

Abstract

This thesis explores the novel's potential to interrogate, reimagine and reflect on the histories of nations, particularly the Kenyan nation. It engages with selected Kenyan novels written in both English and Kiswahili for a period of fifty years of post-independence Kenya in a quest that reveals the novels' contributions in imagining, shaping, and reflecting on the nation's histories. The temporal space under focus — 1963 to 2013, provides a sufficient canvas that enables identification of shifts and continuities, transformations and regressions, and how novelists make sense of the changing times. The task of approaching Kenya's narrated histories through the two dominant national languages, Kiswahili and English, is productive since it taps into not only histories that are language oriented, but also various narrative patterns resultant from the Kiswahili and English literary traditions in Kenya. Furthermore, as opposed to focusing on one novelist's portrayal of the nation, the thesis explores texts from a range of novelists from different generational and geographical locations. This offers diverse insights into Kenya's histories as it is anchored on the belief that an assembly of various —artistically organized (Bakhtin 262) voices from carefully chosen novels offers a richer portrait of Kenyan novelists' conversations with their histories.

The thesis foregrounds how novelists —reflect, and reflect on, extant perspectives in understanding reality by creating new maps of existence through ideas that not only generate, but also transcend existing possibilities and ways of apprehending those possibilities (Adebanwi 407). Reflections on the nation's represented histories presuppose a quest for transformation of values, policies, and laws that govern society. This is the motivation of reimagining and reconfiguring troubled, often suppressed, histories of Kenya, which at times erupt in form of violent conflicts, as seen for instance in the 2007/2008 post-election violence.

In an attempt to understand contemporary Kenya's gender and socio-economic inequalities, ethnic tensions, particular regions' quests for secession on various grounds, and state malpractices on the one hand, and certain individuals' sacrificial campaigns for a transformed society on the other, the thesis charts through the precolonial, colonial, and post-independent Kenyan continuum. The thesis focuses on selected novels' subject and themes and comments on style and structure where into or supports the argument being advanced. Through this approach, the thesis emphasises interrogation of inhibitive structural and perceptual foundations by

reading novels that engage Kenya as a contact zone, Kenya's state histories, socio-political histories embedded in romance novels, and the urban novel's engagement with impoverished but resilient urbanites. Overall, the thesis convenes a reflection on the interface between Kenyan histories and artistic engagements with these histories.