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Composite identities: A representation in yvonne adhiambo owuor's *weight of whispers*

Kasiera Fernandes Esadia[1], Omuteche Juirus[2], Kesero Tunui[3]
[1] Masters Student, Department of Languages and Literature Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya
[2] Lecturer, Department of Languages and Literature Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

Abstract
This paper analyzes the representations of identity struggles in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's narrative "Weight of Whispers" based on the understanding that identity issues and those to do with belonging are dominant in the narrative. The fact that literature always mirrors the daily experiences of the society and community from which a writer comes from implies that the issues represented in the texts in a way therefore reflect the contemporary societal setup and interactions in the society of the setting. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's selected text has been studied to determine the extent to which it projects the challenges, struggles and the length to which characters go to in their quest to understand and (re)create their identity. This paper looks at how Yvonne Owuor, through her text's themes, character and characterization therein, brings to the fore the national, cultural and personal struggles Africans go through in an attempt to define who they are. Using the postcolonial theoretical ideas, augmented by the post-structural theoretical thinking, this paper explores how Yvonne Owuor through her text highlights the characters' day-to-day experiences in the places they occupy in relation to the multi-layered identity struggles. Intertextuality, the argument that texts elaborate other texts with which they engage in various forms of dialogue, was employed in making a comparative analysis of the primary text.

Keywords: identity, postcolonial, pos-structural, intertextuality

1. Introduction
The search for identity has been a recurrent literary theme which many authors across the African continent such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Petals of Blood*, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and Oludhe Macgoye in *Homing In* and many others have tried to address. This struggle has continued to trigger in the individuals a quest for identity as Homi Bhabha asserts, "The question of identification is never the affirmation of pre-given identity, never self-fulfilling prophecy- it is always the production of an image of identity and transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Saleem & Bani-ata, 2014) [6].

Every individual in any society without considering the differences of race and culture, at some point comes across the question of identity in his or her life. So as to answer this identity question of "Who am I?" African writers as noted by Barton (2017) [1], "Needed to explore this history, their roots, their behavior, their view points, their aims and their history and roots". This is a problem that became even more complicated as Barton (2017) [1]. goes on to note, "because of displacement, ethnicity and racial differences therefore, quest for self-definition and identity are the most important concerns recurrently fore grounded in African literature". Yvonne Owuor's texts address such issues.

The Unsettled Protagonist and Quest for Belonging in "Weight of Whispers"
The unsettled protagonist and quest for belonging in "Weight of Whispers" is an attempt to understand the troubled character while trying to conform to the new surroundings he finds himself since he is unable to break free from his past that keeps on haunting him (Owuor, 2003) [13]. In this motif, the troubled character seeks to locate himself in the current foreign state by way of several attempts that may be read as fleeing; especially away from those places that the subject links to the past that can no longer contain in their new status.

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

O'donohue (2000) [12], commenting on the concept of belonging opines, "To be human is to belong. Belonging is a circle that embraces everything; if we reject it, we damage our nature". He goes on to argue that the word "belonging" holds together the two fundamental aspects of life: being and longing. Furthermore, he says "our life's journey is the task of refining our belonging so that it may become more true, loving, good and free" (O'donohue, 2000) [12]. Looked at from this perspective, this paper argues that as humans we do not have to force belonging. The longing within us always draws us towards belonging in place and again towards new forms of belonging when we have outgrown the old ones. At the onset of Owuor's narrative, we are made aware of the protagonist's struggles to downplay the precarious condition he and his family find themselves in. He later tries to escape from this state or at least to adapt to it but in the end fails when things eventually don't go as expected. At the beginning Kuseremane is very sure that he and his family will soon leave Kenya. They view themselves as visitors on transit and not at all as refugees. He considers himself a prince as he has many contacts all

over the world, and not a beggar, who is let down by his friends (Owuor, 2003) [13]. He later on realizes that they might have to stay a little bit longer than expected in Kenya and feels sure that he will get a job with his doctor's degree. This makes him to refuse to accept their current predicaments. Out of the fear of not wanting to disturb and stress his family even more, Kuseremane keeps quiet about the rumors doing rounds about them and their worsening situation (Makokha, 2011) [7]. On the overall, he does not want to admit his own fear, neither towards his family nor himself, because he is too scared of it and his uncontrolled reactions (Makokha, 2011) [7]. He soon however slowly starts to accept and adapt to the situation.

In her commentary on the issue of belonging May (2011) [9], notes that:

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

Viewed from May's (2011) [9]. perspective, for the displaced and those on the move, the regular re-exploration of the concept of the "self" and identity is vital. For this reason we note that the struggles faced by the displaced persons and those on constant movement, like the Kuseremane's, becomes an issue both to them and the host nation-state.

As brought out through the characters of Kuseremane, Lune, Chichi and Agnetha-mama, these characters have to contend with the inherent ambivalence in their struggles and quests to re-create the personal, the self and cultural identities in an urgent manner. On the onset there is the unstable self and then the other important ambivalent spatial, cultural and national spaces that the individual occupies in the modern contemporary African nation- state (May, 2011) [9].

Makokha (2011) [7], in his analysis of "Weight of Whispers" observes that:

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

At a deeper thematic level, this paper looks at the narrative as one about good and evil, injustice and betrayal, love and loss and generally about the general struggle of living, of existence in the context of contemporary ethnicity-laced postcolonial society.

On arrival in the foreign nation, Kenya, the situation of the family soon worsens when rumors about the list of genocide perpetrators start to spread. Their name is "accused, accused" (Owuor, 2003) [13]. The name which has once opened all doors is now a heavy burden on the family. It becomes public that the Kuseremane family must somehow be related to the genocide in Rwanda. "Now tales had been added of a zealous servant instructed by an heir to wipe out the stain" (31). On realizing what Roger, Kuseremane's butler, had done, Kuseremane learns to make himself invisible so that he does not stand out of the masses and make himself an easy target for the police; "I have learned of hidden places; covered spaces that the invisible inhabit" (32). Kuseremane turns to quiet places in order to forget his real life, seems to run away from himself or his own person. While he did not understand in former times why some things always remained unexpressed, he now "can sense why some things must remain buried in silence" (13).

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

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

He wants to stay with his sister and mother in Kenya and "live in the silence-scape and perform the rituals of return, for life" (36). This point to his state of desperation and confused state of mind. He wants to leave and can finally, but after all the struggles and harassment he has gone through as a refugee, he either does not have the strength to leave or does not want to leave anymore, because his former life has fallen into pieces, is inexistent, another life in another time, and this now is his "second life" (36). This serves as a pointer to personal identity struggles and transformation over time and space.

Many sociological studies on belonging have a limited and limiting conception of place. This may be due to, as Gieryn (2000) [5]. calls it, "an understanding of a local place as a passive context for social life" (466). If, as Massey (1995) suggests, we take a view of places as "constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time" (180), with which Massey includes relations to other places, then identities and borders can change, whilst still remaining "the same" place. This paper looks at place as inclusive of social relations and these places themselves as being, according to Cloke and Jones (2001) [3]. "actants" (649). We consider place here, as one which is not essentialist or internalist and can change over time and encompasses relationships to other places. This is as stated by Cloke and Jones (2001) [3]. "it is through acting with and reacting to place that one becomes of "that place" and therefore "belongs" (650).

Commenting on the concept of belonging in "Weight of Whispers", Makokha (2011) [7], notes that, "Owuor's story brings out the protagonist as an escapist who when faced with the situation he and his family find themselves, as refugees, prefer to circumscribe his own and his family's status in euphemistic terms of "visitors, tourists, people in transit, universal citizens with…well…an affinity for Europe" (97). What comes out clearly here is the protagonist's reluctance to accept the unfortunate situation he and his family are in but instead wants to pass a message of hope. This hope appears to be linked not only to the resolution of the dreadful and insecure state of affairs both for him and his family but also for a quest to escape "the whispers", haunting visions and a mysterious, constant uttering of his very own name, that stress him day and night. In his situation therefore, Kuseremane fails to belong as he cannot connect to the place that is Kenya.

In describing what quest is Dieke (2010) [4], has it that quest is that which makes the people feel religiously bound to undertake in order to discover a meaning and a pattern as an alternative to their seemingly desolate lives" (101). Kuseremane's story is one of an individual who over the course of time slides more and more into both identity crisis and a squalid status in an unwelcoming foreign land. Kuseremane finally ends up into anonymity and being greatly weakened, although left ambiguous, we see Kuseremane almost contemplating suicide. Faced with all the foregoing, the resultant feeling, the character feels, is one that seeks both an encounter with the inner self, as well as the release from a sense of personal and historical neglect.

Strongman (2014) [20], writing on post colonialism, makes an observation that can help contextualize Kuseremane's identity struggles within the wider postcolonial cultural upheavals that face postcolonial societies and individuals:

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

In Kuseremane's struggles and his encounters with officialism and all manner of deranging opportunists and a painful past, we learn of both the sagacity and materiality of political thinking that affect cultural identity and expression. Within the text, aspects of Kuseremane's origin are left vague and doubtful, this being a result of the narrative being a present story, particularly during his early days in Nairobi; Kuseremane tends to hold onto some identity hints. As a result, his tribulations appear to remind us of the early postcolonial Kenyan writers like Grace Ogot and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose first works called for a rebirth of deprived, pre-colonial cultural identity.

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

Kuseremane however appears to click to his past identity even though we are made aware of the changing times. He is soon faced with an unhelpful and unsympathetic staff member of the American Embassy who denies him any rights to asylum since he cannot produce the correct papers, having left his back in Rwanda when he leaves in a hurry, Kuseremane still wants to shout to the woman, "I am Boniface Kuseremane, a prince, a diplomat" (17).

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

Ethnization of a Nation-State and Kuseremane's Personal Identity Struggles in Refuge

In Owuor's (2003) [13]. "Weight of Whispers", the author establishes a multifaceted construct of the refugees' experience. To achieve this, she uses Kuseremane who stands for the displaced; those who were forced to flee fighting in Rwanda and whose family and relatives have moved into Kenya. Owuor (2003) [13]. concentrates on the experiences of Kuseremane's family; before the outbreak of the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda, at the war's onset and later while in exile. Kuseremane is confronted with a number of uncomfortable situations, which he does not necessarily know how to behave and handle, when he is forced to flee his home country due to the violence and while in Kenya. When he moves to this new Kenyan society with his wife,

mother and sister, he tries on one hand to adapt into this new land but on the other to keep his loyalties to his loyal lineage while at the same time fending for his family that he locates with.

In looking at ethnicity and Kuseremane's personal identity struggles, this paper borrows from Bauman's (2000) work on modernity and the Holocaust. Bauman examines the systematic murder of a population deemed a threat to national integrity and racial exclusivity; he also discusses the unruly figure of the stranger, who troubles the neat binary of friend and foe upon which the modern state predicates its political maneuvers. Bauman's arguments productively engage with Mbembe's (2016) [10]. analysis of the shifting institutional landscape of the African Post colony. Where, "new forms of Privatized sovereignty and violence have remapped the geographies of power and spaces" (78). Mbembe (2016) [10]. Goes on to observe that:

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

Mbembe is here referring to the economic and political shifts of the late 1980s and 1990s when, pressured by Structural Adjustment Programs and deregulated world markets, African political systems struggled to profitably reintegrate themselves into changing global economies.

Ochwada (2000) [11], points out a "crisis estimated in hundreds of thousands from Rwanda scattered allover the sub- region" (46). The causes of the tragedy can be traced to the capitalist donor countries which as Rahnema (1997) [15]. reminds us, supplied " Rwanda with one of the highest per capita supplies of arms and ammunition on the grounds that the country had been recognized as a particularly "successful model of capitalist development", and yet the power of identity discourse when misappropriated and disseminated through channels such as the Rwandan mass media, and feeding upon popular misconceptions and fear of foreign racial oppression, The ensuing refugee problem engulfed the region.

In "Weight of Whispers", we see that Kuseremane, on arriving in Kenya as a refugee, insists on holding onto the myth of his personal origins along- side postcolonial discursive constructions of the Tutsi as a racialised group. It is argued here that his identity before, and within the narrative is an unending and formless process of becoming that appears to be constantly beyond his control and understanding. Kuseremane as a hybridized royal and member of the neocolonial elite finds it very difficult to fit in, both in the new environment and new- found identity.

Kuseremane, Bon-Bon, as his sister Chi-Chi calls him; his fiancée, Lune, and mother Agnetha-mama are accustomed to the finer things in life. They are Rwandan royalty who are well-travelled, and are clearly unprepared for the impact that the genocide has on their lavish lifestyle. Narrating to us his family's first experience in the hands of the Kenyan authorities, on arrival as refugees, Kuseremane says:

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

Owuor (2003) [13]. foregrounds Kuseremane's multiple-fractured and dual identities and in so doing we are able to recognize the fragile statuses faced by the refugee's. We also get to know how his encounters in the streets of a postcolonial Nairobi city deconstructs Kuseremane's own misguided certainties and identity from the theft of his "ring of the royal house-hold" (24), to his poverty- riddled residency in the repulsively filthy River Road residence in the city. The family has fled to Kenya, believing the move to be only a temporary one, as they wait for relatives and friends abroad to assist them in their journey and settlement to Europe. Kuseremane informing us about the mother's wishes says, "Agnethe, being a princess, knows that time solves all problems. Nevertheless she has ordered me to dispatch a telegram to sovereigns in exile, those who would be familiar with our quandary and could be depended on for empathy, cash assistance and even accommodation. The gratitude felt would extend generation unto generation" (8).

However, after sometime, reality slowly sets in; they have to sneak out of the Nairobi Hilton they settled into first and move into cheaper accommodation. Communication from those they had relied on for help dwindles and eventually dies out. Kuseremane is burdened with looking for work to support his family, but more than that, the weight of finding a way out of what is slowly becoming hell. "But now, I lower my head. The sum total of what resides in a very tall man who used to be a prince in a land eviscerated" (2). Through the reading of this narrative we are drawn into Kuseremane's helplessness as old friends become unsympathetic. Lune's course of despair is also brought to us. Chi-chi's distant nature and escapism is also explored in the narrative.

The situation that the Kuseremane's find themselves in is aptly captured by Kruger (2012) [6]. who argues that, "Deregulated policies undermined the material and social bases of postcolonial states and the strategies through which they secured legitimacy" (2). He goes on to say that such uneven economic shifts furthered the internal dissolution of the state, which found its sovereignty restricted by the tutelary government of international creditors. The demands of global markets and political attempts to restore authoritarian rule create the conditions for private government, as public functions are increasingly formed by private operators for private ends. What this means is that privatized forms of sovereignty reinforce the privatization of the instruments of violence since control of the means of coercion makes it possible to secure an advantage in the other conflicts under way for appropriation of resources and other utilities previously available for all in the nation-state. Owuor's (2003) [13]. narrative and with it her productive dialogue with scholars who examine the cultural, historical cycle of violence and political manipulations of identity expose the historical formation and rhetorical construction of ethnic and racial identities and hence challenging the reader to reflect on the ethics of being human.

In "Weight of Whispers", Owuor appears insistent on

deconstructing political identities which enable the state-sponsored persecution of "foreigners." The narrative's main protagonist "a Tutsi of noble ancestry" escapes from the Rwandan genocide only to face persistent discrimination in Kenya. The refugee, through institutions in the foreign land, such as foreign embassies, Kenyan law or lawlessness and the rude shopkeepers and landlords, who symbolize the tragedy of global capitalism, undergoes a lot of suffering and oppression. Owuor's narrative parallels this with the historical postcolonial construction of Rwandan Tutsi as a group, an identity construction that, as seen earlier, partly enabled the genocide which led to Tutsi being the majority of refugees who were forced to run away from persecution in Rwanda. Progressively alienated from a fictional identity grounded in the colonial discourses of race and ethnicity, the once privileged prince has to contend with his new and undesirable status of refugee, with the duty of constant displacement and horror of disallowed honor. Through Owuor's narrative we are able to explore the enabling conditions of genocide. The historical formation of racialised identities, the capacity of modern state to design a social order desirable to those in power and the unrelenting logic with which private and public authorities are exercised against vulnerable populations are issues also highlighted in this narrative. Kuseremane's situation worsens when they flee home. On departure, accompanied by close family dependants, Kuseremane casually claims the right to buy "the last seats on the last plane", out of a country descending into organized chaos. "We got the last four of the last eight seats on the last flight out of our city. We assumed then, it was only right that it be so" (6). Europe is the final destination for the privileged "travelers", descendants of a carefully groomed elite, who tolerate Kenya only as a temporary refuge. "Fortunately," the prince proclaims, "we were in transit. Soon we would be in Europe, among friends" (14). This is what Mamdani (2008) [8]. refers to as a "self- conscious racialized elitism" (89). Kuseremane's subjectivity is a testimony to the divisive politics of colonialism and its long lasting impact on the constructions of *self* and *other*. This as Partington (2006) [14]. says, is what "partially enabled the 1994 genocide" (112). Kuseremane is described to us the tall man, whose Tutsi aristocracy is physically inscribed in the stereotyped features of his body, seems, as Mamdani (2008) [8]. notes, "to have swallowed wholesome the venom that was the Hamatic hypothesis" (48). This is due to the fact that Kuseremane appears to exploit a collective identity that is wrapped in colonial terms of racial superiority. Partington (2006) [14]. argues that:

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

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

We are however left wondering that if he is a member of the Rwandan Tutsi Monarchy that "was abolished just prior to the country's independence," how could he have been implicated in the genocide? Partington (2006) [14]. rightfully argues that:

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

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

Authored by German and Belgian colonialists, the fiction of the foreign origin of the Tutsi could be skillfully exploited in the 1990s to evoke fear of the return to "feudal servitude" and insist on the Tutsi "repatriation" to Ethiopia. Mamdani (2008) [8]. notes that:

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

What this means is that in the racial coding of "Tutsi" and "Hutu", a superior group of white-like Hamatic peoples triumphed over an inferior race of Bantu negroids. Mamdani (2008) [8]. goes on to opine that:

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

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

> The Belgian shift from Tutsi to Hutu support

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

As Rwanda transformed from a Tutsi-dominated colonial administration into a postcolonial republic founded on Hutu rule, Straus (2008) [19], commenting on the foregoing says, "Race thinking that had once hardened identity categories and benefited the Tutsi minority now gave rise to ethnic nationalism. Rwanda's new Hutu leaders claimed independence in the name of the previously oppressed Hutu majority" (22).

The above is brought out in Owuor's (2003) [13]. narrative when she talks about fight for survival alongside good and evil in the society in the day-to-day lives of the characters. This is the same situation that the Africans, as alluded to earlier, during the colonial Rwanda went through. At one point we see Kuseremane reminiscing as he was being arrested in the Nairobi streets. He thinks back to the time he met an eccentric man at a coffee shop who was selling pornography magazines and women's lingerie to make a living. The man was animated, making a fool of himself, giving a lot of truth to the "black people are monkeys" discourse. As they talked Kuseremane found out that the man had a Master's degree in Sociology but in the Whiteman's land, those degrees did not carry weight. Their conversation highlights Kuseremane's privilege at that time but also brings to light the fleeting nature of a lot of these things we ascribe importance. Smith and Sobel (2014) [18]. argue that, "Status and education can be everything in one place and context and mean nothing in another" (1).

Still looking at the cause of the ethnic violence experienced in Rwanda, we note that in the midst of a deepening political crisis in the 1990s, the Habyarimana administration found it opportune to direct accusations of neo-colonial elitism and regional divisions among the Hutu onto issues of race. An effectively mobilized program of ethnic nationalism denied the linguistic and cultural commonalities of Hutu and Tutsi and instead insisted on a distinctive Hutu identity and a history of victimization to legitimize the exclusionary policies of the Rwandan nation-state and its definition of citizenship in ethnic and territorial terms. Mbembe (2016) [10]. correctly observes that, "As a consequence, an enjoyment of civil rights depended on appurtenance to an ethnic group or locality" (280).

The discourse of Tutsi racial privilege had thus shifted the imperative of racial exclusion, which encouraged the forceful eviction of "strangers" whose presence could only be perceived as a threat to national sovereignty. Securely constructed within the rhetoric of violence and autochthony, the victim who was also the enemy was blamed for the crisis of the postcolonial nation. Straus (2008) [19]. says, " Consider, for example, the broadcasts aired on state radio which instructed all Rwandans to unite against a common enemy since it's the enemy who wants to reinstate the former feudal monarchy" (50).

Those who are supposed to protect and provide assistance to the suffering refugees are the same who prey on the vulnerable and gullible young girls and women out there. When Kuseremane learns of this he feels greatly betrayed by both his fiancée and sister. He also feels that he is the one to blame for this as he failed to provide for them, being the only male in the family.

This paper observes that in this narrative, modern institutions generate divisive political identities which encourage the production of moral apathy towards those marked as "different" and therefore excluded from the protection of the state. So as to survive, even those affected by marginalization eventually appropriate the institutional apparatus of the nation-state to contain unruly minorities as is evidenced above. The Kuseremane's, for being foreigners, are victimized by the racialized identity they were once eager to embrace. Characters viewed as the oppressed are seen to have the potential to oppress, those viewed as holding power and authority can at any time be turned into the oppressed. Therefore, the seemingly ambivalent and contradictory characterization of Kuseremane, the protagonist, as a victim and genocidaire operates within the logic of organized violence and the mutual fear of being victimized by which current oppressed turn into future's oppressors.

Conclusion

This paper finds that in their search for an understanding of their identity and in an attempt to seek shelter from state-sponsored persecution and terror, the protagonists in Owuor's "Weight of Whispers," are disappointed by the exclusionary practices of modern nation-state and its insistence on the oppositional categories of "citizen" and "stranger", and "insider and outsider."

Furthermore, as "difference" mutates into a source of identity struggle; at personal, cultural and national levels, and conflict, characters are especially left vulnerable to organized hostility. Owuor's narrative enters into a constructive dialogue with scholars who question etiological myths equating the modern with civilizational progress and the social production of moral responsibility. Owuor's tale thus engages the rhetoric of identity that has often preoccupied Kenyan contemporary literature. Our interest is therefore drawn to the historical processes through which personal, cultural and national identities are generated as the narrative reveals the enabling conditions of violence and the concern with the epistemic violence of identity discourses that establish privileged and disenfranchised positions within the nation-state.

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