom and resolve. In other words, the dread of death, the imminence of the threat that weighs on his life, becomes the means for him to gain glimpses of the future they were attempting to build and recognize how futile it was to shed the blood of the other.

⁴⁰⁹Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹¹ Martin Heidegger and Joan Stambaugh, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 240/260.

⁴¹² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 12.

The Mau Mau fighters consider the oath as the supreme authority that supersedes Gaceru's power to sanction the death of the enemy. Therefore, they take it upon themselves to capture Maina and push Gaceru to the ground as he cries for help. Although it is not clear whose help Gaceru seeks, the government officers arrive at the scene. However, they do not lend the assistance Gaceru desperately needs. Instead, they shoot him dead. Many of the characters in Watene's play die either at the hands of their fellow villagers for expressing different political beliefs or at the hands of the colonial government for what it considers "terrorism." Although the oath is predicated as a technology for uniting the Gikuyu, it becomes an instrument of oppression as it sanctions deaths and targets the Gikuyu more than their actual enemy. Nowhere in the play does Watene depict the Gikuyu engaging the colonial government or the settlers who have taken their land. Instead, the fight takes the posture of a civil war as Gikuyu fight against each other. Gaceru recognizes, albeit too late, that the assumption that once the House of Mumbi attains unity, it will take the struggle to the European quarter and demand for their stolen land is flawed.

Although *My Son for My Freedom* is rarely studied in connection to Mau Mau, we consider the play as a significant text that reckons with a history that some Mau Mau scholarship tends to silence in post-independent Kenya. We have argued that Watene is interested in recreating this history not to set any record straight but to unsettle the idea of Mau Mau as the national epic upon which Kenya was to ground its ideas of heroism. More than any other dramatic work, the play shows how the Mau Mau killings started. Some bodies were found in rivers, others in forest farms. NEIGHBOR mentions to Gaceru and Mwaura that "a body was found down the valley strangled by a rope and just beginning to decompose."⁴¹³ The use of graphic, violent vocabulary emphasizes the state of the bodies to underscore the defacement of what many Gikuyu considered sacred before

⁴¹³ Watene, *My Son for My Freedom*, 27.

the war. Many of these bodies were mutilated, decapitated, hacked, and cut into pieces before and after death, reinforcing the European myth that the Mau Mau were savages. In the historical Mau Mau conflict, it is the killing of Chief Waruhiu, the very emblem of colonial sovereignty, which led to the official declaration of a state of emergency.⁴¹⁴ The murder shocked settlers and African collaborators, who hitherto had absolute trust in the colonial state's ability to protect them. These early deaths structured the colony's politics and the ideas of sovereignty and the subject. If colonial power was indeed an expression of a state of exception and a permanent state of emergency, the deaths of government loyalists and settlers authorized an official state of emergency on a larger scale than what was already evident in the colony. With the state of emergency, the colonial government asserted its sovereignty—the right to determine who lives or who dies and set limits to death. The state became a machinery singularly devoted to eradicating the disease of Mau Mau through cleansing oaths, rehabilitation, and mostly death. At the end of *My Son for My Freedom*, Mwaura flees into the forest to continue the struggle. Consequently, a new battlefield emerged in the forests around Mount Kenya.

Death, Heroism, and the Life of the Other in Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*

Dedan Kimathi is considered a leading figure in the Mau Mau movement, who fought against the colonial forces from 1952 until he was arrested in 1956, tried at her Majesty's court in Nyeri, and executed in 1957. Kimathi's historical life teeters between patriotic martyrdom and silent indignation, and as such, he occupies an ambiguous place in the Kenyan social and creative imagination. Although some popular writings and monuments in Kenya portray him as a hero, his image was historically suppressed and downplayed in the Kenyan public sphere. Historian Julie MacArthur notes that "in memoirs and popular Kenyan literature, Kimathi could be a tragic hero, a

⁴¹⁴ David Anderson's *The Histories of the Hanged* argues that the question in many people's minds was "if the colonial state could not protect the Paramount Chief, who, then, was any longer safe from the gunmen of Mau Mau?" (91).

misunderstood rebel commander, a power-hungry despot, a prophet patriot, a reminder of the lost dreams of revolution, or a dangerous precedent for future dissidents against the postcolonial order.”⁴¹⁵

Existing historical works about Kimathi reveal a complex figure that resists knowability. Thus, scholars and authors who have written about Kimathi proceed from this position of lack, always knowing that their access to his life is limited. Kimathi’s absent body further creates opportunities for reimagining his life, and in the absence of an officially sanctioned archive, save for colonial documents, reports, and memoirs that cast him as a villain, dramatists such as Watene, Ngugi, and Mugo have embraced strategies of historical reconstruction to craft dramas that seek to engage colonial archives on the rightful place of Kimathi in Kenya’s revolutionary history. For Ngugi and Mugo, Kenyan history must be rehabilitated to create a sacred space for Kimathi and other forgotten heroes. For Watene, history must be probed to reveal what constitutes true heroes and the need to celebrate them.

Watene sets *Dedan Kimathi* in the forest, a space that constrains life, allowing specific modes of existence. As the play shows, the forest orders the soldiers’ daily lives and sets their routines: limits where they can sleep, what they eat, and wear.

1ST SCOUT: Stop being human. We’re animals now. How’s your new “house?”

2ND SCOUT: As comfortable as the houses between the branches of trees can be.

1ST SCOUT: At times, I feel like a monkey.

2ND SCOUT: And what’s the difference between you and a monkey?

1ST SCOUT: I think and speak and shoot.

2ND SCOUT: It speaks and thinks and throws.

1ST SCOUT: It does not speak!

2ND SCOUT: It does. I spend hours listening to their curious chatter.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Julie Mac Arthur et. Al., ed., *Dedan Kimathi on Trial: Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya’s Mau Mau Rebellion* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017).

⁴¹⁶ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 15.

This conversation points to the precarity of the soldiers and their dehumanization. For many of these fighters in the forest, it is difficult to conceive subjectivity since, as a relational space, the forest allows the construction of meaningful associations that enable them to act, think, feel, and live with each other, but in ways constrained by the forest. Indeed, the names of Watene's characters are mostly derived from animals, e.g., Nyati (Buffalo) and Rhino (Rhinoceros). For these characters, the forest folds time, leaving traces of the past and future in every present moment. For instance, 1ST FIGHTER's life is characterized by past memories about his family. He has brought these memories into the forest in the present, which is contemporaneously futuristic, considering that every experience of fighting in the present is a leap into the future—a future where he hopes to be reunited with his family. In spite of this, the forest does not allow us to see the totality of his life beyond his fear that he may die and never see his family again. Instead, we experience his life as fragments, which end in death. 1ST FIGHTER perceives himself as having a death-bound horizon and is confident that he will be killed in his next mission, and this feeling terrifies him. He laments: “And if I die, I won't see my sons. And I will not see my wives again...”⁴¹⁷ But what does death mean to this soldier? Is it the experience of dying? Does he understand how the anticipation of death in the forest shapes his experience of life? If, as some of the soldiers observe, their existence has become like that of the animal, does the meaning of death change how they conceive life? We use these questions as an entry into the forest, a desolate space of suffering but also hope. We want to grasp how this natural landscape made strange through the Mau Mau war shapes the visions of what constitutes heroes in postcolonial Kenya. We particularly look at Watene's staging of *Dedan Kimathi* as an act of public mourning calculated to lay to rest the ghosts of those whose bodies were appropriated in the name of nationalism.

⁴¹⁷ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 14.

We draw from Alain Badiou's idea of the soldier as a paradigm of a hero to take up the question of the Mau Mau soldier and use the above questions as a departure for discussing the idea of heroism in Kenya. Badiou identifies the battlefield as the site of heroism and the figure of the soldier as the creation of modern war. While in ancient wars, the heroic figure was the warrior—as illustrated in epics, the figure of the soldier is the hero that crowns modern wars.⁴¹⁸ Notwithstanding the common nostalgia for the warrior owing to popular culture's casting of the warrior as the desire of our modern world, it is the soldier that is mostly celebrated and memorialized in monuments and sculptures. Watene, Ngugi, and Mugo put on stage Badiou's observations that "the great problem" that our modern world faces "is to create a paradigm of heroism beyond war, a figure that would be neither that of the warrior nor that of the soldier."⁴¹⁹ However, it is up to the audience to judge whether Kimathi has risen beyond his forest identity to become a heroic figure in independent Kenya.

Whereas Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* ends with Kimathi's arrest, Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial* begins with this arrest. This timeline allows us to trace Kimathi's development as a figure in the forest and colonial court. Both the forest and the court are spaces inflected by power relations that order one's life. In the forest, Kimathi is portrayed as a General but nevertheless a soldier like all others. Granted, his higher rank empowers him to discipline his subordinates, but he lacks the authority to sanction the death of one who has taken an oath, which implies that even the Field Marshal is under the power of the oath. As we saw in *My Son for My Freedom*, the oath is the political sacrament that rules over them all. However, in the forest, we encounter a troubled Kimathi who takes power into his own hands. His fear of betrayal and capture drives him to kill some of his soldiers, and he does so secretly in what the audience might categorize as cold-blooded murder. We

⁴¹⁸ Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants* (New York: Verso, 2012), 38.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

are interested in this Kimathi who, theoretically as the Field Marshall, is endowed with the instruments of killing the enemy but ethically and perhaps juridically lacks the authority to murder the enemy. The line between killing and murdering raises the fundamental question of the power to decide on the exception—who dies or who lives—and how it was exercised during the state of emergency. Kimathi's justification for killing fellow soldiers is then crucial in grasping his image as an ambiguous figure in postcolonial Kenya.

Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* is a play about death and the constitution of a heroic figure. It captures the lives of Mau Mau soldiers in the forest—their daily routines, battle plans, missions in the village, and war rituals. The play opens with the death of a soldier and Kimathi and Lucia's disputation on who has the power to take a life. Lucia, one of Kimathi's women, questions him on the soundness of killing a fellow soldier. Kimathi defends himself by saying that the death was “necessary,” implying that the soldier's death is legitimate. Watene does not comment on Kimathi's authority to sanction the death of a soldier, but we later learn that he did not have the power to unilaterally decide who dies and who lives. Rhino, a young soldier, captures the paradox of Mau Mau when he laments that they have killed many of their brothers and sisters, “while yet we suffer for them, living like beasts of the forest.”⁴²⁰ Rhino understands that many of their victims are fellow Gikuyu as opposed to the settlers or colonial officers. Their campaign has become an exercise in deciding which fellow Gikuyu should live and who must die.

Rhino's conversation with Nyati, the oldest fighter in the forest, about his experience of death suggests that he is aware that killing their people is taking a huge toll on their lives. He first casts Nyati as a kind man who, had he been a Christian, would not have hesitated to become a martyr for Christ. He then sarcastically asks how he can kill and still keep his mind tethered to the

⁴²⁰ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 10.

Mau Mau destiny. The question demands Nyati to articulate his thinking about the death of the other and how it shapes his life. Nyati simply responds, “if you could peep into my soul and read out the markings of my suffering, you’d wish you could expand my capacity to bear the pain, bitterness, and sorrow.”⁴²¹ If Nyati’s killing of the enemy causes pain, does he, like Kimathi, kill the other because it is necessary? Why would he persist in an act that brings him pain and suffering? We suggest that Nyati’s remorse has nothing to do with his understanding of the death of the other. His pain at this point is that of loss—losing people who could be part of the House of Mumbi. His experience of death came much later when he participated in a mission and slaughtered parents in front of their children. He gives a graphic account of the killing to Kimathi:

We killed the loyalists, Marshal,
We killed the loyalists.
I dealt with one myself.
I broke in, and snatching his gun,
I told him to face the wall.
I shot him while his family
Watched and screamed in vain.
I killed him and then slaughtered
His wife in front of her children.
I killed them: but still, I can hear
The children’s screams of terror.
I still can see the eyes
Of the three handsome boys
As they pleaded for their mother.”⁴²²

This act drives Nyati into madness. No matter where he looks, he sees the images of the people he has killed and hears their screams. He longs for death and begs his comrades to kill him to save him from the tormenting images of his victims. Considering that Nyati has been a soldier for a long time, and that he even fought for the British in Burma, what makes this particular killing unique? Why is this particular killing driving him insane? We argue that before Rhino questioned him about his

⁴²¹ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 12.

⁴²² Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 30-31.

power to kill, Nyati had never conceived of the meaning of the death of the other.⁴²³ Watching the children cry for the lives of their parents made him realize that his acts were irreversible. But does this bring him around to understanding what death in the context of Mau Mau means? Nyati, like the 1ST FIGHTER, begs for death because they consider it as an end.⁴²⁴ In other words, to them, death is an event that marks the end of life and, thus, suffering on earth.

Neither Nyati nor 1ST FIGHTER seems adequately prepared to confront their own mortality. If death is the cessation of the individual's existence, can Nyati, 1ST FIGHTER, or any other soldier truly comprehend death through the lives they take? Do the haunting voices of those they have killed help Nyati understand the finality of death? We contend that the forest, the theater of war, obfuscates the line between "authentic" and "inauthentic" ways of living,⁴²⁵ thereby thrusting the Mau Mau soldiers into an ambiguous situation that compels perpetual reflection on the nature of existence, life, and death. Yet, numerous soldiers, including Nyati, attempt to reproduce everyday life conditions (inauthentic existence) within this forest. This approach hinders them from comprehending life beyond the mere survival instinct, failing to understand the inevitability of their deaths. In essence, these soldiers struggle to fathom that death is inescapable. They can only start to grasp the essence of their existence and the nature of the Mau Mau cause once they face death head-on. Since this profound understanding eludes them, they perceive death from a public perspective, which leads them to misinterpret death as both a distant and abstract possibility, and as a static event

⁴²³ Jomo Kenyatta notes in *Facing Mount Kenya* that murder was inconceivable in the Gikuyu community and whenever it happened, it could only be repaid by the death of the perpetrator or a member of their family. It could also lead to the ultimate punishment of exile, which was the highest form of punishment among the Gikuyu as it separated one from the land of the ancestors.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ We use authentic existence in the Heideggerian sense to capture a willingness to confront and accept one's own mortality and to take responsibility for one's own choices and actions. Heidegger suggests that authentic individuals are able to confront their own finitude and to embrace their own freedom, rather than seeking to evade or deny these fundamental aspects of their existence. Inauthentic existence is characterized by a refusal to confront one's own mortality and a tendency to evade responsibility for one's own choices and actions.

that ends their existence, failing to comprehend its transformative power. In other words, Nyati and First Fighter do not understand the revolutionary sense of sacrifice.

Death as an abstraction manifests in the Mau Mau war's logic of killing the enemy regardless of whether this enemy is a fellow Gikuyu. To the soldiers, this kind of death is justified as it does not happen to those within the imaginary House of Mumbi. Yet, as we saw in *My Son for My Freedom*, this understanding is always distant and peripheral as the conceptualization of who counts as a member of the House of Mumbi is relational and implicates everyone. When considering the death toll and fatality rates within the Mau Mau, the resulting image complicates the concept of "otherness" and suggests that even the enemy's death could impact those within the House of Mumbi. For instance, Nyati's status as a legitimate member of the House of Mumbi is unambiguous to both him and the audience. Therefore, the idea of him being killed by Kimathi seems inconceivable. Despite this, Kimathi views Nyati as an enemy to be eliminated. Nyati's firm belief in his membership in the House of Mumbi prevents him from accepting any evidence suggesting Kimathi's intent to kill him, presented by Wahu. Nyati fails to imagine a scenario where Kimathi, driven by fear of death, could see him as a threat to the Mau Mau movement. In Kimathi's perspective, figures like Nyati, who aspire for peace, pose potential threats and must be eliminated before they could potentially betray him to the colonial government. Nyati's obliviousness to Kimathi's apprehensions highlights the complex dynamics within the Mau Mau movement.

The case of 1ST FIGHTER captures the interpretation of death as an end—as an event. The fighter is worried that his time is up, and he is going to die in his next mission. He cries loudly, "I am going to die; I won't come back."⁴²⁶ At this point, it is not clear why he expects to die, but we are made aware that this expectation is not existential in the sense that he sees death as a possibility in

⁴²⁶ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 14.

the Heideggerian sense.⁴²⁷ He interprets his death as an event that will occur but does not see it as a possibility that lays out his whole life in front of him. His fear is that he may never see his sons and wives—an interpretation that does not even align with his Gikuyu tradition that views death as a transition as opposed to a break that separates the dead, the living, and the unborn.⁴²⁸ We can then interpret his cry as a call for help in trying to survive or evade death. Indeed, when he returns from his next mission, he expresses joy that he has survived death.⁴²⁹ However, when death does occur to him later, he does not even participate in the event. Death itself is closed off to him when he dies. In a way, he was not present at his own death. Wahu finds him roaming in the forest looking for his mother, wife, and children, and she realizes that he is in pain and his mind is long gone. To her, only death could save the soldier from absolute pain and madness. She draws her knife and stabs him, thus, putting him to sleep forever.⁴³⁰ His death does not even seem to bother the other soldiers. One of them remarks: “Poor, poor fellow. I knew someone would do it.”⁴³¹ Kimathi, his General, simply inquires, “who did it?” and then remarks, “take him away.”⁴³² The death of 1ST FIGHTER does not seem to concern them, for they neither experience it nor does it compel them to anticipate their own deaths.

Watene does not elevate Kimathi above ordinary soldiers. In other words, he does not portray him as the General who has mastered the possibility of his own death. On the contrary,

⁴²⁷ Here we mean that one’s death, which is yet to happen, is not experienced by the person as an actuality but as a permanent possibility. In other words, one does not just die, but can actually live their death—have a relation to their death while alive because death is not an actuality but a possibility. Since they are aware that it is possible to die at any moment, the authentic relation to death is the relation to this possibility and not to its actuality.

⁴²⁸ See Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya*.

⁴²⁹ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 28.

⁴³⁰ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 56.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 57.

⁴³² Ibid.

Kimathi's life is depicted as inauthentic as he conceives death as an event that can happen to him. In Kimathi's perception, death is an actuality—an external occurrence—that comes from outside, rather than an inherent part of his existence. Only Kimathi can experience his own death, but he does not view it as an ever-present possibility. Instead, he sees death as an actuality, an event that marks the end of his life, not an impending probability that could occur at any time. Kimathi's interpretation of death as a specific event leads him to worry about betrayal from his fellow soldiers. In an attempt to delay this inevitable event, he seeks to prolong his life by avoiding death. Whether he sees his life as meaningful and worthy of preservation is beside the point. Kimathi's perception of death distances him from other people and things, creating an anxious preoccupation with his imminent demise. This idea—that death could occur at any moment—should ideally foster a comprehensive understanding of one's life. However, Kimathi's dialogue about his plans to kill Nyati unveils his fear of death and his intent to extend his life by evading it:

I will kill him quietly and swiftly.
I will not even see his eyes.
That will do it.
I won't remember him.
His sad eyes won't haunt me...
Soon you'll close the list of those
Who'd give me up to be hanged.
After you, there'll be no other...⁴³³

Kimathi's preoccupation with his death as a singular event deprives him of the possibility to perceive death as an ever-present possibility. Even if Kimathi's suspicions of imminent death were justified, and the tangible facts concerning his death were established, such knowledge does not equate to an understanding of the ever-present possibility of his death. Interestingly, some of Kimathi's soldiers seem to possess a more profound comprehension of the possibility of Kimathi's death. Their experiences in the forest, where death can occur at any moment, coupled with the

⁴³³ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 58.

sizable bounty offered by the colonial government for Kimathi's capture, lead them to view his death as an ever-present possibility. This recognition of Kimathi's life as something that can end at any moment fundamentally shapes their understanding of the Mau Mau movement's place in history. Rhino emphasizes that:

Our most important duty
Is to protect the dignity of Kimathi.
We know what he feels and thinks...
We must keep his secrets tight
So that if nothing else survives him
At least there will be some mystery
To protect his name from destruction.⁴³⁴

The soldiers recognize the inevitability of Kimathi's death, expressing concern that Kimathi is too consumed by his suspicions to consider the ever-present possibility of his own death. Characters like Rhino discuss Kimathi's mental state and the oppressive specter that appears to haunt him. The soldiers' choice "to keep his secrets tight" could be interpreted as their intention to control the narrative of Kimathi's life. While one can give meaning to life by contemplating one's death, Kimathi seems to fall short of this introspective exercise. Instead of viewing death as an ever-present possibility—a key to unlocking the "measureless possibility of existence"⁴³⁵—he sees it as an impending event to be evaded. This portrayal of Kimathi, as someone fearing death rather than confronting it, is what Ngugi and Mugo critique in their play, arguing that Watene casts Kimathi as a coward. To Watene, a hero is one who has mastered the possibility of his death through the death of the other. His portrayal of Kimathi leaves little possibility that Kimathi could ever rise as a hero who has grasped what it means to preserve the life of the other. Right from the beginning of the play,

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁴³⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 242/262.

Kimathi is shown as a maniac interested in shedding blood.⁴³⁶ He is a Field Marshal, but he does not participate in the active planning of any battles nor does he lead fights like Rhino, Kimbo, 1st Fighter, 1st Scout, and 2nd Scout. His actions are solely directed at his own survival, and the only plans he makes are how to kill his imaginary enemies.

Watene is not interested in rehabilitating the past to make it usable for the present from the standpoint of an African theatre practitioner interested in developing what Mbembe calls an “*imaginaire* of culture and politics”⁴³⁷ in which characters engage in the rhetoric of resistance and emancipation as the true discourse of Mau Mau. Instead, he presents Mau Mau as a question. By staging the movement’s controversial practices, Watene unsettles a history that was taken for granted in the 1970s and mostly advanced by the ex-Mau Mau soldiers in their memoirs. As E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo writes, the history was presented as public knowledge and had two faces that is, “one face assumes that the facts about Mau Mau are well-known, and are simultaneously self-validating,” and the other face “suggests that Mau Mau is very important.”⁴³⁸ Why is the Mau Mau important, and to whom? The factions that were interested in the history of Mau Mau included the homeguards, Mau Mau veterans, the British, and the Gikuyu students of the day.⁴³⁹ If the British were actively involved in suppressing the Mau Mau history, the homeguards, by virtue of their collaboration with the British and their advantage in securing top leadership positions at independence, were bent on burying the Mau Mau ghosts. Atieno-Odhiambo argues that those who need it are intellectual historians and nationalist agitators, opportunistic Mau Mau Generals, and landless Mau Mau. How does Watene’s work fit within these debates? We have shown that his

⁴³⁶ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 7.

⁴³⁷ Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing.” *Public Culture*, 14(1), 2002, pp. 243.

⁴³⁸ Atieno-Odhiambo, *The Production of History in Kenya*, 304.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

project is an act of public mourning, inviting the audience to assess the events in the forest and their impact on perceptions of heroism in Kenya. If the history of the Mau Mau revolves around power—its acquisition, loss, manipulation, and control—then Watene dramatizes this history specifically to understand its influence on postcolonial Kenya. This focus is particularly evident in determining who is recognized as a hero and thus worthy of rewards—be it a state funeral, land, a monument, or a public holiday.

Watene's views were not unique as they mirror Jomo Kenyatta's stance about Mau Mau after independence. Kenyatta did not consider the Mau Mau as a revolutionary movement. Although the colonial government jailed him as one of the movement's leaders, he distanced himself from it and sought every opportunity to denounce it. On April 11, 1961, while still detained but under less restrictive conditions, Kenyatta gave an international news conference in which a journalist asked him about Mau Mau's role in history and its significance to Kenya's eventual independence. He responded that historians would decide Mau Mau's contribution to Kenya's independence. When asked whether he could condemn the excesses of Mau Mau, he indicated that he has always condemned and denounced everything connected to violence. During his trial, Kenyatta had remarked that "Mau Mau should disappear like the roots of the wild fig tree," a statement many Gikuyu widely considered a taboo because they held the fig tree sacred. Asked whether he would like to make an unequivocal denunciation of Mau Mau, Kenyatta responded, "how many times am I going to do this? Did you not read, and if you have not read it, you ought to read it, you ought to read a copy of my speech at Kapenguria and again at the Kitale trial." The journalist pressed, "you are denouncing it, then?" Kenyatta responded, "I have denounced it so many times!" One might argue that Kenyatta was likely under pressure from the British government to denounce Mau Mau before he could gain his freedom from prison. But then, how could we account for his denunciation of the movement after his release from detention and assuming the presidency?

Kenyatta's government ignored the Mau Mau and sought to minimize their standing in Kenya. The system of land allocation and resettlement Kenya developed after independence did not practically favor the Mau Mau fighters, whose chief reason for the struggle was to regain lost land. At independence, the Kenyatta government was concerned about unemployment and landlessness. His minister Tom Mboya devised a land resettlement plan that enabled the government to borrow money from the British government and the World Bank to buy the land that was formerly held by White settlers. By 1969 close to 50 000 families were resettled. However, this did not solve the land crisis in Kenya, as many people could not afford the down payment the government wanted before distributing land. Not surprisingly, the cooperative societies and land-buying companies that Kenyatta and Mboya used were Gikuyu elite institutions that erupted into bitter conflict opposing the Gikuyu peasants (including former Mau Mau) who had invested money in them and the Gikuyu elite who administered them.

At this point in the history of Kenya, Mau Mau is portrayed as a liability. Followers or supporters of Mau Mau, who had hoped for better standards of living in an African-governed Kenya, did not fare any better in independent Kenya than they did in colonial Kenya. If anything, it is those who opposed Mau Mau, those who had remained loyal to the British colonial government, that became the new elite in Kenya. They were better positioned to acquire vast swaths of land in the formerly restricted White Highlands and plum government positions that were hitherto held by British officers. Watene was aware of these politics, which influenced his writing. For him, the image of Kimathi appeared as an inflated figure of a movement that was less valued in independent Kenya. He wanted to feature this figure on stage, not to demean him, but to allow space to question the efficacy of the national narrative on independence. Like many young people in the 1970s, Watene was frustrated that independence had failed to secure the basic guarantees of freedom. In the next

section, we discuss how Ngugi and Mugo reinvent Dedan Kimathi in *The Trial* and create a usable history of which the Mau Mau Revolution can serve as the fulfilment.

Sacrifice and Invention of the Unbreakable Body in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

Ngugi's and Mugo's play begins where Watene's ends. Kimathi, who was arrested near a village as he attempted to return to the forest, is brought into Her Majesty's court to answer for the crime of possessing a firearm contrary to the Special Emergency Regulations. The British spent a lot of resources hunting for the historical Kimathi and labeling him as a rebel and terrorist, but when he was arrested, they slapped him with a common criminal charge as opposed to a political charge of leading a revolution or rebellion. Ngugi and Mugo open their play with the reading of Kimathi's criminal charge to underscore the nature of colonial justice during the war:

Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime Minister or Field Marshal, of no fixed address, you are charged that on the night of Sunday, October the 21st, 1956, at or near Ihururu in Nyeri District, you were found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a license, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency Regulations constitutes a criminal offence. Guilty or not guilty?⁴⁴⁰

The colonial government's decision to charge Kimathi with a criminal offense was consistent with the British policy of never acknowledging the Mau Mau as a political uprising agitating for economic and political rights. The British authorities' treatment of the movement as a terrorist organization meant that its prisoners would never be accorded the rights of political prisoners. Instead, they were treated as criminals and charged in questionably constituted courts that only meted out death as the penalty for violating the emergency regulations. As David Anderson writes in the *Histories of the Hanged*, justice during the emergency was a complex affair, designed to pacify the settlers, circumvent fair trial as generally held by the British elsewhere, and bring the Mau Mau to an end. The ultimate goal of this brand of justice was to execute as many suspected Mau Mau as they could

⁴⁴⁰ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 3.

lay their hands on. Thus, charging Kimathi for a lesser crime that they could easily prove beyond a reasonable doubt was akin to killing two birds with one stone: they denied his role in Mau Mau and ensured a death penalty.

Ngugi and Mugo created *The Trial* to contest what they perceived as neocolonial scholarship that ignored the contributions of Kenya's independence heroes who suffered extreme violence and death to liberate the country from British colonialism. In the preface to the play, they critique Kenyan artists and scholars for downplaying the violence poor people suffered.⁴⁴¹ The play was an opportunity for Ngugi and Mugo to correct the image of Kimathi in the Kenyan public sphere. The events surrounding the creation, production, and performance of the play offered them excellent avenues for inventing the figure of Kimathi as a revolutionary who seeks to unsettle the forces of capitalism in Kenya.

Though Ngugi and Mugo started writing their play in 1974, it was the government's call for entries to represent Kenya at the Second Festival of Black Arts and Culture, or FESTAC '77, that provided the motivation to complete it. Alongside Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*, Ngugi and Mugo's play was chosen to represent Kenya at the festival held in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1977. The late journalist Antonio de Figueiredo noted in a newspaper article that FESTAC' 77 was a turning point for African cultural integration and a recognition of the significance of Black arts globally.⁴⁴² Festac's roots can be found in the anti-colonialist principles of the African Society for Culture, which sponsored the first and second congresses of black artists and writers in Paris and Rome, respectively, in 1956 and 1959.

⁴⁴¹ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, ii.

⁴⁴² Antonio de Figueiredo, "The Power Behind Black Culture," in Chimurenga, *Festac'77* (South Africa: AfterAll Books, 2019).

Festac's influence on arguments concerning African identity, notably whether Arab countries could participate in the festival—an issue that grew problematic and drove countries such as Guinea to withdraw their support—may have influenced Ngugi and Mugo's framing of the play's opening scenes. As Figueiredo observed, Festac predicated Afro-Arab unity on a geographical criterion, excluding Arab countries east of Suez. However, delegations from black groups in the U.S., Brazil, the West Indies, Canada, the U.K., and even the supposedly Afro-aborigines of Australia were welcome. What is important here for Ngugi and Mugo, and for our analysis, is the conceptualization of Black people as interconnected despite their geographical location. We will demonstrate how this interconnectedness shapes Ngugi and Mugo's sense of history. Ngugi and Mugo saw Festac, its successors, and other cultural movements, such as Afro-centrism and negritude, as “cultural and intellectual manifestations of the quest for wholeness.”⁴⁴³ The quest for wholeness is predicated on the idea that the legacy of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and neo-colonialism “attacks and completely distorts a people's relationship to their natural, bodily, economic, political, and cultural base,” and with the base gone, the African's subjectivity becomes fragmented.⁴⁴⁴ Ngugi sees African struggles as a quest for wholeness, and for his part (and Mugo's), “creative imagination is one of the greatest of remembering practices.”⁴⁴⁵ In other words, imaginative arts provide platforms for suturing fragmented history.

Ngugi and Mugo's strategy was to discount colonial archival evidence and focus on select African writings, and Kimathi's lived experience before the war. Thus, they traveled to Kimathi's home in Nyeri to interview people who may have known Kimathi or worked with him. Their aim

⁴⁴³ Ngugi, *Something Torn and New*, 39.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 39.

was to create an alternative picture that engraves Kimathi as a hero of the Kenyan revolution and a much-needed figure to arouse Kenyans to fulfill the aims of the Mau Mau Revolution. To Ngugi and Mugo, Mau Mau's history as a "cultural, political, and economic expression of the aspirations of the African peasant masses" that was yet to be written, and *The Trial* offered opportunities for placing the movement in its "revolutionary context."⁴⁴⁶ While Ngugi and Mugo do not suggest that the hero's life cannot emerge from the archive, they privilege creative imagination in portraying Kimathi's life. As they note, "we agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct our history imaginatively, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants' and workers' struggle before and after constitutional independence."⁴⁴⁷ In other words, they do not endeavor to reproduce the actual trial in Nyeri but rather to reimagine a kind of trial befitting a true revolutionary. The imagined trial allows them to make political arguments aligned with their ideological standpoints.

Ngugi and Mugo rewrite Watene's Dedan Kimathi. Instead of setting their play in the forest, where Watene locates Kimathi and displaying his weaknesses, they use the court, a space they portray as an arena of domination and exploitation of Blacks. The single episode set in the forest is calculated to humanize Kimathi. It depicts him as a kind and generous leader ready to give people second chances but firm with them if they continue to violate the oath. This portrayal of Kimathi is Ngugi and Mugo's attempt to correct Watene's casting of Kimathi as a dictator and murderous leader. The court is central to Ngugi and Mugo's project as they conceive it as the symbol of imperial justice that is skewed towards the oppressor. The power structure of the court allows the theatre practitioners to craft a performance that explores the Black man's subjugation over the

⁴⁴⁶ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 30.

⁴⁴⁷ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, ii.

centuries. Ngugi and Mugo connect Kimathi's struggle to other significant violent events that have shaped the history of Black people:

Sad music saturates the background as the enactment of the Black Man's History (sic) takes place on the stage. The phases recapitulated flow into one another without break or interruption. Phase I: An exchange between a rich-looking black chief and a white hungry-looking slave trader. Several strong black men and a few women are given away for a long, posh piece of cloth and a heap of trinkets. Phase II: A chain of exhausted slaves, roped onto one another, drag themselves through the auditorium, carrying heavy burdens, ending up on the stage. They row a boat across the stage, under heavy whipping. Phase III: A labor force of blacks, toiling on a plantation under the supervision of a cruel, ruthless fellow black overseer. A white master comes around and inspects the work.⁴⁴⁸

They display these scenes of subjection on stage. First, they show slavery, emphasizing the nature of the transactions between unscrupulous white and black traders and their victims. It is fundamental for Ngugi and Mugo to underscore that slavery is the engine that drives capitalism in the West.

Ngugi and Mugo then bring the scenes closer to East Africa as they display the Indian Ocean slavery in action. Slaves are used as porters and work in deplorable conditions. Then, the scenes shift into colonial times, depicting black people in plantations under cruel supervision from black and white overseers.⁴⁴⁹ Finally, they portray songs of resistance that proclaim how slavery, colonialism, and apartheid have devalued black lives as they kill people at whim.⁴⁵⁰ They lament the objectification of the African self but, at the same time, show that Africans have always protested oppression.

Ngugi and Mugo's use of songs is strategic. It allows them to put black bodies on stage to create an affinity with the audience. Historical injustices going back centuries are complex to stage for Nairobi's 1970s audience. However, the use of songs allows sonority to embodied memory. The songs emphasize the loss of land and freedom and the subjugation of Africans through violence as

⁴⁴⁸ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 5.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

fundamental aspects of Africa's history. For Ngugi and Mugo, "the past, future and present flow into one another"⁴⁵¹ as they all portray "historical degradation" in which "slavery, colonization, and apartheid are supposed to have plunged the African subject not only into humiliation, debasement, and nameless suffering but also into a zone of non-being and social death characterized by the denial of dignity, heavy psychic damage, and the torment of exile."⁴⁵² The songs suggest that slavery, colonialism, and apartheid are at the core of Africa's desire to know themselves, reclaim sovereignty, and find their place in the world. They also underscore that restoring African land, freedom, and a sense of self cannot occur through peaceful means but rather through the barrel of a gun. As LEADER proclaims to the crowd, "rally round the gun!"⁴⁵³ Ngugi and Mugo's preference for a violent revolution communicates their anxiety with the constitutional independence Kenya gained, which benefited the homeguards and British loyalists more than the peasants and Mau Mau fighters. In *Homecoming*, Ngugi sees a justification for the violence that attempts to change "an intolerable, unjust social order."⁴⁵⁴ He sees this violence as purifying.⁴⁵⁵

To show the legitimacy of revolutionary violence, Ngugi and Mugo depict police brutality during the state of emergency.

WAITINA: [*addressing two soldiers stationed at the opposite end of the stage*] Askari, cover the streets well and shoot down at the bloody terrorists."⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵¹ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 2.

⁴⁵² Mbembe, *African Modes of Self-Writing*, 242.

⁴⁵³ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 5.

⁴⁵⁴ Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 29.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 6.

The police round up those they have not shot and march them to screening grounds, where black hooded collaborators determine their degree of commitment to Mau Mau.⁴⁵⁷ The screening was categorized into three levels based on color gradation, ranging from white as clean, black as notorious, and gray occupying the liminal space between clean and dark and thus designated those who could be rehabilitated to achieve the whiteness label. Those categorized as “white” were not considered a security threat and were let go or sent to a Gikuyu reserve. Here Ngugi and Mugo’s source material is “Operation Anvil,” which the British launched in April 1954 to cut down Mau Mau support in the capital city. Screening relied on crude bodily assumptions, such as an informant (*gikunia*) spotting a Mau Mau supporter or adherent based on how a person appeared. The process was flawed because the informers used it to settle scores with their enemies or solicit bribes. Many Gikuyu were detained without trial based on the *gikunia*’s word.⁴⁵⁸ Operation Anvil was a process of subjugating the Gikuyu, showing them that the colonial government had absolute power to decide who lived and who died. In *The Trial*, Ngugi and Mugo rewrite the screening exercises to show how Africans coordinated their efforts to evade arrest and detention.

Rewriting the History of Black Female Body in Mau Mau

While in Watene’s *Dedan Kimathi*, women appear as docile bodies with no agency, doomed to serve abusive men like Kimathi, in Ngugi’s and Mugo’s *The Trial*, women occupy fundamental roles that not only shape the play’s plot but also call into question the scholarly silence about women’s contribution during the Mau Mau. Indeed, *The Trial* is bent on rewriting Watene’s portrayal of women as powerless. For instance, Watene’s play casts two female characters, Lucia and Wahu, who are not married to Kimathi but are at his disposal. He dominates their lives and uses their bodies as

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ *History of the Hanged*, 252.

he wishes. At one point, Kimathi treats Wahu as a lover, a vessel for giving birth to more soldiers,⁴⁵⁹ and at another point, as a soldier who must follow orders regardless of their merits.⁴⁶⁰ When Kimathi first becomes suspicious of Nyati's wish to surrender, he orders Wahu to become Nyati's woman to spy for him.

KIMATHI: You are to be his woman.

WAHU: But I am your woman, Marshal.

KIMATHI: From today, you cease to be my woman. From today, you're my soldier, with the prime duty of keeping an eye on Nyati.

WAHU: And to sleep with him?

KIMATHI: Yes, and sleep with him.

WAHU: But I must have the privilege of sleeping with whom I please.

KIMATHI: I order you to be his woman.⁴⁶¹

Watene's Kimathi sees women as tools to manipulate and use to achieve his ends. He uses his self-instituted military codes to subjugate Wahu. Ultimately, it is Lucia, the woman he mistreats at the beginning of the play and sends to inquire about his mother's well-being, who betrays him to the British. Although Wahu saw through Lucia's scheme and warned Kimathi, the Field Marshal seldom took counsel from a woman, and this constituted the tragic flaw that cost him freedom.

In *The Trial*, women's dignity is restored. Ngugi and Mugo portray two generations of women, a WOMAN, and a GIRL. The woman is the girl's mentor instilling in her the revolutionary ethos that will free workers and peasants. Ngugi's and Mugo's description of the WOMAN depicts her as an exemplar. Physically, she is about thirty to forty years of age, has a mature but youthful face (meaning good-looking), peasant clothes connecting her to the popular struggle, is energetic, and walks with great care straight into the mouth of a gun.⁴⁶² She is wise and perceptive, her body

⁴⁵⁹ Watene, *Dedan Kimathi*, 25.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶² Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 8.

and mind are fully alert, and she is fearless and determined.⁴⁶³ Above all, she is a mother.⁴⁶⁴ The description of WOMAN—a character without a proper name signals Ngugi and Mugo’s corrective measure to foreground women in the anti-colonial struggle. Previous literary and scholarly works on Mau Mau downplayed women’s active participation in the movement, often relegating them to Gikuyu reserves, where if they contributed at all, it was to gather food for the real fighters in the forest.⁴⁶⁵ While Watene incorporates women soldiers only to show how Kimathi’s leadership denigrated these women, exploiting their bodies for the benefit of men, Ngugi’s and Mugo’s WOMAN plays a central role in *The Trial*, as she determines the play’s architectonics, moving the plot forward, and foregrounding the gun as the symbol of resistance. The WOMAN’s role is to deliver a gun to Kimathi in jail, and the play’s action is organized around this goal.

At the beginning of the play, as the police round up peasants to take them into screening and detention centers, WOMAN unknowingly walks straight into the mouth of the gun.⁴⁶⁶ Johnnie, a European officer, asks for the woman’s passbook, but the woman does not have one. The officer scrutinizes her as one would a commodity. Ngugi and Mugo describe the encounter as follows: The officer summons the woman, but she does not move. Instead, the officer walks around her. “He looks her up and down. With the tip of his gun, he attempts to lift her skirt as if to see her legs. She brushes it aside disapprovingly, with dignity, and moves a step back. He stops moving and nods his head as if she has found favor in his eyes. Now a lascivious smile spreads over his face.” The officer

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ See Muthoni Likimani’s *Passbook Number F47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

⁴⁶⁶ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 8.

remarks, “not bad. Nice legs, eh? Nice pretty face, eh?” The officer appraises her again, “nodding his head lasciviously.” He remarks, “women are their own passbooks, eh?”⁴⁶⁷

If WOMAN symbolizes land, then the officer’s interest in undressing her is symptomatic of the desire to penetrate Kenya. Here, Ngugi and Mugo’s portrayal of the woman borrows a leaf from Fanon’s discussion of the Algerian woman. Fanon argues that colonial power saw the Algerian woman as an exotic erotic object and a threat. His description of European imagining of the Algerian woman as an exotic object anticipates Ngugi and Mugo’s rendering of the WOMAN: “A strand of hair, a bit of forehead, a segment of an ‘overwhelmingly beautiful face’ glimpsed in a streetcar or on a train.”⁴⁶⁸ Here the European has no way of seeing the woman in her nakedness, and he desires to do so. While the veil plays a unique role in Algeria as it functioned as the object of desire, control, fear, and fetish, thus becoming fundamental to the European pathology of control in Algeria—Fanon writes, “unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure”⁴⁶⁹—Ngugi and Mugo’s WOMAN occupies a similar place in erotic imagination dependent on her beauty and the officer’s imagination of what lay beneath the woman’s skirts. She, too, wears a veil, but one that allows her to shift or transform her appearance into a woman or man, depending on the revolutionary role she must play.

Ngugi’s and Mugo’s WOMAN poses a threat to the colonizer because he does not have access to her. The woman demands dignity but also flirts with the officer while in disguise. When faced with danger, especially when the officer is about to discover the gun she is concealing in her basket, the woman undresses herself to flirt with the officer. The woman’s strategy unfolds as

⁴⁶⁷ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 9.

⁴⁶⁸ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 43.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

follows: She teases the officer to distract him [“Are you frightened? A white Bwana frightened by a woman’s skirt? A woman’s ‘gardening’ and ‘market’ basket”].⁴⁷⁰ She then appeals to the White officer’s sense of superiority. (“Imagine, I would never have believed it. A Whiteman. A soldier. Afraid of black woman.”)⁴⁷¹ She finally pretends to submit and supplicates before the white officer. This final act impresses the officer, and he stops ransacking the woman’s basket and trying to eat the loaf that conceals a gun.

As the woman plunges deep into the anti-colonial struggle, she transgresses the gender-specific roles common in her society. In Fanon’s language, “the woman penetrates into the flesh of the Revolution,”⁴⁷² a psychoanalytic language that shows how the woman no longer sees her identity as a peasant and her clothes as symbols of weaknesses but as signs of power. By agreeing to wear man’s clothing and disguise herself as a man, selling fruits outside the court, the woman suggests that she enjoys a certain agency in how she wants to contribute to the struggle that is often dominated by men. Ngugi’s and Mugo’s WOMAN is what Fanon calls “woman-arsenal” to refer to the woman’s role as a soldier who delivers weapons where they are needed. Ngugi’s and Mugo’s WOMAN relates to Fanon’s Algerian woman. She:

carries revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her good looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of the patrols.⁴⁷³

Ngugi’s and Mugo’s WOMAN also embraces her femininity as a passport to enter places prohibited to men but subverts this femininity to conceal her identity before she delivers a gun to Kimathi.

⁴⁷⁰ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 10.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 54.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 58.

Thus, *The Trial* reinvents the Kenyan woman as a revolutionary and retrieves her femininity as a symbol of anti-colonial struggle.

The Invention of Kimathi's Indestructible body

Kimathi is an inscrutable and dominant figure in Kenya's heroic myths of nation-building. In early post-independent Kenya, some scholars considered Mau Mau as "a nationalistic protest legitimately executed."⁴⁷⁴ However, most people in East Africa, particularly those outside the Mau Mau strongholds of Mount Kenya, "had reservations about the moral stature of the insurrection all along."⁴⁷⁵ Mazrui attributes this ambiguous attitude to (1) the "too official" history of Mau Mau in popular archives generated by the colonial government and (2) the means Mau Mau employed in the struggle pitting the Kikuyu against themselves. However, we suggest that what complicates the place of Mau Mau in Kenya and the conceptualization of Kimathi as a revolutionary hero is the complexity of the idea of the nation as a basis for making sense of the Mau Mau. Ngugi and Mugo, aware of the complexity of the notion of nationalism in post-independent Kenya, took up the figure of Kimathi and imbued it with an indestructible body, elevating him to national immortality, and in the process of doing so, they espoused their idea of nationalism and provided a mode of veridiction for determining true national heroes.⁴⁷⁶ In other words, they offered a rubric, anchored in the aphorism "Seeker of Truth and Justice," a phrase we have borrowed from Ngugi's novel, *Matigari*

⁴⁷⁴ Mazrui, *On Heroes and Uhuru-Worship*, 23.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Veridiction, derived from the Latin "veridico", means "to tell the truth." We use a "mode of veridiction" to refer to a method or mechanism that defines how truth is validated, told, accepted, or understood in a particular discourse or context.

(1987).⁴⁷⁷ Matigari (the adjective) is “the patriot who survived the bullets. The patriot who survived the liberation war, and their political offspring.”⁴⁷⁸ In short, he is one with an indestructible body.

While Ngugi and Mugo are neither interested in creating the real Kimathi—the one the colonial government executed in 1957 and buried in an unmarked grave—nor the real trial that condemned him, Kimathi’s sham trial and absent body allow them to invent a Kimathi embodying the figure of The Seeker and a trial that serves as a mode of veridiction to determine not only the being of the Seeker but also rekindle the fight for liberation and freedom. I focus on Kimathi’s four trials that take place in his cell.

During the first trial, the dramatists constitute Kimathi as the Seeker, who must tell the truth he owns and do so at the risk of losing his life. Kimathi is not merely a defendant but a man on a quest, challenged to comprehend and articulate the essence of life and death under the dominion of capitalism and neo-colonial perspectives. The trial unfolds as a linguistic exchange between Kimathi and the colonial officer, Henderson, who bears dual roles: as the presiding magistrate and the prosecuting attorney. Henderson’s mission is seemingly simple but profoundly challenging: Persuade Kimathi to accept a plea bargain—a confession, repentance, and admission of guilt. Henderson presents an appealing case to Kimathi, promising him that accepting the plea bargain will spare his life, a life which otherwise seems destined for the hangman’s noose. Operating under the presumption of Kimathi’s rationality, Henderson believes he can convince Kimathi to strike a deal.

Henderson employs various rhetorical strategies in an attempt to win over Kimathi. One such approach is to assert that they are both “conscripts of western civilization,”⁴⁷⁹ and that Kimathi

⁴⁷⁷ Ngugi’s Seeker of Truth and Justice is akin to parrhesiast—one who tells the truth. Parrēsia—the fact of telling the truth and is distinguished from “untruthfulness and flattery.” (See Foucault’s *The Government of the Self and Others*, 51.)

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁷⁹ I use Talal Asad’s phrase in this context to underscore how Henderson has internalized Asad’s argument that the idea of Western civilization acts as a conscription, or compulsory enlistment, which forces non-Western societies to accept

should employ rational thinking and opt for life. Another strategy involves appealing to Kimathi's nostalgia, conjuring vivid memories of Kimathi's childhood landscape. A more personal approach involves Henderson drawing parallels between Kimathi's impending fate and the trials endured by Henderson's own ancestors in Scotland. However, throughout these exchanges, Kimathi manages to maintain an equilibrium, countering each strategy with his unwavering truth. He emphasizes the asymmetrical relationships that underscores the encounter between his people and Henderson's, highlighting the subjugation of black people. Kimathi's role as the Seeker mandates that he unveil the truth. In this context, the truth is to unmask Henderson, revealing his position atop a colonial system that oppresses black people. Kimathi advocates for a total revolution to dismantle this system. Such truth, by its nature, invites a death penalty, solidifying Kimathi's role as the Seeker. Ultimately, Kimathi triumphs by prioritizing his people's collective existence over his individual need for self-preservation. This selfless act elevates him to the status envisioned by Ngugi and Mugo – the Seeker of Truth and Justice. His victory resides not in escaping death, but in illuminating the path towards liberation.

During the second trial, Ngugi and Mugo refashion Kimathi as the Seeker, who must embody truth, publicly practice it, and enact it in his conduct. Kimathi's challenge in this trial is to stay true to the truth he proclaims even when the truth demands the death of his blood brother to preserve the movement. Ngugi's and Mugo's Kimathi—unlike Watene's Kimathi, portrayed as inconsistent in his conduct and as resorting to lies and conniving to avoid the charge of violating the Mau Mau oath—dramatizes the truth with his body and sets a good example to his soldiers. In Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, Kimathi killed those he suspected of betraying the cause without a hearing. In *The Trial*, Kimathi is a merciful leader, willing to give those who betray the cause a chance to

and conform to Western norms, values, and ways of life. These societies are made to be 'conscripts' in the project of Western civilization, often through means like colonialism, globalization, or neoliberal policies.

defend themselves. Such is the case of his brother Wambaria, who went to negotiate with the British. They are given a second chance to redeem themselves. However, when they defect, he sanctions their death.⁴⁸⁰ When Henderson challenges Kimathi's morality, accusing him of killing his rivals, Kimathi argues that he had to defend the cause at all costs. "I have only sought to protect the struggle from betrayal, opportunism, and regional chauvinism."⁴⁸¹ Thus, Ngugi and Mugo recreate Kimathi to fit the role of a hero and leader of his people.

The Seeker must speak the truth about the true meaning of "preservation of life." Kimathi does not consider living under "neo-slavery"⁴⁸²—a life that exploits workers—any different from being in chains. He laments the imposition of colonial culture on his people's ways of life—the evidence of which is embodied in the different dances and tunes people sing—and wonders whether the transformed landscape—"the strange land"⁴⁸³—can sustain their existence. The Seeker longs for the courage and strength of his generation:

How long shall we
Gichamu Karuraini youth
Of Iregi Generation
Allow our people to continue
Slaves of hunger, disease, sorrow
In our own lands
While foreigners eat
And snore in bed with fullness?⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 70.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 36.

⁴⁸³ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 38.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 38.

Ngugi and Mugo use the Psalmist's lamentation over the destroyed Jerusalem to ground the Seeker as a member of the exiled House of Mumbi, which is a stranger in her own land.⁴⁸⁵ In the Biblical account of Psalm 137, the Psalmist ends the lamentation with a cry for justice against those responsible for Jerusalem's destruction. For the Seeker, these communities are represented by the "Banker's delegation—or a Trade-cum businessman."⁴⁸⁶ An often-overlooked stanza in the Psalmist's lamentation in the modern usage of the psalm is the singer's cry about the dishonor of his way of life brought about by an arrogant empire and its stooges.⁴⁸⁷ Ngugi and Mugo frame the disputations between Kimathi and the Banker's delegation to capture the essence of this cry for justice and restoration of honor. The delegation sees 'capital' as the most significant engine of progress and freedom and implores Kimathi to "Confess. Repent. Plead guilty"⁴⁸⁸ to prevent capital flight from the country owing to the Mau Mau war. The delegation frames independence in terms of one's own flag, religion, and Black leaders at the top of the state. However, to Kimathi, genuine independence must get rid of the master-servant relationship, a feat that can only be instituted by the workers and peasants:

The oppressed of the land...all those whose labor power has transformed this land. For it is not true that it was your money that built this country. It was our sweat. It was our hands. Where do our people come in your partnership for progress?⁴⁸⁹

At the core of Kimathi's second trial is Ngugi and Mugo's framing of the Seeker as one who understands the theory of the "state and revolution" and seeks to dismantle the very existence of the

⁴⁸⁵ Ngugi and Mugo's source is Psalm 137, in which a community held captive in Babylon (i.e., "by the rivers of Babylon") expresses its yearning for Jerusalem, from which its members had been deported after the Babylonians besieged it in 597 BCE and subsequently destroyed in 587 BCE.

⁴⁸⁶ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 38.

⁴⁸⁷ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Fifth Edition, 894.

⁴⁸⁸ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 40.

⁴⁸⁹ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 40.

state. Kimathi (the Seeker) embodies Lenin's arguments that the state "is not a neutral body standing above society that may be used by any group or class in society for its own purposes; instead, it is historically and structurally designed to defend the ruling class," and that "the oppressed class must overthrow this state institution and the ruling class in whose interest it operates, and be prepared to use any means necessary, including violence and force, to do so."⁴⁹⁰ The Seeker must tell the Bankers' delegation the truth that genuine independence and freedom are only possible when the workers overthrow the capitalist state. This truth poses a risk to Kimathi, for the Bankers' delegation serves as tempters and witnesses against him in a case where death is the only penalty.

Ngugi and Mugo create the Seeker as the figure who guides his people to understand genuine freedom. He speaks the truth about the 'false prophets' of the people's liberty. At the beginning of Kimathi's third trial, the dramatists describe a Kimathi in physical pain and mentally exhausted. He is reflecting on the treachery of the capitalist class—drinkers of darkness and blood—and reasons that his people will see through this class's perfidies. However, fear grips him upon realizing that his people may actually fall victim to the treachery. He wonders whether this is reason enough for him to preserve his life to educate and guide the masses to complete the revolution. This view is shared by WOMAN, who, in a conversation with GIRL and BOY, remarks that "Kimathi is a genius in this struggle. It is, therefore, important to rescue him even at the cost of a few lives. The struggle must continue."⁴⁹¹ However, while WOMAN is interested in saving Kimathi, the Field Marshal, who will lead his people to victory on the battlefield, Kimathi, the Seeker, considers preserving his life if only to ensure that the people understand what genuine victory looks like. In other words, he fears that people might fall for a victory that maintains the status quo akin to what many African countries

⁴⁹⁰ Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 11.

⁴⁹¹ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 61.

attained in their quests for self-determination. Kimathi's fear is also about "how to discern our enemies," especially those who come in the name of the people "in black clothes, with sweet tongues," or what he refers to as "checkbook revolutionaries!"⁴⁹²

In the third trial, the dramatists constitute Kimathi as the Seeker who must speak the truth about the true meaning of "preservation of life." A delegation of bankers and traders implores Kimathi to confess, repent, and plead guilty to prevent capital flight from the colony, which will affect many lives. Kimathi's truth here is that any life defined by a master-servant relationship is not worth preserving. Kimathi's challenge is that the treachery of the capitalist class—drinkers of darkness and blood—might trick his people through this class's perfidies. Fear grips him upon realizing that his people may actually fall victim to the treachery. He wonders whether this is reason enough for him to preserve his life to educate and guide the masses to complete the revolution. Kimathi's tempters are the Business Executive, Politician, and Priest. Although this class shout the movement's slogan that "Black is beautiful" and "Black power," their neo-colonial views about freedom enrage Kimathi, who drives the trio out of his cell. For the Business Executive, people have already won the war as to him, victory constitutes the lifting of the color bar to allow Black people access to the economy. For the politician, freedom means the ability for Africans to obtain political positions. The priest, on his part, glories in their freedom to Africanize the Church. Kimathi sees their ideas of freedom as products of chained minds and wonders whether there is a revolution that can "*unchain these minds!*"⁴⁹³

Ngugi and Mugo create the figure of Kimathi as the Seeker who will speak the truth to these minds and, through his sacrifice, bring a revolution to unchain their minds. The Seeker's truth will

⁴⁹² Ibid., 50.

⁴⁹³ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 47.

underscore the fact that the people have not won the victory. To him, victory means dismantling the colonial capitalist state as opposed to merely co-opting Africans into it (not that they were ever outside the state; they are part and parcel of it but as exploited workers) in the hope that they can wield its machinery to better their lives. For the Seeker, victory is when the people “seize back the right and the ability to make *themselves* new men and women in *their* own land.”⁴⁹⁴ In this iteration, victory in a revolution cannot be the act of incorporating Africans into public places, businesses, churches, and the White Highlands. This merely amounts to “equal rights” discourse, which is a signal of inequality. Genuine victory must “break up the *exploitative* capitalist state.”⁴⁹⁵ For Ngugi and Mugo, the Seeker can unchain the peoples’ minds to enable them to reconstitute as “new men and women” in a new society.

Finally, the Seeker must be willing to give up his body and his life for his people. In Kimathi’s fourth and last trial, Henderson tortures him after his rhetoric fails to persuade Kimathi to betray the Mau Mau cause to preserve his life. Henderson’s torture is not a substitute for Kimathi’s death but rather a technology calculated to elicit a confession and inflict pain. Jailing Kimathi in itself was not unique. After all, the state of emergency had transformed the lives of Africans into inmates in open prisons. What distinguishes Kimathi’s prison from his comrades is the extreme ‘constraints and deprivations’ his body was caught up in. He was accused of a crime that attracted the death penalty and was aware of the colonial governments’ practice of sanctioning death for Mau Mau soldiers. His fate was cast in stone unless perhaps he confessed. However, since Ngugi and Mugo cast him as the Seeker, betraying the movement was out of question. This certainty enables him to reconcile himself to the possibility of death. The execution of Mau Mau soldiers was torture in so far

⁴⁹⁴ Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial*, 45. (The emphasis is ours).

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

as these soldiers were tortured and suffered extreme pain calculated to elicit a confession and lead up to the day of execution. Few condemned men were spared the hangman's rope.

Henderson and his African stooges torture Kimathi to compel him to confess. Confession was much desired by the colonial juridical system, and torture was calculated to inflict pain to compel the prisoner to plead guilty. Henderson brags to Kimathi that his fellow generals broke (we assume under torture) and that he, too, will break. "This practice of torture," as Foucault observes in *Discipline and Punish*, was bound together with "pain, confrontation, and truth,"⁴⁹⁶ and in Kimathi's case, they were etched on his body. Since Henderson is not interested in the Seeker's truth about imperialism, he tortures him to compel a guilty plea and information about the whereabouts of Stanley Mathenge, one of the remaining Generals. Here Ngugi and Mugo take issue with the British colonial juridical system that embedded torture in its practice. During the emergency, the bodies of the condemned soldiers became the property of the colonial government, and those executed were buried in unmarked graves without their traditional funeral rites. This practice was perhaps the most horrible death sentence any African could receive. Kimathi (the Seeker) submitted to this death knowingly to protect the Mau Mau cause.

Scholars of Ngugi and Mugo's play often read Kimathi's four trials as a paradigm of the sacrifice of a god. For instance, Michael Etherton sees these trials as epitomizing the Christian Eucharist.⁴⁹⁷ While this reading sheds light on Ngugi and Mugo's constitution of Kimathi as a savior, in our analysis, as we hope we have demonstrated that the dramatists are also interested in how aesthetics of embodiment, particularly how Kimathi's body is seized by meaning. As a virtuous body, Kimathi is constituted as the Seeker, a figure that is akin to the Ancient Greek's *parrehsia*st—

⁴⁹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 41.

⁴⁹⁷ Etherton, *Development of Drama in Africa*, 153.

one who has parrhesia, which is the act of speaking the truth. The Seeker is a fundamental figure in Ngugi and Mugo's attempts to rewrite the history of nationalism and heroism in Kenya.

If Ngugi and Mugo's depiction of the subjugation of the Black people in several scenes of the play appear to rest on what Achille Mbembe refers to as "Afro-radical" and "nativist" scholarship that employs a Marxist standpoint to read Africa's subjugation, dispossession, and historical degradation through slavery, colonization, and apartheid,⁴⁹⁸ Kimathi's four trials, which constitute him as the Seeker trouble such a reading as they exhibit a strong sense of self-reflexivity and an instrumental conception of knowledge that goes beyond a partisan struggle to which a moral significance is appended.⁴⁹⁹ Even when it appears that the dramatists' portrayal of the Black man's domination coalesces the history of Africa into a series of subjugations within the Fanonian narrative of liberation, Ngugi and Mugo rescues their black subjects by showing how they constitute themselves as revolutionaries. In this iteration, the play's depiction of Black Man's history does not appear to rest entirely on the narrative of victimization. The depiction of spaces of domination (e.g., the court and the prison) are emphasized to show how Black people transform these landscapes of oppression into avenues of resistance, leading to the emergence of new political subjects.

Conclusion: Fighting for the Soul and Mind of the Mau Mau

Ngugi and Mugo's challenge in *The Trial* is how to present Mau Mau as a national movement that serves as Kenya's national revolutionary epic. The attempt to recreate what many scholars have articulated as a regional movement into a national epic sheds light on how the dramatists grapple with the idea of nationalism and nation-building in post-independent Kenya. Ernest Renan, writing

⁴⁹⁸ Mbembe, *African Modes of Self-Writing*, 241-242.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

at the end of the nineteenth century, argued that “a nation is a body and soul at the same time.”⁵⁰⁰ He identified two principles that constitute the soul of a nation, that is, the past and the present.⁵⁰¹ The past is a gateway for a shared bank of memories, while the present captures a people’s desire to co-exist and continue to build on their past. In this iteration, notions, such as “race, language, interests, religious affinity, geography, and military necessities” do not on their own constitute a nation. Instead, a nation emerges from a lengthy history of sacrifices, struggles, and devotions. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* embodies Renan’s argument that a key social capital on which a nation stands is the heroic past of “great men and glory.”⁵⁰² That is to say, a people’s shared historical accomplishments and desire to carry them forward into the present are fundamentally necessary as the shared suffering “unites more than does joy.”⁵⁰³ The practice of putting Dedan Kimathi on stage—to celebrate, vilify, question, and more importantly, mourn him is “worth more to national memory than triumphs because they impose duties and require a common effort.”⁵⁰⁴ We see Ngugi’s and Mugo’s project as an attempt to reaffirm that the sacrifices revolutionaries are willing to make constitute the enormous unity that is the Kenyan nation. Indeed, Kimathi’s trials in his cell and the events in the court and the streets demonstrate that Kenya’s existence, to use Renan’s language, is a daily referendum. For Ngugi and Mugo, if a common past makes up a nation, then the history of Mau Mau is a great candidate for a shared glorious past that Kenya can continue to build on. However, owing to Mau Mau’s contentious history, a great deal of selection is needed if the

⁵⁰⁰ Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, in Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992. (Translated by Ethan Rundell), 9.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

Revolution is to serve as a basis for building the Kenyan nation. In Renan's parlance, Ngugi and Mugo must be willing to get Kenya's history wrong, and this does not entail fabricating the evidence of what Mau Mau stood for but rather being selective on what should be remembered.

If the question that troubled the Kenya of 1960s and 1970s was how to identify a hero, Ngugi and Mugo's response is unequivocal that Mau Mau and Dedan Kimathi (as the Seeker) are the criteria for considering Kenya's heroes. However, other scholars contend that "Mau Mau is by no means the only narrative through which Kenya can come to terms with its past and thus with itself."⁵⁰⁵ For instance, African historian Bethwell Ogot sees a challenge in Ngugi's and Mugo's use of participation in Mau Mau as the sole criterion for choosing Kenya's heroes. He does not see the merits of privileging the Mau Mau since Kenya has had many voices in the anti-colonial movement, and there were many nationalisms. To him, Mau Mau's prominence in national liberation discourses has consigned these other voices to social death.⁵⁰⁶ Ngugi and Mugo are aware of these critiques, and they not only provide a rebuttal in the play's preface but incorporate plot lines that present Kimathi and Mau Mau as a national movement. Ngugi and Mugo's contention is with the guild historians who insist on a Kimathi and a Mau Mau history that must emerge from the archive. For their part, the dramatists see creative imagination as a means of creating a usable past for refashioning new futures. It is in this endeavor that they constitute the figure of Kimathi as a national hero, elevating him to "national immortality."

Therefore, Kimathi's role in Mau Mau—his life, capture, trial, execution, secret burial, and missing body—provides an opportunity to examine the powers and poetics of the production of history and the nature of knowledge in postcolonial Kenya. The contest over the meaning of Mau Mau and Kimathi's place in it has always been about the constitution of memory and control of

⁵⁰⁵ Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale (ed.), *On Mau Mau and Nationalism* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 6.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

history. Ngugi and Mugo's play found ways of making the absent dead body speak in ways a living body would never have been permitted to. Theater's amplification of Kimathi has reopened a public debate over Kenya's past futures. That the dramatists succeed in arousing the Kenyan public to grasp Kimathi's second death under the post-independence government is a testament to theater's power to complete the Mau Mau revolution. *The Trial* demonstrates that the process of constituting knowledge and producing history is always messy—and perhaps for a good reason: contested knowledge and history might be the people's last defense against historical amnesia as it compels them to congregate—be it in theater, cafes, streets, the media, or in parliament—to demonstrate that Kenya's existence is a daily plebiscite.

CHAPTER 5: The Poetics of True Decolonization

Intersecting Narratives: Africa and the Caribbean

The transatlantic slave trade and colonialism created deep-seated connections between Africa and the Caribbean. In other words, Africa and the Caribbean have faced a shared history of enslavement, colonialism, and exploitation by European powers. This shared history led to various revolutionary events across both regions, seeking liberation and freedom. The revolutionary events and their aftermaths in these regions have often been intertwined through these movements, making a joint study meaningful. Moreover, both Africa and the Caribbean have been deeply affected by globalization, with its mixed effects on their post-revolutionary development. Globalization has posed challenges to these regions regarding economic dependency, cultural infiltration, and political sovereignty, making it essential to study how these regions have navigated these challenges in their post-revolutionary stages.

The idea of an unbreakable body provides a compelling analytical lens that further justifies the comparative study of the aftermath of revolutions in Africa and the Caribbean. The “unbreakable body” symbolizes resilience, endurance, and the ability to rise against oppressive forces - qualities that are integral to the revolutionary ethos of both Africa and the Caribbean. The body offers a shared narrative of resistance and showcases the spirit of survival that binds these regions together, even in the face of adversity. The unbreakable body serves as a common cultural and ideological emblem, which, despite varying geographical and temporal contexts, helps to unite these regions in their shared struggle against colonial and post-colonial challenges. The unbreakable body intertwines the personal with the political, allowing the body to function as a site of historical memory and resistance. In the context of Africa and the Caribbean, the body encapsulates the lived experiences of those who bore the brunt of colonial and neo-colonial oppression and yet, through

their indomitable spirit, forged paths toward liberation and freedom. The sections that follow examines Césaire's representation of the aftermath of Haitian revolution, emphasizing King Christophe's obsession with founding an unbreakable body, and how this quest threatened to break the bodies of Haitians, who in the age of post-emancipation conceived society as the space of freedom and reconstruction.

The Tragedy of King Christophe

If the work of Black artists, as Césaire asserted in his Rome address, is to hasten decolonization and prepare for good decolonization, how can we read *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963, 2015)⁵⁰⁷ to interrogate the constitutive elements of good decolonization and delineate the pillars of bad decolonization? How can we engage the assumptions Césaire made about his *present*, that is to say, the “problem space” in relation to which he reconstructed the pasts that have become the subject of our contemporary scholarship?⁵⁰⁸ In this project, we read decolonization as the problem space defining Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* to discern whether the questions underpinning this play continue to merit responses within the configuration we have come to designate as the present reality we inhabit.

The question of good and bad decolonization manifests itself right at the beginning of the play when the audience is immediately confronted with the visceral contention between Christophe and Pétion for the control of the future of Haiti. The assassination of Dessalines (Toussaint Louverture's successor) leads to Christophe and Pétion's battle for control of Haiti. The Senate

⁵⁰⁷ Aimé Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe: A Play* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015). Césaire made the remarks during the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959.

⁵⁰⁸ David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 8. [See a complete description of the meaning of “problem-space” in the introductory chapter.]

offers Christophe the presidency after stripping most of its powers and bestowing them on itself. However, Christophe perceives a presidency devoid of inherent authority as analogous to a corporeally eviscerated figure, rendered ineffective and bereft of vigor.⁵⁰⁹ He sees the position as a leadership role without its operational potency, akin to a body hollowed out or a lifeless shell, symbolizing the futility of such a position. The mulatto-dominated Senate, under the leadership of Pétion, asserts its commitment to establishing a presidency that shall never devolve into despotism. Nonetheless, Christophe is under the impression that the Senate, in its machinations, harbors a racial prejudice against him because of his black identity, thereby encapsulating the conflict within the paradigm of bioracism. While the historical distinctions between the mulatto and black populations of Haiti do bear relevance in this context, we argue that Césaire's play transcends the binary racial contention within Haitian governance. The play instead channels these complexities through the lens of Christophe's character, prompting a more overarching question: What is Haiti's greatest need?⁵¹⁰

Christophe posits: "The greatest need of this country, of this people who must be protected, must be corrected, must be educated, is...."⁵¹¹ His thought, however, is interrupted by Pétion's interjection: "liberty."⁵¹² Pétion's conception of liberty revolves around the absence of tyranny, a reasoning that aligns with what we describe in subsequent sections as "first liberation" to refer to emancipation of slaves from physical bondage. While acknowledging that liberty is essential, Christophe envisions a deviation from what he characterizes as "easy liberty," which must never be desired. This notion is particularly salient in Haiti, a land of "transplants," where people who have been transplanted from their homes must learn to transcend their existing limitations. Hence,

⁵⁰⁹ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 10.

⁵¹⁰ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 11.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 12.

⁵¹² Ibid.

Christophe believes Haiti should advocate for aspirations beyond mere liberty. This early divergence of views on visions for the future of Haiti delineates the space of contestation between Pétion and Christophe's vision of Haiti and, by extension, their ideas of decolonization.

Hunt Hawkins, writing about Césaire's lesson about decolonization in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, described "good decolonization" as a complete break from the structures of colonization.⁵¹³ This description implies that in Césaire's parlance, "bad decolonization" refers to a situation where, even after gaining political independence from colonial powers, a country continues to be economically, socially, or culturally dominated or influenced by these powers or continues to mimic their structures and systems. This situation could result in continued exploitation, inequality, and lack of true sovereignty. Césaire's dramatic works were particularly concerned about situations where newly independent countries merely replaced foreign oppressors with local ones without meaningful changes to the oppressive systems and structures of the colonial era.⁵¹⁴ We consider this situation, which Achille Mbembe refers to as the "logic of repetition," to describe the tendency for postcolonial societies to continue operating under systems, ideologies, or structures similar to those of the colonial era, a form of bad decolonization. Bad decolonization is, then, a process that fails to bring about meaningful liberation, defined as autonomy, and self-determination for previously colonized peoples.

This chapter reads Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* beyond a simple indexing of instances of good or bad decolonization to flesh out the complexity of the idea of decolonization in the aftermath of a revolution. For Haiti, decolonization was a revolutionary process that involved a fierce, almost instinctual rejection of all forms of subjugation, especially those enforced under the

⁵¹³ Hunt Hawkins, Aimé Césaire's Lessons about Decolonization in *La Tragedie Roi Christophe*." *CLA Journal*, Vol. 30 (2), 1986, pp. 144-153.

⁵¹⁴ See Aimé Césaire's *A Season in the Congo: A Play* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1968); *A Tempest* (Ubu Repertory Theater Productions, 1969).

pretext of race. It was a fight by the Haitians to reclaim all aspects of their existence, ranging from their immediate environment to the broader horizons and greater depths of their lives. Here, the question that lingers and guides our inquiry is whether decolonization in Haiti dismantled systems, establishments, and notions that upheld domination rather than signaling a simple shift of power from the master to the enslaved person. We seek to suggest, through Fanon and Mbembe, that decolonization in Haiti, as depicted in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, is a multifaceted process that unfolds with (1) first abolition (liberation from physical bondage) and (2) a self-abolition (rejection and eradication of the servile part of oneself). In this case, decolonization manifests not as an event (with capital E) but as processes whose philosophical meanings lie in what Mbembe characterizes as “an active will to community.”⁵¹⁵ In other words, decolonization is not just a historical incident or political process, but a profound philosophical act rooted in a collective desire or “active will” towards establishing a shared community. This “will to community,” or the drive to establish a collective identity and solidarity, is, according to Mbembe, a manifestation of the will to life. In other words, it is an expression of a desire to thrive, prosper, and assert one’s existence. The ultimate aim of this drive is to achieve self-determination and create a meaningful legacy or heritage.

The moniker, bad decolonization, finds its meaning in Césaire’s *The Tragedy of King Christophe* due to Christophe’s mangling of the “self-abolition” as a constitutive process of decolonization in a post-emancipated society. While Césaire draws our attention to the limitations of Haiti’s initial emancipation—that liberation from physical bondage and the breaking of the “double” consciousness is insufficient to secure full recognition and establish an egalitarian society—he devotes the majority of scenes to the “second abolition,” which is a more complex stage. Whereas the “first abolition” signifies an immediate negation, an outright rejection of the colonizer’s-imposed identity and objectification, the second abolition goes further. This stage involves not merely the

⁵¹⁵ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 2-3.

abolition of the “Other”—the enslaver’s oppressive presence and influence—but also a self-abolition. Here, self-abolition constitutes purging oneself of any traces of the enslaved identity and overcoming the psychological wounds left by the dehumanizing experience of slavery.

The Tragedy of King Christophe, a play spanning fourteen years, meticulously illustrates the period from Christophe’s rise to power in 1806, his self-proclamation as king, through a consequential civil war, leading to the country’s partition, and ending in his suicide in 1820. The play explores the aftermath of Haiti’s successful liberation from slavery, focusing on Christophe’s descent into tyranny as he attempts to simultaneously unite, safeguard, and ennoble his formerly enslaved subjects. His method involves coercing them into constructing the largest citadel in the western hemisphere, sited atop a mountain with dangerously steep slopes. In Act I, Césaire documents Christophe’s miscalculated attempt to confer immediate dignity upon his people by establishing a monarchy, an endeavor that ultimately fails. Act II explores King Christophe’s subsequent endeavors to stimulate productivity within a highly constrained timeframe. However, his relentless pursuit of these ambitious goals results in escalating cruelty, burgeoning desperation, and spiraling paranoia. Act III recounts the final stage of Christophe’s reign, culminating in his suicide amidst a widespread popular revolt. We read *The Tragedy of King Christophe* to show how Césaire stages the complexities of self-realization in a space where the initial liberation fails to lead people to a state of mastery or autonomy.

Becoming Haiti/Undoing Haiti

Following the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick, Saint-Domingue emerged as a French colony, becoming the most prosperous and bountiful sugar-producing territory in the New World during the 18th century. Its production surpassed that of other French and English Caribbean colonies, excelling in the export of crops such as cotton, coffee, indigo, and cacao. By 1789, sugar exports reached 115 million francs, with total revenues estimated at 150 million francs. Saint-Domingue played a crucial

role in France's economic growth, particularly in port cities associated with the slave and colonial trades.⁵¹⁶ However, the colony's prosperity was built on the extreme brutality of the slave system. Of the half a million people in Saint-Domingue in 1791, nearly 90 percent were enslaved Africans. In August 1791, the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue began a massive uprising under the leadership of a former slave, Toussaint Louverture. Despite facing internal divisions and external threats from the Spanish and British, who sought to take control of this troubled colony, the rebels managed to take control of the island.

Louverture, effectively in control of the island by 1801, attempted to create a semi-autonomous state under French rule where slavery would be abolished. However, he was captured by French forces sent by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 to reestablish control and reinstitute slavery. Following Louverture's capture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, one of his lieutenants, continued the fight for freedom. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines declared Saint-Domingue an independent nation, renaming it Haiti, the original Taino name for the island. Haiti thus became the world's first black-led republic and the second independent nation in the Americas after the United States. Therefore, within the narrative of the Black diaspora, Haiti holds a significant position as the first place where the contemporary concept of decolonization was actualized. Mbembe points out that Haiti not only carries the title of "Africa's eldest daughter" due to its predominantly African-descended population, but it also earned the title of "eldest daughter of decolonization." Haiti was the first to translate the principle of human rights into a universal concept through its decolonization process.

However, what does decolonization mean, considering Haiti was divided when it declared independence under Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1804? Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* shows

⁵¹⁶ Alex Dupuy. *Haiti from Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens: Essays on the Politics and Economics of Underdevelopment, 1804-2013* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

that Haiti's emancipation was flawed and incomplete. As the play unfolds, a French ship in the harbor carrying weapons incites discourse among the Haitian populace concerning the lingering consequences of slavery. Central to these dialogues is the power struggle between Christophe and Pétion for dominion over Haiti. The Black citizenry perceives Christophe as the only credible harbinger of freedom due to his adamant refusal to collude with the French. In contrast, they condemn Pétion for his pursuit of power, which he seeks via an alliance with the French in exchange for reparations. The question posed by the Black community is one of profound irony: why should they, the formerly enslaved, be obligated to pay reparations? As the SECOND CITIZEN satirically asserts: "A Black man [Pétion] offers to pay reparations to those who Blacks so rashly deprived of the privilege of owning Blacks!"⁵¹⁷ These discussions among the citizens foreground one of the play's central problematics—what kind of Haiti should the formerly enslaved aspire to create—and tease out the limitations of the first liberation.

Since neither the Toussaint-led initial liberation of slaves nor the Dessalines' empire automatically led to *a state of mastery* or self-awareness, the liberated slaves lacked the establishment of complete autonomy. Without achieving a profound internal transformation (self-ownership), the act of emancipation, which was primarily a negation (rejection of the enslaving "Other"), resulted in the reduplication of old oppressive structures and dynamics as embodied in Dessalines' despotic rule and, as we will demonstrate, Christophe's tyrannical rule. In both regimes, new forms of servitude emerged, manifesting as internalized oppression—activities of the "Other" being exercised on and against Haitian people, thus, symbolizing the survival of internal servitude despite the abolition of physical slavery. In other words, the slave, though physically freed, continued to perceive themselves through the lens of the former master, resulting in a perpetuation of the master-slave dynamic internally. This dynamic reflects the deep-seated psychological effects of slavery and colonialism and

⁵¹⁷ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 14.

highlights the inherent complexities in the Haitian decolonization process, which extends beyond physical emancipation to involve profound psychological transformations.

Despite achieving political independence and liberation, the “spirit of the plantation” continued to haunt Haiti. Moreover, since the plantation system was predicated on suppressing the enslaved individuals’ subjectivity, reducing them to mere objects in service to their masters, its lingering effects, which include deeply ingrained power structures, social hierarchies, internalized oppression, and the residual psychological damage caused by centuries of dehumanization and exploitation, continue to shape Haiti’s history. Césaire shows how the formerly enslaved people strive to achieve autonomy—becoming fully self-defined individuals free from the internalized notions of inferiority and objectification—and how this process is laden with complexities beyond overthrowing the enslavers.

Haiti was not “undone” when Pétion and Christophe failed to agree on a form of state to establish in Haiti. Right from Toussaint’s days, Saint-Domingue was defined by its racial hierarchy. The class and racial structure in Saint-Domingue were complex, with white French planters at the top owning most large plantations and slaves. The middle class comprised small plantation owners, including white Creoles and freed slaves or *affranchis*, who also owned property and slaves. The lower class comprised slaves, who produced the immense wealth that made Saint-Domingue the “pearl of the Antilles.”⁵¹⁸ The class system allowed free mulattoes and blacks to become property and slave owners, while the racial system marginalized them socially, politically, and economically. The racial hierarchy engendered by slavery produced ideologies of race and the defense of “the color line.”⁵¹⁹ Mulattoes also practiced racism against blacks, contributing to the perpetuation of class relations and

⁵¹⁸ Dupuy. *Haiti from Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens*, 60.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

divisions. Racial stratification in Saint-Domingue intersected with class divisions, creating a horizontal racial division among whites, mulattoes, and blacks. Race and racism were used to maintain white control over power and privilege while also reinforcing the dominance of the *grands blancs* over the *petits blancs*. However, these racial divisions did not erase class distinctions among whites. Mulattoes, who opposed white racism, also despised blacks and supported the slave system, limiting their ability to unite against the racial system until they realized that freeing slaves was essential to achieving their own freedom. Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines failed to chart a path for Haiti beyond racial hierarchy and class divisions. Christophe and Pétion's contestation at the beginning of the play adds to this problematics of race and class. *The Tragedy of King Christophe* glosses over this history not necessarily to underscore the divisions between Christophe and Pétion's camps but to underscore the complexity of attempting to unify Haiti without tackling the fundamental challenge of race and class divisions.

The events in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* begin after the assassination of Dessalines, who was ambushed and killed in Pont-Rouge, near Port-au-Prince, while he was on his way to deal with a rebellion in the south of the country. In Derek Walcott's drama, *Henri Christophe*, both Christophe, and Pétion contrived to have him killed, but could not agree on how to share power.⁵²⁰ Therefore, Césaire's play begins with a power play epitomized by a cockfight, an allegory that reflects and foreshadows the central problematic of the play. The cockfight, a familiar spectacle in Caribbean culture, becomes a metaphorical battleground on which power, dominance, and liberation are played out, mirroring the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave.⁵²¹ The cockerels, trained to fight to the

⁵²⁰ Derek Walcott. *The Haitian Trilogy: Henri Christophe, Drums and Colors, and The Haitian Earth* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002).

⁵²¹ The master-slave dialectic unfolds as a fight to the death for recognition and freedom, where one party, the master, seeks to assert dominance over the other, the slave, who, in turn, seeks recognition as an equal being. This struggle involves a process of mutual recognition, with each party affirming their self-consciousness through the other. This dialectic is mirrored in the cockfight at the beginning of the play.

death, serve as proxies for their masters, the human characters of the drama. The power dynamics of the cockfight reflect the power dynamics between the characters, particularly Christophe and his rivals for power, embodying their struggle for control and dominance in the new Haitian state. However, in a profound deviation from Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Césaire emphasizes the destructive consequences of this struggle for dominance through the symbol of the cockfight. The fight to the death results in the mutual destruction of both parties instead of leading to a resolution and a synthesis. The fight foreshadows the tragic outcome of Christophe's reign.

Becoming King Christophe I

Césaire's nuanced depiction of the fractious power dynamics in Haiti amid the aftermath of the civil war is portrayed through the abortive attempt at Haiti's reunification spearheaded by Christophe. Upon witnessing his nation's physical and societal devastation, Christophe halts his onslaught against Pétion, espousing the prospect of a truce and potential reunification. However, we observe a discourse laden with derogatory disdain within Pétion's camp, dismissively questioning Christophe's suitability to rule Haiti.

PÉTITION: Indeed, Christophe proposes the reunification of the island. It goes without saying that it would be under his authority, his royal munificence deigning, no doubt, to distribute among you and me some paltry rewards, the stipends of low-level sinecures. In short, we would become the subjects of His Most Christophean Majesty!

A REPRESENTATIVE: That's outrageous!

A REPRESENTATIVE: No deals with that tyrant!

A REPRESENTATIVE: That puffed-up pasha!

A REPRESENTATIVE: better Louis XVIII than Christophe!

A REPRESENTATIVE: May Heaven take vengeance upon him!⁵²²

Confronted by this stark display of division, Christophe's anguish echoes the tumultuous narrative of African colonization, wherein intra-population discord is cast as a central element precipitating Africa's disempowerment. In Christophe's speech, "dust" symbolizes disintegration and devastation,

⁵²² Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 30.

while stone symbolizes “creation.” Thus, his determination crystallizes in the resolve that “the human material needs recasting,”⁵²³ a sentiment that grows into the driving impetus that defines the rest of the play. Césaire’s theatrical endeavor in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* can be expansively construed through this idea of recasting humanity, posited as the essential component of “true decolonization.” Christophe wanted to execute a vision of a new trajectory for Haitian history through reshaping black existence. He grappled with the daunting enormity of the task of recasting humanity. Césaire depicts him as a leader ensnared in the labyrinth of unknowing, unable to devise a concrete strategy for recasting humanity. He asks, “But how? I don’t know. We’ll do what we can in our nook of the world. In our little workshop! The smallest country in the universe is immense if the hand is broad and the will does not falter. Forward Much!”⁵²⁴ Christophe’s goal is to found a people and build a civilization. For him, the questions of how to recast humanity and what Haiti needs are intertwined, reflecting his vision for Haiti’s second liberation. If the first liberation was solely focused on the emancipation of slaves from physical bondage, the second liberation marks a “transition from damaged consciousness to autonomous consciousness,”⁵²⁵ inaugurating a process that requires slaves to “expose themselves and abolish the being-outside-of-self that is precisely their double” in the Hegelian sense.⁵²⁶ Mbembe’s reading of Fanon’s theory of decolonization allows us to make sense of Christophe’s quest to inaugurate the second liberation (self-abolition) in Haiti.

⁵²³ Ibid., 31.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 50.

⁵²⁶ Drawing on the Hegelian philosophy of the master-slave dialectic, this externally imposed identity is referred to as the “double.” According to Hegel, the dynamics of recognition between the master and the slave lead to a struggle that forces the slave into a dual consciousness — a consciousness that sees itself not only through its own eyes but also through the objectifying gaze of the master. This dual consciousness signifies a profound self-alienation, a “double” existence where the slave’s self-perception is heavily influenced by the master’s degrading perspective.

In his theory of decolonization, Frantz Fanon articulates a distinct framework that incorporates both *hermeneutics* and *pedagogy*, which, according to Achille Mbembe, is grounded upon a political discourse concerning property and ownership. Mbembe delineates Fanon's viewpoint, suggesting that for Fanon, the battleground of proprietorship is primarily rooted in the idea of self-ownership. These conflicts symbolize endeavors to regain, reclaim, and, if required, forcefully retrieve what is intrinsically ours and rightfully belongs to us.⁵²⁷ If slavery, as Christophe laments,⁵²⁸ dispossessed blacks in Haiti, then "to own oneself is nothing other than a step toward the creation of new forms of life that could genuinely be characterized as fully human."⁵²⁹ Achille Mbembe's reading of Frantz Fanon posits that for Fanon, existence was synonymous with creation, with the act of producing something, especially time. The primal historical Event is time itself, which serves as the bedrock for all subjectivity, or in other words, the foundation for all self-awareness and self-recognition.

Moreover, being, or existence, was not simply located within the dimension of time but was actively formed through it, by it, and, to some extent, because of it. This interpretation suggests that time is not merely a passive backdrop against which life unfolds but an active agent in shaping existence and consciousness. Time is not just a container for experiences but also a fundamental participant in the construction of one's identity and self-understanding. Césaire, like Fanon, saw time not only as a stage where history and existence play out but also as an intrinsic part of being, shaping our consciousness and subjectivity. Hence, in Haiti's history of liberation, time is an active element in the formation of the self and the unfolding of history. For instance, long after Christophe

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁵²⁸ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 37.

⁵²⁹ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 53.

instituted his creation to usher black people into history, his critics remarked that his initiatives would fail as they transgressed time, meaning they were outside the European progression of history. His European friend, Wilberforce, counseled him in a letter that “One does not invent a tree, one plants it! One does not extract its fruits but allows it to bear them. A nation is not a creation, but rather a gradual ripening, year by year, ring by ring. Sow the seeds of civilization. We must give time due time.”⁵³⁰ Wilberforce’s reasoning—notwithstanding his good intentions given his prominent role in the abolition movements—is laden with European thought that saw the native as people “located outside of time” and that “Europe had the monopoly of that essential human quality we call the disposition toward the future and the capacity for futurity.”⁵³¹ Wilberforce sees time as a gift of civilization that Christophe, in his uninitiated form, should learn to wield. He does not recognize Christophe’s quest to *create anew*—to inaugurate his people into a timeline—one of the many.

Césaire’s Christophe is obsessed with founding a people and a country. He consequently orchestrates the establishment of a kingdom in the North as an act of refusal to accept the continued servitude of black people, which turns into an act of black people projecting their identity. Finally, he morphs into what Mbembe calls “an act of refoundation, a sign, and Event” calculated to inaugurate a future. Christophe sees this future as a moment of “self-creation” and “invention.”⁵³² Césaire depicts Christophe as a master craftsman, malleably molding Haiti into a desired formation. In outlining his vision, Christophe extols the virtues of redemption, rebirth, and regeneration, with his linguistic choices reflecting his aspiration for construction, establishment, unity, and

⁵³⁰ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 36.

⁵³¹ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 53.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 44.

transformation.⁵³³ His solemn pledge to the Haitian populace embodies his unwavering commitment to their well-being, encapsulated in his vow:

I will never permit on any pretext whatsoever the return of slavery or any measure contrary to the freedom and full exercise of civil and political rights by the people of Haiti, and I will govern with only one end in view: the interests, happiness, and glory of the Haitian family of which I am the head.⁵³⁴

In this solemn pledge, the Haitian monarch firmly asserts his commitment to ensuring the freedom and preservation of the rights of the Haitian people. This declaration reflects his resolve to prevent the return of any form of enslavement or any action that could infringe upon their civil and political liberties. The reference to “any pretext whatsoever” implies Christophe’s staunch resistance to any subtle, covert, or manipulative mechanisms that could reintroduce oppressive systems or practices. Moreover, Christophe articulates his sole governing principle to be the pursuit of the Haitian people’s interests, happiness, and glory. He envisions himself not just as a ruler but as the head of an extended Haitian family, thus evoking a sense of unity, shared destiny, and collective welfare. This familial metaphor underscores the personal, emotional investment that Christophe feels for his people and his political responsibilities. His goal is to elevate Haiti, to restore its dignity and prosperity, and to instill a sense of pride and accomplishment among its people. Christophe epitomizes Fanon’s idea of decolonization as “a struggle to own oneself” and become one’s “own foundation”⁵³⁵ while forging a distinctive, autonomous path forward.

Is a monarchy then the kind of state Haiti needs? Christophe lets his secretary, VASTÉY, persuade the people of the need for a monarchy. Vastey frames this need for a monarchy in terms of upholding black dignity. He suggests to the citizenry that the restoration of the Black man’s dignity

⁵³³ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 22.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵³⁵ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 55.

and the assurance of his position within the sphere of humanity can only be achieved through establishing a kingdom, signified by a crown. In his words:

The whole world is watching us, citizens and its multitudes think that black men lack dignity. A king, a court, a kingdom—that if we want respect, is what we must show them. A leader at the head of our nation! A crown on that leader’s head. That, believe me, would calm those heads in which windy ideas could, at any moment, unleash a storm on our own heads right here!”⁵³⁶

If Christophe’s plan was to forge a path for Haiti that does not maintain servitude beyond the first liberation or breed “new forms of servitude,” it remains to be seen whether a monarchy was best suited to deliver this promise. Although Christophe’s monarchy is a historical event, Césaire deploys it not only to underscore the challenges of nation-building in Haiti but also to use Haiti’s history as a backdrop and crucial resource for his exploration and critique of the decolonization process and the emergence of new African nations. Christophe’s form of state and relationship to it eventually determined the tenor of his decolonization. While it is not clear at this stage of the play whether Vastey’s reasoning concerning the monarchy as amplifying black people’s dignity will hold—especially if we consider that the recognition he talks about depends on the “Other,” an act that depicts the institution of the monarchy as an initiative aligned more with the first liberation that merely sought to break free of physical bondage than the second liberation (self-abolition) that leads to “self-ownership”—Christophe embarked on a long process of searching for a “creation” that will inaugurate the black people’s journey to *disalienation*, which Mbembe describes as “a precondition for the creation of a new species of men and of new forms of life, that is, forms of life that could genuinely be characterized as fully human.”⁵³⁷ The idea of disalienation points to a process of reclaiming selfhood and agency that had been suppressed and lost under the oppressive system of

⁵³⁶ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 15.

⁵³⁷ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 55.

slavery. Thus, to be fully human was to be restored to freedom, autonomy, and self-determination. For Vastey, slavery had engineered “a gap between image and essence,” which the establishment of the monarchy seeks to seal. However, this gap between image and essence for Christophe called for radical decolonization beyond instituting a form of government. To restore the self to image called for a new strategy that would not only achieve this feat but also inaugurate something new that would ultimately locate African people in *time* and *history*. Therefore, the futurity of Haitians was at stake in this form of decolonization.

Christophe tasked his engineer, Martial Besse, with the search for *a creation*. Besse suggested an invention befitting “patrimony,” an idea that pleased Christophe, who immediately imagined a citadel.⁵³⁸ A citadel aligns with Christophe’s desire to create a legacy that embodies his vision of a self-sufficient, prosperous, and independent black nation. More importantly, the magnitude and complexity of constructing the citadel on a “steep slope” underscored Christophe’s need for a creation that went beyond making minor progress to inaugurating his people as artisans who, to use Mbembe’s parlance, while molding minds, substances, and shapes, didn’t need to replicate pre-existing templates. The Citadel appeared as a seemingly impossible project that the people must make possible as a way of affirming their collective consciousness and transcending their biological limits. As Christophe pronounces: “Against fate, against history, against Nature!”⁵³⁹ Christophe understood that as slaves, Haitians had been trapped in a situation without opportunities for “self-ownership” and confined to a limited range of actions. They could only produce activities as immediate extensions of their body and to the benefit of their masters. How, then, could such people transcend their limitations of the present moment and engage in expansive and ultimately

⁵³⁸ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 40.

⁵³⁹ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 40.

universal actions and interactions characteristic of humans? Christophe saw laboring on the citadel as a framework for bringing into fruition what Mbembe describes:

A new species of men, endowed with a new essence. Men who are no longer limited or predetermined by their appearance, and whose essence coincides with their image. Their image is no longer something separate from whom they truly are. Nor is it, as in the colonial dispensation, something that does not belong to them. There is no longer a gap between this image and the recognition of oneself as one's own property. Only such "men" can create new forms of life, free from the shocking realization that the image through which they have emerged into visibility is not their essence.⁵⁴⁰

Here, Mbembe envisages the emergence of a new "man," who is no longer limited. These individuals no longer bear the burden of their existence being circumscribed or predestined by their appearance. This depiction departs drastically from the colonial circumstance where their image was alienated from them. Christophe also saw the citadel as a symbol of liberty and nation-building, becoming Haiti. "Built by the whole people, men and women, children and elders, built for the whole people!"⁵⁴¹ It was to serve as a fortress, a massive breastplate of stone. Impregnable, thus, signaling the new secure Haiti.⁵⁴² Ultimately, it was to stand as a monument that cancels the slave ship to mark a new social order in Haiti. Christophe's miscalculation in constructing the citadel stemmed from his belief that a well-built and completed *creation* alone would be sufficient to foster self-consciousness among the people. However, our argument is that he failed to understand the true significance of labor as the crucial factor capable of guiding emancipated slaves towards self-awareness.

Self-Abolition: Labor and Haiti's Second Liberation

⁵⁴⁰ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 54.

⁵⁴¹ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 40.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

Césaire imbued “labor” with the capacity to both create (redeem) and destroy. In the Hegelian sense, redemptive labor is a pivotal mechanism through which the enslaved forms self-consciousness.

Here, the enslaved, through labor, achieves a consciousness of self that the master, dependent on the slave’s labor but not involved in it, does not attain. The labor of the enslaved becomes an embodiment of their own subjectivity, a manifestation of their inner world into the external one.

The transformation of the natural world through labor is thus a reflection and an assertion of the self-consciousness of the slave. This dialectic offers a compelling paradigm through which we can read Christophe’s mobilization of Haitians for the construction of the Citadel. Christophe issues a royal decree pronouncing that “liberty cannot exist without labor.”⁵⁴³ Work is not merely an act of survival or subservience but a crucial means of self-realization and liberation. Through labor, the slave acquires a greater self-consciousness and authority than the master, demonstrating the dynamic, transformative potential inherent in labor itself.⁵⁴⁴ In Christophe’s Haiti, this dialectic uncovers a complex layer of power dynamics. In his attempt to secure Haiti’s self-autonomy, Christophe imposes a forced labor regime on his fellow citizens. Here, Christophe plays the role of the master, with the Haitian laborers as his slaves. Instead of being a liberating process leading to self-consciousness, their labor becomes a tool of oppression. For instance, *FIRST LADY* and

⁵⁴³ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 40.

⁵⁴⁴ Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 23. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic emphasizes the transformative power of labor and its role in the metamorphosis of the slave’s consciousness. The fundamental premise in this dynamic is that the master compels the slave to work, which consequently leads to the slave’s domination over nature. Originally, the slave succumbed to the master’s power because he was himself subjugated to nature, influenced by his instincts for self-preservation. However, through labor, the slave transcends this inherent bondage to nature and his instinctual self, thereby achieving a form of self-liberation. Work becomes the medium of emancipation, breaking the shackles that bind him to his own nature and, by extension, liberating him from the control of the master. His transformation of the natural world via labor allows the slave to construct a new reality - a technologically altered world wherein he exercises authority. The authority that the slave gains through work is distinct from the immediate authority the master initially possessed. The slave, through the process of laboring, transcends both the physical environment and his own innate limitations. He transcends the master who remains bound to the unaltered, given world. In this view, the master’s power, rooted in the slave’s fear of death, is essentially a catalyst for historical progression. However, it is the slave’s labor, transforming the world and himself within it, that actualizes and refines this progression.

SECOND LADY question VASTHEY whether “the path of liberty and the path of slavery would be one and the same.”⁵⁴⁵ Vastey’s inadequate response is that Christophe is working hard to ensure that “never again, anywhere in the world, shall there be a young black person ashamed of the color of her skin, who finds her color an obstacle to realizing the wishes of her heart.”⁵⁴⁶ Christophe is blind to the people’s suffering under his strict labor regime. He admonishes the COUNCIL OF STATE for their efforts to intercede for the tired and broken citizenry in need of a much-deserved break from building the citadel. He asks, “What was in this country before the coming of King Christophe?”⁵⁴⁷ And responds that the country was shit. “Not even that! There was shit, do you hear me, and nothing but shit!”⁵⁴⁸ Christophe sees Haitians as lacking the willpower to develop the country and, as such, must be compelled to work.

The irony lies in the fact that Christophe, in his role as the “master” of the Haitian household, fails to recognize the humanistic value of the labor of his “slaves” (his subjects). In his single-minded pursuit of the citadel as a manifestation of Haiti’s second liberation, he unwittingly recreates the oppressive dynamics he sought to overcome, thereby underlining the tragedy of King Christophe’s reign. Redemptive labor would have fostered a greater self-consciousness and unity among the Haitian workers, giving rise to a collective identity that is defined not by their former slave masters but by their own collective efforts. Toiling and transforming the landscape to construct the Citadel would have, in essence, shaped the workers’ own identity and collective consciousness. Only in this framing can we construe the peasant’s labor as a transformative and potentially emancipatory act.

⁵⁴⁵ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 46.

⁵⁴⁶ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 50.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 61.

Bad Decolonization

If we construe bad decolonization as an act of creating a new Haiti on the existing plantation structure, then Christophe's tragic flaw lay in the assumption that he could enact Haiti's second liberation—decolonization beyond physical bondage—without fundamentally dismantling the deep-rooted structures of colonization. His first error was perhaps to misconstrue Haiti's greatest need as the desire for recognition from the French. Vastey, Christopher's secretary, lays down the case for a monarchy as a state that Napoleon will recognize and uplift black people's dignity. For instance, the constitution of a Black Kingdom court using European signifiers illuminates the convoluted complexities inherent to such a project. The entire ceremonial rehearsal is predicated on the fabrication of corporeal comportment that would be identifiable within the context of a European court. The Master of Ceremony pronounces, "to walk well, you must hold yourselves straight without stiffness, direct your legs in a line, never move to the left or the right of your axis, make your body participate imperceptibly in the collective motion."⁵⁴⁹ This ceremony, possessing a carnivalesque aura, functions as an exercise in the fabrication of bodies, thus, underscoring the intricate mechanisms of subject formation, whether unintentional or premeditated, embedded in Christophe's initiatives. Rather than solely elevating Africans as per Christophe's imagination, the ceremony reveals how these very Black individuals are constructed as subjects under a Black King. This revelation raises the question: Is this the type of future Christophe envisions for Haiti?

The framing of Black people through the lens of European symbols and rituals is both a powerful and troubling aspect of Christophe's vision, which Césaire insightfully unpacks in the play, revealing the tensions within postcolonial identity formation. Christophe becomes frustrated that Blacks cannot recreate the European court, thus, gaining the much-desired recognition from the

⁵⁴⁹ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 21.

French. Christophe's court was an act of overreaching himself. Terry Eagleton, writing in the context of *Macbeth*, notes that "when a man overreaches himself, he brings others and himself to nothing, to the condition of inert objects or corpses."⁵⁵⁰ Christophe's life is so wedded to his fellow slaves that any act that does not alter their lot in life is an act of self-destruction. By becoming King, Christophe projects himself beyond his community but unfortunately fails to re-articulate the terms that define this community. He plunges into a form of schizophrenia as he attempts to set up a new community—which fails because it pretty much keeps the plantation structure intact. Christophe relentlessly pursues a Eurocentric Kingship, which finally fails him.

METELLUS, the loyal servant-turned-rebel, offers an invaluable critique of Christophe's rule and the pitfalls of "bad decolonization." Césaire deploys this character to represent the oppressed Haitian populace that experiences a perverse form of emancipation under Christophe's rule, where the chains of slavery have merely been supplanted by the tyranny of one of their own. Césaire crafts Metellus as a character that embodies the tribulations of the Haitian people, having endured the horrors of slavery and the arduous struggle for freedom. Metellus' firsthand experiences and the vivid descriptions of his trials lend a palpable sense of authenticity to his critique. He harks back to the era of their shared struggle with Toussaint, painting it as a period when their bloodshed had meaning, symbolizing their collective drive for a common body politic. His metaphor of "glorious, raucous blood" and "bitter cassava" used to dress their wounds vividly encapsulates the spirit of their struggle, highlighting both its harshness and noble purpose.⁵⁵¹ However, Metellus' disappointment and disillusionment surface when he contemplates the fruits of their struggle: the redeemed land they had envisioned as a sanctuary for all Blacks has turned into a "battlefield,"

⁵⁵⁰ Terry Eagleton. *Body as Language: Outline of a "New Left" Theology* (Sheed & Ward, 1970), 7.

⁵⁵¹ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 26.

symbolizing the “double tyranny” of Christophe and Pétion.⁵⁵² The theft of Hope, once the beacon guiding their fight, is perhaps the most profound of his grievances. Metellus humanizes Hope, describing her as a fearless madwoman who called to their timid blood, spurring them away from complacency and towards their freedom. Yet, this Hope, like the promised land, has been desecrated. Metellus accuses Christophe and Pétion of debasing their motherland, reducing it to “a trivial, contemptible puppet” in the eyes of the world.⁵⁵³ Herein lies Metellus’ salient rebellion, an incisive indictment of Christophe’s rule, symbolizing the collective dissent of the oppressed Haitian populace. His rebellion thus serves as an emblem of the deep-seated discontent within the populace, highlighting the pitfalls of Christophe’s rule and the unfulfilled promise of a truly emancipated Haiti. Metellus’ execution highlights the inherent paradox within the postcolonial Haitian society. Despite the proclaimed freedom from colonial chains, Christophe’s rule, ironically, mirrors the authoritarian tendencies of French slave masters, suppressing dissent and stifling the voice of the oppressed. In this light, Metellus’ death signifies the quelling of a voice that dared to critique and resist the regime’s deviation from the emancipatory ideals of the revolution. Metellus’ demise is not simply a personal tragedy but rather a broader allegory of the failed promises of the Haitian revolution and the perilous path that postcolonial Haiti had taken under Christophe’s rule.

Towards a True Decolonization

Césaire’s question at the beginning of the play was: What is Haiti’s greatest need? King Christophe’s attempt at answering this question failed as his “creations” ultimately brought agony and suffering to his subjects, prompting them to rebel against his rule and support his arch-nemesis, Pétion. This chain of events culminates in the tragic suicide of King Christophe. We suggest that Haiti’s greatest need is intricately tied to the aspirations and dreams of the Haitian peasantry about

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

their new nation. The peasants perceive the emergence of new landowners as a blatant violation of their freedom, a contradiction to the spirit of post-emancipated Haiti.

SECOND PEASANT: When we beat the whites back into the sea, that was to have this land for ourselves, not to toil on the land of others, even if they are black, but to have it for ourselves.⁵⁵⁴

The peasant speaks to the initial purpose of their revolution—to expel their white oppressors and reclaim the land for themselves, for the Haitian people. Theirs was a struggle against physical bondage and economic subjugation, symbolized by the ownership of land, the most fundamental resource for survival and prosperity. The peasant's lament points out a tragic irony of their post-revolutionary reality: they are still laboring on land owned by others, even if those owners are now their fellow black countrymen. This indicates a continuation of their economic subjugation and challenges the idea that they have genuinely achieved the freedom they fought for. Despite the change in the color of their masters, their condition remains fundamentally the same. They are still landless laborers, a reality that starkly contradicts the promises of the revolution. This critique underscores the necessity of a genuine decolonization process that dismantles the colonial era's economic structures and ensures an equitable distribution of land and resources among the Haitian people. The peasant's lament also critiques Christophe's failure to dismantle plantation land policies and distribute land to peasants. Instead, Christophe substituted the exploitation of black people by French slave masters for the exploitation of black people by a new class of black landowners. His Royal Dahomeyans kept the system running.

Given the brutality of Christophe's rule, some peasants debated whether a republic could be better than a kingdom. Their concern is whether a different form of state will allow them to move beyond their first liberation (freedom from physical bondage) to self-awareness or self-abolition.

⁵⁵⁴ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 45.

FIRST PEASANT's response captures what we believe is Césaire's response to the question: What is Haiti's greatest need?

What I love is the earth (land).
I believe in the earth that I work with my own arms,
but the fat King won't put it in our arms to keep.⁵⁵⁵

The First Peasant's statement reveals a deep-seated yearning among the peasants for land ownership—a tangible symbol of freedom and self-determination. It illustrates a profound understanding that the form of the state — whether a republic or a kingdom — is not as crucial as the economic structures that govern their lives. The Peasant's declaration of love for the land underlines their intimate relationship with it, viewing the land as a living entity they engage with through labor. This love represents the idea of self-ownership, self-awareness, and self-abolition, wherein the peasants see themselves as autonomous beings capable of defining their destinies through their engagement with the land. However, they are hindered by King Christophe's oppressive rule, which denies them access to the land, keeping it away from their “arms.” The king's refusal to distribute land symbolized as the “fat King” withholding the earth from their grasp, reflects the ongoing exploitation and the lack of genuine emancipation. In this light, Césaire seems to argue that Haiti's greatest need isn't a specific form of governance but a substantial transformation in its socio-economic structures. This transformation would involve transitioning from a society marked by economic exploitation and class disparity towards a more equitable society where the fruits of labor — in this case, the land — are accessible to all, leading to a truly liberated and self-aware citizenry.

To conclude, we hark back to Mbembe's assertion that the philosophical meaning of decolonization as an event lies in an active will to community. He says, “this will to community is another name for what could be called the will to life. Its goal was to realize a shared project: to

⁵⁵⁵ Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 68.

stand up on one's own and to create heritage."⁵⁵⁶ Césaire's Christophe can be read as embodying this will to community and will to life in his efforts to build an independent and proud nation following the liberation of Haiti. However, he fails to grasp the complexity and contradictions of the decolonization process. His methods are brutal and oppressive, suggesting that the will to community, pursued without regard for individual rights and freedoms, can lead to new forms of tyranny and oppression. In leaving the plantation's economic structure intact, Christophe failed to lay a strong foundation for Haiti's second and true liberation.

The plantation economic structure determined not only what one did (i.e., their role in the economy) but also who one was (i.e., their social identity) within the context of Haitian society. The structure of this system inherently shaped the individual and collective consciousness, thus influencing the modes of interaction, the range of potential relationships, and the overall societal dynamics. Therefore, only a complete overhaul of this structure would have paved the way for decolonization as self-awareness.

⁵⁵⁶ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 3.

Conclusion: Total Revolution and Decolonization

“Space Traitors” has explored the concept of revolution in drama that engages the afterlives of anticolonial struggles through the indices of violence, power, and subjectivity. It has examined the desire for total revolution in societies burdened by oppression and violence, highlighting the comprehensive transformation of societal structures and shifts in consciousness that characterize such revolutionary movements. While conventional scholarship has read anti-colonial struggles as rebellions or uprisings, seen as lacking the transformative impact necessary to be deemed revolutions, this project has underscored the significance of revisiting how we categorize these events, particularly those like the Mau Mau and the Maji Maji continue to hold political and cultural significance in their respective contexts. Rather than dismissing these events as failed revolutions or rebellions, the project argues for considering them unfinished revolutions. It draws inspiration from Emmanuel Kant’s perspective on revolution as a sign of human progress and asserts that anticolonial revolutionary events serve as historical signs that encapsulate the past, reveals the present, and foreshadow the future.

Furthermore, the project highlights the lasting impact of revolutionary events beyond their immediate consequences. It introduces the concept of “permanent virtuality,” influenced by Foucault and Kant, to describe how certain events persistently influence the present and future despite occurring in the past. The Maji Maji Revolution, the Zanzibar Revolution, the Mau Mau Revolution, and the Haitian Revolution, explored in the study, have achieved the status of permanent virtualities. They serve as vital repositories of collective memory and lessons, guarding against historical amnesia and preserving the narratives of Tanzania, Zanzibar, Kenya, and Haiti. By examining these events as permanent virtualities, the project sheds light on the ongoing engagement and reevaluation surrounding postcolonial and post-emancipation societies. These societies, grappling with the legacies of slavery and colonialism, have used these events as points of conjecture

to engage in debates, contestations, and negotiations about their pasts and futures. Through this continuous process, these events have solidified their significance and enduring presence.

“Space Traitors” has underscored the importance of understanding revolutionary events in their historical, social, and cultural contexts. It challenges conventional categorizations of revolutions and advocates a nuanced examination of anticolonial revolutionary events. By examining the representations of these events in historical drama and exploring the dynamics of the body as an analytical category, the project has provided valuable insights into the complexities and legacies of decolonization. It invites further scholarly inquiry into the intersections of history, memory, and performance and calls for ongoing reflections on the ever-evolving meanings and implications of the revolution in our contemporary world.

The project has also explored the intersections of decolonization and historical drama to shed light on how forms of artistic expression engage with the complexities of postcolonial societies. It has underscored the importance of historical knowledge and memory in the process of decolonization and invited a critical examination of the narratives and assumptions embedded in historical drama. This contribution will encourage a deeper understanding of how drama serves as a means of reckoning with the past and envisioning alternative futures. By situating the analysis within the specific contexts of African and Caribbean drama, “Space Traitors” contributes to the broader field of African and Caribbean studies. It highlights the unique perspectives, concerns, and artistic expressions that emerge from these regions, offering valuable insights into the complexities of postcolonial societies. This contextualization fosters a deeper appreciation for Africa and the Caribbean’s rich and diverse theatrical traditions, challenging Eurocentric perspectives and promoting a more inclusive understanding of global theatrical practices.

The question that lingers is: What is the present “problem space?” If this problem space can be categorized as decolonization, what kind of decolonization? For societies that have experienced

colonization, achieving true decolonization involves a comprehensive transformation of the social, cultural, and intellectual structures that colonial rule influenced. We can think about decolonization in our present reality through the concept of “disenclosure,” which Mbembe appropriates from Jean-Luc Nancy to describe the removal or lifting of closures, boundaries, or restrictions.⁵⁵⁷ In the postcolony, disenclosure represents a broad intellectual and social liberation process from the vestiges of colonial domination. That is, transcending the restrictive parameters set by the colonial past and its continuing impact on collective identity, cultural norms, and societal structures. Disenclosure, in this sense, serves as an intellectual tool for understanding the transformative potential of decolonization, presenting it as an ongoing process of opening up new horizons of thought and action rather than merely an act of resistance against colonial legacies.

Disenclosure demands a critical reassessment that not only considers how colonial structures of power have permeated the social fabric, influencing societal norms, perceptions of self and other, and the very understanding of history and identity, but also challenges these colonial narratives to lift the closures they impose, and to foster an environment that invites the emergence of novel perspectives and structures. This process of disenclosure must never be constrained to critiquing or deconstructing the past; it should involve the creative task of envisioning and constructing new forms of thought and social organization. In this sense, “disenclosure” is not just about liberation from the past but also about the potentialities of the future. It encourages individuals and societies to defy the limitations imposed by the colonial legacy and to actively participate in crafting a future that, while acknowledging the colonial past, charts its own course. This process implies a form of intellectual emancipation and transformation. It is about reacting to or resisting the colonial past and proactively envisioning and enacting new possibilities for the postcolonial present and future.

⁵⁵⁷ Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 61.

Some of the ways I wish to extend this project is through developing the idea of the “unbreakable body” and “the body” as a concrete approach to examining decolonization as the will to a shared existence. The study of the body in literature and theater has been a focal point for various critical theories and academic investigations, each with its unique angle and perspective. These studies range from examining the body as a site of personal and collective identity, a battleground of political and cultural contestations, to a medium for representing and experiencing reality. However, the concept of the unbreakable body, as explored in “Space Traitors,” holds a unique position within this broad spectrum, especially within the context of African theater and literature.

The unbreakable body in “Space Traitors” is predominantly seen as a symbol of resistance and resilience against external oppression, exploitation, and marginalization. This conception contrasts dominant examinations of the body in African literature and theater, which often focus on the body as a victim of oppression, exploitation, and violence. The unbreakable body, however, goes beyond this narrative, representing the body as an enduring force capable of withstanding trauma and rising above adversities. Furthermore, the concept of the unbreakable body also deviates from traditional studies by envisaging the body as a revolutionary weapon. The body is often a space of performed culture, memory, and identity in existing African theater and literature. However, in “Space Traitors,” the body becomes an active agent of resistance and rebellion, performing acts of defiance and resilience that counteract oppressive forces. The unbreakable body transcends the individual body to represent collective resistance and resilience in the face of shared adversities. While conventional studies often explore personal experiences and identities, the unbreakable body provides a more communal lens, signifying shared struggles, collective resilience, and the communal spirit of resistance.

The unbreakable body also serves to bridge the temporal gap between historical struggles and contemporary experiences. By connecting the enduring spirit of resistance of past

revolutionaries with today's generation's struggles, the concept encourages a rethinking of historical narratives and an understanding of the enduring nature of resilience.

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