MURDER SHE WROTE: READING YVONNE ADHIAMBO OWUOR'S *DUST* AS FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL CRIME FICTION

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I make a case for feminist methods of reading postcolonial crime fiction by using Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel, *Dust*, in order to investigate the gendered construction of criminality in Kenya. While *Dust* has correctly been read as an historical fiction text that challenges the hegemonic narratives which uphold the postcolonial state as is, much less attention has been paid to the ways in which its female characters have made this possible. Through the three featured women in the text, I argue that postcolonial feminist crime fiction proffers ways to interrogate and reimagine phallocratic vernaculars and structures of nationhood and citizenship, human rights and security, and the historical framework of what judicially constitutes a life, and what does not. By reading women's silence and women's memory as forensic tools against the state's masculinist storytelling praxis, I attempt to contribute to the dismantling and reconstruction of the 'human' in art, human rights work, legal policy, and other social imaginaries.

CONTENTS

Introduction

> "I wish to understand something about my country, one that murders the best of its own. What kind of nation gets terrified of a great imagination? What kind of people annihilate holders of a persistent and transcending dream?"[1]

> Extrajudicial executions targeting young men is not the beginning and end of police brutality by any stretch of the imagination. Who are we unseeing?[2]

As scholarship on postcolonial crime fiction increases, postcolonial Kenyan writers' narration of crime as a political statement and/or as a social consequence of modernity have been pulled into scholarship on the genre's critical scope. In what is still a relatively small field, works by John Kiriamiti, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, David Maillu, Mwangi Ruheni, Frank Saisi, Meja Mwangi, Charles Mangua, Stanley Gazemba and Mukoma wa Ngugi – all men – have received considerable academic attention for writing crime narratives into their critiques of the postcolonial state. Yet true to form, there is little to no attention paid to women's movement or present modes of existence, as writers or as characters, and the ways in which they complicate the genre's concerns with sociopolitical resistance, national security and police investigative practices. With few exceptions, such as Alina N. Rinkanya's chapter,[3] and Julia Augart's brief acknowledgement of works by Marjorie Oludhe-Macgoye and Monica Genya, scholarship on this particular literary landscape has been a largely masculine affair. As such, many of these texts often take the gendered affectivity of criminality for granted, and thus do not sufficiently interrogate the circuits of literary production and consumption that maintain the erasure of women's encounters with and knowledge about the hyper-weaponised state and its attendant moral publics.

By considering the affective labour carried out by the female characters in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's debut novel, *Dust*,[4] therefore, my thesis attempts to bring together scholarship on postcolonial studies, Black feminism and crime fiction to interrogate dominant and dehumanising logics of criminality and citizenship in Kenya. Placing *Dust* in conversation with the genealogies of Kenyan law, androcentric histories of police violence and ethnonationally determined identities, I draw attention to how a feminist reading of

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[1] Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, interviewed by Kingwa Kamencu, "The charming paradox of Yvonne Owuor," *Daily Nation*, Jan 3, 2014.
[2] Mwikya, Kenne. Twitter Post. Oct 21, 2018. 8:55 AM. https://twitter.com/KenneMwikya/status/1053902524602822656.
[3] Alina N. Rinkanya, "Rewriting Gender in Kenyan Crime Fiction," in *Life is a Thriller: Investigating African Crime Fiction*, ed. Anja Oed and Christine Matzke (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2012), 185-192.
[4] Yvonne Owuor, *Dust* (London: Granta, 2014).

postcolonial crime fiction's accounts for Black women's ways of seeing, listening and moving through[5] the world deconstruct hegemonic raced, classed and gendered constructions of the criminal and re/imagine different ways to think about the human.

*Dust'*s prologue opens in the streets of Nairobi, where Moses Odidi Ebewesit Oganda is running for his life. After a robbery gone wrong, the police are after him. He hurls the old AK-47 in his hands away, but the memory of it stays on the page – he had traded water songs for it in Eastleigh. Now, to the soundtrack of city noises – screams, gunshots, police orders and bystanders' calls for more death, and a ringing cell phone – Odidi runs towards his house in Nairobi, and hopefully, if he makes it, towards his parents' home in Northern Kenya, which he has not seen in years. But in the narration of his consciousness and the urgency of his running, the two spaces crowd themselves out, spill into his flight for his life, and the once-familiar city changes around him, confuses him, calls for his execution. Odidi runs through Nairobi and through a world of memories, but he does not stand a chance – he is shot several times from behind. Odidi dies.

Shortly afterwards, when Nyipir, Odidi's father and Ajany, Odidi's sister, retrieve his body to take him home, we learn that his murder took place a few days before the results of the general elections were announced on 30th December 2007, and at the beginning of the post-election violence that stands out as an epochal crisis in the chronological account of Kenya's historiography. As national chaos unfolds, Odidi's grieving mother, Akai Ma, disappears into the desert to confront the ancient ghosts she holds responsible for her own death while Ajany returns to Nairobi to investigate an open-and-shut police case. In the city, she meets Justina, Odidi's lover, who holds a daily vigil for him, and has a different story to tell about what happened, and how it happened.

About this period during which this investigation takes place, Grace Musila cogently observes that

> quite apart from the now-typical political mudslinging that often attends electoral campaigns, the foregrounding of the two men's masculinities in the electoral context and the Kenyan public's fascination with constructing and contesting the two candidates' manhoods were suggestive of a certain phallic orientation. This emphatic lingering on the two men's manhoods not only emphasised the historically masculinist posture of state machinery, it also underscored what can be termed the phallocratic landscape of state power in the country.[6]

[5] Kara Melton, "'A Kind of Logic, A Kind of Dominant Logic': Navigating Colonialism, Honoring Black Mobility, and Thinking on Moving Through'" (Master's thesis, Queen's University, 2016), 11.
[6] Grace Musila, *A Death Retold in Truth and Rumour: Kenya, Britain and the Julie Ward Murder* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2015), 36.

This phallocratic orientation of storytelling shows itself in the majority of reports, historical accounts and analyses of the period, and of Kenyan history in general. But in addition to ethnicity and class as analytical lenses, "which have hitherto been foregrounded in understanding the 2007 post-election crisis,"[7] Musila argues for gender as a third lens through which both this period and Kenyan political culture as a whole can be understood.[8] By undertaking a close reading of *Dust* as feminist postcolonial crime fiction, then, I hope to demonstrate and examine the ways it interrogates and reimagine phallocratic vernaculars and structures of nationhood and citizenship, human rights and security, and the legal frameworks of what judicially constitutes a life.

Part of the state's institutional response to the post-election violence was the formation of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. Established in March 2009, its "broad mandate […] was to inquire into gross violation of human rights and historical injustices that occurred in Kenya from 12 December 1963 when Kenya became independent to 28 February 2008 when the Coalition Agreement was signed."[9] In 2013, the same year *Dust* was first published, the Commission published its discoveries, conclusions and recommendations in the allegedly doctored[10] Report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and handed the version to president Uhuru Kenyatta who, at the time, was facing charges of crimes against humanity perpetrated during the post-election violence. The 2200-page report details, often ambivalently, the systemic use of violence against people in Kenya by state security agencies by the British colonial government and the four post-independent regimes that fall within the given timeframe, and while it puts forward several reformative recommendations, the state is yet to implement them.

In the last decade, police violence in Kenya has received increasing and increasingly critical attention from Kenyan citizens and grassroots organisations, local and international mainstream and social media and national, non-governmental and international human rights institutions. Where formal reports, tweets, Facebook posts, newspaper articles, video clips and documentaries are concerned, there is social commentary and human rights rhetoric aplenty. But queer scholar Keguro Macharia identifies and problematizes "report realism", the genre in which many of these accounts are written:

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[7] Musila, 40.
[8] Musila, 40.
[9] Report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, Vol I, 2013, vi.
[10] Oscar Obonyo, "Afraid of the truth? Why the TJRC report is a political hot potato," *Daily Nation*, July 23, 2017. https://www.nation.co.ke/news/afraid-of-truth-why-tjrc-report-political-hot-potato/1056-4027768-rjt4elz/index.html.

> Kenyan writing has been shaped by NGO demands: the 'report' has become the dominant aesthetic foundation. Whether personal and confessional or empirical and factual or creative and imaginative, report-based writing privileges donors' desires: to help, but not too much; to save, but not too fast; to uplift, but never to foster equality. One can imagine how these aims meld with traditional modes of realism and naturalism and also speak to modernist truncations and postmodern undecidability […] The report aesthetic goes beyond citing facts and figures. It is concerned, above all, with a search for truth and accuracy and is threatened by imaginative labour.[11]

Macharia was not making a comment about Kenyan fiction in particular, but I argue that the rigid concern with singular truths and the politics of uplift-or-downfall apply in a majority of the texts slotted into the crime fiction genre. *Dust*, I argue, persistently asks a question that refuses the gendered limitations of this genre, as well as the format of an epochal conclusion: "*What endures*?"[12] Appearing thirteen times in the text, the question's repetition and its answers draw our attention to slippery chronologies, the psychogeographies of haunting and the persistence of heartbreak that eludes the Commission's realist reportage. Interested in what these forms of knowledge attempt to lay bare for investigation, I hope to explore their connections with each other within in order to understand what it means – and in many ways, has always meant – to be a criminal and/or a citizen within the sociopolitical parameters of humanity dictated by the nation state and its attendant moral publics.

Dust has been read by reviewers and scholars alike as a historical fiction text that "ingenuously narrates the [hi]stories on the margins in Kenya"[13], particularly through its portrayal and critique of state-sanctioned violence. Yet even though we are privy to Odidi's adrenaline-pumped thoughts as he runs for his life, the three women who feature in his final memories, and then in the rest of the novel, hardly fit into the analyses and arguments on the ways in which *Dust* is descriptive and critical of Kenyans' encounters with the state's security apparatus. Considering the phallocratic nature of scholarship on the genre as mentioned above, this way of reading, which focuses primarily on the text's male characters and yields a heavily androcentric bibliography, is not surprising. To these ways of reading, Saidiya Hartman, trying to locate Black women's labours during and after slavery in the US, opens a line of inquiry for me, too:

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[11] Keguro Macharia, "Report Realism: Tentative Notes on Contemporary Kenyan Writing," *Gukira* (blog), January 25, 2012. https://gukira.wordpress.com/2012/01/25/report-realism-tentative-notes-on-contemporary-kenyan-writing/.
[12] Owuor, 47.
[13] Boiyo Amos Burkeywo, "Narrating Kenyan History Through Fiction in Yvonne Owuor's *Dust,*" (Master's thesis, University of Nairobi, 2015), 6.

> So where exactly does the sex drudge, recalcitrant domestic, broken mother, or sullen wet nurse fit into the scheme of the general strike? […] Where does the *impossible domestic* fit into the general strike? What is the text of her insurgency and the genre of her refusal? What visions of the future world encourage her to run, or propel her flight?[14]

Hartman refers to the concept of the general strike as developed by W.E.B. Du Bois, a political praxis through which Black people withdrew their labour from white supremacist productive economies – during the American Civil War, they ran away, took up arms against slaveholders or sabotaged their property. Arguing that "the classic detective story endorses the bourgeois state and its social arrangements and presents any challenge to these as threats to be allayed,"[15] Yumna Siddiqi considers the class consciousness of the general strike within the genre of postcolonial crime fiction. This genre, she argues, "expresses anxieties about order and control [and] rehearses the efficacy of the police through narratives of detection and pursuit;"[16] a close feminist reading thus requires paying close attention to the affective labour carried out by the figure Hartman draws our attention to. Through Akai, Ajany and Justina, whose movements, silences, questions and acts of storytelling draw our attention to the destructive intimacies of heteropatriarchal ethnonationalism's systemic constructions of humanity, I consider their postcolonial criminality and modes of detection via their specific geohistorical contexts and experiences of impossible domesticity.

Who is the impossible domestic? Discussing the ways in which she is a problem and chance for Du Bois, Fred Moten argues that she is indexed as follows:

> the one who does the labour of the house that is constitutive of the economy and yet remains irreducibly outside of the economy and the house, not just as stranger, but as outside the law, outside of the law's protection even if open to the law's assault. This is what I mean by criminality — the status of the outlaw in all of its constitutive force in relation to the law, the house, the commune, the family; the status of the outlaw in all of the deconstructive force and danger to the law and the house of its ordinary imagination. This criminality is essential and historical. The outlaw, the impossible domestic, is before the law but not subject to it because [she is] not under its protection. She is, rather, the law's object or, more precisely, the thing or gathering or vessel of and before the law, up ahead and destructive of it. She can be prosecuted but she cannot and chooses not to prosecute. Citizenship is denied to the thing who denies citizenship. She enacts an ordinary apposition to, a

[14] Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labour," *Souls* 18, no. 1(2016): 167, 171.
[15] Yumna Siddiqi, "Police and Postcolonial Rationality in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*," *Cultural Critique* 50 (2002), 176.
[16] Siddiqi, 176.

> denial-in-abolition of, citizenship. *The impossible domestic apposes the citizen-subject.*[17]

Considering the ways in which male crime fiction writers in Kenya imagine women within the matrix of criminality – for instance, Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* frames the main character's socioeconomic position and attitudes towards women as a direct consequence of having a "whoring mother"[18] who dies on the second page of the text, chasing down men who did not pay her– Moten's descriptive juxtaposition of the impossible domestic and the citizen subject is fitting for the work this thesis undertakes. What becomes increasingly evident in a close reading of the nation state's grammars, knowledge systems and institutional structures of law and order – and often, therefore, in the worldmaking potential of Kenyan fiction, and in literary response to it – is that the impossible domestic is rendered illegible. Yet as Hartman argues,

> if we intend to do more than make the recalcitrant domestic, the outcast, and the insurrectionist a figure for our revolutionary longing, or impose yet another burden on black female flesh by making it 'a placeholder for freedom,' then we must never lose sight of the material conditions of her existence or how much she has been required to give up for our survival.[19]

By mapping a quotidian genealogy of state violence through the three primary women characters in the text, *Dust* places heavy emphasis on the material conditions that inform impossible domesticity when it is juxtaposed patriarchal, apparently law-abiding personhood. Each of these three women are, per Kenyan law, guilty of various criminal acts; they are also vital agents within the temporal scope of the investigation into Odidi's death, an investigation that illuminates the "national economy of secrets"[20] as a multi-gendered, multi-ethnic, multi-class affair that shifts hegemonic conceptions of criminality, justice and human life. By implicating each and every character and his or her social position in the crime story of Odidi's death, *Dust* emphasises the fallacy of innocence and highlights the role that classist politics of complicity plays in the systemic making of the human and the rights he or she is entitled to. Juliane Okot Bitek's review puts it more eloquently by succinctly pointing out, "the pervasive nature of dust, the way it defines everything, gets into everything, carries cough germs, triggers asthma, sits on your eyelashes *and creates otherworldly silhouettes on*

[17] Fred Moten, "Uplift and Criminality," in *Next to the Colour Line*: *Gender, Sexuality and W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 340-341, emphasis added.
[18] Charles Mangua, *Son of Woman*, (Nairobi: Spear Books, 1988), 7-8.
[19] Hartman, 171.
[20] Owuor, 124.

the road ahead. Dust is the evidence that everything will integrate in time, and yet all of it remains."[21].

Chapter One unpacks the text's loaded assertion that "memories are ghosts"[22] by recalling the geo-histories of police violence in Kenya through Akai Lokorijom's encounters with spectrality, starting with a long-disappeared colonial police officer named Hugh Bolton. As Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi note,

> women's colonial histories […] challenge the chronological boundaries that have framed African colonial history generally, boundaries based largely on formal political markers, such as a decisive military defeat, a treaty of "protection," or the hoisting of the flag of independence. For the most part, such markers are not gender-neutral, but rather signify definitive moments in the colonial histories of male political elites.[23]

Through Nyipir, Akai's husband, *Dust* identifies certain periods within Kenya's history using these political markers – the State of Emergency between 1953 and 1959, early post-independence years between 1963 and Tom Mboya's assassination in 1969, and the 2007-2008 post-election violence that intersects with the aftermath of Odidi's death. Unlike the TJRC Report mentioned above, however, these neat chronological divisions are rendered untenable by Akai's probing into the unthinkable, particularly the trajectory between "Why is what you know more truthful than what I know?"[24] and "Where's my son?"[25] and the chaos and/or silence it engenders. As a young girl educated at and expelled from a missionary school, Akai Ma's questions, relationships and dis/appearances underwrite the gendered continuities of state violence between the colonial state and postcolonial nationhood. Taking into consideration, then, that "Akai lives in the Northern Frontier District (NFD), distanced, *Dust* tells us, from the heart of Kenyan politics" and is also "removed from the Kenya imagined in "fiction about Kenya,"[26] this chapter explores the significance of her character through what is considered madness by patriarchal renderings of motherhood. Her modes of questioning , wandering and haunting as a method of remembering, as well as her intimate experiences with the state's agents of law enforcement resurrect the ghostly figures

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[21] Juliane Okot Bitek, "The Powdering of History: Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*," *Warscapes*, Oct 26, 2015, http://www.warscapes.com/reviews/powdering-history-yvonne-adhiambo-owuors-dust.
[22] Owuor, 8.
[23] Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi, introduction to *Women in African Colonial Histories,* eds. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1-2.
[24] Owuor, 225.
[25] Owuor, 35.
[26] Keguro Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor II," *Gukira* (blog), April 16, 2014, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2014/04/16/reading-yvonne-owuor-ii/.

of colonial and postcolonial Kenya that elucidate the fissures between the law and Black motherhood that do not just criminalise her movements and actions, but render them those of a mad woman.

Chapter Two takes a closer look at the ways in which post/colonial legislative frameworks regarding criminality are structured to manage impossible domesticity by considering the city's psychogeography through Justina, an artist and sex worker in Nairobi. As artist Naddya Odhiambo has pointed out, "patriarchy is the scaffolding that holds up the city"[27]; but as Odidi runs through a city of "ravenous, carnivorous urban trolls,"[28] Justina is the humanising marker towards whom he has set his bearing, and through whom we will learn about his life in the city. When she reappears almost two hundred pages later, we learn that she is an artist and sex worker in Nairobi. This chapter is therefore concerned with critically engaging the stories this criminalised figure knows, tells, forgets, incarnates, discards or hides about the city by engaging with the history of sex workers in Nairobi as documented by Janet Bujra and Luise White, the representation of 'urban women' in postcolonial Kenyan novels and in contemporary mainstream media, and the various post/colonial laws that criminalise sex work.

If Justina represents a Kenyan type of woman, and Akai-ma is the 'unthought', then Chapter Three positions Ajany as the postcolonial detective, a transnational figure suturing together, in her body and travels, Akai-ma and Justina, but also going where they cannot go in some instances. As the detective figure whose role is complicated by historical and personal burdens of fugitivity, I argue that Ajany uses the historical and personal burden of heartbreak, which "elucidates how the violence of racial capitalism inaccurately reproduces Black life,"[29] to navigate her investigation into the story of her brother's death. Taking her entry into the reader's purview through music – a ringtone on Odidi's phone interwoven with the sounds of the city – as a crucial aural starting point, this chapter pays close attention to how the text's soundscape guides Ajany's movement so as to explore investigative praxes that do not pander to the deadly logic of the police state's extra/judicial frameworks.

Dust is, ultimately, a radical memory project, where "memory work is myth-building and myth-busting, story-making and story-unmaking, a stitching and patching, cutting and pasting, and never as patchy and cut-pasted as when it's collective memory work."[30] By

[27] Bethuel Muthee, "Naijographia," (*Naijographia* Catalogue, Nairobi, 2017), 6.
[28] Owuor, 6.
[29] Katherine McKittrick & Alexander Weheliye, "808s and Heartbreaks," *Propter Nos* 2, no. 1 (2017): 14.
[30] Keguro Macharia, "kenya's memory work," *Gukira* (blog), May 31, 2013, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2013/05/31/kenyas-memory-work/.

emphasising the ways in which women's modes of memory disorder the archives and contemporary mechanics of the police state, the text makes a critical intervention into crime fiction studies from the continent. yields several contradictory answers and does not purport to resolve these contradictions, or even to suggest they can be resolved. Hopefully, however, in the way that "to 're-member' is to make a member again, to bring that member back into the community of imagination, re-awakening past trajectories and giving new momentum along new paths of the present",[31] I conclude that *Dust*'s careful consideration of women's histories and a critical feminist engagement with the worlds they have thus engendered opens ways to imagine more ethical and regenerative ways to think about forms of justice beyond what our legal systems claim to represent.

[31] Wambui Mwangi, "Silence is a Woman," *The New Inquiry*, June 4, 2013, https://thenewinquiry.com/silence-is-a-woman/.

Chapter One
The Ghosts that Make Her Wander: Interrogating the Police Post/Colony Through the Haunting Poetics of the Black Mother

> *I speak of the Black mother as that part of us which is chaotic, messy, deep, dark ancient, old and freeing.*[1]

Dust's prologue opens in high and chaotic momentum on the streets of Nairobi as Odidi runs for his life, as people – cops and civilians alike – call for his death. In real time, it is a brief scene, but his memories lengthen its text as "all his life races past him in spaceless time and timeless space, and he can feel again, only much faster, and with sunlike light, all he has felt before."[2] Our encounter with the terrain Odidi covers, therefore, is twofold. On the one hand, the text maps his trajectory through the city and its soundscape; on the other, he races through a series of disjointed memories, ranging from days to decades old. It is the latter's topography that features lingering conversations, relationships in fragments, music and astrology, home and its reverberations and Elsewhere, plans for the future, colleagues, friends and family. When the first bullet tears into his shoulder, we learn that "it is said that in the throes of battle dying men cry out for their mothers. *Akai-ma*, Odidi groans. She wards off ghouls and bad night entities, wrestles God, casts ancient devils into hell before their time, and kicks aside sea waves so her son will pass unhindered."[3] As Odidi hobbles desperately, losing control of his bladder, we learn that Akai-ma "fixes everything. Retrieves those who belong to her."[4] And finally, when he hits the tarmac and realizes he really is going to die, "Akai-ma will be mad. Flicker of laughter. She *was* mad. *Akai-ma.*"[5] Considering the text's insistent claim that "memories are ghosts"[6] and "places are ghosts, too,"[7] this chapter hinges on the third formulation by exploring the ways in which Akai's madness – or the part of her that is chaotic, messy, deep, dark, ancient, old and freeing – offers a way to navigate the haunted terrain Odidi's death opens up to investigation. If historical fiction here is rendered by haunting as a mode of remembering – and the text insists on it, directly referring to haunting and its affectivity at least nineteen times – I am interested in how patriarchal memory-making is rendered untenable by the illegibility of the Black mother.

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[1] Marion Kraft, 'The Creative Uses of Difference.' In *Conversations with Audre Lorde* ed. J. Wylie Hall, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 147.
[2] Yvonne Owuor, *Dust* (London: Granta, 2014), 7.
[3] Owuor, 7.
[4] Owuor, 8.
[5] Owuor, 8.
[6] Owuor, 24, 106, 123, 124.
[7] Owuor, 121.

Tirop Simatei has argued that "one of the persistent concerns of Kenyan literature is violence generated by colonial injustice and perpetuated in independent Kenya through unaltered colonial structures and institutions;"[8] in this regard, *Dust* is no exception. But many of these texts, and many scholarly engagements with them, take a masculinist colonial and postcolonial history for granted; as Elleke Boehmer cogently observes,

> when we look at its iconography, its administrative structures or its policies, the new postcolonial nation is a historically male constructed space, narrated into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists and writers, in which women are more often than not cast as symbols or totems, as the bearers of tradition.[9]

This narration is exemplified in the temporal iconography of the Report of the Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). Explaining the chronological framework of its labour, the TJRC Report states that for its analytical purposes,

> the historical period has been divided into four distinct epochs […]:
> - British colonial era (1895 to 1963)
> - President Jomo Kenyatta's era (1963 to 1978)
> - President Daniel Arap Moi's era (1978 to 2002) and;
> - President Mwai Kibaki's era (2002 to 2008)[10]

While the multi-volume report is the first of its kind, it has been entrenched in the typical banality of government bureaucracy, dormancy and periodic attempts at erasure or manipulation of its authors, its content or its process,[11] and is ultimately not much more than an authoritative document peddled by dishonest politics. Still, its iconographical timeline, divided into administrative regimes that demonstrate elite, phallocratic modes of temporality, is telling of a pedagogically androcentric history as a way of knowing and remembering Kenya, where women are both invisible as humans but hypervisibilised as symbol or territory, and where the stories about violence are neatly identified by epoch with lesser consideration for the intimate ways in which they linger for generations. This thesis primarily argues that if *Dust* is also a story about the nation – nation-building, nationhood, nationalisms – then it is also an intervention in temporal archiving that centres that which Macharia

[8] Tirop Simatei, "Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations: Violence, Landscape and Memory in Kenyan Fiction," *Research in African Literatures* 36, no.2 (2005), 85.
[9] Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 22.
[10] Report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, Volume IIA, 2013, 2.
[11] Most recently, for instance, Ron Slye, one of the members of the Commission, recently published *The Kenyan TJRC: An Outsider's View of the Inside* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), which purportedly details multiple concerns about the politics of the TJRC, including, for instance, deleted chapters on elite land ownership in Kenya.

identifies as "Akai's hungers"[12] and what Audre Lorde recognises as "a dark place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, 'beautiful and tough as chestnut stanchions against [y]our nightmare of weakness' and of impotence."[13] *Dust* I argue, presents this madness through the spectral figure of the Black mother and her poetry in Odidi's final memories as a point of departure, compelling each character to confront his or her relationship with the chaotic terrain that haunts postcolonial life, where poetry is a "revelatory distillation of experience"[14] that will prove useful to Ajany's investigative function.

Avery Gordon's definition of haunting is instructive for this purpose:

> Haunting is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes very obliquely. I use the term *haunting* to describe how singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done with comes alive, when what's in your blind spot comes into view. *Haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present and the future.* These spectres or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent or symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view.[15]

As we have seen, *Dust*'s prologue presents one such animated state through Odidi's flight – the unresolved social violence in question here is the state's systemic proclivity to kill, but the capitalist, heteronormative logic of this crucial function of the state is distorted by memory and place. And when Odidi dies, this terrain and its populace – people and ghouls and night entities – do not disappear; in fact, they make up a significant part of the rest of the text's story, which makes the living, human figures mentioned occupants and active agents (henceforth referred to as spectral figures) in a spectral realm that insists we focus on the un/knowability of secret things. The violent and quotidian social crisis of extrajudicial executions – acknowledged in this parlance to varying extents by the government, human rights organisations, the media and civil society as a cause for superficial alarm – takes centre stage in *Dust*, but it is the Black mother's madness through which its gendered historical burden will be unpacked.

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[12] Keguro Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor II," *Gukira* (blog), April 16, 2014, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2014/04/16/reading-yvonne-owuor-ii/.
[13] Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Toronto: Crossing Press, 2007 reprint), 36.
[14] Lorde, 37.
[15] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xvi.

I say 'most of the figures' because as Odidi slips into death, we do encounter an actual ghost for a few seconds, perhaps one of the ghouls Akai-ma fails to ward off:

> Just when Odidi would have thrown himself into Nyipir's arms, a chill shadow crashes into him, stabbing into his body.
>
> Now.
>
> It stretches over him.
>
> Odidi croaks. *You!*
>
> It stares back, empty-socketed, and as noiseless as when they had first met. *What do you want?* Hollow hunger. Perpetual thirst. *Here I am.* The thing smiles. Odidi understands […] *Leave her alone.* Cold tears […] *Please.* The shape watches Odidi's seeping shadow flow into a twisted, dark-red cave, its den. *Not her fault*, Odidi pleads. *I'm here*.[16]

The only non-living figure individually identified in and recalled to Odidi's memory is the skeleton in the red cave that he and Ajany discovered as children. It is thus tempting to treat it as the only ghost, and an easy one at that when we find out it belongs to Hugh Bolton, a police officer who went missing just before Kenya's independence – the representation of colonial spectrality in the postcolony. But the text asserts that this will not be the case: anybody who is remembered is implicated in ghostliness, and thus there are several people – many of whom have died social deaths and reclaimed identities not granted or determined by the nation state – not just to be investigated, but who also embark/have embarked on particular investigations of their own. Importantly, Ajany's investigation into her brother's death, which I explore in Chapter 3, is foreshadowed, or haunted, by an older, incomplete investigation into the disappearance of Hugh Bolton. It thus becomes impossible for her to arrive at the resolutions she needs regarding Odidi's death until the earlier mystery is also probed for answers that did not yield to the original, official line of inquiry, but yield now under the weight of a haunted history. And as it turns out, before his death, Odidi had resurrected the childhood memory of the skeleton, inadvertently bringing about the necessary interferences between investigations, and the lives and livelihoods between them; if we are thus tasked with a particular way of knowing both what happened and what is happening now, then it's important to understand and interrogate existing hegemonic knowledge constructions – on what the law, the criminal, and the citizen are –as well.

In addition to the depiction of her madness, therefore, which Keguro Macharia necessarily reads as "unending mourning,"[17] I am drawn to Akai-ma in particular because

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[16] Owuor, 11.
[17] Keguro Macharia. "Reading Yvonne Owuor I." *Gukira* (blog), Jan 20, 2014, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2014/01/20/reading-yvonne-owuor-i/.

hers is the only figure cast into battle in the ghostly plane of Odidi's memory. The insinuation is clear: as a mother, it is Akai's duty to protect her children from harm, even go so far as fight the otherworldly to protect and repair, as is the labour assigned to, expected of and disproportionally produced by Black women. And while it shall become clear that Akai-ma would probably do what she could to protect her son, her spectral figure loses the battle, and, as it turns out, cannot fix everything. Odidi is murdered and the ghouls, all but one unknown to him, survive into the rest of the text, such that *Dust* is replete with ghosts. Gordon elaborates on the function of the ghost:

> If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life […] The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or what is happening."[18]

Dead people's names and/or unnamed dead people appear as a running commentary of spectral figures alongside Odidi's own. This is emphasised by the fact that in real time, after Odidi's death is brashly explained away on television, Ajany and Nyipir Oganda, daughter and father, meet in Nairobi to take Odidi's body home while "a chubby man [mutters] an oath that will render him the president of a burning country," a deed that "will add fuel to an already out-of-control national grieving,"[19] and catalyse the formation of the TJRC in 2008. *Dust* briefly accounts for the several weeks that Kenyan news, and news about Kenya, revolved around the ethnopatriarchal rivalry between two men referred to as Chibaki and Agwambo[20], and that "a man from Ghana named Choffeur [who sends] another named Kofi Annan to save Kenya,"[21] nodding toward the ongoing phallocracy of the political landscape; but it is the ghouls and ghosts that haunt the post-colony under the sanitised trope of extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances that will consistently demand the attention of the friends and family, and many, many Kenyans, that will survive Odidi.

I am drawn to Akai for a third reason. After her initial introduction in three formulations in the prologue, she is repeatedly introduced anew, as per each character's perspective, before we finally listen to her stories according to her. These reintroductions are

[18] Gordon, 8.
[19] Owuor, 24.
[20] That is, former president Mwai Kibaki and his then opponent, and current leader of Kenya's opposition, Raila Odinga.
[21] Owuor, 82.

an interesting textual device because *Dust* does not just render Akai's stories as gap-fillers in an official history, but as a whole and complicated life with its tangent geohistories that are both subject to the laws and patriarchal logic of the oppressive colonial and postcolonial state *and* to its own desires and fears. The insistence on introducing her again and again serves as a reminder that the stories of Kenya are inaccurate or incomplete as if she has not been present all along, disrupting linear, unimaginative renditions of truth and rendering patriarchal rules and assumptions about Black womanhood untenable. The stories about how the novel's characters *met* and *came to know* Akai are notable junctures of illegibility – what I referred to in the introduction as the unthought. Of course, the nature of these introductions warrants individual attention because they give us insight into various ways of seeing Akai, and the chronology in which *Dust* presents them allows us to see the ways in which she scuttles the linearity of patriarchal logic. By centring Akai's madness as a lens through which to understand this haunting, the scene of the crime, and thus the site of the law and its interpretations ceases to be an exclusively male territory, but instead must contend with a figure who is, as Macharia observes, "always interrupting (a bath, a sentence, a mourning), always too present, if spectral."[22] The questions Akai poses herself or prompts from the other characters or the reader, those that seemed to produce or have been produced by some sort of madness, are the site at which a particular social life is made – one that has to reckon with very real and complex figurations of womanhood that live and build worlds in the "border crossings, grey areas, and the ambiguous interstices of the binaries where woman is both benevolent *and* malevolent with powers that are healing *and* lethal, both traditional *and* modern, both victim *and* agent, both goddess *and* whore, 'soft but stern'; in short, just human."[23]

The Black mother fulfils a different role in the postcolonial literatures of nostalgia and nationalist identities, however, where

> one noticeable aspect of gendered constructions of the nation is the configuration of the nation as the land/subjects/female and the state as the rulers/male; a notion that can be traced back to the colonial state's […] mapping of the imperial conquest through grammars of 'penetration' of feminised territories.[24]

[22] Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor I."
[23] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Imagining knowledge, power and subversion in the margins," in *The Politics of (M)otherhood* ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (London: Routledge, 1997), 3.
[24] Musila, 40, 42.

Motherhood in particular has an assigned and therefore legible nationalist role because, as Ifi Amadiume argues, "maternity is viewed as sacred in the traditions of all African societies. And in all of them, the earth's fertility is traditionally linked to women's maternal powers. Hence the centrality of women as producers and providers and the reverence in which they are held."[25] This reverence often means an inadvertent inability or unwillingness to imagine the real lives of mothers as anything other than endlessly generous and violently long-suffering at the same time, even when it is well-meaning. Christina Kenny, for instance, writes that "a great tragedy of *Dust* is Akai's inability to protect her family, in spite of her prodigious and elemental power"[26] – not the systemic and historical violence that has led to the murder of her son, but her failure at preventing it from happening.

But African literatures are also populated by women-as-mothers who work through a different worldview and world-building praxis that prioritises not just their survival, but their desires, their curiosity, their failures and all other complications therein: from Buchi Emecheta's Nne Ugu[27] and Mariama Ba's Ramatoulye[28] to Ayobami Adebayo's Yejide[29] and Lola Shoneyin's Bolanle.[30] In many ways, they carve out the possible and complex geo-historical terrains of possibilities of survival, desire and other world-building praxes. And because they have lessons to teach, we must "never close our eyes to the terror, to the chaos which is Black which is creative which is female which is dark which is rejected which is messy which is […] sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting."[31]

After we encounter Akai-ma through Odidi's memories and projections, we meet her for the first time when Nyipir and Ajany fly Odidi's body home; this time, she is figured as the solid, harsh reality of madness. She emerges from the rust-coloured family Land Rover and the text introduces her, not as Akai-ma, but as "Nyipir's Oganda's wife, Akai Lokorijom:

> She flows like magma, every movement considered, as if it has come from the root of the world. Tall, willowy, wasp-waisted, her breasts still large and firm, she is made of and coloured by the earth itself. Something ferocious peers out of dark-brown eyes, so that even her most tender glance scalds. Her voice, a bassoon-sounding, gravel-coloured afterthought. At unpredictable moments, for nameless reasons, she might erupt with molten-rock fury, belching fire that

[25] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, (London: Zed Books, 1987), 191.
[26] Christina Kenny, "'She is made of and coloured of the earth itself': Motherhood and Nation in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*," (presentation, 39th AFSAAP Annual Conference, Perth, 5-7 Dec 2016), 15.
[27] Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, (New York: George Braziller, 1979).
[28] Mariama Ba, *So Long a Letter*, trans. Modupé Bodé-Thomas, (London: Heinemann, 1989).
[29] Ayobami Adebayo, *Stay With Me,* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018).
[30] Lola Shoneyin, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).
[31] Lorde, 101.

> damaged everything it encountered. Akai was as dark, difficult and dangerous as one of those few mountains where God shows up, and just as mystifying.[32]

Dust does not avoid the trope – that of the motherland, the mother as land – and Kenny identifies Akai as "a mythic embodiment of nation […] experienced by her lovers and children as a grounded earthly phenomenon."[33] But contrary to what Amadiume observes about the expectations that motherhood tendency towards provision, protection and nurture, Akai is volatile, volcanic, even dangerous. There are no allusions to fertility, tenderness or loyalty to anything or anybody but her own illegibility and mystery and her madness, as Odidi predicted it, is evident:

> Nyipir's eyes are fixed on the bald patches on Akai-ma's scalp where she has torn out her hair. Scratches and tear marks on her face. Blood cakes her body in thin strips. One of Nyipir's AK-47, the four-kilogram 1952 with a wooden butt stick and hand guard, is strapped to her body, cradled in a green kanga with an aphorism written on it: *Udongo uwahi maji,* 'Work with wet clay.'[34]

This snapshot of Akai is perhaps the most arresting image in the text: she has arrived at the site of her son's homecoming broken, armed and mad. Her failure in the spectral terrain in which we first encountered her foreshadows her physical lateness to the scene of battle, and even though she knows her son is dead and that it is his body in the coffin that comes off the plane, she repeatedly demands to know: "Who is it?" When Nyipir finally succumbs to her question and tells her who, her following questions defy the logic of his answer: "Where is my son? […] Nyipir, where's my son? […] I told you, 'Bring my son home.' Didn't you hear me? Nyipir, *where's my child?*"[35] Over an hour later, she redirects her questions towards her daughter, even after she has seen Odidi's body: "Where's your brother?"[36]

Perhaps Akai's grief comes close to understandable: it is that of a mother encountering her dead child. However, when Nyipir tries to distract it with Ajany's presence, her only living child now, and when Ajany demands that her mother tends to her desolation, too, and reaches for her,

> Akai recoils, tears herself away. Her eyes are thin slits, her nostrils flare, and when Ajany looks again, her mother is a still, steady point with a finger on a trigger and a smile on her face. *Click-clack*. Selector set to burst. Clear gaze.

[32] Owuor, 33.
[33] Kenny, 19.
[34] Owuor, 33.
[35] Owuor, 35.
[36] Owuor, 37.

> Gun pointed to heart, a glint from the barrel like light on a pathologist's scalpel. *Certainty*. Akai will pull the trigger if Ajany moves in her direction again.[37]

Ajany drops to the ground and covers her face as the possibility of her own death looms "[tender] because her mother is on the other side,"[38] and waits. In that moment, and for the rest of the story as told through Ajany, Akai evokes and affirms the first line in Lorde's poem for the Black mother: "I cannot recall you gentle."[39] Unable to coax the life she wants out of her husband and daughter, she spurns them in a "shift of pressure, rush of air. Running feet, a question, and the distant slam of doors. Car engine revs, wheel squeal […] Akai Lokorijom is leaving."[40] The question of Odidi's whereabouts lingers after she leaves in such a way that prompts Ajany to return to Nairobi to find Odidi, but it also extends into the past: in August 1998, when the US Embassy in Nairobi was bombed, Akai packed her bags, prepared to go look for Odidi. Nyipir's intervention with his own intelligence-work and his confirmation of their son's safety is the only thing that stopped her. But it is now 2007, and Nyipir is unable to give the same reassurances she is demanding from him, so she leaves to untangle her questions on her own. Akai-ma loses her spectral battle, cannot fix everything and, while we will not find out where she goes, she has left behind the memory of her – a spectral figure – and a difficult line of inquiry for her family to try find answers to.

Akai's departure is not unprecedented. After she leaves, Galgalu and Nyipir are left to fill in gaps to explain her behaviour to Ajany. Galgalu maintains the only thing he knows about Akai is that she is somewhat predictable, that "always, she comes back home,"[41] and Nyipir recites the story about a black leopard that he has always reserved for all the times like this. But this time, the text tells us, "a disappearing mother, heaving silences, and the desire to vomit out anguish"[42] endure. This is the consequence of Akai's departure: for much of the text, we encounter her, just as we did with Odidi, through other characters' memories as a spectral figure: even if they are reluctant, all the characters who know Akai have no choice but to confront the haunted terrain she moves in and out of. Though frightening, Gordon elaborates that

> haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done. Indeed […] haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that

[37] Owuor, 37.
[38] Owuor, 37.
[39] Lorde, 100.
[40] Owuor, 38.
[41] Owuor, 40.
[42] Owuor, 47.

> moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.[43]

Neither attempt at accounting for her mother's disappearance is sufficient for Ajany, and she soon leaves Wuoth Ogik, not to go after her mother, but to try produce this something-to-be-done by answering her heavily laden question. Ajany's memory of Akai is inextricable from that of the pink house as she moves through it, remembering her childhood: if her mother is a haunting/haunted figure, this is a haunting/haunted house. Its most tangible ghost is a name in the books in Wuoth Ogik's library, "Hugh Bolton", who was recast by Akai as "Someone Else"[44] when Ajany, trying to improve her reading, incidentally came across it in one of the house library's many books. As it turns out, though, "the same ghost that had haunted her had haunted Odidi."[45] That is, the same particular ghoul he confronted as he died – might have remained a back-of-the-mind presence for Akai and Nyipir had Odidi not called a stranger to Wuoth Ogik shortly before he was killed: a man named Isaiah Bolton.

The Bolton name, whenever it has been uttered at Wuoth Ogik, has always rattled Akai and Nyipir and the apparition of Isaiah comes at an especially inconvenient time for the family, but incidentally convenient for the temporal project of the narrative. He is looking for Odidi because he is looking for his father – Hugh – and his presence resurrects an investigation much older than the one Ajany is about to embark on, breaking down history's linear timeline to collapse significant parts of the two into one. Unnervingly, he arrives with one of Wuoth Ogik's books, *Engineers' Field Guide*; Odidi once took it as his, and then in response to a newspaper advertisement in search of Hugh, sent the book to England, to Isaiah, who has been curious about the older Bolton his whole life. Consequently, Isaiah now shows up at Wuoth Ogik, book in hand and with questions of his own, including questions about a painting that has sat between the book's pages for decades. Thus, we are reintroduced to Akai once more when Ajany, a painter herself, takes the canvas and

> reads the neat script – *Finn diri* – beneath the watercolour of a nude woman whose eyes glower. The woman, not just naked, exposed, raw to the soul. Intricate body scars jump off the small canvas. Languid. Indolent. Poured out woman. Etched into it, sorrow, hunger, beauty, anguish, worship, and defiance. One hand on her knees, the other beneath her head; something arcane suggested in the fecund, swollen, belly. Details – a beaded wrist

[43] Gordon, xvi.
[44] Owuor, 54.
[45] Owuor, 64.

> bracelet. *This is a soul*. Worlds slipping, a giddy wondering, Ajany glares at the artist's signature: *H. Bolton.*[46]

The image bears close ties to haunting: her threat to undress and curse her family on the day Odidi and Nyipir fought, and Odidi left home for good, has retroactively come to pass, permanently imprinted on canvas and raising questions as impossible to answer as if she had uttered them herself. Since it will be a long while before Akai herself tells stories that explain how the painting came to be, we are compelled, in the meantime, to try make sense of the painting through Ajany's, Isaiah's and Nyipir's reactions to it. Ajany simultaneously looks away and shields her brother's coffin from the image – it is unbearable, incomprehensible in the way the overwhelmingly private has become visible to all, and she has to fight the urge to destroy it with her own painting. For Isaiah, it is a means through which he will find his father. For Nyipir, it is a breaking point, for "there's nothing left of Oganda's home;"[47] his wife has been desecrated by a dead man, the evidence of which has been delivered by the dead man's son.

Yet despite the shock to Nyipir's patriarchal sensibilities and the obvious sign of Akai's pending motherhood in the image, the woman on the canvas was not a mother or wife in the Oganda household at the time of painting, which makes the claim to familial desecration indefensible. But the image poses questions for each character about Someone Else, his relationship with Akai and with Wuoth Ogik and, as per Isaiah's insistence, his whereabouts, and the answers require excavating taken-for-granted truths and deliberately hidden graves. The woman in the image is not (yet) Nyipir's wife and Akai's mother, then *who is she?* Ajany and Isaiah therefore find themselves tasked with looking for answers at the intersections of all these questions. And because "Akai Lokorijom [has] not come home yet"[48] – indeed, it will be a while until the text even begins to track her movements – we are first required to confront intergenerational recollections from those who she has left behind: Ajany, Nyipir, Galgalu, the ghosts of Wuoth Ogik, and their tangential hauntings. One of the first spectres *Dust* therefore resurrects to bear witness to the painting and its accompanying questions is Selene Bolton, Hugh's ex-wife, who first asked the question about Akai in the fifties, and through whom the landscape of the colonial state's police violence is narrated.

[46] Owuor, 65.
[47] Owuor, 71.
[48] Owuor, 117.

For the entirety of the colonial period in British colonies in Africa, "law and order had been a near obsession with certain sections of European settler communities."[49] In Kenya, early settler colonialists believed the law

> was essential to their project, a tool to advance and protect their racial, political and economic dominance. The courts must, they argued, be tilted in favour of whites: first, to teach Africans new ways of thinking and acting (hence 'master and servants' laws), and second, to protect whites' freedom to do as they wished vis-à-vis Africans (most importantly, to impose extra-judicial punishment on Africans.)[50]

While settlers had little control over the courts and the law, the colonial administration and judiciary "held a largely instrumental understanding of the law as it was to be applied to Africans. Laws should be passed and enforced in order to create a new society, a new African."[51] There was therefore a common understanding between the three parties that "African societies had not yet sufficiently evolved to where English law and justice could keep the peace;"[52] despite the implication, then, 'extra-judicial' punishments were permissible, even necessary, to keep African labour subordinate and well-behaved. Kenyan feminist scholar Mumbi Kanyogo signals to this etymological history when she says:

> 'Extra-judicial killings' is an icky phrase to me. What about 'legally authorised' murders by the state e.g. death penalty? Not to mention that 'extra-judicial killings' are informally authorised by the state through policies of denial/orders to kill… there's a way that the phrase avails reform as a possible situation even when we know it is not. It makes the right to life sound debatable.[53]

The record of extrajudicial killings as the misnomer for what had long become a state-authorised practice comes into historical record during the Mau Mau insurgency,[54] but before that, the "juxtaposition of British common law and customary law, and the establishment of the Dual Policy complicated the day-to-day lives of Africans."[55] The everyday legal status of

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[49] David M. Anderson, "Policing, prosecution and the law in colonial Kenya, *c.* 1905-39." In *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830 -1940* ed. David M. Anderson, David Killingray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 183.
[50] Brett Shadle, "White settlers and the law in colonial Kenya," *Journal of East African Studies 4* no. 3 (2010): 510.
[51] Shadle, 510.
[52] Shadle, 510.
[53] Kanyogo, Mumbi. Twitter Post. Aug 16, 2008, 5.17 a.m. https://twitter.com/miss_mumbz/status/1029930058775973888.
[54] See, for example, TJRC Report Vol IIA.
[55] Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya: 1900-50*, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2005), 3.

African women in colonial Kenya was therefore consistently in flux, as were the personal opinions of colonial officers, but historian Tabitha Kanogo notes that "it all boiled down to an issue of control."[56] At first, the colonial administration believed that women ought to be controlled by kinsmen, or under the patronage of a missionary if they managed to extricate themselves from 'backward' indigenous practices. Yet as Kanogo notes,

> representations of African women as perpetual legal minors, chattels, exploited beasts of burden, not too intelligent, gossiping, giggling, idle, shy, vulnerable, and dependent social victims, were countered by increasing complaints about unacceptable behaviour on the part of women [including]… the exploration of and encounter with difference, experimentation, expansion, lawlessness, individualism, encounter with danger, access to diverse resources, legitimation and creative imagination made possible by women's new ability to move across boundaries that with the advent of colonialism had become permeable.[57]

Customary law in many rural African communities was concerned with transferring the custodianship of women from father to husband, and did not believe a woman had any legal standing to make decisions or complaints about the facts of her life that were chosen for her. Colonial officers' initial position was one of non-interference with customary law where women were concerned, but as more and more women "found opportunities to act amid the conflicting policies, unintended consequences and inconsistent compromises that characterised colonial rule,"[58] legal arbitration became increasingly necessary.

In 1931, the newly-arrived Attorney General made a rather simplistic but definite (and loaded) intervention in response to ongoing enquiries into the legal status of women:

> As far as he was concerned, 'A native woman is *capax doli* according to the rules which apply to women of other races, or to persons of the other sex.' Referring to the ability to commit a crime or capability of criminal intent, *capax doli* implies that all legally culpable people were equal before the law. Regardless of their sex or race. That included African women. As members of a specific gender, women had no separate 'legal status' from that of men. However, this was far from the reality. It was one thing to be held legally responsible for one's mistakes, and quite another to have the legal rights to determine one's future.[59]

[56] Kanogo, 33.
[57] Kanogo, 2.
[58] Owuor, 2.
[59] Kanogo, 24.

Moten's definition of the impossible domestic comes to mind here: the law's object is outside of the law and its protection, open to its assault, can be prosecuted, but cannot and chooses not to prosecute. The term 'extrajudicial punishment' interestingly extends a gendered perspective through this particular history as it renders African women in colonial Kenya extrajudicial subjects: while they certainly experienced violence from both the settler state and their respective communities, they held few legal rights to recourse. African women as not-quite-human political subjects were essentially written into law while their lives were simultaneously written out of it, if ever considered, an archiving and law-making process that has gone through superficial reformation since independence.

This is what Obioma Nnaemeka means when she argues that "gender construction is part of the processes of knowledge construction,"[60] urging us to recognise how gender politics often push storytelling to the peripheries of 'real knowledge' so that women's stories, often not included or given their due within official or recognised colonial or nationalist mythology, are thus delegitimised within masculinist configurations of state power. For this reason, the questions we encounter at the heart of Akai's probing philosophy – the crux of the unthought – are central to the interrogations of the moral frameworks of criminality that *Dust* wields. In the geohistorical periphery of the legal, extra-judicial and punitively carceral legal-social environment described above, "the vigorous incursions of hopeful administrators […] coincided with the arrival of Akai's family"[61] in Ileret, a village on the shore of Lake Turkana in Northern Kenya. *Dust* accounts for these in-between complex figurations of a growing girlhood: "scrambling over life's fences, traveling long distances alone to look for and dwell briefly with members of her pastoralist family, Akai erupted without patience into her teenage years. She was a consummate shirker of herding duties and a cook who always burned food, more likely to be found hunting, swimming, and challenging young men to wrestling matches."[62] Irish missionary pressure on the villagers, however, resulted in her attending school. Kanogo observes that "missions endeavoured to produce moderately literate girls steeped in Christian ideals and suitable as wives for Christian men,"[63] but for Akai in this new place, her "restless imagination thrived when it found fresh universes" and "with her new knowledge insights, Akai intended to seize the world." This is not to say that she held her formal education to a higher standard than what she already knew – rather, Akai learned to form new questions in a new language, and with them she opened up just how

[60] Nnaemeka, 7.
[61] Owuor, 224.
[62] Owuor, 225.
[63] Kanogo, 203.

much was yet to be known by it: "What desire is at the heart of God? Who fills it? Where do stars go, if, as you say, they die? Where is the farthest far away? […] *Why is what you know more truthful than what I know?*"[64]

In his poignant reading of Akai, Macharia parenthetically notes that "for a certain 'familiar' narrative to emerge about 'project Kenya,', Akai must be 'forgotten'; or, more precisely, the value of what she knows and how she knows must be 'discounted'; and the fragments she lets slip fit too easily into a 'project Kenya,' so much so that readers never query what else she knows and how she knows it."[65] But in addition to her refusal to be forgotten – those insistent introductions – Akai's persistent and difficult questions and her intention to "seize the world"[66] counters the foundational model of the irrational native. After her first period, she shunned "the ways of women: manners, expectations, cooking skills, animal husbandry, pleasure, birth, how to sing, how to weep, how to raise children, how to invoke God, and how to kill a man" – and instead insisted she be initiated into manhood. When her mother told her that she was cause for shame, Akai asked, "How?"[67] After she returned to school, initiated into neither womanhood nor manhood, "she decided she would become a teacher and a traveller. When she came back home, she would organize proper cattle raids. She wanted to own at least ten-thousand large-horned cows"[68] – neither colonial administrative or missionary logic nor the more familiar ways of her own people had space for Akai's desires.

Around the same time, near the geohistorical centre, a young couple named Hugh and Selene Bolton, weary of British nostalgia, "skipped onto a ship that was heading out to the Kenya colony,"[69] apparently seeking "adventure in blank-slate kingdoms *where [they] owned the rules and would remake a country in [their] image.*"[70] They berthed in Mombasa and took the train inland to rapidly burgeoning Nairobi, and then further still into Naivasha, where they "studied the soil, experimenting with crops, failing, waiting for rain, digging and planting, and mobilising human beings whose lives, dreams and cultures were as far away from their own as universes can be."[71] *Terra nullius* as a colonial fantasy was not at all a new ideology, but Hugh and Selene had left behind a war-weary country not realising that they had entered one that had also just come out of the Second World War, and was sliding into

[64] Kanogo, 203.
[65] Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor II."
[66] Owuor, 224.
[67] Owuor, 224.
[68] Owuor, 224.
[69] Owuor, 90.
[70] Owuor, 90.
[71] Owuor, 92-93.

yet another battle aggravated by white land ownership, violated and aggravated ethnic politics and a systemic subordination of indigenous knowledge structures.

Hugh fell in love with Kenya and Selene was in love with Hugh, so they built a house, established a vineyard, and started keeping respectable company. Like many settlers, Hugh took up hunting, and would disappear for days, audaciously claiming everything he touched as his whenever he returned home. Selene, on the other hand, contained herself within domesticity, expecting Hugh to tire so they could go home. She decorated, surrounded herself with servants, suffered a lonely miscarriage while Hugh was off somewhere, bought goats, went home alone, came back to Hugh and tried to fit into nightclub life in the city wherever her social class allowed her and distracted herself from Hugh's affairs with news from the colony:

> New favourite dinner topic: Mau Mau.
> Subtheme: -- *kiapu*, the oath, the covenant.
> Its dreadful mystery, the herald of shadows.
> Favourite rumour: insurrection.
> Favourite fear: death of the European.
> The unspoken: loss of a nation, nowhere else to go.
> The fear: requiem for an ideal.[72]

The Mau Mau uprising was both an insurrection and a majority-Gikuyu civil war, to which the British government responded with propaganda, detention camps, hangings and 'extrajudicial' executions. It is around this time that Selene learned that Hugh was an officer for the Crown and a firm believer that "power is useless if it cannot be expressed."[73] As death and details spilled out of the news, Selene found herself harbouring a small desire to do to Hugh what the Mau Mau were doing to white settlers or Black 'loyalists' and home-guards – "poking holes in Hugh's body before splitting his stomach with a machete and shearing his skin"[74] – not out of revulsion for what he was doing, but because the internecine war stood in her way of returning to England. After the Hola Massacre of 1959[75] at a British detention camp that received international criticism and pressure to end the violent administration, "Hugh was transferred to Athi River to lead some of the mopping up operations,"[76] where he met Aggrey Nyipir Oganda and claimed him as *his* native aide. Hugh's vocabulary of

[72] Owuor, 99.
[73] Owuor, 101.
[74] Owuro, 101.
[75] See Caroline Elkins' *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), Chapter Ten.
[76] Owuor, 103.

ownership turned into whining complaints about 'selling out', his interpretation of the masculinist posturing of independence in the pipeline of the promised postcolonial state's machinery. Eventually, unwilling to let go of the professional vigour tied to his visions of conquest, Hugh was deployed, virtually exiled, to Northern Kenya by annoyed superiors.

His report on return to Naivasha was a commentary on a land devoid of people but vivid with scenic and aural description of the new places he had discovered and conquered.[77] In this piece of country he claimed as *his,* yet again, he decided to build Selene a house; wanting so badly to make and keep him happy, Selene kept up her pretences and agreed to go. On the night before she left Naivasha, however, she wandered into her husband's workspace and examined his paintings, thus another introduction to Akai:

> a fiery-eyed, long-limbed, crop-haired, full-lipped, dark-brown-skinned woman. Harsh lines, clear, old eyes […] lewd if it were not for fine details – a beaded bracelet, intricately patterned stomach scars – which made the work an intimate ode to visceral femininity […] her belly rounded, pregnant, legs stretched out, watching the artist, the universal lover's gaze, hand beneath her head, a half-smile […]

Akai was a shock. Before she discovered the painting, Selene's experience and knowledge of Kenya had never figured a transgressive figure like Akai into it; after seeing the portrait, Akai became suddenly real, yet unreachable, yet inescapable in Selene's imagination. Perhaps curious to know more about this woman, Selene followed Hugh to Wuoth Ogik, but "if all houses had resident spirits, Selene knew the ones here regarded her as an invading entity."[78] Her reality of Kenya, which she already so despised, now featured the insistent image of a woman she would never be able to name or speak to – the white settler women Hugh disappeared with at parties were tolerable; this striking, Black and enamoured woman was a nightmare:

> That first night at Wuoth Ogik, the face of the painted woman haunted Selene's sleep. *Who is she?* Mouthed in silence to a darkness that scared her. She clung to Hugh. *Who is she?* she thought as she got out of bed […] She wandered downstairs and outside and found herself in a courtyard. She sat on the edge of the fountain, leaning back until the water's coolness soaked her body. *Very, very civilised fountain,* she told the water […]
> Sensation of being watched.
> Then.
> A movement, a strangled-off voice, scuffling.

[77] Owuor, 110.
[78] Owuor, 113.

> A minute later, Aggrey the aide appeared carrying a calabash of water, which he offered her at once.
>
> "*Ni nini?*" Selene gasped. What is it?
>
> "*Paka tu,* madam." A cat.
>
> […] *Who is she?* she needed to ask. "Thank you. You may go now," she said instead, handing over the gourd.
>
> The aide bowed and left.
>
> *Who is she*? The wind screeched among doum palms; Selene covered her ears. *Enough*. She dashed into the house […] [and] ignored the shadows that entered the room with her.[79]

Selene would never meet Akai, would not even get to find out anything more about her than what the painting gave away, but she was there, at the house, hidden and watching Selene, her presence made heavier by the weight of the question Selene was unable to articulate – *Who is she?* – the unaskability and unanswerability of which disrupted the most intimate spaces in the ordered colonial landscape of ownership and desire. With the possibility and proximity of Akai, the Kenya that Selene had long suffered for her husband became finally unbearable – the white settler women Hugh flagrantly had affairs with were tolerable; Akai was not – and she left the North, and then the country without Hugh but pregnant with Isaiah. She never saw her husband again, but the memory of him lingered, like a ghost, as her baby's absent father.

But Selene's memories, while certainly a version of truth, are only half-sufficient for the purposes of this chapter's project; even as they are forced to feature Akai, they are still Selene's own, and Selene ran away from the fact of Akai, understandably choosing to leave as much as she could remember in Kenya when she returned to England. This section of the text, in fact, rendered by the novel through the ghostly figure of Selene, functions primarily to lay the groundwork for haunting at the intersection at which Akai's life clashed with white colonialist security apparatuses, represented by state officer Hugh Bolton, and African visions of freedom for a post-independence state, represented by Nyipir Oganda; for had Nyipir not met Hugh, he would have never met Akai. And even though Selene died in England two years prior to this moment, her questions about Akai are resurrected when one of Hugh's portraits returns to Wuoth Ogik via his son, Isaiah Bolton, whose question echoes his mother's unspoken ones: *might you know who the woman in my father's work is?*[80]

Nyipir does not just know the woman in the painting, he "*knows* the day, time, and emotion of the making of the painting"[81] because he had a role in its creation. But so visceral

[79] Owuor, 113.
[80] Owuor 125.
[81] Owuor, 125.

is his aversion to the memories the portrait engenders that when Isaiah approaches him and tries to explain that Moses (Odidi) sent the image to him, Nyipir is willing to kill him; as we learned from Akai earlier, "to name something is to bring it to life,"[82] and Nyipir has no desire to name and confront the attendant ghosts that connect the painting to his son's death, ghosts he thought he had rid himself of a long time ago. In order to silence the spectral rabble, then, he sends Galgalu to eliminate the unwelcome visitor. But Nyipir cannot rid himself of haunting simply by causing another death; Galgalu seems to know this and orders Isaiah to go look for his ghosts in Nairobi, as Ajany has. Nyipir is thus left behind to face two corpses – his son's, and the skeleton in the red cave, which he retrieves with Galgalu's help – and the familiar ghouls that have been resurrected by the recent series of events: Odidi's death, the election and post-election violence, Akai's disappearance, Ajany's return to Nairobi, Isaiah's visit, and the arrival of the portrait.

Through Nyipir's triggered memories, the image of Akai is juxtaposed with two others that have been resident at Wuoth Ogik for years, framed and proudly displayed on the mantelpiece. The first is a black-and-white photo of Nyipir the tracker-policeman, on horseback carrying a crooked Kenyan flag on December 12th, 1963, the day of Kenya's independence. On that day, Nyipir shouted orders for his men to follow, and the Leader of the Nation gave him a nod of approval. It was a euphoric, hopeful time of "blended cultures, intoxicating futures – the new revised Kenya […] Glory! Goodness! Forgiveness! Education! Hard work!"[83] The photo is an obvious mark of his Kenyan-ness, especially because we are told that "Nyipir was Kenyan once. Then Kenya tore Akai away from him."[84] This happened the day after the national ceremony, when he

> became one of the newly independent warrior-men stepping in array into Hurri like locusts. Invading the nation. Marching, marching, and not seeing then that he and his kind were the new scapegoats, so that a freshly haunted people would never ask *why* […] Man hunting man in comradeship. Predatory subtlety; soft, no-fuss walking. Silent gestures – a look could say everything. *Muscular wakefulness, essential manliness, as if this were how it had always been* […] Close-target reconnaissance work. He was in a platoon fanning out in the northern terrain, tracking scents. Women, children and elderly equalled prey, equalled game. Blasting hapless homesteaders, AK-47-ing camel herds to encourage cooperation. They mowed down elephant families, loaded tusks into lorries with blacked-out number plates. Destination, Singapore via State house. The national economy of secrets.[85]

[82] Owuor, 35, 251.
[83] Owuor, 25.
[84] Owuor, 123.
[85] Owuor, 123.

If any figure in *Dust* is representative of the continuities of Kenyan policing structures and strategies between the colonial era and post-independent Kenya, it is Nyipir. His role as an active security agent in the making of the postcolonial state, was bolstered by the training he had received in the years before. In the 1940s, he was a student and domestic worker at Fort Hall, in Central Kenya, when he met and came under the night time employ of Warui the gravedigger, who "made bodies disappear for the Crown, and everyone else who paid for it."[86] For months, Nyipir dealt with "hacked-to-death human casualties of a small war,"[87] because "interrogation units were generating far too many bodies for one man to bury alone under the blanket of night."[88] Eventually, after moving upwards from one incidental promotion to another, he was transferred to "a special 'processing' station [that] was built to manage the national crisis,"[89] where he had met Hugh Bolton, "a man who walked with power."[90] As the colonial officer's aide, Nyipir was taken for police training because Hugh would not work with civilians. When he was sufficiently trained, they hunted men – Mau Mau insurgents, and others – together.[91]

Nyipir's and Hugh's exile to Northern Kenya made them the reason for the detour Akai's life takes, which inadvertently became Nyipir's own diversion from his long-term plans to go to Burma and find his brother and father. She appeared at the watering hole in which they are taking a bath and "from the time when he first saw Akai Lokorijom standing on the other side of a heated watering hole, shimmering in the heat, Nyipir's life had been about that moment, that season, that second […] Even at that time, he had desired to squeeze all of her into himself, hide her from the world, and contemplate her for and by himself."[92] In this instant, Akai is introduced as

> an ebony-hued woman, as slender as the leaves of the mwangati tree, whose long neck was adorned with wire coils lifted off telegraph cables, shimmered into view from across the brackish oasis. When she had waved long arms at Nyipir […] he was sure he had fallen asleep and was experiencing a revelation. When she hailed him in a low, laughing voice, Nyipir had known exactly who she would be to him."[93]

[86] Owuor, 167.
[87] Owuor, 170.
[88] Owuor, 170.
[89] Owuor, 172 .
[90] Owuor, 271.
[91] Owuor, 271.
[92] Owuor, 224.
[93] Owuor, 314.

Perhaps it is love, or infatuation, at first sight, but the inclination to contain the wandering Akai was rooted in the attitude towards out-of-place African women. It is clear he meant wifehood for Akai, but the way in which that came about would not be nearly as simple as the desire to control and contain her within his visions of the future. At that particular moment, as it were, she reached towards the wrong man as she kicked off her shoes and jumped into the water. Thus, when Nyipir tried to chase her away from what she herself was causing to happen, "Hugh heard Nyipir. Knew his fear and his knowledge became malice."[94] The beginning of Akai's and Nyipir's relationship, then, was catalysed by the white supremacist pedagogy of conquest over Black space and Black bodies represented by Hugh's role in the relationship he had with Akai soon afterwards.

Dust makes a very important, multi-layered intervention in discourses about violence, gender and the colonial state through the brief relationship between Akai, Hugh and Nyipir. While we are given a relatively extensive account of Nyipir's perpetrations of violence against countless bodies, Hugh's violence is presented to us, not so much through his career, into which murder, kidnapping and torture were embedded, but through his relationship with women, and particularly through his relationship with Akai. Every tenet of the state agent's job also manifests in the intimate and violent interactions between Hugh and Akai. *Dust* therefore demands we make connections and pay attention to the relationship between state violence and gender-based violence, which is so often decried and even more often normalised and/or ignored altogether in both human rights and state propagandist discourses.

This topography of colonial state-sponsored violence invested in quelling Black insurgency was Nyipir's only experience of nationhood and citizenship – of *being* Kenyan – until independence day, when the meaning of being Kenyan was supposed to change, and it is interesting that Nyipir registers the unfulfillment of this dream as the loss of Akai. On the one hand, the implication that Akai and the nation are interchangeable in patriarchal imaginaries is obvious and consistent with Nnaemeka's critique that "nationalist politics depoliticizes women's politics, forcing the repoliticisation of women's politics back on the national agenda only as an aftermath of nationalist struggles."[95] Nyipir was, after all, myopic about one thing: muscular wakefulness and essential manliness *was* how it had always been, and it was his training under the colonial police that made his high-ranking post-independence job possible. On the other hand, as Nyipir builds a cairn for Hugh's bones, the second image on the mantelpiece – a photo of the "late minister for economic planning,

[94] Owuor, 316.
[95] Nnaemeka, 2.

planner of a pre-independence mass airlift, designer of the national flag, the murdered Tom Mboya"[96] – complicates this perspective. Nyipir, we are told, "lost his Kenya on July 5, 1969, in Nairobi, when Tom Mboya was assassinated,"[97] which refers to the day he lost his job, his body and his faith in post-independence nationhood to the state itself.

Taking this into consideration, the implication of the original claim – that he was Kenyan once, until Kenya tore Akai away – actually suggests that Akai, with her damned secrets and modes of illegibility, was left at the threshold of independence, and post-independent Kenya marched into postcoloniality, or tried to, without the Black mother's madness. In other words, Nyipir might have lost the Kenya that was falsely promised the day after independence – after all, he was still an agent in the state's inherited security machine and a believer in the newness of reformative politics – but as a body commandeered by the state, he was still *of* Kenya, a new nation that disregarded the Black mother's lessons. And as Musila points out,

> while a large chunk of [African literary and feminist studies] rightfully applies itself to the ways in which women's bodies have been textualised in the nation-project, limited attention has been paid to the fact that – contrary to popular perceptions of men as 'ungendered,' a perception best seen in the popular usage of the term 'gender' as synonymous with 'women' – men and their bodies are part of the gendered imaginings of the nation-state.[98]

By insinuating that Akai's version of Kenya, which revolved around her desires, mistakes and contradictions, was discarded by the reborn nation at independence – or rather, the reborn nation *attempted to* discard the Black mother and her lessons – *Dust* intervenes in the reading praxis Musila speaks about by using Nyipir and his relationship with Tom Mboya's death to draw our attention to these masculinised embodiments and manifestations of postcolonial nation-making. As we are told, Mboya's murder "was a culmination of fears, swirling rumours, the meaning of clandestine oaths that made the rest of the country territory to be owned. It was the purpose of *the silences that had started before*,"[99] where 'before' refers to all the systemic acts of silencing that Nyipir actively participated in that constituted the making of Kenya until that point. However, even if Kenya's national languages became "English, Kiswahili and Silence," after Mboya's death – that is, it was wiser to speak about

[96] Owuor, 50.
[97] Owuor, 271.
[98] Musila, 40.
[99] Owuor, 271, emphasis added.

many things that were not 'what happened in 1969' – "there was also memory,"[100] and, as is emphasised by the text, memories are ghosts. Therefore, while *Dust* uses Nyipir's story to draw attention to masculinity-as-nationhood, the sudden introduction of the inconvenient fact of Akai's portrait to the historiographical trajectory that mapped Nyipir's Kenyan-ness demonstrates its failure to shed her influences, and forces every character to confront this haunting.

It is obvious that Nyipir thinks that his son is like Mboya, a brilliant but hapless victim of a brutal nation, but I am more interested in the temporal links Nyipir draws between 1963, 1969 and 2007. What, then, changed about this androcentric Kenya after Mboya was killed, according to Nyipir?

> After Mboya, everything that could die in Kenya did, even schoolchildren standing in front of a hospital that the Leader of the nation had come to open. A central province was emptied of a people who were renamed cockroaches and 'beasts from the west.' But nobody would acknowledge the exiles or citizens who did not make it out of the province before they were destroyed. Oaths of profound silences – secret shots in a slithering civil war.[101]

In the largely horrified public imaginary, the assassination was attributed to a jealous Gikuyu elite afraid of being usurped from power; after the assassination, "facing a revolt from the Luo and the growing support for change among Kenyans […] Kenyatta's closest allies reverted to their ethnic bailiwicks through oathing to force the Kikuyu voters to return sitting members of parliament in the election."[102] For months, while Gikuyu men of varying import were summoned to swear their allegiance to the Gikuyu nation, people from Othered ethnic groups were displaced, disappeared, tortured and/or killed in multiple, gruesome ways. As Nyipir carried out his orders, he became fluently adept at weaving silence and memory, saying nothing, but writing down the names he remembered "in case one day a stranger might ask if so-and-so existed."[103] But to confront those who were disappeared by the state – by Nyipir – "is to contemplate ghosts and haunting at the level of making and unmaking world historical events," and, as Gordon argues, "you cannot encounter this kind of disappearance as grand historical fact, as a mass of data adding up to an event, marking itself in straight empty time, settling the ground for a future cleansed of its spirit."[104] While Mboya's death

[100] Owuor, 273, 274.
[101] Owuor, 274.
[102] TJRC Report Vol IIA, 22.
[103] TJRC Report Vol IIA, 22.
[104] Gordon, 63.

marked an important turning point in Kenyan history, neatly splitting Kenya's historiographical timeline into 'before Mboya' and 'after Mboya', haunting consistently demands we pay attention to the underwritten continuities of this violence. Therefore, one evening at camp, the ongoing and violent – but never spoken about – constructions of phallocratic constructions play out in

> [a] two-hour Ajua game. Slam on board. Nyipir collected all but four of Corporal Gakuo's seed 'cows.' He had gloated, '*Mia dhako!'* Give me a woman!'
>
> The corporal spat, *'Kihee!'*
>
> Silence that precedes an ambush. Three jumpy men watched. *Kihee*. Uncircumcised. Nyipir dropped a seed into the grooved slot before turning to the man. He asked, 'How does a mutilated penis make a man more of a man? *Msenje*,' he said. 'I've buried your testicles before, I can bury them again.'
>
> It was only when a locust whirred over a pale-brown anthill that Nyipir realised that in this epoch of silence, he had spoken, and by speaking he had made himself a sacrifice.
>
> He got a confirmation within five days:
>
> *Citing Acting Inspector Nyipir Oganda for indiscipline, insubordination, and criminal activity, failing to protect civilians stealing police equipment and stock, absconding from duty; protracting military conflict*... Verdict: dishonourable discharge.[105]

The Ajua board game has varied interpretations and signifiers across multiple cultures in the world, but in Luo communities, a feminised human body is exaggeratedly coded onto the board, with each player tasked with conquering the other's. It is a complex game whose rules and implications are beyond the scope of this project, but what really transpired as what the Kenya Human Rights Commission would call "the politics of the foreskin,"[106] – the political weaponisation of interethnic politics and toxic masculinities. Nyipir's transgression here was not just refusing to be infantilized by a Gikuyu officer, but also refusing to keep silent, choosing, instead, a homophobic slur that insulted his superior's manhood in retaliation. And so, three days later, he

> was summoned to headquarters. There was a fractured mahogany desk in a dim rectangular room, wood soon darkened by spattered blood. Same colour as if it were soaked in tears. Nyipir wept first when four men – his colleagues – held him down and his hat […] fell askew. One examined his teeth as if he were a cow. Another shaved off his moustache with a razor blade, cutting his

[105] Owuor, 275.
[106] Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, "The Politics of the Foreskin," *The 2006 Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Referendum Report*, September 2006, http://www.knchr.org/Portals/0/CivilAndPoliticalReports/BehavingBadly.pdf?ver=2013-02-21-140244-413.

> upper lip. He waited for the snap that would confirm the splitting of bones, the death of faith. He had imagined he would stand tall. Had thought he could speak tersely and clearly about the codes of decent men, of officers and citizens. Had believed he was protector of country, woman, and home. But by the end of that day, he was crawling, hatless, shoeless, and he body was twisting at the end of a sharp stick. They had brought a basket of snakes into his cell; the snakes writhed but were benign. Then they had offered to find his wife, explained to him what they would do to her. Only then had he screamed. *'Akai?'* said his peer, an officer who had trained with him in Kiganjo, who beat his body and toyed with his testicles […] Violated intimacies that men freed from conscience permit themselves, knowing that shame seals secrets in. There had been no one to tell that he existed. There had been cold reasonable voices also devoid of truth: 'You are a good man.' 'Take the oath.' 'For the father of your nation.' The red-eyed glare of a big-faced man in a photograph, blurred when seen through Nyipir's tears as he contemplated giving his life to a person who growled *nyoko nyoko* as he invaded even his citizens' inner spaces. *So this was nationhood?* A body freed from ordeal, a soul that would have to take care of itself. Nyipir nodded yes.[107]

Gordon argues that "in the torturers' vigilant and hysterical attempts to unearth and cast out subversion, that barely human object they saw as mortally endangering their world, they created a corollary form of dehumanization and objectification," a not-yet-ghost in a "constant state of imminent death."[108] Even though "the disappeared have lost all social and political identity: no bureaucratic records, no funerals, no memorials, no bodies,"[109] the terrorised and speculative knowledge produced by disappearance resides, in part, in the nonsensical space Nyipir was suspended in for months, not quite alive, not quite dead.

But, as he tells Ajany, he had lived. Nine months later, one of his torturers,

> Petrus Keah had arranged [his] escape. He then commanded Nyipir: *Live. Forget. The past's behind you*. Nyipir had asked, *How?* Petrus had said, *You're a man, you'll know what to do* […] *Kenya will survive us.* Before Nyipir could reply, Petrus added, *Amnesia is also medicine*. Then he told Nyipir, *Run.* So Nyipir ran. He ran and thought about forgetfulness, and how to create it.[110]

Nyipir arrived at Wuoth Ogik "[shimmering] like a Nilotic ghoul […] Galgalu had found him, and he had screamed for Akai to hurry."[111] For a month, he could neither go indoors nor speak about anything that had happened to him. And when he finally got into bed with Akai, "he clung to her. Afraid of secret things. Every night he touched the curves of his

[107] Owuor, 300-301, emphasis added.
[108] Gordon, 78.
[109] Gordon, 80.
[110] Owuor, 301.
[111] Owuor, 301.

wife's body, the places he longed to know and fill again. Every night he understood a little more that all he could do was hold her to his body. He then watched as every night shifted her body to the edge of their bed. Their quiet tears. And he could do nothing."[112] Nyipir had lost Akai – the afterlife of the daily violence he inflicted, and that had been inflicted upon him, rendered him unable to pursue heteronormative sexual intimacy with her and thus causing him to seek reprieve in writing down the names he could not forget. This implied impotence, caused by the torturous post-independence state eager to suppress the messiness of real or imagined queer encounters, emphasises the extra/judicial consequences of state-sanctioned violence within the private spaces of its subjects.

Despite Nyipir's attempts, however, "neither the disappeared nor knowledge of them ever appears unaccompanied by ghosts,"[113] and writing down the names of the dead did nothing to create the forgetfulness Petrus had advised him on. Desperate to carve out a life apart from these looming ghosts, he "had gone to find the man who, it was said, could return a human being to something of a life. While transacting a liturgy, Nyipir had given the Trader the names. In exchange, the Trader talked to the network of people who would ensure that the name *Aggrey Nyipir Oganda* would be expunged from official records."[114] Officially dead to the state and then resurrected at the very edge of it, he restarted his life, making his living from cattle rustling and illegal arms trade, and for decades, he imagined himself freed from the haunting.

Meanwhile, Isaiah has made it to Nairobi and has found a man named Ali Dida Hada, an officer who was once "looking for Bolton."[115] In the chaotic aftermath of Tom Mboya's assassination, Ali Dida Hada was given the Hugh Bolton case despite his protests. But "the name 'Bolton' was a vapour at the watering holes. Where did he live? *Somewhere*. Where did he go? *Anywhere.* When was he last seen? *Hard to say*. There were tiny, tiny story fragments linked to his presence, but these, too, merged with the lives of other British colonial officers."[116] Like Hugh, his months-long exile to the North resulted in the loss of his wife, who, like Selene, preferred England from her husband's days as a student. After a failed suicide attempt, he resigned himself to a wandering life of "reconnaissance duties, intelligence gathering in the much-avoided Northern Frontier district"[117] under the moniker

[112] Owuor 301.
[113] Gordon, 126.
[114] Owuor, 302.
[115] Owuor, 134.
[116] Owuor, 234.
[117] Owuor, 235.

'Bakir.' Eventually, he met the Trader, who suggested that a house like Wuoth Ogik, inhabited by a down-country man, "would know about *wazungu*."[118]

This is how Ali Dida Hada found the pink house and met Akai: when he got there, her

> back was to him. Curvy thinness, like a carved Dinka cow's horns. Calves, ankles, legs – firm, feminine, long. A small waist, wide hips. She was as dark as midnight. His hands tingled, needing to touch what he knew was soft skin. He caught her scent and imagined tasting its source. Her body radiated strength; her movements were a dance. Needing to look at her, he fixated on her outline."[119]

Ali Dida Hada is the third state agent to render Akai an object of sexual fascination, which is telling of the heteropatriarchal gaze of the state that hypersexualises Black women's bodies while simultaneously invisibilising their lives and livelihoods. By this point, Akai has known intimately what it means to be subjected to this gaze, and has developed her own methods to manipulate it in her favour and defences against its consequences. In the six months he posed as a herdsman and worked at Wuoth Ogik, the intimate relationship they developed directly under Nyipir's nose distracted Ali Dida Hada from his investigative path, and any attempt to return to it was side-lined by Akai. One day, Nyipir left for business, and on a hunch, Ali Dida Hada followed, but not before Akai bit his chin and promised him that he would return.

Therefore, even though he discovered Nyipir's cattle rustling and illegal cross-border arms trade and agreed to a covert partnership with him that will last years; even though he kept up a half-hearted lookout for Hugh Bolton thanks to a small stream of money from an anonymous source in England; even though evidence of the man he looked for was literally within his reach,, he never solved the one and only case he was ever assigned:

> Years later, he had asked Akai Lokorijom, 'Hugh Bolton?' She answered, 'Just a name.' 'You never heard of Hugh Bolton?' he persisted. 'I hear so many names.' She sighed. 'People are looking for him.' She turned to him. 'Why should it bother me?' Ali Dida Hada did not have an answer then.[120]

Now, Isaiah, who still does not know who Akai is, offers him the piece of canvas as a clue: "Ali Dida Hada takes the bookmark with two fingers, tilts it into the light. It takes him a minute to understand that he is seeing a pregnant, nude, wide-eyed Akai Lokorijom. His mind

[118] Owuor, 238.
[119] Owuor, 238.
[120] Owuor, 218.

goes blank. A thick fog shifts. Right there, he understands the nature of his own lunacy, why it will never leave him. *Just a name*, she had said. He had believed her."[121] Akai did not just lie to Ali Dida Hada; she "dishevelled his thoughts. She had mixed up his questions until driven by a yearning he had yet to name, in spite of Nyipir's presence, Ali Dida Hada reached for Akai" and promised to show her the oldest moon that "knows the secrets of the night."[122] But Akai did not want it; she already knew that moon because it harboured some of her own secrets, and she knew, for her sake, she could not share these with Ali Dida Hada, a still living and still active agent of the state. So instead, she redirected him with her desire for a "forgetting moon"[123], one that would throw him disremember what he had learned so far, and perhaps erase even her own memories of Hugh. And even though Ali Dida Hada promised to find it for her, inadvertently ending any deliberate effort to search for the missing man, "she had turned away from him, an abrupt move. Walked through Wuoth Ogik's courtyard. Left him standing, aching, wanting. No goodbye. Doors and case closed."[124] Investigation aside, Akai herself was an indecipherable puzzle. Ali Dida Hada ended his stint in Northern Kenya, returned to Nairobi and was assigned the high-ranking desk job of assistant commissioner of police, with no defined duties.[125] And until Isaiah shows up at his office demanding information on his father, portrait of Akai in hand, Ali Dida Hada had kept the file officially open but dormant for as long as the money from an anonymous source in England kept it warm.

Compelled, now, to return to the North, he leaves Nairobi with Ajany and Isaiah. When they arrive at Wuoth Ogik, they learn that Akai had indeed come home, inflicted considerable damage, and fled again. This is where *Dust* finally tracks a grieving Akai down

> a woman who has run away from home to outsprint death, shreds her clothes. She has travelled two hundred and fourteen kilometres to do this […] Healing and insight. A spirit problem. A spirit solution requires a forfeit. A scapegoat. What is she willing to offer? Soul healing needs sacrifice. Given the extent of the problem – she agrees, death is the problem – to appease its hunger, something beloved and of blood must be offered. Something that will endure awfulness. 'What could that be?' She thinks about it for a long time. [126]

[121] Owuor, 219.
[122] Owuor, 219.
[123] Owuor, 219.
[124] Owuor, 219.
[125] Owuor, 216.
[126] Owuor, 200.

While Ajany was chasing after Odidi's ghosts and trying to flee her own in Nairobi and Nyipir was at home building cairns and grappling with ghostly memories, Akai, weary of the problem of death, was immediately oriented to the future as she dreamed up ways to solve it. The next night, as her daughter danced in the city and her husband slept, she returned to the homestead to execute a cattle raid

> when livestock, it is said, tiptoed out of Wuoth Ogik. Not even a moo of distress. Not even Nyipir's pampered dance-ox tried to find its way home after it wandered away from the main herd of camels, cows, sheep, and goats heading northward. The news flew across watering holes. The rustler has been rustled.[127]

All these years after she had left school, Akai finally arrives at the site of one of her childhood dreams to be one of the greatest cattle rustlers in the region; but, it turns out, this has come to pass at a significant, haunting cost – she has learned "the exhaustion of bleeding life one love at a time, of trying to keep a step ahead of the threat, dread, fear."[128] We are never witness to what Akai does to the animals; presumably, she slaughters them herself in sacrifice to the crowd of interned ghosts and ghouls that Odidi's dying has conjured. This is Akai's version of justice, or her something-to-be-done: ridding herself and her family of the spoils from years of secrets, violence and the police state that nearly killed Nyipir and would eventually kill Odidi. Akai's solution for the problem of death is not concerned with due process or legal representation, in part because these have never been accessible in her world, but in part because life and death have never been a matter of what is legal, but what is survivable. As such, the intergenerational, damaging burden of criminality/state violence/survival/ghostliness borne by Hugh, Nyipir, Ali Dida Hada, Galgalu, Odidi and Akai herself will, at least according to Akai, be lessened by giving back to the spirits – the ghosts – the wealth that has been accumulated because of years of injustice. Importantly, Akai's sacrifice does not put an end to haunting – if we are reaching for a resolution, that is not it. What it does, however, is respond to what haunting has been demanding all this time: a complex, intergenerational reckoning with, not just for Akai, but for everyone implicated in the systemic problem of death.

Back at Wuoth Ogik, Nyipir, furious, then resigned, then devastated about the theft of his livestock – the audacity of Akai Lokorijom – Nyipir sends Ali Dida Hada after her, asking only that his animals – he does not know they are dead – be recovered and returned

[127] Owuor, 203.
[128] Owuor, 330.

to him. Before he leaves, Ali Dida Hada asks Isaiah, who has just received the confirmation of his father's death via the cairn Nyipir built for bones:

> 'You want to reopen the case?'
> Isaiah wipes his forehead. An exhalation: 'Don't know.'
> Ali Dida Hada says 'Me, I'm looking for a woman.'
> 'Good luck,' mutters Isaiah.
> 'Come with me.'
> 'Why?'
> 'She has answers. Maybe for you, too.'[129]

Isaiah agrees. They set out and spend the next night at a missionary outstation where Ali Dida Hada, as part of his investigative process, "looks into a place in his being where Akai Lokorijom had lived from the first day he saw her. He examines its contours and how it has formed him."[130] Akai might have distracted him from solving his only case, but now that he knows this, he is taking seriously the ways of seeing and knowing the Black mother: "Herdsman, a poem,"[131] she used to demand of him, compelling him to see her world and speak its language. This is how he anticipates Akai at Anam Ka'alakol, and when Akai finally arrives, she is introduced once more: "She has aged. So many lines crisscross her face. Her gaze still burns, and her mouth, though softened, still has its sarcastic twist. She smells of the land, its age, heat, and hardness. Wizened hands. And she says, 'You are here.'"[132] Ali Dida Hada is the only person in the world who grasps her world, and when he recites his poems, it is as if he can see as she does and she is not alone inside her imagining." [133] No longer lonely in her grief, Akai admits, "Bakir, I'm tired." She has, after all, been trying to outsprint death, and she is a long, long way from Wuoth Ogik.

Her confession, regarding the animals, is brief: "Gone."[134]

And what of the answers she has for Isaiah? To his very first question, the one he asked Nyipir, she answers

> in her version of English, 'I'm the woman in Hugh pictures […] I see your mother, Selena […] She come back for Hugh. But Hugh want me, not her […] Your father? He is not Hugh. OK?' She taps his face […] 'Look your colour, see? […] Not Hugh. Selena – *ai!* – she's mad […] Good revenge. Hugh…'

[129] Owuor, 305.
[130] Owuor, 305-306.
[131] Owuor, 218.
[132] Owuor, 329.
[133] Owuor, 330.
[134] Owuor, 330.

> she glares at Isaiah. 'A bad, bad man.' She sneers. 'Be happy Selena mad.' Another gurgle. 'Or your hair be red like stupid.'[135]

In this way, Akai, without saying much, finishes Selene's incomplete story, not with an account of what happened to Hugh, but of exactly what did *not* happen to him because Selene left him; a different story of madness. Selene had returned to Naivasha to wait, and when Hugh did not go after her, had allowed herself to make love to Lazaro, the houseboy. Suddenly faced with the news that the ghost he has been chasing for so long does not quite belong to him in the way that he thought, Isaiah builds a cairn "for every illusion and lie, for questions and his personal dead."[136]

When Akai returns home with Ali Dida Hada, Isaiah and nothing else, she asks Nyipir for forgiveness for his sacrificed animals. Hurt, the only thing a drained Nyipir can gesture towards is another neglected story, one that is essential to filling gaps in Ajany's investigation (discussed in Chapter Three): "Akai, remember, you also have a daughter."[137] Finally, after Ajany's exhausting search in Nairobi, she sits with her mother at Odidi's grave to "taste the sorrows woven into Akai-ma. They have always been there; she has just not known how to look before. Feeling its hugeness, Ajany understands how much shelter it has needed. Why it had to detach from Wuoth Ogik and wander."[138] Wuoth Ogik, built by a disgraced colonial agent in an attempt to contain the space he felt systemically entitled to, and taken over by the fallen postcolonial state agent that helped build it, could never mean 'the journey's end' for Akai, whose life could not be contained by this haunting/haunted nationalist artefact.

What *does* Akai choose to share with Ajany? She begins, "I became Turkana, but before that, I was Dodoth. I left school to meet one man, my father. But I met two. One is Nyipir. The other, Hugh Bolton. They were together."[139] On the day she jumped into the water, "she dived through a portal into another way of being."[140] Akai's decision to become Hugh's lover was motivated by "the promise of the bigness of life" from a man who she thought, at that time, to be "the face of life. His hair was fire. He had answers. He had travelled farther than anyone [she] knew. Such a person was what [she] wanted. This is how [she] wanted to be."[141] And in response to her difficult questions, she tells Ajany that Hugh "'read me things from his books. He showed me how to feel his music.' Eyes shut, memory

[135] Owuor, 331.
[136] Owuor, 335.
[137] Owuor, 339.
[138] Owuor, 341.
[139] Owuor, 343.
[140] Owuor, 344.
[141] Owuor, 344 .

resurrects strains of what she cannot name as Chopin's Nocturne in E minor. She sways with the sounds of that past. *This is what I wanted*, she says to Ajany."[142]

Where Nyipir remembers the day, time and emotion of the paintings as rage, Akai colours and complicates his memory with a parallel account of both desire and manipulation, especially when

> Hugh started to fondle and toy with Akai in public. Grapping at her in Nyipir's presence. Nyipir also started to act out. Breaking china, dropping kettles, polishing his hands. Not eating […] Akai began to stalk him. She would toss plates and cutlery just to watch him tense up. She undressed in his presence. Needled him to provoke a reaction. He always bowed and walked away.

But Hugh's fetishism and malicious exhibitionism unsurprisingly developed into physical and verbal abuse when one day,

> during a sudden rare arid land storm, Hugh decided to sketch Akai where she had been reclining behind a boulder near the rude veranda. He commanded her to stay in the rain. She did […] He worked all through the afternoon. His sketch done, Akai had ran in shivering, pouting and snarling like a mad cat.
> "Shut up, cow." Hugh had screamed. "Can't you see I'm painting?"
> Hugh worked through the night. Nyipir did not sleep at all.

And then Akai got pregnant, the figure with child Selene found in her husband's painting. But whereas Selene was haunted by Akai from the moment of her discovery, Akai "'never thought about Selena. She was not of our life. Even when he brought her here *and made me hide myself*, even when he left with Nyipir, and I was left here alone, I was happy.' A chuckle of youthful folly."[143]

Nyipir's question on what would happen to Akai after Selene came would be answered after Selene left, when Hugh's insults towards Akai diversified into "*ngilac, talonowa.* Lice, bat."[144] At the threat of miscarriage, Hugh was relieved, but Nyipir nursed Akai back to health, and when the foetus did not die,

> Hugh arranged a sudden safari to Lokitaung. Nyipir told Akai not to go. She looked back at him, her smile faked. 'We finish this,' she said. Hugh returned a week later by himself. He explained, "She's gone back to her people. Among her own kind […] Bring a sundowner. That matter is done. Now silence.[145]

[142] Owuor, 344.
[143] Owuor, 345, emphasis added.
[144] Owuor, 345.
[145] Owuor, 345

It is likely that Akai's naiveté led her to believe that Hugh was taking her to some of the many places he spoke about, and that she could just sever whatever forbidden intimacies were forming between her and Nyipir. But Hugh sent her off on a boat with fifty shillings and a sheep for her people, and more than a year since Akai had last seen her family, she finally arrived home.

But whatever goodwill her sudden reappearance garnered soon faded away when the father of Akai's baby did not come to claim his family, as she lied he would. Akai, the harbinger of shame her mother predicted, was coming to pass, and her stepfather eventually cast both her and her mother out of his home and into a homestead a two-day walk from Ileret. Here, Akai gave birth to two "caramel-skinned children with large grey eyes"[146] – Ewoi and Etir.

But the midwife's firm belief that "twins are bad"[147] serves as a forewarning to coming grievances like an "entrenched desiccating drought season. Everything burned. Everything struggled to breath before drying to death."[148] The strain on basic resources resulted in a fight between Akai and her mother, and

> words became a blow. Akai's mother slapped her to the ground. Told her to stop dreaming. Said she was a mere curse that had tainted life from the moment she was born. Akai did the unthinkable. She backhanded her mother. Her mother took her by the head and spat out a dirge: 'You are dead…' So Akai left with a bundle of her few things. Her mother packed the twins, too, tied everything to the camel, and pushed them away. 'Go and die,' she hurled.[149]

If we were to mark the moment at which Akai became a ghostly figure, it would be this culmination of ungovernable womanhood. She passed through her teenage years without officially gaining the status of man nor woman, was a disappeared figure for a few years, during which she was fetishised and animalised by Hugh before being discarded from Wuoth Ogik, could not redeem her chance at womanhood with a marriage when she returned home, and, having passed through the shame of community and family, especially her long-suffering mother, she was fully denounced, cursed into death. In this way, she would never quite be a citizen of the independent Kenya that was on the cards at the time: it would have

[146] Owuor, 345.
[147] Owuor, 345.
[148] Owuor, 347.
[149] Owuor, 347.

no space for the turns and complexities of a life that had been, for all intents and purposes, socially snuffed.

This would explain why Akai's return to Wuoth Ogik is such a shock to Hugh: she was supposed to have been expendable – in fact, she was supposed to no longer have existed, because 'now, silence' – but she survived pregnancy, disownment and estrangement, the Chalbi Desert, her children's slow starvation and a flash flood that had carried her close enough to find the pink house. Hugh's blinding rage when she demanded her dues – that he pay her bride price to her father and he fetch his children's bones from where she left them – manifest in the usual: "Whore! Whore! *Ngikakumok!* Rain preventer!" But this time he has a knife he intends to use on the inconvenience that is the "prostitute, monkey, slut, slug"[150] that has materialised from seemingly nowhere. When he attacked, aiming for Akai's womb, Akai sticking to him, "Nyipir clicked the rifle's hammer into place and shot Hugh in the throat."[151]

Akai and Nyipir drove then carried the body as far away from the house as they could, into a cave. Then they returned to the house and waited to be found, but Selene had long left Kenya, so nobody came looking for a while. They transitioned into tumultuous postcolonial family life until "many seasons after, when memory is dust, Ali came. But he could see nothing."[152] Akai's confession serves a critical function here by explaining the ways in which "the ghost imports a charged strangeness into the place or sphere it is haunting, thus unsettling the propriety and property lines that delimit a zone of activity or knowledge,"[153] a characteristic feature of haunting that Akai took advantage of. She elaborates that she and Nyipir "planted new myths about Wuoth Ogik. It was an aborted mission base. Its disappointed priest had gone back to Europe, after giving over its stewardship to his assistant and friend, Nyipir. In Kenya's pre- and early post-independence days, anything was believable. And a story repeated often enough became fact."[154] The fact that a state officer trained as a cryptanalyst 'could see nothing' is not just a comment on the shortcomings of official methods of investigation; it is also an allusion to how she disabled the state organ charged with maintaining order, making its process redundant for as long as it could not or would not consider "the women's place of power within each of us [that] is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep"[155], not just with a fabricated story, but with the

[150] Owuor, 347.
[151] Owuor, 347 .
[152] Owuor, 350.
[153] Gordon, 63.
[154] Gordon, 63, emphasis added.
[155] Lorde, 37.

knowledge she gained from navigating the impossible domesticity that made *her* Kenya until that point.

Years later, when Nyipir was stuck in the entrails of the Kenyan state,"[156] Akai, with only a young Galgalu's help, gave birth to a premature and fevered baby that would be Ajany. But even though Akai apportioned hope for all the people and places in her life – Hugh, Ewoi and Etir, Nyipir, Odidi – she could not muster it for the girl she was sure was going to die, not even enough to name her. As soon as she could walk, she strapped the nameless child to her back and "wandered away from Wuoth Ogik, seeking news of Nyipir at watering holes and trading centres."[157] It was the second such journey she took – wandering in desert-land, looking for a lover, carrying her child – but unlike what had happened to the twins, she would not watch this baby die in the wilderness. Instead, the disillusioned mother left her child under a Mareer tree and ran three days back to Wuoth Ogik, where Galgalu and Odidi would ask a question that closely resembled Akai's own years later: "Where's baby?"[158] When they were unable to get an answer out of Akai, they dashed off in the direction from which she came. Four days later, they return with the still-living girl, and "Odidi turned to [Akai], eyes afire. He said in an old man's voice, 'This is *my* baby'"[159], thus rearranging the order of care in the Oganda household for good and accounting for what Ajany has experienced, until now, as 'bad' motherhood.

With her part of the story finally out in the open, and the sacrifice for it made through Nyipir's prized livestock, Akai prepares to leave Wuoth Ogik, as everyone else shall do soon after. The magnitude of long-hidden secrets finally uttered out loud is unbearable in some ways: it does not restore life to those dead, neither does it reconstitute the home that is Wuoth Ogik, which is literally falling apart. Letting go of the last of the haunting monuments that defined the Oganda family's life for decades does not mark the end of haunting; but Akai does have some advice for Ajany on how to accommodate and navigate it going forward:

> 'Akai-ma, how does madness come? Can it arrive with the sound of wailing? It's inside.' She stops. 'It cries. Like a baby.'
> 'Tell the crying one that she has a mother. She belongs to life. She has a mother and the mother holds her. The mother forever holds her […] This is my heart, this is my breathing, and it's you. You hear?' Heartbeats. Arms tighten around each other. Time darts through them. Small contentment.

[156] Owuor, 342.
[157] Owuor, 341.
[158] Owuor, 341.
[159] Owuor, 343.

Macharia argues that "few, if any, of the frames available to write on 'African women' (as marginalized and marginal, as subaltern, as 'spectral') seem to work for the Akai who lives in the Northern Frontier District."[160] By considering the socio-legal parameters of criminality through the haunting impact of colonialism on Black life, however, a feminist reading of *Dust* as a postcolonial crime fiction text provides a frame that accounts for the extra/judicial figure of the Black mother and what she has to teach about the ways in which she experiences the world.

[160] Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor II."

Chapter Two
"They don't really need us": Tracking the Human Figure through Urban Womanhood in Kenyan Fiction

As Odidi runs for his life, the text tells us that "he just wants to go home."[1] Home, as we have seen from the last chapter, is Wuoth Ogik, where he has not been in ten years; home is also the house in Nairobi in which he lives, and Justina, the woman he lives with. The very first time we encounter Justina, through Odidi's memory, she is immediately located within a network of criminals: the Somali ex-warlord who sells women's lingerie and traded an AK-47 for Odidi's water songs, the ghostly crowd of gang associates Odidi is running towards, and the gun-toting car-jacking Odidi himself, her lover. Yet it is only until nearly two hundred pages later, when she makes herself known to Ajany, that we learn that as a sex worker, she is a criminal of her own standing, living in a shack north-east of the central business district. This house in mind, Odidi grabs onto the haunting image of Justina to propel him forward through Nairobi's previously familiar streets: she is a "shelter of faith", "faith into sorrow into longing" and an "oasis;"[2] she is even the beginning of a new destiny, if he survives this and marries her.[3] From these fragments, we glean that since he met her, Odidi has learned to navigate the city – as a criminal, as an organiser and as a dancer – via Justina's world.

This chapter therefore considers Justina's figure inside and against the geo-history of gendered and classed criminality in urban Kenyan spaces in order to interrogate hegemonic construction of the citizen – and by extension, of the human – in Kenyan law and moral publics by closely reading the ways in which she delineates her territory in the carnivorous city, taking the spaces she needs by subverting the structures that try to dictate her mobility. Given that "strategies of endurance and subsistence do not yield easily to the narrative of the grand revolution, nor has a space been cleared for the sex worker, welfare mother and domestic labourer in the annals of the black radical tradition,"[4] where does the impossible domestic figure in narratives of resistance and survival? Through postcolonial literary representations of the urban woman, a figure who has taken up significant space in Kenyan fiction since the early 1970s, I explore the visions of justice – woven into her name as incantation, as Just-ina – that she offers, or leaves behind when she eventually flees.

[1] Yvonne Owuor, *Dust* (London: Granta, 2014).
[2] Owuor, 5.
[3] Owuor, 15.
[4] Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labour," *Souls* 18, no. 1(2016): 171.

This chapter hinges on a slippery implication Justina makes in her final conversation in the text. She is at Twilight 333 and she has interrupts Isaiah's mesmerisation with Ajany's dancing:

> Justina giggles. 'But you can't dance with her.' She pointed at Ajany.
> 'Why?'
> 'You are just a human being.'
> 'So?'
> 'They don't really need us.'
> 'Who's they?'
> Justina starts to say something but hugs her body instead. She would do anything to feel Odidi's strong and securing arms around her even for a minute. She wants to hear again his vow to keep her safe forever.
> Isaiah says, 'She's human.'
> The DJ changes the music.
> 'Keep telling yourself that. You dance?'
> 'Mhh'
> 'Like that?' [Justina gestures at Ajany]
> 'No,' says Isaiah.
> 'Dance with me?' Justina asks.
> 'Yes,' Isaiah replies.[5]

The implication to which I refer lies in the 'us,' as in 'They don't really need *us*' – she and Isaiah are just human beings; *she* is *just* a human being. It is a slippery assertion because it is so implicit and it is never articulated further, but it is also a subtle embedding within a particular and often overlooked tradition of postcolonial writing, discussed in this chapter, in which the figure of the urban woman attempts to reimagine a model of humanity in the postcolonial city that does not simultaneously produce the gendered and classed dehumanisation they are subjected to. Justina therefore often eludes us because her figure, as it moves through Kenyan law and moral publics, signals towards a construction, or hybridity, that rejects the "single homogenised descriptive statement that is based on the figure of the West's liberal monohumanist *Man*"[6] that became central to the postcolonial state.

Justina's superficial absence from the text makes her a difficult literary figure to read, in part because her disappearance is so sudden and so thorough, even as she does issue a warning that it is likely to happen. Like Ajany and Akai Ma, she wanders through a particular pschogeography, but unlike them, she appears or is mentioned in only about twenty pages of the text; there is hardly a backstory, hardly an introduction, hardly a goodbye. But she is also

[5] Owuor, 248.
[6] Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 23.

the first woman we meet,[7] the last woman we read about,[8] and, according to Odidi, she is a human marker in a city that "all of a sudden changed its shape and turned against him. Roads slither into hard walls; blocks of shadow scurry away to expose his next step to ravenous, carnivorous urban trolls."[9] And while the legal-moral matrix that attempts to dictate her subjectivity in the postcolonial state provides context for her experiences as an outlawed citizen, we are introduced to her through Odidi's panicked intimacy as "Justina, his girl,"[10] for whom he is buying lacy feminine things in Eastleigh. The introduction is so brief, it is easy to overlook, especially in the urgency of Odidi's life-threatening dash through the city. But she appears again, still as he runs, as "incantation: *Justina! Justina!*"[11] He turns down Jogoo Road and, finally in his neighbourhood, Justina appears for the third and final time before he dies, this time as a person amongst other familiar people:

> draped in her yellow muumuu with its ridiculous giant pink carnations. He adores that dress on her. He adores her. Her eyes are unusually large, luminous and hollow. Her howl fragments his heart – who has wounded her? *Whom must he kill?* – and then flames flare from his heart's soul and engulf him, and after he screams out, he can no longer see Justina.[12]

After Odidi dies, Justina virtually disappears from the narrative, with hardly a promise of return. As somebody who has not met Odidi's family yet, she does not feature in its expansive memories, nor in their limited knowledge about Odidi's adult life in the city. For a long time, she does not even figure as a constituent part of Ajany's investigations in an unfamiliar city. But when she reappears in the text, she is sitting on a high stool in a red kiosk, watching Ajany scrub the spot of road where Odidi was killed. While this gap may make it seem easy to shunt her to the narrative's margins, we learn that this will not be possible because she "has come to the site of Odidi's death daily. At her first visit, she was furtive and frightened but now this pilgrimage is just one of the things she does with her life, like drinking tea at ten o'clock."[13] Justina has thus been deliberately present in the text every single day since Odidi's body was vanished by a plainclothes officer into a mortuary. Furthermore, even as she knows the answer to the question Ajany asked her father – *how did my brother die?* –

[7] Owuor, 2.
[8] Owuor, 365.
[9] Owuor, 6.
[10] Owuor, 4.
[11] Owuor, 5.
[12] Owuor, 7.
[13] Owuor, 190.

it is notable that she *lets* Ajany find her in order to re-enter our purview, a deliberate assertion of her control in what feels to her like an otherwise uncontrollable situation.

Knowing about her daily pilgrimage might prompt rereading the first two hundred pages, not necessarily to see if one can find her, but to understand the geohistorical terrain she occupies or moves across, particularly because she is the only current resident of the city in Odidi's family. Musing on her own walks through Nairobi city, artist Jepkorir Rose writes that "a city plan is to construct a narrative view of history as a march in one direction,"[14] and as Naddya Odhiambo, another artist, points out, "patriarchy is the scaffolding that holds up the city."[15] While designing Nairobi, neither the British Empire nor postcolonial Kenya accounted for the outlaw and the impossible domestic as human beings – it was, at first, a white man's city and then, after independence, the African man's city. But history is already a march in as many directions as there have been people – as materially present residents, as ghosts, or as travellers and visitors in transit to elsewhere – and so any masculinist vision of city planning always already goes awry; and if, as Moten argues, "the question of the city is inseparable from that concerning what it is to be, at once, of and outside of the house, of an impossible domesticity, of the broken generation/s of the *metoikos* [stranger],"[16] then we need to be attentive to the spaces of impossible domesticity Justina carves out in *Dust*'s Nairobi, and how her experiences of the city reconfigure hegemonic frameworks about citizenship and the law.

In a July 2017 exhibition at the Goethe Institute in Nairobi, the artists' collective, from which Rose's and Adhiambo's observations above are derived, proffered a method through which I could read Justina through the stories of a city designed and built with the intention to house labouring men and their masters, yet whose social life was significantly shaped by impossible domesticity. Naijographia, Bethuel Muthee writes, is "Nairobi geography beneath my feet. Naijographia: natembea, inaniandika. I dwell in constant movement in an attempt to make legible the marginalia written in faint steps."[17] Through haunting, Kamwangi Njue expands the concept through Roba Oteraw's articulation of a subculture of Naijographia, Ngirimaa. Ngirimaa reconsiders urban aesthetics through "'nusu mtu nusu hawayani,' loosely translated to half [human] half ghost; ghost here represents the world created by sense understanding of the world itself. These conversations on reaction to

[14] Jepkorir Rose, "Thoughts on Naijographia," (*Naijographia* exhibition catalogue, Nairobi, 2017), 3.
[15] Bethuel Muthee, "Naijographia," (*Naijographia* exhibition catalogue, Nairobi, 2017), 6.
[16] Fred Moten, "Uplift and Criminality," in *Next to the Colour Line*: *Gender, Sexuality and W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 340.
[17] Muthee, 2.

the world become ghosts that invade half our humanity, and becomes."[18] Through historical accounts of sex work in colonial Kenya and a close reading of Sylvia Wynter's theory of the human, Ngirimaa situates Justina within the dis/ordered pedagogies that shaped social life in colonial Nairobi, and which consequently haunt social life in the postcolonial city. If *Dust* is also a story about Nairobi, Justina's figure significantly contours that story.

In "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/ Power/ Truth/ Freedom", Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter maps out the construction of "our present ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself"[19] and how it has been used to answer the "Heideggerian question as to the who, and the what we are."[20] The essay discusses how Renaissance humanists redescribed the Latin-Christian conception of human "outside the terms of the then theocentric, 'sinful by nature' conception/ 'descriptive statement'"[21] which had, until then, been used as the hegemonic standard in the West and in the West's conquest until disrupted by Copernican astronomy; this description she calls Man_1,the Rational (but still Christian) Self and political subject of the state. While Man_1 was constructed by the Renaissance humanists and laymen, the epistemic shift still upheld the Judeo-Christian matrix of humanity, such that the space of Otherness left behind by 'Enemies-of-Christ' needed to be peopled, this time by the "peoples of the militarily expropriated New World territories (i.e., Indians), as well as the enslaved people of Black Africa (i.e., Negroes).

The gradual degodding of Man_1 by the secular intellectuals from the Renaissance itself was to cause an epistemological mutation through which Man_1 would now be constructed in its Darwinian variant, Man_2, a purely secular, biocentric human. Man_2's new order of knowledge shifted its descriptive statement such that there was a marked differential categorisation of

> all the colonised dark-skinned 'natives' of the world and the darker-skinned and poorer European peoples themselves were now to find themselves/ourselves as discursively and institutionally imprisoned as the Indians, the Negroes-as-slaves and the Mad had been […] in the terms of the descriptive statement of the earlier form of Man_1.[22]

[18] Kamwangi Njue, "The Ngirimaa Manifesto," (*Wanakuboeka FeelHarmonic* exhibition catalogue, Nairobi, 2018), 33.
[19] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003), 260.
[20] Wynter, 264.
[21] Wynter, 263.
[22] Wynter, 310.

The rational/irrational master code thus gave way to the selected/dyselected master code that would provide grounds for the Malthusian economical formulation of Natural Scarcity, which Man_2 has mastered. But while the above mentioned discursive imprisonment held true,

> what might be called the archipelago of its modes of Human Otherness […] [is now] peopled by a new category, one now comprised of the jobless, the homeless, the Poor, the systemically made jobless and criminalised – of the 'underdeveloped' – all as a category of the economically *damnés* rather than, as before, of the politically condemned.[23]

Referring to Frantz Fanon's theorisation of anti-colonialist and postcolonial politics in *The Wretched of the Earth*, it is within this archipelago of Human Otherness – read through Kenyan pre-independence and post-independence/colonial geo-histories – that we find Justina and the community in postcolonial Nairobi in which she lives. Her home is in that vast, vague and dehumanised domain of Nairobi's 'informal settlements' that are simultaneously permanent and precariously impermanent and she bluntly tells Ajany that she exchanges "sex for oil and canvases,"[24] already anticipating Ajany's disdainful judgement.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the legal status of women in colonial Kenya went through various and significant changes, and a handful of particular laws did not just survive unchanged throughout the colonial period, but remain a convenient reference point today. Sections 153 to 156 of the Penal Code respectively criminalise men and women living on the earnings of prostitution, using any premises for the purposes of prostitution and anybody who owns, rents or lives in a brothel.[25] For contextual significance on this legal scale – that is, regarding the seriousness of the crime – these laws are listed between Section 152, "power of search for persons detained" (should a magistrate suspect somebody is being detained somewhere "for immoral purposes"), and Section 157, "conspiracy to defile" (where 'defile' is a Kenyan colloquialism for sexual violence). Both these penalties, at least at face value, demonstrate consequences for legal subjects who disregard the consent of another, one through kidnapping and the other through sexual violence; and yet, the fact that sex work is more often than not a transaction between consenting adults, is a factor completely disregarded in Sections 153 to 156. For instance, in June 2014, the Nairobi County Assembly

[23] Wynter, 321.
[24] Owuor, 195.
[25] Laws of Kenya, Chapter 63: Kenyan Penal Code. Accessible at https://srhr.org/abortion-policies/documents/countries/02-Kenya-Penal-Code-2014.pdf.

voted to remove sex workers from the capital city's central business district (CBD).[26] The ward representative who tabled the motion stated that

> We are concerned that the enforcement of the provisions of the Penal Code on prostitution remains lacklustre and those commercial sex workers now undertake their unlawful practice openly within the CBD. This assembly urges the county government to move with speed and vigorously enforce the provisions of the law to deter the vice within the CBD.[27]

Again, in late 2017, a different politician tabled a motion to outlaw sex work from the city, claiming "I am deeply concerned that this business is today happening rampantly and openly within our communities without repercussions on the offenders as provided for in law."[28] This motion was passed on 1st December of the same year and although it was stifled by sex worker organisations, similar motions make this cyclic return to Parliament every few years. Additionally, the Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu municipal/county by-laws criminalise sex work by prohibiting loitering and solicitation of sex workers, and Section 26 of the 2006 Sexual Offences Act criminalises the deliberate transmission of a life-threatening disease, compels disclosure of one's HIV status and allows the court to authorise compulsory testing for a person accused.[29] Notably, all of these laws do not criminalise sex work in itself, even as they weaponise the moral panic around them, but they certainly make it almost impossible to make a living or a life out of it.

Following Wynter's mapping of the human, Man2, and its archipelago of Human Otherness, the Kenyan Penal Code is historically entrenched in the trajectory between the bioeconomic construction of the "ostensibly human normal category: *homo oeconomicus* (the virtuous breadwinner, the stable job holder, the taxpayer, the savvy investor, the master of natural scarcity)"[30] and The Sixties, when various anticolonial movements around the world

> were really the first opening phase of the dynamic in which the series of 'isms' (initiated by the black antiapartheid struggle for civil rights, women's rights/feminism, indigenous and other-of-colour rights, gay and lesbian rights

[26] Otiato Guguyu, "MCAs kick sex workers out of city," *Daily Nation*, June 5th, 2014. http://mobile.nation.co.ke/news/MCAs-kick-sex-workers-out-of-city-/-/1950946/2338934/-/format/xhtml/-/11a300uz/-/index.html. This vote was soon complicated by the lack of funds to 'rehabilitate' them: see http://old.nswp.org/fr/timeline/event/kenya-mcas-kick-sex-workers-out-city-lack-funds-support-sex-workers.
[27] Chrispinus Wekesa, "Nairobi MCAs asked to ban sexworkers," *The Star*, April 4, 2014. https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2014/04/04/nairobi-mcas-asked-to-ban-sex-workers_c920369.
[28] Maureen Kinyanjui, "Nairobi MCAs debate motion to ban sex workers from city," *The Star*, Dec 1, 2017. https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/12/01/nairobi-mcas-debate-motion-to-ban-sex-workers-from-city_c1678480.
[29] Laws of Kenya, No. 3 of 2006: Sexual Offences Act. Accessible at https://prostitution.procon.org/sourcefiles/KenyaSexualOffencesAct3of2006.pdf.
[30] Wynter and McKittrick, 19.

> and so forth) had erupted to challenge Man's episteme, its truth, and therefore its biocentric descriptive statement.[31]

This collective and momentary upheaval would be the site of DuBois' and Hartman's general strike as outlined in the introduction, and had, of course, been fuelled by earlier anticolonial movements. But it is also worth looking at the way these multiple terrains interacted *before* (and to inform) the general strike, that is, in this case, around the time of the codification of Kenyan law in the 1930s. It was also, as will be discussed shortly, around the time Nairobi sex workers became some of the first African landowners in a colonial city.

H. F. Morris explains that

> a codified body of criminal law and procedure, replacing the English common law and statutes of general application […] had a great appeal to administrators, government law officers, judges and magistrates, and, whatever their differing views as to the respective merits of codes on the Indian, or more purely English, model, they were virtually all agreed that the introduction of such codes was an essential measure of reform.[32]

Mapping the adoption of penal codes across the country, he further observes that "when one territory intends to introduce a code, it uses the codes of others as its models, improving and bringing them up to date, and the resulting product is then used as the latest model for enactment somewhere else."[33] Kenya's relationship with penal coding, therefore, officially began in 1897, when the Indian Penal Code and the Indian Criminal Procedure Code were adopted in what was then the East Africa Protectorate. While the latter was replaced by a local one in 1914, the transition from Indian Penal Codes was a protracted one between the Secretary of State legal advisor Bushe and other local authorities, including the governor and the Chief Justice. Nevertheless, the model Penal Code, based on Nigerian legislation, was completed in 1924 and officially put in place in Kenya in the early 1930s.

Janet Bujra writes that Nairobi was founded along the Kenya-Uganda railway in 1899, two years after the Indian Penal Code was imported, and that by 1911, two-thirds of its population was African, with men outnumbering women in a six to one ratio.[34] She finds the first mention of sex work in a census document: "Behind the government offices runs the Nairobi River, through a swamp cultivated almost entirely by Indians. On the borders of this

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[31] Wynter and McKittrick, 23.
[32] H.F. Morris, "A History of the Adoption of Codes of Criminal Law and Procedure in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African Law 18* no.1 (1974): 6.
[33] Morris, 6-7.
[34] Janet Bujra, "Women 'Entrepreneurs' of Early Nairobi," *Canadian Journal of African Studies 9*, no. 2 (1975): 216-217.

swamp are several houses, some of which are occupied by… native prostitutes who pay rent to the Indian owners."[35] It is important to note this first record of sex workers as tenants because of the class mobility that would eventually make them some of the first African landlords in the city.

Bujra mentions that these women were from multiple ethnic groups across the country, not just those living in proximity to the city, and there was a myriad of reasons for their migration, from abusive or argumentative family and spouses to colonial intrusions to rural community epidemics. As 'native locations' and African villages came up across the city to accommodate the rural-urban migration of Africans looking for work, "both Pangani and Pumwani had a large population of independent women, many of whom had made good and built or bought houses there" by the late twenties.[36]

Colonial administrators at first believed that the women were forcefully moved to Nairobi by men, and that they were organised into brothels, although in reality, they were "never subject to exploitation by pimps or brothel owners. Each woman seems to have organised her business separately and lived independently."[37] Still, it was assumptions like these that would inform the anti-sex work clauses in the Penal Code, which, as mentioned above, never criminalised the actual career, but its earnings and the sites of its labour. This, as discussed through Luis White's research below, was in itself intimately tied to the changing economy of property, home ownership and inheritance under colonial law from the twenties to the late fifties.

Bujra identifies a number of precipitating factors that propelled these women into sex work, such as the ratio of men to women, or infertility, but I would like to draw particular attention to the labour economy. Although rural-urban migration was happening in considerable numbers, there was no wage labour available for women. Other than sex work, the most viable means of income was brewing beer, and these two professions often still work in the same terrain – for example, the Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme that exists today is, according to their website, "an organisation by and for sex workers, women having sex with women (WSW), women using drugs and bar hostesses in Kenya."[38] These four demographics (which is not to say one is absolutely distinct from the other, or that one woman could not fall into all four) also find historical roots in the ways in which sex workers queered kinship once they found themselves in these communities, often

[35] Bujra, 217.
[36] Bujra, 217.
[37] Bujra, 221.
[38] www.bhesp.org.

without blood ties, or having deliberately cut themselves off from their family. Instead, Islam was a significant way through which they queered kinship, because Muslim communities were not entrenched in ethnic belonging, and Islam "offered urban social security, moral neutrality and a model for economic success."[39] Central to this choice was the certainty that the community would bury them, something that would not have been possible under the constraints of ethnic belonging and geography. Another queering process was the adoption of pseudo-kin across genders and ethnic backgrounds – these women married both men and women, adopted other women's children, some of whom would then be their heirs, and took care of younger women for the sake of reciprocal care in their old age.

While Bujra's account is certainly informative, and she is critical of Western studies that do not think about African women's social contexts but instead liberally apply cultural universalism, she thinks Marxist critiques prove more productive for her case because they see sex work "as merely one expression of exploitative social relations, and in particular it holds up bourgeois marriage as a mirror to prostitution."[40] And while Bujra writes about the decades before The Sixties, one of Wynter's central arguments, and that of the movements themselves, was the redefinition of "Marx's class struggle in the terms of the 'politics of being': that is, one waged over what is to be a descriptive statement of the human, one whose master code of symbolic life and death each human order organises itself."[41] As such, even as Bujra's account offers incredible insight into early sex worker communities in Nairobi, her main interest in women who succeeded in Nairobi still leans favourably towards *homo oeconomicus* frameworks and thus leaves out important tenets of this politics of being, such as pleasure and desire, motherhood, health and violence.

Luise White's book-length study, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, provides a more nuanced history of the urban colonial economy of Nairobi by centring sex workers as active architects in the psychogeographical construction of social life, during and after World War II. In White's introduction, she states that her main concerns are, as with any historian, "the interaction of class and kin, family and farm, migrants and housing,"[42] but she takes her work from the oral history of sex workers in early Nairobi. What her title alludes to, therefore, is a history of Nairobi's urban growth – literally, its built environments and the ideologies that informed the blueprints – through which we can

[39] Bujra, 227.
[40] Bujra, 214.
[41] Wynter, 319.
[42] Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 21.

understand Nairobi as both the site of queered black world-making that takes seriously the safety and comfort of vulnerable citizens, or of dis/order and heartbreak imposed by the law and white paranoia. If gendered subjectivity is important for us to understand spaces of impossible domesticity, then we are compelled to investigate what urban women's reconfiguration of the city – how and where she moves, how she makes herself in/visible, how she makes a living and a life – offer towards thinking about citizenship and the law. The impossible domestic is therefore unimaginable as a human being herself, but manageable as a thing to control, or a tool with which to manage sexuality, movement and the heteronormative family. Keeping in mind the functions of haunting as discussed in the previous chapter, I therefore make lengthy reference to White's historiography because of how impossible domesticity shaped/shapes official policy and legal documentation, even as the same law and policy would not account for its complex and radical assertions of humanity.

Here is Justina's own scant history, as told to Ajany:

> Family from Mombasa, Nairobi railway workers, father a polygamous train driver in the last days of the steam engines, Justina growing up contented in the city with assorted brothers and sisters, then a series of misfortunes that devastated, decimated, and dispersed the family. Disease. Job loss. Death. Dropping out of school to take care of her sick mother, who had been the youngest and later abandoned wife. Justina's little joys: timing the Mombasa-Nairobi train as it chugged along the railroad close to her shack, running after it and listening for the sound of its horn. [43]

I do not wish to presume that White's historiography is literally applicable to Justina's personal history; historical accounts must be read alongside fiction, but cannot fill in its gaps. However, in order to explore the continuities she underwrites between colonialism and independence – including and especially her own pathologisation as a morally degenerative urban woman – Justina must be considered within the broader tradition of sex workers' representation in postcolonial Kenyan fiction by exploring where she stood within racialized colonial fantasies and paranoia on health and wealth, and how she navigated and manipulated urban colonial plans through different conceptions of order. Her movements and shelters around Nairobi were, in effect, a city anti-plan marching in different directions from the colonial government's blueprints.

[43] Owuor, 199.

The Comforts of Home traces the history of Nairobi's sex workers all the way to the city's beginnings, in 1899, when the Mombasa-Kampala railway in Justina's story reached the "unoccupied area thought by officials to be therefore free of interethnic violence,"[44] a typical colonial view of *terra nullius* upon which to perpetuate a new violence. As "events of the 1890s ruptured the established economies of African marriage systems by shifting wealth away from cattle owners and toward agriculturalists"[45], sex work was one of the consequent professions that came out of migration and wage labour formation in this newly formed city. She notes that

> Prior to World War I, in Nairobi at least, prostitution was an activity many women willingly combined with cultivation and trade […] Nairobi's Africans did not live in a world divided into prostitutes and respectable women, a world in which prostitution was a specific occupation, or even a concept that the woman herself would use to describe her work.[46]

The war changed this, and many women transitioned into full time sex work, or sex work as primary income, in part to meet the demand and reap the highest benefits of interracial transactions. For some of them, marriage was no longer the only option for a livelihood because "there was another way then."[47] As Bujra noted, some of them could not or would not return to their rural homes, but White identifies several others – wartime and pre-wartime sex workers – who frequently visited and sent money to their families; some others who invested their money in building huts in the African settlements of Nairobi; and others still who kept their money in their homes who would have enough money to build houses in Pumwani, the official African location created in the early 1920s.[48]

Nairobi's colonial authorities demolished three of the six African settlements in order to move their residents to Pumwani because "in the years before 1920 the rhetoric of urban segregation was the rhetoric of medicine and sanitation. Segregation was equated with control over those diseases each race inherently had and could, by residential proximity, transmit."[49] After the War, "prostitutes and other 'objectionable persons' were declared diseased."[50] Pumwani was therefore built (and Nairobi further designed) because "diseases and purveyors of diseases merged in the eyes of the administrators [and] the control of urban

[44] White, 40.
[45] White, 29.
[46] White, 43.
[47] White, 44.
[48] White, 45.
[49] White, 46.
[50] White, 46.

space became more than the control of infection: it became control over African sexual relations […] Africans were to be contained not because they were diseased but because they were Africans. Control over Africans' housing became control over urban Africans."[51] Curfews were put in place to control where sex workers could go and who could visit sex workers in order "to keep the supply of [male] employed labour fluid while limiting the mobility and non-African associations of watembezi prostitutes."[52] The Medical Department, the "only branch of the colonial state that could effect the removal of urban communities […]"[53] would bring watembezi (streetwalking) sex work, as a primary form of sex work, to a four year hiatus in 1924.

As such, malaya sex work emerged, and developed social relations both outside of and despite the attempts at state control. A lot of male labour in the booming employment market were in need of what was on sale, which was more than just sex. Malaya sex work, which became both a day and night time activity at varying prices, "offered a more extensive set of domestic services for sale; the woman provided a short-term lease of whatever else was in the room: bedding, water, utensils […] [They] even managed to charge for conversation."[54] In order to stay outside of the state's surveillance, these women often passed their customers as husbands. While women adapted to the more effective form of capital accumulation, malaya sex work was also manipulation of social space "in a community in which privacy was at a premium, in which the communal bathrooms and latrines had no doors,"[55] even though this could also mean a man could refuse to pay or turn violent and the woman could do nothing about it. This was a notable retreat into respectable silence, where neighbours and landlords did not mind sex work as long as the transactions were done in private; secrecy, in turn, created networks between the women in some communities and maintained boundaries in others. White argues that the former group did so because of the common experience of conversion to Islam more than with occupation or location.

Within the colonial imaginary, sex workers had morphed, thus far, from 'loose women' to 'prostitutes and other objectionable persons' to 'diseased African women' and the administrative policies that shaped Nairobi reflected this. The growing city was designed to control biologically and socially depraved sexualities whose arrival and development was seen as the consequence of men's migration and income, and controlling urban women's

[51] White, 46-47.
[52] White, 47.
[53] White, 67.
[54] White, 55, 57.
[55] White, 57.

movement and access was an ideologically essential exercise. Yet they gave no consideration that these women – many of whom had practiced the watembezi form of sex work and literally walked forbidden terrains over and over again – were responding to and manipulating socioeconomic pressures, just as everybody else was. It was as Justina says to Ajany, "A prostitute's child needs the same things other babies have."[56]

This is not to say they colonial authorities were not aware of what was happening, limited and racist as their gaze was. Indeed, by the time sex workers and their dependents officially entered Kenyan law in the Penal Code that criminalises them now still, "the rumour known even to children in Pumwani in 1930, that prostitution was approved by the colonial regime, was astute: prostitution was essential to the smooth running of migrant labour economy of the scale Nairobi required in the 1920s."[57] The Indian Penal Code that defined and governed criminality at the time was not tailored to the demands colonial settlers were making because "problems arose when local labour relations were sufficiently capitalist that the urban work of men differed fundamentally from the work of urban women and had to be policed accordingly."[58] Actively enforcing it would have meant the arrest of many more African men because its target was registered labourers (which women were not at the time) and it criminalised only solicitation, not sex work. As such, "labour registration had left the unwaged and unregistered all but outside the law. Denied a legal apparatus with which to facilitate the wholesale removal of any group from the city's streets, the state had to become subtler with its criminal law to deal with prostitutes."[59]

A good fictional account of these nuances is addressed in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Murder in Majengo* (1973). Perhaps the first fictional text in English to attempt a detailed representation of the lives of sex workers in Kenya, it was later republished with its prequel, *Victoria*, which stretched its original temporal parameters into colonial Kenya. Victoria is a retired sex worker living in Nairobi, and frequently encounters triggers that remind her of her younger days. For instance, in the 1930s, on the way back to her family home after abandoning her new-born baby at a mission hospital and leaving her marital home before that, she passed through Kisumu, where she met Chelagat. Victoria moved into the house Chelagat shared with other sex workers, and slid into the work within days with little surprise and great pleasure from its material gains. When she finally declared she was ready to return to her mother's home with all the wonderful things she had bought and the money she had

[56] Owuor, 197.
[57] White, 76.
[58] White, 65.
[59] White, 66.

earned, with which she would dazzle the clan she left behind into forgiving her for leaving her husband, Chelagat pointed out the limitations to her plans:

> In my country, a *malaya* cannot go home […] And will they not say you are spoiled? You have had other men, European men and circumcised men of other communities. You have got used to other ways of living. Will you go to one of your round villages and hoe and bring water with your hair all shaggy? Will you go as a fourth wife to another old man, you who sit poring over a newspaper as though you can read it? Will you make do with millet porridge in the good season and pounded cassava in the dry season? And when your old man dies, will you be able to tear your clothes off and weep upon his body, showing that you have done him no wrong? And if you cannot, what will they do to you?[60]

Victoria was not a sex worker in Nairobi, but it is notable that it is objects and events in Nairobi that trigger her memories of her years in Majengo, an African village in a colonial town that would become a postcolonial city. She does not know she has slipped so easily into criminality until this conversation happens; what she knows is that her material conditions got better very quickly. But Chelagat continues, explaining how she and the other women continue to survive:

> Well, if they threaten to send me out of town, I pay them, that's all. You won't starve. You've got a good head, you know. Maybe you could even learn to read. *They won't let you live like a whole woman but perhaps you learn to live like half a man*. But don't say I made you. I gave you food and a place to rest, that's all. You did the rest yourself.[61]

Not only did Chelagat draw attention to the network of criminals that kept the city running, she also insisted that the life an urban woman not committed to a husband could have was as close to humanity as they could get. This statement, like Justina's, was twofold: it was a convicted acknowledgement that women are whole humans, even if 'they' would not allow it, and that to be half a human is better than to be non-human. The region of the half-human is that arbitrary space of criminalisation between the law and lawlessness.

The 1930s, heavily affected by the Great Depression, were characterised by a significant drop in the demand for labour, followed by a huge pre-World War II boom. Sex workers' domestic spaces morphed as the city did, from varying degrees of safety against vagrancy and invasion of privacy for both men and women as customers and as roommates,

[60] Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, (Nairobi: Macmillan Education, 1993), 26.
[61] Macgoye, 27.

to services offered according to what was then affordable. By the late thirties, several hundred women had moved into domestic wage labour, but malaya sex workers were acknowledged by the state as "a necessary part of African life in Nairobi: they could reproduce male labour power cheaply and effectively enough for the state – without even taking up very much space – and save the Municipality the cost of family housing and wages."[62] Sex workers navigated the areas between legality and the development of social life such that by the end of World War II, capital accumulation had made it such that they were a large part of the landlord class in Nairobi, and choosing heirs for their property.

This did not bode well for a state invested in making African housing as cramped and temporary as possible, and so it redirected its energies here, attempting to control African class formations by controlling the home space. Throughout the thirties, housing relations were shaped by and between private landlords and the state-as-landlord. During wartime, the control of sex work was at a low, and "the three forms of prostitution interacted with each other to produce a discernible regional price differentiation,"[63] which opened up the city in different ways. To what extent this intervention was successful on the administration's part is debatable, but is not really my concern; more relevant to this research is that after World War II, the changing accumulative capital landscape had led the colonial imaginary to redefine crime on the basis of African property ownership.

According to colonial authorities and some scholars, post-war Nairobi was hit by a crime wave violent enough to apparently warrant suppression, although Black Africans in many parts of the city did not hold the same level of worry for their safety. White finds value in both these positions, arguing that they describe "two different gendered and salaried universes of risk and danger. The crime of post-war Nairobi was against property, specifically the kind of property that skilled men could afford."[64] The economic growth was so far unmatched and the demand for labour was high and "crime was, if anything, more professional than the construction industry."[65] And while domestic violence against women seems to have decreased at this time, welfare associations developed a renewed interest in African women's private lives, identifying single women and sex workers themselves, punishing them and repatriating them to their rural homes. In many ways, the Kikuyu General Union, the Luo Union and their ilk's intervention in public life in order to preserve the

[62] White, 94.
[63] White, 182.
[64] White, 186.
[65] White, 188.

woman's dignity, and thus of her community – shaped the public morality that the postcolonial state maintains about sex work today.

Thus far, therefore, it is not difficult to see how the Penal Code would attempt to control African private lives' and social relations by skirting around criminalising sex workers' labour, choosing to criminalise their income instead, which, considering how many families they supported and kinship networks they created, covers a greater scope. Around the same time, though, as Victoria recalls the women's role hiding anti-colonial politicians in their home and passing communication between Kisumu and other parts of the country, a general strike was in the works. In her argument towards the making of the human, Wynter discusses the global context within which this was happening:

> What happened by 1950? […] The majority of the world's peoples who had been colonial subjects of a then overtly imperial West had now become politically independent. At that time, we who, after our respective anticolonial uprisings, were almost all now subjects of postcolonial nations, nevertheless fell into the mimetic trap of what Jean Price-Mars calls […] 'collective Bovaryism' – because the West is now going to *reincorporate* us neocolonially, and thereby mimetically, by telling us that the problem with us *wasn't* that we'd been imperially subordinated, *wasn't* that we'd been socioculturally dominated and economically exploited, but that we were *underdeveloped.* The West said: 'Oh well, no longer be a *native* but come and be Man like us! Become *homo oeconomicus*!'[66]

Development, or postcolonial modernity – "the human effects of the expansion of markets in goods, labour or knowledge, and of the growing power of the states over people"[67] – became the goal, and Nairobi was its biggest marker. The postcolonial state inherited the colonial state's city, and did little to change it; instead, they continued to divide the city according to similar gendered and classed structures, despite a population burgeoning from rural-urban migrations. The African neighbourhoods from the colonial area, many now called slums or informal settlements, were replicated across the city, demolished, and built again in the same place or elsewhere to accommodate a growing working class. Yet the above account on the geo-histories of sex workers in Nairobi already renders the construction of *homo oeconomicus* untenable. White's observation that "landlords and self-employed women and self-employed women kept Nairobi orderly for years"[68] cogently summarises a large part of

[66] Wynter and McKittrick, 20.
[67] J. Lonsdale, "Jomo Kenyatta, God and the modern world," in *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate*, eds. Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 38.
[68] White, 219.

the argument: sex workers held economic power in significant and unexpected ways, but simultaneously could not fit the Western descriptive statement of the 'human.' Both within and despite the hostile and dehumanising *homo oeconomicus'* matrix, they carved out their own genre and praxis of humanity.

The Mau Mau uprising of the fifties and the consequent State of Emergency have received considerable scholarly attention, but it still reads like a mostly androcentric affair, as well as mostly Kikuyu. Yet Nairobi sex work was a multi-racial, multi-ethnic affair, and "prostitutes have figured more prominently in Mau Mau historiography than did women householders or married women, armed or unarmed"[69] (although, of course, women's political organising across the board was not new). Both African male politicians and the colonial state fantasised about and weaponised the sex-worker-as-disease and the sex-worker-as-seductress; some sex workers were oathed into the Mau Mau, others did the oathing themselves; the Mau Mau only allowed monogamy and made it a fineable offence to be living with a sex worker. Life around the Mau Mau changed, too. Bullets flew in through windows in the middle of the night during police raids; women paid to marry men for protection against arrest; money was given to support both sides of this war; some sex workers became Home Guard informants; slums and locations were torn down or contained by barbed wire; and people shed and picked up ethnic and religious identities for their own safety: "becoming a Muslim was a way to survive Emergency regulations; being a Kikuyu was not."[70] For the most part, sex workers lost out on a large chunk of earnings and savings; but after the Emergency,

> the fate of the women who had lived and worked in the city's new estate of Makadara, and the women who swept the city clean while the ethnic group preferred for the job was considered too great a risk, represents perhaps a vision of community in Nairobi that colonialists and developers never imagined. The old Muslim networks, the informal sector, the residuum, could support the people the legal sector deemed redundant.[71]

This vision involved hastily reorganised housing policies that would see a marked increase in African house ownership, but not a reproduction of the desired social change "in a city that had been as ungovernable as long as Nairobi had."[72] Nairobi retained more unemployed and self-employed Africans, in part supported by sex workers' earnings, and "by the early

[69] White, 205.
[70] White, 210.
[71] White, 212.
[72] White, 213.

1960s overcrowded slums provided the social life and stability, and the welfare for the infirm and the unemployed, that the official housing estates failed to offer."[73] By the time the dust settled on the newly post-independent city, and the masculine African elite had been elevated into the social category of *homo oeconomicus* by ethnopatriarchal patronage politics, "landlords and self-employed women had kept Nairobi orderly for many years."[74] By so doing, they provided an alternative blueprint with which to enter the postcolonial city, even though they were almost immediately written out of the sanitised image of new nationhood.

With this history of urban planning, legislation and accompanying moral anxieties and the general strike in mind, what, then, became of the postcolonial city? *Development*, or postcolonial modernity – "the human effects of the expansion of markets in goods, labour or knowledge, and of the growing power of the states over people"[75] – became the goal, and Nairobi was its biggest marker. The newly post-independent state inherited the colonial state's city, and did little to change it; instead, it continued to divide the city according to similar gendered and classed structures in the name of a mimetic development. Yet the above account on the geo-histories of sex workers in Nairobi already renders the construction of *homo oeconomicus* untenable. White's observation that "landlords and self-employed women and self-employed women kept Nairobi orderly for years"[76] cogently summarises a large part of the argument: sex workers held economic power in significant ways, but still could not fit the Western descriptive statement of the 'human.' Both within and despite this hostile and dehumanising Man_2's/*homo oeconomicus'* matrix, they therefore carved out their own genre and praxis of humanity.

It is this historical world-making pedagogy that I hold as most relevant to Justina's context, especially because, like Akai in the previous chapter, Wynter encourages us to shift our focus from the overdetermined, biocentric *homo oeconomicus* to the human as a "hybrid-auto-instituting-language-storytelling-species, or, *homo narrans.*"[77] In the epochal transition from colonialism to post-independence and the continuities of gendered politics, the sex worker became a significant character in early post-colonial fiction, which was actively concerned with the worldmaking labour that imagining the possibilities of a 'new' Kenya required. With few exceptions like Macgoye and Monica Genga-Idowu (discussed below), rampant sexualities were posited in (mostly male-authored) works of fiction as some of the

[73] White, 220.
[74] White, 219.
[75] J. Lonsdale, "Jomo Kenyatta, God and the modern world," in *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate*, eds. Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 38.
[76] White, 219.
[77] Wynter and McKittrick, 25.

most visceral ills to plague postcolonial nation-building, which phallocratic institutions, elite male politicians and working-class men were taking responsibility for.

To date, rampant feminine sexualities in postcolonial imaginaries are a consistent topic of gendered contention in popular media because, as Dina Ligaga argues, patriarchy "needs to circulate these narratives as cautionary tales" in order to tame this construction.[78] For instance, more recently, sex workers have been in the news for using 'black magic' to entrap customers into repeat patronage;[79] another news story claims that sex workers are 'now' offering their services right before the start of an average work day[80]; yet another one concerns itself with the residential estates in which sex workers have 'now' moved their business to.[81] Interestingly, these tabloids often cite sex workers themselves, which would provide an interesting collage of testimonies and experiences were they not fixed within moral anxieties about 'women of the night' or 'night nurses' – the women seem to only ever talk about sex and hardship, and seem to only come alive under cover of darkness and shadows – which is more a commentary on the kinds of questions journalists ask them than a comprehensive account of their experiences. Even when reporting on physical and sexual violence, mainstream press seems unable, or unwilling, to render an account without objectification and castigation.[82] If the figure of the sex worker shaped pre-independence urban policy and capital accumulation, and also invented forms of resistance and queered Man_2's conceptions of kinship and community, then she certainly shaped the literary landscape, or, arguably, in some cases, was used to do so.

For this reason, I take seriously Desiree Lewis' claim that "by focusing only or primarily on legislation and formal rights, one loses sight of how deeply postcolonial nation-building and citizenship discourses are rooted in heterosexist patriarchal violence."[83] In order

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[78] Dina Ligaga, "Mapping emerging constructions of good time girls in Kenyan popular media," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 3 (2014), 249.

[79] David Odongo and Pkemoi Ng'eno, "Nairobi sex workers using black magic to 'tie' men in Nairobi," *The Standard* (Nairobi), Feb 22, 2018. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/evewoman/article/2001270743/here-is-how-prostitutes-are-using-juju-to-confuse-married-men-in-nairobi.

[80] James Mwangi, "Morning glory: Nairobi men get sex in the streets before heading to the office," *Standard Digital Entertainment* (Nairobi), Feb 9, 2018. https://www.sde.co.ke/thenairobian/article/2001269071/morning-glory-nairobi-men-get-sex-in-the-streets-before-heading-to-the-office.

[81] Mose Ndubi, "Do you live in these estates? Commercial sex workers have set up base in residential areas," *Standard Digital Entertainment* (Nairobi), June 22, 2016. https://www.sde.co.ke/article/2001244488/do-you-live-in-these-estates-commercial-sex-workers-have-set-up-base-in-residential-areas

[82] Stella Cherono, "Puzzle of Unsolved Murders of Sex Workers in Nairobi," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), May 15, 2018. https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Puzzle-of-unsolved-murders-of-sex-workers-in-Nairobi-/1056-4562036-n7j91fz/index.html.
While introducing a murder victim, Cherono writes that "In life, her body had been battered by alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence […] Now, in death and without make-up, all the ugly marks of her suffering on her face and hands were exposed for the world to see. Only her thighs, which were barely covered by the off-shoulder ribbed pink dress, seemed to have survived the wear and tear."

[83] Desiree Lewis, "Gendered Spectacle: New Terrains of Struggle in South Africa," in *Body Politics and Women Citizens*, ed. Ann Schlyter (Stockholm: Sida), 133.

to manage rampant sexualities, Lewis argues that "racist fictions about the contaminating effect of women's bodies in the public sphere surfaced in government policies in several African countries shortly after decolonisation;" consequently,

> public spectacles demonising African women as degenerate and corrupting have been central to hegemonic post-colonial definitions of the healthy postcolonial nation and the social body. Such acts can be read as patriarchy's 'rationale' […] but it is also important to read them as performative practices with a self-constitutive discursive function. They enlist women's bodies as signifiers to ritualise acts of purging or discipline and thus imagine fictions of a cleansed body politic.[84]

Mapping the circulation of the good-time girl – another sexually deviant figure in patriarchal projections of womanhood and the flow of capital – in the Kenyan public imaginary, Ligaga argues that popular media present their stories as "spectacle, to be read and consumed as entertainment, but also to act as cautionary tales against certain kinds of behaviours."[85] The popular press is certainly a useful lens, but I am drawn to it more because of what it obscures. Part of the cautionary rhetoric is to always frame the sexually rampant impossible domestic within the constricting parameters of their work; for instance, sex workers are frequently referred to as 'women of the night', who seemingly only ever come alive after dark, slinking in shadows in which they trap men and "eroding the moral fabric and values that society stands for."[86] If popular media contains sex workers inside the shadow of night and many postcolonial novels kept them in the same criminalised position, then I turn to popular literary representations of the postcolonial city as a marker of modernity in early Kenyan novels as another useful entry point into understanding how the human figure of the sex worker and the rest of her life – her desires, her opinions, her relationships and her health – measures up to the postcolonial standard of the monohumanist *Man*. These texts provided discursive support for the postcolony's projection of Nairobi as a place of infinite material possibilities, but Tom Odhiambo notes that they are "littered with prostitutes, drunkards, street urchins, petty thieves and other social deviants."[87]

According to Colomba Muriungi, "most female writers in Kenya have, more often than not, avoided writing about the prostitute figure. Those who chose to write about her, and

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[84] Lewis 132-133.
[85] Ligaga, 251.
[86] Ndubi, "Do you live in these estates?"
[87] Tom Odhiambo. "The City as a Marker of Modernity in postcolonial Kenyan popular fiction," *Scrutiny2 10*, no. 2 (2005), 47. Odhiambo's observation carries the same contemptuous language that popular press adheres to even today, in which poorer classes of people occupy the same imaginative space as litter/garbage.

these have characteristically been male writers, depict the prostitute within the sociological framework that sees her as an agent of moral decay in the society."[88] But Stephanie Newell notes that popular writers "return repeatedly to the character of the sexually self-determining figure who moves freely around the city, and [rehearse] similar ideological scripts in which materialistic good time girls grab men's money before being punished;"[89] and a number of Kenyan women writers have featured or mentioned the city woman in perhaps equal proportion as their male counterparts. Indeed, she is a difficult figure to avoid in the politics of rural to urban migration that was characteristic of earlier post-independence novels, while later texts tend to feature variations of the sexually rampant woman as unavoidable figures in the psychogeography of city men. Perhaps the more fitting argument, then, is that many of these writers – male and female – write about this impossible domestic either as an 'irredeemable' biological and social ill or a victim to be saved from drudgery, or a combination of both, reflecting an increasing moral anxiety that is supported by gendered and classed socialisations. And while some of these texts, like Macgoye's *Victoria* and Genga-Idowu's *Lady in Chains* (1993), offer rather nuanced representations, and others are evidence of deeply entrenched misogyny and respectability politics in which the sex worker is just barely human in their terms, if at all, one thing they all seem to have in common is an attempt at providing an answer to the same question that plagues parliament every few years: *what is to be done about the sex worker*?

Soon after *Murder in Majengo* came out, David Maillu's *After 4:30* (1974) was published by Comb Books, which was Maillu's own publishing house and thus probably the only one that would agree to print it. Even though it also provides a textured representation of the lives of sex workers, it bears a different tone from Macgoye's text(s) in that "sexual appetite pervades *After 4.30*. Sex is not simply a means to a financial end, though it is that. It also satisfies libidinal urges."[90] Probably the most controversial novel of its time, it is a verse novel about what urban women, married and unmarried, are subjected to at the hands of lovers, husbands, employers and (sex work) customers. The main character (Tom Odhiambo observes her name is Emili Katunga) through whom we see the other women, is a typist until 4.30 p.m. and a sex worker afterwards to supplement her income. She writes quite bluntly and seamlessly about her living and working conditions, her sexual encounters

[88] Colomba Muriungi, "Breaking the Chains: Female Bonding and Cultural Emancipation in an Emergent Urban Space in Kenya," *African Insights* 35, no. 2 (2005), 289-290.
[89] Stephanie Newell, introduction to *Readings in African Popular Fiction*, ed. Stephanie Newell (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 6.
[90] Keguro Macharia, "Reading David Maillu II," *Gukira* (blog), Jan 2, 2013, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2013/01/02/reading-david-maillu-ii/.

with men, her opinion on national law and politics, her personal (sexual and material) desires and what she thinks about other women – her secretary cousin Lilly, Lilly's employer's wife, other sex workers and other Nairobi wives in general – who she holds in very low esteem.

Keguro Macharia writes that "*After 4:30* enacts a radical sexual politics;"[91] indeed, Emili-as-narrator defies the class respectability politics upheld in Kenyan moral publics and challenges mainstream conceptions of legality, pleasure and labour. The text opens as such:

> I like the way I sweat men
> with *this*!
> A man is like a sheep,
> you see
> when he's inside you
> you can tell him anything on earth
> call him a pig
> a swine
> a warthog
> or sweetheart
> and he'll reply you, yes.
> Yes![92]

But this soon develops into:

> Why must men always sit there
> making law for the woman?
> Do they know what it is
> to be a woman?
> To hell with these philosophies
> And man's law
> That ignore the existence of woman…[93]

Then we learn about the characters that people her life. There is Lily, her social antithesis, who repeatedly turned down her boss's advances until she was out of a job; about her cousin's boss and his desires; about his wife, her suspicions and her submissions; about the men who have abused her; about Susi, the "queen of city prostitutes"[94] who knows where the big money is (in part because she is sleeping with Lilly's boss) and is landlady of several properties; about Christian men and their hypocrisies, and politicians and their lies; about Martha, whose rich husband beats her; about her sister, to whom she passes the lessons she

[91] Macharia, "Reading David Maillu II."
[92] David Maillu, *After 4.30*, (Nairobi: Comb Books, 1974), 5.
[93] Maillu, 16, 20.
[94] Maillu, 100.

has learned from all these other people so that Mwelu might not learn them herself; and about her mother, who was killed by a kick to the chest from her father in his military boots. Like the people in Justina's community, she recognises that powerful men occupy the topmost hierarchy in an interclass network of both criminal activity and gendered violence.

Interestingly, the way in which she tells these tales paints her as an extremely unsympathetic character; she thinks married women are selfish for not wanting to share their husbands, that other sex workers are of a lower social and moral calibre than she is (at some point, she flatly denies being a sex worker, claiming that what she does is unavoidable part-time work) and she consistently derides and shames all the women she speaks about for the choices they have made for their own survival, even those that are closest to home. She advises her sister to find herself a good man who will love her and not beat her, and wants tenderness and love from a man herself, but also condemns marriages, and all men, at length. She is the embodiment of confusing contradictions, but what she consistently paints is a history and a culture of gender-based violence in all forms of its abuse in her daily life and the way that these have informed her politics. Therefore, even as she consistently warns her sister against men, it is evident she sees marriage as an inevitability even for Mwelu – a life marked by hesitation, disdain and fear. Failing that, she is counting on her own son to grow up and take care of her in her old age – after he has found a good wife of his own to cook and clean for him. Her point is clear: to her, men are useless, but for as long as it's a man's world, they are also women's only security.

Rebeka Njau imagines the trajectory of the urban-to-rural repatriated impossible domestic in *Ripples in the Pool* (1978), a speculative fiction text about how local and family politics play out in rural life when disrupted by city influences. The first influence is Selina, who was "no ordinary girl; she was arrogant, self-centred, highly expensive and feared no man."[95] She is a young rural-born woman from Itukarua living in Nairobi, splitting her time between her nursing job and keeping the company of rich men. She is not a sex worker – the text refers to her as a "woman of the city,"[96] a demographic that includes the good time girl, or in the latest misogynistic colloquialism, a "slay queen."[97] Intriguingly, rumour has it Selina came to the city already 'spoiled' – she has a personal and family history of mental illness and is stigmatised for a rape that happened in her childhood – which bio-essentialises her

[95] Rebeka Njau, *Ripples in the Pool*, (Heinemann: London), 1.
[96] Njau, 9.
[97] Nduku Muema, "The era of the slay queens: Their strange ways and mannerism on social media," *Standard Digital Entertainment*, Sept 25, 2017, https://www.sde.co.ke/article/2001255530/the-era-of-the-slay-queens-their-strange-ways-and-mannerism-on-social-media.

lifestyle; that is, her whole life, she was bound to a destiny of outrageous and contaminating sexuality.

Like Maillu's narrator, Selina maintains that men are life-draining animals always confused by women's bodies, but she also asserts that "although I am free with them, they cannot cheat me. I know what I want from them."[98] Unlike her literary predecessor, however, she argues that she holds a particular power over men so they dare not treat her like they treat other women. But once again, like Emili, she is looking for a husband – not so much to hold her tenderly, but because she is tired of her chosen lifestyle. Still, she is unwilling to relinquish the freedom she has known, so she is very insistent about wanting a man she can control.

With these experiences and desires in mind, she meets and marries a man, even though, as the novel opens, "[n]o one could explain why Gikere married Selina even in the face of the strong protests of his own mother. Nor could they understand why Selina herself chose to live with a man of Gikere's kind."[99] Selina sets about her marriage exactly as she intended, making Gikere attend to her every whim, but soon after her first miscarriage, he compels her to move to Kamukwa, his village. The text is peppered with expectations that village life will calm Selina down, but Selina spirals further and further out of Gikere's control, and often, outside even the reader's comprehension. Still, while the novel starts out with a strong-willed and certain Selina, her character deteriorates into flatness once she moves to Kamukwa, where all she does, we read, is bemoan her mother-in-law's influence over Gikere's life, order his sister, Gaciru, about and pamper herself as she would in the city. In other words, she shatters the fantasy that redeems rampant sexuality through rural repatriation.

Throughout a series of harrowing events that occur to the residents of Itukarua and Kamukwa, and a local politician's exploitation of his constituents, Selina's mental health deteriorates rapidly, and her uncontrollable nature, biocentrically tied to her city life and her estranged mother, is held accountable for her husband's failures and estrangements. She herself becomes incredibly abusive, and when Gaciru receives a marriage proposal that threatens to take her away from the family home, Selina murders her and disappears into bushland. By the time Gaciru's lover goes after her in the final pages, Selina has been de-named, characterised only as a shadowy shape, a creature and a mad woman. She attacks and kills the young man, too, before vanishing,

[98] Njau, 9.
[99] Njau, 1.

Writing in the eighties and nineties, male-authored texts like Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* (1976) and Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* (1988) seriously undertook the labour of violent stigmatisation of sex workers – as wives, as city dwellers and as mothers – to varying extents. Introducing his mother, Dodge Kiunyu declares that all she did "was collect a quid who came for a tumble," [100] and her attempts to get cheating customers to pay her is what eventually killed her. Mwangi's descriptions of sex workers in *Going Down River Road* – such as big-arsed with tits and udders walking around with 'on sale' adverts at the front of their skirts[101] – render sex workers as physical objects to be used and discarded, useless to the common goal of development the men of the text are concerned with, and ultimately altogether repulsive unless necessary for men's cheap after-work pleasure.

Published around the same period, though, Thomas Akare's *Twilight Women* is a psychogeographical novel laced with references to the UN Women Conference of 1985 hosted in Nairobi that may have been an attempt at a feminist vision of the city. According to Muriungi, the text "suggests that the problem of twilight women is that their ideas of freedom from men have backfired and thus prostitution may not assist women in any way to resist gender inequalities that patriarchy has engendered;"[102] In the same vein, Raoul Granqvist argues that "the sequential ordering of the stops of the walk, the meticulous naming of the streets, the locations and the topographical hierarchies, and the emphasis on material consumption, loyally adhere to the masculinist convention that we are familiar with, here accentuated defiantly by parading male authorship."[103] I am therefore particularly interested in the fact that Akare draws institutional human rights into the literary paradigm, the relevance of which I shall discuss shortly.

In F.M. Genga-Idowu's *Lady in Chains*, we meet Susan, a married woman who moves to a slum in Nairobi from Western Kenya with her husband and children. When she arrives, Nairobi becomes humanised as Susan is styled into a clever play on the term 'city woman' that calls attention to her spatial politics:

> Nairobi was fettered by blessings and woes. The day and night clubs screaming down at her round the clock bring woe to her sleeping children. The skyscrapers and freshly mowed lawns of Lavington and Muthaiga bless her with beauty. Karen and State House powder her face to make her bright. *Scabies attack her hands placed in Kibera, Kangemi, Kariobangi,*

[100] Charles Mangua, *Son of Woman*, (Nairobi: Spear Books, 1988 [1971]), 7.
[101] Meja Mwangi, *Going Down River Road*, (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 2001[1976]), 118.
[102] Muriungi, 290.
[103] Raoul Granqvist, "Peter Pan in Nairobi: Masculinity's Postcolonial City," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 387.

> *Korogocho, Kawangware and Kayole. Under her dress – a rare material consisting of a blend of heterogeneous fabrics – lies an infectious gangrene named Mathare. Under her chin, an army of fungi named Majengo mobilize as extensively as they attack.* In her womb lie quadruplets sucking away the labour of her hands. She is the source of life and the giver of goodies and guidelines to her offspring. Their heartbeat is her own.[104]

Poverty pushes Susan to brew beer to supplement her husband's income, but when that fails, he suggests she take up employment at a bar. Here, she meets and befriends other women "who make her understand that it is not obligatory to live with Ochola for all her life;"[105] she becomes a city woman herself, a constituent part of the story of Nairobi's body politic. What unfolds is a friendship story between Susan and Marilyn that functions as personal intimacy and professional smarts on how to survive and capitalise off patriarchy and its own vision of the city because "a woman cannot afford to be careless these days."[106] Susan tricks her husband into letting her marry a younger, wealthier man, but by the time she is found out, she has changed her name to Suzanne, divorced them both and become a successful businesswoman. Odhiambo argues that this renaming symbolises her "unshackling herself from the countryside, poverty or dependence on her husband, and successfully [inserting] herself into a modern world […] [with] all the trappings of modernity."[107] These trappings require a move from Nairobi's more diseased parts into the bourgeois neighbourhoods where respectable femininity – which no doubt has its own complex histories – resides.

A common trend in these popular literary imaginaries, then, is that this impossible domestic has existed within paradigms of criminalisation, biocentric disgust and/or rehabilitation, all of which carry a particularly gendered and classed burden of shame. As Zawadi Nyong'o observes in the introduction to an anthology of stories by East African sex workers, "until they are given a sewing machine or a hair comb by a 'do-gooder' (usually a man) with a big heart, and 'voila!' – a woman rehabilitated, a woman again, smiling, clean, still dependent, still vulnerable, but nevertheless, a bad woman turned good."[108] These texts, while cognisant of sex workers' daytimes and night lives in a way that Kenyan popular press is not, have a harder time reckoning with the story-making that makes up experiences of gendered violence, complex sexualities and queer kinship.

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[104] F.M. Genga-Idowu, *Lady in Chains*, (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 1993), 60.
[105] Muriungi, 38.
[106] Genga-Idowu, 117.
[107] Odhiambo, 53.
[108] Akina Mama wa Afrika, "*When I Dare To Be Powerful": On the Road to a Sexual Rights Movement in East Africa*, (Nairobi: Akina Mama wa Afrika, 2010) 2, emphasis added.

Thus, I return to our first encounter with Justina, through Odidi, as shelter of faith, as oasis. In what shall be presented in the press to a paranoid public as a months-old battle between the criminal class and the police force entrusted with protecting public interest, Justina – within the specific part of the city that is his territory, and within the seething mass of people he lives and works with – is the first marker of safety in the text. What the rest of Justina's text yields, even in the pages in which she is not concretely present, is the tangible and precarious psychogeography of this projection of care and security for people in the grey space outside citizenship but within country.

For this reason, I am drawn back to her ritualised journey to Odidi's place of death, because "for her, Odidi is not fully out of reach. When she can sleep, in the middle of dreaming, she knows his arms envelop her, her head is tucked into his chest, and she hears his heart beating." [109] For her, Odidi was also a marker of protection in a violent world that eats its youth, and her private memories often return to the feelings of care he invoked in her in this neighbourhood, streets that she walks often. And then one afternoon, she watches from inside a red kiosk as Ajany scrapes the blood from the ground, lies down on the tarmac. Interestingly, passersby are not even intrigued: "exhausted from running battles with false policemen, murderous gangs, double-tongued politicians, and priests of sorrow, […] a small woman scrubbing blood off the potholed road is nothing to marvel at."[110] Similarly, Justina's fear from her first vigil has dissipated into banal routine for her grief. This is the site of *a* death, but it hardly stands out from others, especially now; for one, it is January 2008 and there is an ongoing national crisis during which the police are killing hundreds of citizens across the country, but killing vulnerable Kenyans is something the police do almost every other day outside the chaos, anyway.

Justina is very careful about letting Ajany find her, but Ajany's increasing proximity to Odidi's neighbourhood grants us access into the intimacies of the city around her – her community, in particular, and the way in which banal fear and grief circulate there – before they meet. Not too far away, another young man is shot dead by the cops for impersonating a police officer. As Ajany scrapes her brother's blood off the road, none of the people around her think her behaviour abnormal or remarkable, especially not in this "unreasonable season."[111] But Justina notices her, and activating a whisper network in this familiar space, she leaves instructions with the kiosk owner, who presumably speaks to the hairdresser, who

[109] Owuor, 190.
[110] Owuor, 190.
[111] Owuor, 189.

interrupts Ajany's grief by pulling her from the road just before a truck runs her down. And while Ajany gets her hair washed by Gloria, the woman who will direct her to Justina, we learn from the neighbourhood salon what its patrons think of Nairobi's elite criminal network:

> Politics, where politicians have names linked to habits: The drunkard whose wife beats him? The slut who has three children with his secretary? The drug dealer running after the newsreader who is younger than his daughter? Which one? The fool who shot his driver? The election bandit? The murderer found dead in his pool? Mocking laughter. If-these-men-cannot-keep-their-families-how-will-they-keep-the-country? The question boomerangs. They retreat to the theme of fashion. A new clothing-and-shoe shop. Fallen-off-a-ship designer wear. Crime. *Ayayayaya!* Whispered, *'Walimpata.'* They got him. 'Good.' 'The betraying insect.'[112]

These are potent appropriations of the public moralities that frequently label not just women, but the entire archipelago of Human Otherness, as necessary evils: it implicates powerful men within the parameters of criminality they so loudly and systemically condemn.

Only after Ajany has paid for her braids does Gloria tell her where to find Justina, and when Ajany finds Justina's shack, she walks into the small space wielding the respectability politics so typical of the texts discussed above: "*Why her? Why this place?* […] *Why this?*"[113] *Her* is the historical figure of this particular impossible domestic: a disease, an annoying ghost figure, a criminal. *This place* is the "hovel [whose] door eases shut behind Justina and locks into place,"[114] firmly enclosing her in the small space that was Odidi's domestic life, a slum, an intimate focal point in the city's visual terrain of criminality. *This* is the archipelago of Human Otherness that her protected childhood and socially mobile training obscured her from; *This*, as it turns out, is not a one-dimensional plane of criminality; *This* is Ajany's detour; if her wandering around Nairobi is going to yield anything in her mission to find Odidi-the-human under piles of paperwork and within a network of half-told truths whose frames of reference date back to colonial Kenya, she is going to have to go through Justina's world. Justina tells Ajany that she met Odidi two years earlier at the club she uses as her base, Twilight 333, and they left together that night because "I was there. I saw him. I wanted him. I got him."[115] As she talks about the life they made in Nairobi's underworld, she explains that "'[t]hose dogs could never find him.' Pride. 'I protected

[112] Owuor, 191.
[113] Owuor, 197.
[114] Owuor, 193.
[115] Owuor, 194.

him'"[116]; when she talks about their home, it is with an impermanence that suggests the normalcy of displacement, or the inevitability of vanishing at one's own discretion: "Tomorrow, when you come back to look for Justina, you may find there is no Justina. Maybe there will be even no house."[117]

Justina stays home and charges Ajany for her time that night. For a time, they sit in silence, touching hair and belly and back, surrounded by Justina's canvases. They cry together, fall asleep and only speak about Odidi when the sun comes up. Over ginger tea and mandazi, Justina inadvertently answers Ajany's silent questions about *Her, Here* and *This* – that is, the complex web of criminality that were the conditions of their life – that made and ended Odidi's life:

> 'Sometimes, Odi-Ebe used to dress up as an old woman to pass through police roadblocks. They never caught him.' She squeezes into skintight shiny red trousers. 'This is our world. Odi's world. […] He almost made it home.'
> 'What happened?'
> '*Uhaini*.'
> Betrayal.
> 'Who?'
> 'A diseased dog we were paying. He's gone now'
> 'Gone'
> 'Someone's got him'
> 'So this is normal?'
> Justina's head goes up. 'What's wrong? Your brother was a thief? So what? Ebe organised us, he organised everyone. We do – did – do everything for our men. Even die.'[118]

As it did in the salon, betrayal comes up again. There is no telling whether the hairdressers and customers at Gloria's God Gives Hair Design are speaking about the cop who killed Odidi but the format is similar: the animalised turncoat within the grid of criminality has been 'got', vengeance in the place of justice. Justina's bereaved response to Ajany, in which Odidi was both a thief and a community organiser, gestures towards how his murder disrupted a complex and already precarious safety and security network that the people around them both created and depended on.

Justina lets Ajany keep her indoors for the night, for a talking price. For a time, they sit in silence, surrounded by canvases, Ajany touching Justina's belly, Justina touching Ajany's hair and back. They cry together, they fall asleep and "are only able to speak of Odidi

[116] Owuor, 197.
[117] Owuor, 198.
[118] Owuor, 197-198.

at dawn."[119] During this time, over ginger tea and mandazi, Justina inadvertently answers Ajany's silent questions, Ajany learns about Justina and this part of Odidi's life almost to the minute he was shot down not far from where the two women are drinking ginger tea and eating mandazi. On the second night, Ajany and Justina go out dancing together, Ajany dressed in some of Justina's clothes. Justina, also at work for the night, disappears once again from the narrative, with the lingering uncertainty, per her own admission, that she will be back. Ajany, however, unable to match Justina's price the night before, wants more of Odidi's life, so she makes it her mission to find the elusive woman again.

Their second meeting – the location is unspecified, but it is probably Justina's house – does not go well. Justina wants to be left alone, Ajany is persistent. Both women are shouting at each other, with Justina rebuffing the compulsory heteronormativity in Ajany's kinship claims:

> "My parents…"
> "Never tried to reach him."
> "They searched for him. He was coming home."
> "Home!" Justina pushed Ajany.
> "*This* was a better life for him?
> "Yes."
> "My brother is… was an engineer, a sports star…"
> "Did it help him?" Justina shouts.
> "You certainly didn't, *slut.*"
> Justina slaps Ajany twice. But when Ajany lifts her hand to push Justina, a lake of red dancing before her eyes, she remembers the swelling womb beneath Justina's blue chiffon blouse. Her hand hovers in the air.
> Justina offers. "*Hebu jaribu.*" Just try.[120]
> […] "I would, but Odidi's baby is here."
> "The baby's mine."
> Ajany's voice chills: "Blood calls to blood. I'll find the child."
> "I'll kill it first."

Ajany's class contempt is obvious and predictable but what's more important is Justina's disregard for whatever barriers are being thrown up between her and Odidi by his angry sister. Her insistence that she is still the unborn baby's parent, despite whatever hopes Ajany has projected on the child once she rescues it from what she thinks is despair, subtly disavows the patriarchal template of maternity that scholars like Florence Stratton have been critical about.[121] Instead, she gestures towards historic and contemporary queered networks of care

[119] Owuor, 199.
[120] Owuor, 221-222.
[121] In her discussion of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Florence Stratton problematises the repeated trope that narratives about pregnant women often falls into: the 'Mother Africa' mold that inadvertently objectifies the woman. In

work, of which she is a part, that sustained Odidi when *homo oeconomicus*' heteronormative economy had no use for him anymore. Where Ajany tries to suggest that Justina is not qualified to do the care and repair work Ajany came to Nairobi to do, Justina reminds her that it has been an integral part of hers and Odidi's sustenance in a city that otherwise criminalised them. Unable to save Odidi, Ajany has decided that she will save the baby from *This* place she is convinced took Odidi's life but Justina is quick to point out that the elite formula of meritorious upward social mobility, represented by the class of men she heard about at the hair salon, had also not protected Odidi from the criminal system that was so quick to stomp out his dreams and banish him to the squalor that Ajany looks down on so much.

The third time the two women meet, Ajany intercepts Justina at the club, on Justina's turf, which is a notable shift in the control Justina wielded regarding when and where she could be found. This time, Ajany is with Isaiah; Justina knows him as "the *mzungu* [Odidi] was meeting at Wuoth Ogik," [122] and this evening, a possible source of income, especially when Ajany abandons them both and heads to the dancefloor:

> Ajany is dancing. Justina watches Ajany as she has before. Finds Odidi's stormy abandon in Ajany's gestures, in her sinuous moves. Ajany is unconscious of her complete otherness. She is not of this place. Just like Odidi Ebewesit.
> A vision, a feeling.
> Justina takes three urgent steps towards it. Ajany must go. She'll beg Ajany to leave before the rottenness creeps over and possesses her.
> Her baby moves. *I know*, Justina soothes her child.
> She turns to confide in Isaiah.
> […]
> 'Dance with me?'
> 'No.'
> 'I need you.'
> 'You don't.'
> Justina giggles. 'But you can't dance with her.' She pointed at Ajany.
> 'Why?'
> 'You are just a human being.'
> 'So?'
> 'They don't really need us.'
> 'Who's they?'
> Justina starts to say something but hugs her body instead. She would do anything to feel Odidi's strong and securing arms around her even for a minute. She wants to hear again his vow to keep her safe forever.

Achebe's text, Elewa is also a pregnant woman who survives the death of her lover, who, like Odidi was murdered by the state. Stretton argues that Elewa is positioned as a venerable figure for her pregnancy, and her subjectivity makes it so that her child's birth is symbolic of a better future.

[122] Owuor, 246.

> Isaiah says, 'She's human.'
> The DJ changes the music.
> 'Keep telling yourself that. You dance?'
> 'Mhh'
> 'Like that?' [Justina gestures at Ajany]
> 'No,' says Isaiah.
> 'Dance with me?' Justina asks.
> 'Yes,' Isaiah replies.[123]

I explore the relationship between music and Ajany's ethereality in the next chapter; as mentioned earlier, I am particularly interested in Justina's gaze and the slippery assertion of her humanity. From where she stands, she is not the Other; Ajany, who has come into her world wearing certain privileges and different heartbreaks, as Odidi had, is. Concerned that Ajany might face the same fate as her brother, Justina moves to warn her away, but then stops, turns to Isaiah again and pull him out of his reverie. Importantly, while Justina's layered assertion, set against the background of the complex personhood sex workers occupy in Kenyan archives as explored above, is a powerful one, it is also an acknowledgment of vulnerability. The phrase '*just* a human being', or a genre of human being consigned to otherness by *homo oeconomicus*, also emphasises particular conditions of precarity. The ways in which Justina's representation in *Dust* provides us a terrain to understand humanity, within and despite constructions of criminality, provides substantial groundwork for problematising both governmental and nongovernmental human rights organisations' language of liveability, legality and crime, but it is equally important to note that *This* genre of humanity is vulnerable to the most brutal physical, economic and social violence perpetrated and perpetuated by the state and its attendant moral publics.

Akare's reference to the institutional international human rights world in *Twilight Women* become relevant, if only retrospectively, because, whether accidentally or by design, it indicts the rhetoric and policy work that occurs in the relationship between state and global politics, and thus that still uphold this monohumanist *Man* as a model of recommendation for institutionally (colonial) mimetic postcolonial administrations. In 1984, Kenya ratified CEDAW, a treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly at the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1980, whose clauses include protection against violence, stereotyping and discrimination in the areas of employment, health and access to justice. In particular, Article 6 (and the history of its drafting) implicitly recognises the

[123] Owuor, 248.

differences between forced and voluntary sex work, and is directed to suppress the former.[124] CEDAW requires its state signatories to submit a report on the status and progress of gender rights, and in 2016, the Kenya state-party submitted a report that "fails to articulate and address our concerns as women workers in the sex industry."[125] In response, Kenyan sex worker organisations submitted a shadow report titled *'Aren't We Also Women': Kenyan Sex Workers' Shadow Report Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women 68th Session*, in which they note that

> in as much as Kenya has many organisations that fight for women's rights, the repressive patriarchal structures of society and misogynist interpretations of culture, law and morality combined with the stigma and discrimination against sex workers constrain sex workers from seeking or finding support from most civil society, women's advocacy, or human rights organisations."[126]

Its recommendations, limited by the scope of the CEDAW Treaty itself, comprehensively cover decriminalisation, healthcare, affirmative action and political participation under the powerful assertion in its title – that sex workers are women, too, and therefore human. But it also includes police sensitisation and police protection. As stated in the introduction, the Kenyan police force is a colonial institution whose pedagogy is rooted in taming or eliminating the outlaw and the impossible domestic; just recourse, therefore, cannot involve allowing its continued existence. This is where I argue that Justina's figuration and implicit proclamation provide a doorway into complicating human rights recommendations. When she tells Isaiah that *they* don't need *us*, with the default implication that *us* is human, she gestures towards the genre of human that she has presented us with throughout the text, even when we are under the impression that she is absent. Unlike Chelagat in *Murder in Majengo*, the goal of this genre is not to be half a man; the default position is fully human, whether or not the law or the popular press or moral publics think so. Like Emili Katunga said in *After 4.30*, "To hell with these philosophies/ And man's law/ that ignore the existence of women;"[127] but unlike Emili, the resolution cannot be men's protection in Man's world. If the text's mission is to present not only a just commemoration but also a just representation

[124] Chi Mgbako and Laura A. Smith, "Sex Work and Human Rights in Africa," *Fordham International Law Journal* 33 no.4 (2011): 1200-1201.
[125] Phelister Abdallah, Lucy Maina, Josephine Mtende and Peninah Mwangi, "'Aren't We Also Women?': Kenya Sex Workers' Shadow Report Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 68th Session." United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, October 2017. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KEN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_KEN_29091_E.pdf
[126] Abdallah, Maina, Mtende and Mwangi, "Aren't We Also Women?"
[127] Maillu, 20.

of the fair and transcendent dream's labour and lifeline that is central to Owuor's storytelling, then our reading of it must open to what is known, or could be known, within this shadowy gendered region that has been rendered criminal, where every single aspect of *homo oeconomicus'* own conception of humanity is dismantled.

We never find out exactly what Justina was going to say to Ajany to get her to leave, we can only ever guess what Justina assures her baby she *knows*, and we do not know what it is Justina starts to tell Isaiah. Perhaps because she now seems to have made the habit of returning to the forefront of the text, we anticipate that she will eventually reveal some or all of this to us, but when Ajany goes looking for her next, she

> [finds] herself wandering from door to door, [discovers] that not one of the doors was familiar. 'Justina?' she [asks] passersby.
> *No.*
> Not even stout Gloria [remembers] that Justina had existed.
> 'But I saw her… you showed me…'
> 'Are you sure, Mami? Can I fix your hair?'
> Out of Ajany, a tiny whimper.
> The kiosk man had frowned. '*Ai*! Madam, Justina?' Ajany had examined the bland look on the man's face. A shield.[128]

It is just as well that Justina has made good on her promise to disappear, home, art and all – perhaps what she knew was that Ajany would "breathe all that was in and of her that was also Odidi's"[129] if she allowed her back into her world. The community network Justina had used to guide Ajany feigns forgetfulness regarding the pregnant woman and there is no way of knowing where she has gone, what she has gone to do, whether she will return; as she told Ajany, "This is our world […] Tomorrow when you come back to look for Justina, you may find there is no Justina."[130] If, indeed, she kept returning to Twilight 333 because she was "waiting for [Odidi] to come back"[131] then it seems that Justina's pilgrimages, both to the kiosk and to the club, stop after that night; perhaps Odi-Ebe did come back, and Justina left with him. Then again, perhaps he did not.

Macharia notes that "*Dust* insists on the ethical imaginations of its makers,"[132] including that of Justina and the often-misrepresented figure that precedes her in Kenyan cultural production. By deconstructing the legal and/or neoliberal matrix of humanity that

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[128] Owuor, 275.
[129] Owuor, 275.
[130] Owuor, 197.
[131] Owuor, 253.
[132] Keguro Macharia, "towards an ethical imagination," *Gukira* (blog), June 7th, 2014, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2014/06/07/toward-an-ethical-imagination/.

renders her life disposable, *Dust* provides a framework with which we can conceive of the city as a geohistorical space designed, occupied and survived by networks of care and justice that do not fit in project Kenya's legal and social imaginary. What's more, the impact of the labour Justina undertakes lingers as the text makes sure she remains a critical part of the story by leaving behind the slightest trace of her: the damaged lily she laid to commemorate the site of Odidi's death, which, like her, has been present in the story all along, and whose fragments are carefully gathered and carried back to Wuoth Ogik. Indeed, as Ajany had told Galagalu, she was going to Nairobi to get Odidi flowers, and the retrieval of this one in particular represents "the best portions of a brother's life – shoes, football, a woman, and an unborn child"[133] – and allows for Odidi's burial when she returns home.

[133] Owuor, 199.

Chapter Three

"'Ontopsy' means 'see for yourself:'" The Feminised Poetics of the Postcolonial Post-mortem

While we first encounter Akai-ma on a spectral plane, and Justina as a humanised marker in a cannibalistic city, Arabel Ajany Oganda, the third woman to feature in Odidi's desperate memories, enters our purview musically, via the ringtone on Odidi's phone. She is his younger sister and she is calling Odidi because she has done something terrible, and she wants him to tell her what happens next. But Odidi does not pick up and later, her father calls with the devastating news: Odidi is dead. This chapter explores how Ajany uses heartbreak as an investigative tool – an affective magnifying glass, so to speak – to look into the 'extra'/judicial frameworks that dictate the parameters of criminality and human life in Kenya. To this end, I make use of Katherine McKittrick's and Alex Weheliye's work on heartbreak, which "can be the heavy waves and vibrations that interrupt black life discursively and physiologically,"[1] to argue that Ajany's modes of scrutiny renders the institutionalised rationality of state violence counterintuitive in the creation of and search for Black life. Using that persistent ringtone as a point of departure, I consider the novel's soundscape relevant to Ajany's movements, which emulate Akai's and Justin's psychogeographies, where emulation "honours black creative labour and invention – the boom-bap-blonk-clap – as diasporic literacy, yet also understands this work as a series of inaccurate repetitions that disclose the awful, the hurtful and the intrusive."[2]

Attempting an encompassing definition of the postcolonial detective, Ed Christian write that this figure is

> always indigenous to or settlers in the countries where they work; […] usually marginalised in some way, which affects their ability to work at their full potential; […] always central and sympathetic characters; and their creators' interest usually lies in an exploration of these detectives' approaches to criminal investigation are influenced by their cultural attitudes.[3]

Save for the totalising paradigms of 'always', this definition appears to be pertinent to subsequent studies into this character and the genre into which he or she has been slotted. And yet, two things remain consistent. As Saidiya Hartman and many others note about

[1] Katherine McKittrick & Alexander Weheliye, "808s and Heartbreaks," *Propter Nos 2*, no. 1 (2017): 13.
[2] McKittrick and Weheliye, 13.
[3] Ed Christian, "Introducing the Postcolonial Detective: Putting Marginality to Work," in *The Postcolonial Detective* ed. Ed Christian (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 2

their respective and intersecting fields of study, the existing, accessible archive as recognised does not takes seriously Black African women as detectives, neither does it take seriously Black African women writers of detective fiction. Where Kenyan literature is concerned, Alina N. Rinkanya's analysis of and Julia Augart's survey on Kenyan crime fiction seem to be the only acknowledgement of female-authored/featured detective fiction, and this acknowledgement is brief.

Keguro Macharia, however, notes that, "*Dust* hinges on one sentence: 'I'm… uh… looking for Odidi,'"[4] a declaration of Ajany's textual position as the postcolonial novel's primary detective, which rejects the ethnopatriarchal ideologies that inform and bolster the hegemonic landscape of criminal investigation and law enforcement in Kenya as represented by Hugh Bolton, Ali Dida Hada, Aggrey Nyipir and Petrus Keah. Like them, she is guilty of violence; unlike them, her violence does not bear the state's stamp of approval. Ajany therefore navigates this investigation as transnational outlaw, and the elision of distinct roles – the investigator, the perpetrator, the witness, the victim – turns the logic of the racist, heteropatriarchal, anti-poor legal system on its head. Put differently, the stubborn and grieving investigator is complicated by the current fact of her own fugitivity, a condition which, as we will see, demands "seeing around corners, stockpiling in crevices, knowing the un-rules, being unruly, because the rules are never enough, not even close."[5]

Akai's heartbreaking question (and her consequent disappearance) provides the impetus for Ajany's investigation: *Where's your brother?* I am particularly drawn to the illegibility of the question – Odidi is, after all, *right there* in the coffin that comes off the plane with Ajany and Nyipir – as one of many sites of heartbreak, because Ajany's consequent attempt to reconstitute the life of an already-dead man requires us to shift conventional modes of investigation in order to answer it. As Akai and Justina have demonstrated, postcolonial crime fiction demands "a metafictional, metaphorical and analytical investigation into postcolonialism itself."[6] And since the heart, as biological and affective organ, is a recurring motif in *Dust* – it is mentioned at least eighty times in the entire text – then heartbreak inadvertently becomes our investigative tool.

Exploring the enunciations of Black life through the TR-808 speaker, McKittrick and Weheliye explain that heartbreak

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[4] Keguro Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor III," *Gukira* (blog), April 14th, 2014, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/reading-yvonne-owuor-iii/.
[5] Keguro Macharia, "fugitivity," *Gukira* (blog), June 2, 2013, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2013/07/02/fugitivity/.
[6] Wendy Knepper, "Confession, Autopsy and the Postcolonial Postmortems of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," in *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective* eds. Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen, (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 39.

> captures, at least a little, those injuriously loving emulations of what it means to be Black and human within the context of white supremacy. Heartbreak works with and in excess of the bio-mythological heart, the hollow muscular organ and its narratives of affectively variegated tenderness and loss. Heartbreak represents the reverberating echoes of our collective plantocratic historical pasts in the present. Heartbreak elucidates how the violence of racial capitalism inaccurately reproduces black life. Heartbreak bursts apart. Heartbreak is feeling outside of oneself. Heartbreak is the demand to feel outside of one's individuated self. Heart/////break cannot be recuperated. Heartbreak fails the heartbroken. *Heartbreak waits. It sounds.* It envelopes us like the thumping bass of the TR-808. Heartbreak cannot be repaired or resisted. It emulates but it defies emulation.[7]

When Ajany sees Akai for the first time, "a concentration of absences from seven and a half years twinge in her heart like a torn string clanging lost music,"[8] a longing that is immediately rejected by a mother who still does not see her: heartbreak sounds. Perhaps more than anything, she wants her mother's grief to recognise her(s), but the reverberating echoes of Akai's expected and realised fears make that impossible, and the consequence of her mother's heartbreak is Ajany's own. Therefore, while several scholars and critics have argued that the novel offers a commentary on the political culture of violence in Kenya, a feature characteristic of crime fiction texts, Ajany's errant investigative process particularly demands that we listen to the ways in which the rhythm and cadence of her own heartbreak interrupts, resists and deconstructs the ethnopatriarchal order of police investigation by "[exceeding] and [unsettling] the accumulative logic of cis-heteropatriarchal racial capitalism."[9]

Thus far, the four official languages we have to work with – English, Swahili, Memory and Silence – each articulate heartbreak in different ways, but in an interview in which she discusses the painful history of Lingala in Kinshasa, Owuor asks and responds to the question that would apply to the political vernaculars that *Dust* interrogates: "How do you navigate a language that carries wounds? By singing it. By singing it."[10] McKittrick and Weheliye extend the navigation that Owuor names, that is, singing, to encapsulate the creation of *and* "our neurobiological and physiological response to the deep boom, clap, blip, which is untracked and everywhere and seeping into us and emanating outward and beckoning friendships and starting fights and teaching and storying and moving and keeping

[7] McKittrick and Weheliye 14.
[8] Yvonne Owuor, *Dust,* (London: Granta), 34.
[9] McKittrick and Weheliye, 22.
[10] Novuyo Rose Tshuma, "The Jalada Conversations No. 2: Yvonne Owuor," *Jalada*, Aug 25th 2015, https://jaladaafrica.org/jalada-conversations/the-jalada-conversations-no-2-yvonne-owuor/.

a beat (offbeat) and heartbreak"[11]– in order to pay attention to the attachments to musical narratives-genealogies-sounds that the conditions of being black open up.[12] As Macharia puts it, "the ellipses that mark her speech, her stutter, gesture, if obliquely, to the 'already known' and 'never known' with which patriarchy 'always already' fills in the silences of women's speech."[13] If we read these ellipses as 'heart-speak,'[14] and take seriously the claim that "music and painting bandaged soul-holes,"[15] then even though heartbreak fails the heartbroken, I am interested in how music and painting mitigate heartbreak, when they can, by being attentive to the modes of articulation that do not pander to heteropatriarchal political vernaculars. Heartbreak is, after all, also "an aesthetic-psychological practice […] [as] sorrow song [that] untangles that violence, it does not describe the violence for profit,"[16] thus compelling us to pay close attention to Ajany's relationship with music, her affective labour as a painter and sculptor and, when she speaks, *how* she speaks. As Wendy Knepper argues in the case she makes for Anil as investigator in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), "the aesthetic form of the novel bears consideration."[17]

Akai's question prompts Ajany to recall a scene that unfolded on her very first day back in Nairobi, where Nyipir picks her up from the airport so they can collect Odidi's body from the morgue and take him home to Wuoth Ogik. Ajany has a nosebleed as soon as she sees Odidi, and when the sympathetic police pathologist, Dr. Mda, takes her aside to help her clean up, he asks

> "Do you know what 'autopsy' means?" *Ontopsy*. Dr. Mda pronounced it, shifting vowels and consonants, introducing new sounds so that his cadence gave warmth to words and suggested uncomplicated worlds […] "'Ontopsy' means 'see for yourself.'" He cleaned her nose. "That's what we'll do."[18]

According to an unnamed mortuary attendant, however, Odidi's death is "God's riddle."[19] which enforces what Musila notes as "the state's insistence on acts of God or suicide as the causes of death [which] is often accompanied by elaborate, but poorly executed, cover ups."[20] Sure enough, when the police pathologist indignantly protests that this is "a *Mporis* case. The

[11] McKittrick and Weheliye, 20.
[12] McKittrick and Weheliye, 21.
[13] Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor III."
[14] Owuor, 8.
[15] Owuor, 14.
[16] McKittrick and Weheliye, 22.
[17] Knepper, 38.
[18] Owuor, 43.
[19] Owuor, 42.
[20] Grace Musila, *A Death Retold in Truth and Rumour: Kenya, Britain and the Julie Ward Murder* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2015), 79.

candaver brongs to the state!" Ali Dida Hada, who is present, pulls rank and orders him to "reveal through science how this *cannot* be a police case."[21] Cause of death is therefore signed off as "exsanguinations caused by pneumothorax and heart failure"[22] and after he is stitched and dressed up, "documents signed, all protocol adjusted and therefore observed, Moses Ebewesit Odidi Oganda was officially dead."[23]

While Dr. Mda is certainly not wrong about the etymology of 'autopsy', he is complicit in falsifying its process. The information in his final report – an uneventful death that requires no further interrogation – is the antithesis of what he claims as his method, prompting Ajany and the reader to look into the details that lie beneath the exchange between him and Ali Dida Hada. Broadening the scope of the pathologist's definition, then, Knepper calls this analysis the literary post-mortem, an approach that makes room for metaphor, and thus for literary dissection:

> Initially, [autopsy] referred to the act of 'eye-witnessing' or 'seeing with one's own eyes' […] A second meaning is first recorded in 1678: the contemporary sense of 'autopsy' as the 'dissection of a body to determine cause of death'. Often the crime story entails the interplay between the literal post-mortem process and the metaphorical act of autopsy, which involves dissecting, cutting apart and examining the various kinds of evidence presented, such as confessions, testimonies, alibi, reports by eye-witness, etc. In an investigation of a crime, the literal and metaphoric meanings of autopsy are subject to critical dissection and analysis. Autopsy then is undertaken by the investigator and the reader as the critical activity of *seeing for oneself* and reconstituting the body of evidence – a process that goes beyond the autopsy report or eye-witness accounts.[24]

The detective labour expected of Ajany is clear as expanded by Knepper, but from our perspective as readers, *Dust* is not just a crime fiction text; it is a corpus of evidence subject to dissection. Recalling the iterations of heartbreak discussed above, an autopsy of *Dust* therefore demands our visual and audio attention by insisting that we look over the evidence of Odidi's life for ourselves, including the pieces of evidence the text avails to us, the reader, but not to Ajany.

The first of these is in the text's prologue: whereas Ajany hears the automated "*Mteja hapatikani kwa sasa; the mobile subscriber cannot be reached,"*[25] we are privy to the scene

[21] Owuor, 20.
[22] Owuor, 20.
[23] Owuor, 20.
[24] Knepper, 38, emphasis added.
[25] Owuor 79.

of the crime on the other end of her phone call. Thinking about the implications of a missed call within Kenyan sociality, Kweli Jaoko asks pertinent questions about the automated voice that speaks to Ajany in Odidi's place:

> How does the *yuko mteja*, the one who is unfound, who resides outside our social injunctions to always be present, sit alongside or come up against all the others who have been reported missing, those who have been extrajudicially killed? What is the temporal continuum between one who is *yuko mteja* temporarily and another who has entered that contact zone of no return where the state unpersons us, disappears us, tells us those who can't be found cannot be declared dead because they have not been issued death certificates, which cannot be issued precisely because they remain unfound?[26]

When Nyipir calls Ajany to tell her Odidi is gone, she finds it a strange idea: "'*Gone. Where?*"[27] In order to answer Jaoko's and Ajany's questions, this scene requires yet another close reading, because while the earlier chapters have been attentive to its visual narrative, it is now just as necessary to subject the accompanying aural landscape to scrutiny so as to find out what did not or could not make it to the post-mortem report.

Odidi's senses are heightened as he runs through the city. Soon enough, however, his city "change[s] its shape and turn[s] against him,"[28] and as Odidi loses sight and visual orientation of his surroundings, the narrative begins to rely more heavily on what Odidi can *hear* around him. As such, there is a mixed soundtrack to the last few minutes of Odidi's flight. Gunshots, thumping footsteps, a mob jeering, flying stones,

> *Swish, zip, pop, rattle.*
> Bullets.
> Grunt, *thud*. A man falls.
> *Ratata…* Screams.
> […] a wail, '*Odi, man, cover!*'
> Other chords of voices echo:
> *Hao!* There they are.
> *Waue!* Kill them.
> *Wezi!* Thieves.[29]

There is also the memory of the water songs Odidi sang to earn the AK-47 he throws away as he runs. *Hawa! Waue!* And then, unexpectedly, a song, Cesária Évora's *Um Pincelada*[30]

[26] Kweli Jaoko, "Four Theses on *Mteja*," *Bring Me the African Guy* (blog), Nov 12, 2016, https://kweligee.wordpress.com/2016/11/12/four-theses-on-mteja/.
[27] Owuor, 79.
[28] Owuor, 6.
[29] Owuor, 4.
[30] Owuor, 6.

joins the cacophony, a ringtone he has reserved especially for Ajany, in Brazil; but since he cannot answer the phone as he runs, the music continues, triggering memory. The song, whose title translates to 'A Brush Stroke' and whose lyrics narrow in on childhood nostalgia and hints at Ajany's work as a painter, is the entry point into Odidi's and Ajany's shared childhood in Northern Kenya, and thus their shared language of myth-making, when their parents' frequent absences meant that there was "no one to tell the children how *it* had been, what *it* meant, how *it* must be seen, or even what *it* was. Because of this, they re-created myths of beginnings."[31] Anything Odidi said, Ajany believed, so from a young age, Ajany understood much of the world through the fantastic, conjured up by herself and her brother; left to formulate much of their own language about the world, they developed their own heart-speak.

Ajany is still calling when the bullets finally hit their mark, and as Odidi spirals into death, the brushstrokes draw his memory's attention to his university days, and his last time at Wuoth Ogik. Over ten years earlier, he had transported the sound, spirit and personal aesthetic of Fela Kuti, Patrice Lumumba and Thomas Sankara back home, dismantled the gun his father had given him many years earlier and sang: "*Aye, aye, aye… I no go agree to make my brother hungry, make I no talk*..." Nyipir responded to the phallic performative pacifism by trying to whip the feeling of the music out of his son, insistent that "the only… war you fight… is for what belongs to you. You can't live the songs of people who don't know your name."[32] The two men wrestled, Odidi's left arm broke – and with it, his rugby dreams – and, despite his father's pleas, he left Wuoth Ogik, intending to never return.

Odidi is not yet dead, but the *ping* from the objects they arrange around Odidi – anything from guns to bullets to knives – replaces the ringtone. And as he continues to slip quickly past his life while lying here on the tarmac, he

> connects meaning to sounds he hears: a tire squeal, a slammed door cut-off-words, ricochet shouts of once-alive friends […]
> Voices.
> More cars.
> Whirring of a camera.
> […]
> Murmurs.
> Then.
> *Five, four, three, two, one, action!* A voice, gravelly, pompous, and familiar: 'Our *mbrave mboys* returned fire for fire. Two of our men were wounded. The gang leader *mocked* us. Threw abuse. Our *mbrave mboys* gave chase. The

[31] Owuor, 7.
[32] Owuor, 10.

> climinals *fred* on foot. We persisted […] The *climinals* moved with the *plecision* of *rocusts* […] They have been *stearing*, conning, and *dismantring* vehicles. Have executed bank *romberries*, *mundered poricemen,* and escaped with ninety *mirrion shirrings*.'
> *Shit!*
> Odidi understood.
> A setup.[33]

This is the soundscape of Odidi's death: he and his gang, who have been renting guns from and paying off the police for months, have been sacrificed for the media. His shame at being fooled into dying "contains fear because there is no one who will hear what he has to say"[34] because the state has conclusively sounded out the reason for his death and effectively prevented any official action against his murderers because they were just doing their jobs.

The accompanying spectral image to this soundscape demands our attention again as it did when Akai-ma's figure was at war, this time because of the exchange that happens between Odidi and the chill shadow that

> stretches over him.
> Odidi croaks, *You!*
> It stares back, empty-socketed, and as noiseless as when they had first met. *What do you want*? Hollow hunger. Perpetual thirst. *Here I am.* The thing smiles. Odidi understands. *If you touch her*… Odidi shivers. *Leave her alone.* Cold tears […] *Please*. The shape watches Odidi's seeping shadow flow into a twisted dark-red cave, its den. *Not her fault,* Odidi pleads. *I'm here*.[35]

Odidi has long figured out that the skeleton in the cave he and Ajany found when they were children is Hugh Bolton's, and has even reached out to Isaiah Bolton, who has been looking for his father for years, in England. Now, as he dies, he imagines that the ghost he has resurrected will go after Ajany after all these years, and he will be unable to keep his juvenile promise to protect her from it. But Odidi underestimates the impact a childhood story and a childhood ghost has had on the rest of Ajany's life because she has been shaping and reshaping a sculpture of this ghoul for years, "everything reconstructed from the "dark-lit memory of a skeleton and its last-breath gesture."[36] While this ghoulish figure lingers as *Hugh Bolton* in my analysis of Akai's haunting above, from Odidi's and Ajany's perspective, it takes on a different identity: this is Obarogo,

[33] Owuor, 15.
[34] Owuor, 16.
[35] Owuor, 11.
[36] Owuor, 48.

> the blind bogeyman born out of Odidi's desire to hear his sister scream. Obarogo, who took life from the wool of darkness. Obarogo, who needed eyes in order to see in the dark and who sought out little girls whose eyes were open when they should have been asleep. Obarogo, of course, avoided boys.[37]

Although it was never Odidi's intention, Obarogo came to symbolise a much bigger terror for Ajany than it ever was for him. Through the sculpture, Ajany has been trying for years, and failing, to develop her own ways to confront a ghost that has not stopped following her since she was a child, across borders, wanting her eyes, and seeping into the shelter she once took in her work as a painter.

Um Pincelada's prompt to pay attention to the brushstrokes of childhood is therefore two-fold. On the one hand, as we have seen and heard from the scene of the crime, it is an intimate connection to a Far Away sister for Odidi; on the other, it emphasises Ajany's own creative labour, which is rooted in childhood heartbreak. As a child in a new school in down-Kenya, she picked up painting as a shield against the shame of coming from the country's geohistorical margins, while Odidi learned to play the piano. But her artwork turned out to be more than protective armour: it was also a

> new way of speaking that clamoured inside her. She drew shapes, forms, and creatures from the space around which the image would be born. Canvas, paper earth. A yield of unsought rewards: applause from a school she hated, the first prize in the national art show […] and the sense that what she felt was what it was like to be born at last.[38]

What Ajany did not anticipate, however, was parents who projected their own nightmares, enemies and devils – that is, for the intents and purposes of the nation state's legal parameters, their crimes – onto Ajany's new-found mode of articulation, so much so that they threw her work in the fire. Later, while she mourned the loss of her work, Odidi determinedly tells her to "paint a river out of Wuoth Ogik. Then paint an ocean and a ship, and inside the ship, me and you going Far Away."[39] Where Ajany's urge for wanderlust is concerned, therefore, "he had started it, Odidi had. Their homelessness. He had conjured up stories of Elsewhere – imagined siblings, aunties, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, a web of doting relations in which he had Ajany inserted their longing to leave. Those relatives never did come."[40]

[37] Owuor, 13.
[38] Owuor, 51.
[39] Owuor, 52.
[40] Owuor, 117.

For many years, then, Ajany invested her interiority as a Black girl/woman wanderer in her older brother and the fictions they articulated through heart speak, especially when the teachers and the other children at their down-Kenya school treated them as barely-Kenyan. As they grew up, however, Odidi's visions of Far Away halted in Nairobi, where he found space as a star-student and star-sportsman and attained an upwardly mobile status at the University of Nairobi. Ajany, on the other hand, who barely made it into university, skulked in the design lab, keeping up her curiosity about places further than 'Here.' Eventually, she found an arts program and a scholarship in Nova Scotia, Canada. When she presented it to her brother, he was resistant:

> 'Here, we belong […] Us, we stay here, 'Jany.'
> She waited a moment. Stammered, ''Didi, don't see it. Can't see it here.' She tapped her chest.
> He had said, 'Not about seeing.'
> Teardrops in lashes. She thought a little about that, her face contorting under doubt. With fright in her eyes, she whispered, 'Let's go, Odi.' Heart pounding. 'Let's go Odi… Thh-th-this…' She grunted to a stop.
> 'This,' emphasised Odidi, his hand up in the air. '*this* is home.' Tears in his gaze, voice firm. 'Home.'
> 'How?' She would do anything to feel how he felt
> Odidi watched her, rocking on his heels.
> She pleaded. 'You p-promised, 'Didi.' […] Was it possible that two separate feelings of space could exist between them? […] She saw his rootedness, compared it with her floundering. A panicked question had burst through her lips: 'Why does Obarogo need eyes? What's he looking for his inside darkness?'
> Shadows crisscrossed her brother's face. He almost said something, uttered a please. But shutters fell, and instead he barked, 'Choose.'
> […]
> She let him go and drifted into Elsewhere alone.[41]

The previous chapters have demonstrated at length the ways in which Kenya is no country for women, at least not with regard to its institutionalised nationalist, heteropatriarchal constructions of citizenship, just as they have demonstrated how women's wandering and questioning praxes have subverted these structures in order to create some kind of survival. Ajany is no exception. She was looking for reprieve from the heartbreak that painting attempted to tend to – her parents' rejection, weighted by years of their own heartbreak, her fictional family's absence, her marginal citizenship, her poor grades, and always, the lingering ghoul, Obarogo – but was not sufficient in Odidi's rooted 'here'. Yet since his

[41] Owuor, 119-120.

murder necessitates her return from Elsewhere, she now has to make 'Here' legible to her ways of speaking:

> Here. She could paint this; hold the brush as a stabbing knife. There. Colouring in landscapes of loss. She could draw this for him, *this longing to hear his particular voice, listening for echoes of bloodied footsteps*, borrowing dead eyes to help her find him again. Here. Jagged precipices of wounding, and over cliffs, an immense waterfall of yearning, falling and falling into nothingness.[42]

This initial emphasis on 'Here', which attempts to capture aural memory and turn it into visual evidence, happens at the morgue, where Ajany and Nyipir have gone to "[rummage] among the discarded dead in order to find and retrieve their own."[43] But outside the morgue, after the conversation she has had with Dr. Mda and the falsified report she has witnessed,

> a twist deforms Ajany's full lips. *Here*. The evidence. They are descendants of a Lineage of Living Dead. Breathing in, she shifts her body to stare at a beige coffin, habitat of the new and unquiet dead on a day when distorted election results will set a bucolic country afire. *The outside world is drenched with human noises of accusations and counteraccusations, election rigging, and the miracle of mathematical votes that multiply and divide themselves*. But within their world, in a self-contained, haunted compound with its lone grevillea tree, upon which a purple-blue bird tweets, and where death prowls at half past three, *Ajany bends forward to listen to and for her brother, Odidi, whose story-words had created vessels that always carried her into safe border.*[44]

Macharia notes that "the pull and insistence of 'Here' (even when it hides in 'There'),

> refers as much to the space Ajany occupies as she paints as it does to the painting itself—an abstraction of 'loss,' 'longing,' 'echoes,' and 'yearning.' It refers to the time-space and geo-history of her remembering, to her body's present. It refers, as well, to her struggle to materialize into a now:here that would register her as "present," as "witness."[45]

It is worth noting that unlike Akai and Justina, Ajany moves through the text without ever quite disappearing from our line of sight. Wherever she goes, be it the interior kinesis through memory or her travels across man-made state borders, that is, Far Away, we are always

[42] Owuor, 18, emphasis added.
[43] Owuor, 19.
[44] Owuor, 19, emphasis added.
[45] Macharia, "Reading Yvonne Owuor III."

'Here' with her, compelled to pay attention to the ways in which the feminised trajectories I explored in the previous chapters inform the urgency of the novel's present-day investigation, as well as her methods of survival as a millennial character. Ajany's decision to leave her brother's protective but affectively limited scope marks a significant breaking away from his own place of comfort and his influence, an interruption of their shared heart-speak, and the beginning of her own 'Here.'

Ajany's first attempt at dislocation is inextricable from her subjectivity as a Black African woman on the move across continents, a trajectory whose beginning is marked by the fact that she was "the only African applicant […] accepted by default [because] she fit the exotic indigenous-person profile."[46] In the seven years since leaving, she moved across the Americas – a journey we are not privy to, but whose affective implications are accumulated in the sculpture she travels with – and we finally catch up with her in Saudade, Brazil, where she escapes a threatening woman in the street by dashing into a building whose

> name was 'Clube Dorival.' It was evolved by a few of the assorted casualties of music's broken promises. Saudade's men showed up in suits and ties and two-toned shoes; its wild-haired women in recycled evening wear that flowed and shed light and molded cloth to all-shape bodies. Desire was communicated through still moments […] Saudade was a crossroads peopled by remnants of the colonised. Portugal-infused Africans, vagabond refugees, wounded immigrants, all in-betweeners, representatives of nations' detritus, those who had disappeared into 'lost' and merely curious. It was a place of meeting, and sometimes a bordello. Ajany found it five years ago […] Dark brown décor, coffee, wine, voices into music, over music, as music, russet mustiness […] Aphrodisiac melodies. Chico Buarque and other tunes. It was always dusk there. They were five, the music makers.[47]

One of the music makers draws her attention: Bernardo, a singer and a guitarist who, that first night, approached Ajany with a steady confidence, declaring, not asking, that he was taking her home with him later that night. She did not stay to find out if he would, but she did go home to paint him, and then returned the next day, this time to leave with him. Inside the intimacy that formed between them, where "song is sorcery"[48] she forgot about the home she had fled because she could not fit. When she wrote home, it was to tell Odidi she was happy and loved.

[46] Owuor, 119.
[47] Owuor, 138-139.
[48] Owuor, 140.

Recalling the pleasurable feel and heartbreaking history of Blaque's 1999 track, *808,* McKittrick and Weheliye observe that

> love and sex are always knotted to broken hearts, because the throb of feeling good, from dome to foot, has a painful musicological history. The heart (muscle) and its narratives of loss and tenderness – tender losses – moves to, stop with, pause on, slide across the boom of racial-sexual violence. Heartbreak […] boomingly [amplifies] joy and pain, sunshine and rain. The thump, the boom, create shivering circuits of pleasure laced with damage, loss, sorrow.[49]

This is an apt descriptor of Ajany's and Bernardo's relationship which, as is described by the text, was characterised by his consumption of her, at first through apparent adoration that felt good to Ajany, but which rapidly manifested into exotification, a gendered and racialized form of objectification. Ajany was enchanted by the big blue-black man and what he had to say, and he took so much from her when he spoke that "it did not occur to either of them that she, too, might speak;"[50] instead, in the scenes in which the text recalls them together, we encounter Ajany mostly through her reactions to what he said and did. The first time he made her cry, it is because of a reminder that still, she did not belong in the world she was trying to create and occupy comfortably: "Bernardo said her madness was not African enough. 'I feel… authenticity… That's your dilemma.'"[51] By then, exotification was not new to Ajany – who he called Arabel – but at this level of intimacy, Bernardo un-homed her from her own body and seduced her into seeking a settling place in a world that catered only to his whims and desires such that he soon became "the house of forgetfulness,"[52] so much so that she eventually stopped writing to her family altogether. Soon afterwards, she also stopped painting, as her own visions of Far Away were contained by her lover, and Odidi, who had presumably made some kind of peace with his sister's transnational mobility, urged her to leave Bernardo and return home. While it is understandably an expression of care for his sister, it is also an inability to fully comprehend that Ajany would have to claw her way out of this man just to return to a geography she had clawed herself out of, too, or that whenever she did try to leave "he always finds… found [her],"[53] and in a futile attempt to recuperate, she would go back to him.

[49] McKittrick and Weheliye, 15.
[50] Owuor, 140.
[51] Owuor, 140.
[52] Owuor, 140 .
[53] Owuor, 268.

True to the familiar and unsettling ways in which *Dust* renders flashbacks, the narrative of this abusive relationship is unsurprisingly not presented by the text in chronological order, but rather in fragments of memory woven into the primary investigation's narrative, insisting that our investigative scope tends to it with the same urgency with which it tends to Odidi's life. The text's decision to juxtapose Ajany's deracination with the present-day task at hand demonstrates the multiplicity of 'Here' by introducing another battlefront in which she is dealing with heartbreak, and insisting that it's vampiric logic of disposability is consistent with the gendered logic of state violence. Put differently, this apposition insists it is impossible to conduct an investigation into the hyper-weaponised machinery of the police state, and to imagine freedom thereof, without seriously contending with women's experiences of state violence within intimate or private spaces. The text cleverly makes this connection by temporally juxtaposing Ajany's desperate situation with her brother's own: at the same time that she was calling Odidi – that is, at the same time the police were chasing him down, intent on murdering him – Ajany was "waiting for others, the law keepers, to come for her, had expected up to the end, before the plane strained for high skies, to be caught. She had expected all these others to reach her first but instead, Nyipir had phoned from Kenya."[54]She had finally left Bernardo for the last time by stabbing him. The urgency to return home and attend to Odidi's death, therefore, provided an inadvertent escape from her own crime, so Ajany hurriedly packed her things, left the statue in its corner, and fled Brazil, and once the customs officer stamped her passport at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, she was "of Kenya again."[55]

While Nyipir and Akai-ma are intimately familiar with Wuoth Ogik's history, Ajany re-enters the house for the first time in years via the cadenced nostalgia that Évora invokes in *Um Pincelada*. For her, "Wuoth Ogik was once a sanctuary crammed with the music of rangeland life: a father's hollow cough, herders' sibilant whistles, day handing over life to the night, a mother's sudden haunted cry, a brother singing water songs to camels."[56] As she grapples with the (im)possibility of bringing Odidi back to life, she crosses time by walking through the house, sifting through its present artefacts and finding shadows in the memory of his music – "old fashioned Afro-rumba. Franklin Boukaka, Fundi Konde, Mzee Ngala. Addiction to water songs – a liturgy of flowing, bubbliness […] Heartbeats. *This is my brother.*"[57] But as she searches, her pulse is interrupted by "a gap, an uneven bump: the

[54] Owuor, 47.
[55] Owuor, 49.
[56] Owuor, 47.
[57] Owuor, 55.

rhythm is off:"[58] on the bookcase that bears Wuoth Ogik's books, some of Odidi's favourite texts are missing.

It is the first or the most obvious clue since Akai's departure and, incidentally, the disturbance in the familiar arrangement of Wuoth Ogik's music foreshadows Isaiah Bolton's arrival with Odidi's copy of *Engineer's Field Guide*. Nyipir is immediately repulsed by Isaiah's name, but Ajany, having just discovered the disrupted rhythm, is curious about Isaiah's relationship with it, and

> enshrouded in the mood of that day, she wants to paint him: movement of space around and about him, presence, hard restlessness, shades of sadness […] Ajany squelches a fleeting urge to tug at the stranger's face muscles. An old habit: it is how she built her knowledge of the shape and texture of faces, which she used to colour in shadows that were the frame of a half-finished sculpture now abandoned in her Brazilian studio.
> Annoyance.
> Ajany chews on her fingernail. *What face was she cursed to seek and never find*? A breeze. She sniffed at the odour of stale cow emanating from the man and scowled. *What did he want*?

Isaiah has come to find his father or what remains of him, but his appearance with the bookmark that bears Akai's image blows open the scope of Ajany's investigation into something much bigger – the inevitability that finding Obarogo, rather than trying to outrun him, is part of her process of finding Odidi. One of the tropes Rinkanya observes in Kenyan crime fiction texts whose detective figures are women is that there is almost always a male assistant who almost always ends up marrying the female lead, suggesting that "the novels' heroines are not militant feminists – they cherish their 'womanly' qualities, seeking solace and happiness in marriage, in male company and support."[59] In this case, while Isaiah functions as a Hugh-incarnate in Nyipir's imagination, as a final joke in the story of Hugh Bolton's life in Akai's imagination , and as a potential customer and acquaintance of Odidi's in Justina's imagination, *Dust* introduces him into the context of Ajany's investigation as an inconvenient but necessary complication. Finding Hugh means he, too, has to find Odidi, making him the male detective assistant that is characteristic of the few Kenyan crime novels whose protagonists are women.

When Isaiah gives her the painting for the first time, Ajany first reaction is a sonic impulse, embedded in her memory, to destroy it:

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[58] Owuor, 53.
[59] Alina N. Rinkanya, "Rewriting Gender in Kenyan Crime Fiction," in *Life is a Thriller: Investigating African Crime Fiction*, ed. Anja Oed and Christine Matzke (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2012), 192.

> To scare them, Galgalu had threatened her and Odidi with a ritual of malice, which he said vacuumed the essence of a person's life through a circle of fire. Its potency slithered out of a seductive song that lured the target's soul into a confined aperture where it becomes perpetually entranced by the song keeper. Right now, if she knew any such song, she would sing it to own the soul of the artist who blended shades of black with velvety violet strokes, infused with red and spots of gold-yellow, and touched them so that a woman's life was incarnated on a page. She would sing the song to consume what she had just seen and disintegrate what she now knew. Quivers start inside her stomach. Heart palpitations. Breathing is an effort. Here, now, is the tune of underworld streams feeding murky marshes […] She sees why Odidi had fled Wuoth Ogik's enchantment with silence. Silence would never explain why and how Akai Lokorijom, their mother, came to be the naked potent, pregnant subject of Hugh Bolton's art.[60]

We have seen, already, how Akai navigated and manipulated silence where she could to suit her purpose; Ajany's desire to fill it, however, eventually triumphs over her whim to destroy the painting. There is, after all, another choice, one that would aid her investigation, but requires a breaking open of the silence Odidi fled: she goes to Nyipir, the only other person who would know. Tactfully withholding the painting at first, she asks about the name in the library:

> 'Who's Hugh Bolton? His books are in the house.'
> Nyipir hesitates. Then, 'We worked together, long ago. Police.'[61]

Nyipir's answer explains, just barely, his role in the police machinery that eventually killed his son and now plagues him with guilt, but another question, after she shows him the painting, yields a similar answer:

> 'Why d-did my brother die?'
> Nyipir halts. Then a staccato answer: 'Police.' *Let it suffice*.[62]

Struck by the guilt, shame and loneliness in Nyipir's otherwise incoherent answers, Ajany holds onto the rest of her urgent questions: about the skeleton in the red cave, about how Akai came to be a nude subject in Hugh Bolton's work, about why Isaiah believes Wuoth Ogik does not belong to the Ogandas after all. But the two mirroring answers hold the police

[60] Owuor, 65-66.
[61] Owuor, 68.
[62] Owuor, 6.

system responsible for both the existence of the painting and the murder of her brother, and make it clear that she cannot [re]turn to its investigative mandate to answer her questions. And as if the cacophony of half-answers or non-answers coming to her at heavy velocity is not confusedly overwhelming enough, "one question crosses wires with another so that from out of her memory, a deliberately suppressed phantom now bounds into Wuoth Ogik."[63] As if bidden by Nyipir's answers, which invoke sorrow, horror, terror, and powerlessness in Ajany, her crime and Bernardo's spectre catch up with her, and under the historical weight of everything else that is unfolding,

> something at last detonates. There is a minuscule space into which sanity may slip without turning into chaos, an intimate line that should not be crossed by unbearable memory. At last, she is stumbling down cliffs. Mind is black, body melts into massive silent waterfalls that cascade into endless chasms, falling and falling. Her spirit whispers to her soul that Ajany is now dead.[64]

Seeing for oneself, as it turns out, requires poking at the rawest, most tender parts of broken hearts. Considering the intergenerational damage, this certainly promises to be a maddening project, and it thus makes sense that Ajany's body forces her to take leave, even temporarily, of the violent present that she has been moving through if only to recall the small details she will need to untangle this series of nightmares from each other. Temporarily and metaphorically a corpse herself, Ajany is now also subject to a post-mortem, even as I argue that passing into a comatose state is also a part of her process of investigation. She is overwhelmed by the fact of Odidi's death, her mother's disappearance, Nyipir's guilt-ridden grief, Isaiah's arrival and the portrait of Akai, and consequently slips away from 'Here', and we as readers are required to follow her to 'There' – "inside her dreaming,"[65] the region of her sub-conscience, in order to conduct this autopsy. There, she and Odidi lied to Akai about seeing the skeleton in the cave; there, Odidi promised to protect her against face-eating monsters. But there, too, the figure that loomed over Odidi's death – we cannot forget that it is an important piece of evidence that Odidi left us in the prologue – is entangled with Bernardo's phantom, and since "childhood pillows do not offer simple dreams,"[66] the heartbreaking continuities between 'Here' and 'There' become even more evident and the brushstrokes from a lingering juvenile terror intersect with those of her ex-lover. While she

[63] Owuor, 71.
[64] Owuor, 71.
[65] Owuor, 74.
[66] Owuor, 77.

recalls hers and Odidi's visit to the cave on one level, therefore, it is Bernardo's name she screams out of her nightmares:

> '*Bernardo*!' she howls.
> To name the unnameable is a curse.
> *Bernardo!* The entity rips at her heart and she arches her back away from the sense of salted wounds that still bleed, still seethe, still yearn, still make her moan. She tugs at air, fighting portions of her life that are trying to disintegrate into Bernardo again.[67]

Because Bernardo's monstrous figure is inextricable from Obarogo, ghost of her childhood and all the fears it has represented thus far, it turns out that returning to Kenya does not guarantee ridding herself of the heartbreak any more than her earlier geographical dislocation did. Instead, she discovers that her grief for her brother's murder becomes inseparable from the fear of what she has done. As "just Arabel"[68], she would "[writhe] around a steel pole, accompanying Bernardo's seven-minute story, which he sang in a throbbing bass. Her life in stark light twice a week, working so hard to show Bernardo how necessary she was to him."[69] But one day, a few days before Odidi's death, Bernardo, in whom she had needily, hurtingly, lovingly tried to take root for over four years, callously discarded her and replaced her with another dancer and lover. Unthinkingly, or perhaps thinking more clearly than she had in years, Ajany drew blood, fled, and called Odidi, who was dying at that exact moment. Even as she is finally being lured from sleep, Bernardo intercepts her on her way to consciousness with a reminder:

> 'You'll turn black-black,' [he] had once rasped at her.
> As then, she now saw herself from the outside in.
> 'We're lost in the same song, we're the same lost song.'
> Speaking to her tears: 'Don't cry. I'm the son of a witch.' He had licked each tear sliding down: 'Não sou eu. É a música.' *Not me, it's the music.* Yet, compelled by his life, which had taken over something inside her, a madness that she offered and he needed, she still danced naked for him, stripped down to her soul. His hands cupping her breasts: 'You alone?' '*Não, meu amor.*' She should have fled then.[70]

Ajany finally returns to consciousness armed with the knowledge that the beginning of her investigation, as well as the cause of her fugitivity, lie in the cave she and Odidi found

[67] Owuor, 77.
[68] Owuor 79.
[69] Owuor, 79.
[70] Owuor, 104.

as children. Before anybody can stop her, then, she runs right out of Wuoth Ogik and is swallowed by the night. As the Trader explains, "It's out […] Now it roams."[71] *It* is likely Ajany's madness borne by fear, to which several references are made throughout the text. *It* has encountered attempts at containment – in Odidi, in a sculpture, in Bernardo – for all the years since she saw the skeleton, but *It* now demands she return to its place of origin if Ajany stands a chance at surviving (which is not necessarily the same as solving) this mystery. Ajany therefore retreats into the caves she used to explore with her brother, the early and terrifying stages of their inquisitiveness; "among the sojourners there, it is understood that *ekhera*, the restless dead, might show up and shout around encampments at night. The most tormented sounds are the *ekhera* avoided by other ghosts – those exiled and lonely."[72] After decades of trying to flee Hugh Bolton's ghost, just to have it seep into everywhere she went and most of what she loved or worked on, Odidi's murder has made it time to confront it head on.

Ajany returns to Wuoth Ogik the next morning only to instruct Galgalu "as if in a dream, [to] 'tell… Baba I've gone to find Odidi.'"[73] Galgalu, who has known her all her life, a nurturing figure in place of Akai's lack of maternal tenderness, can see that "she had turned herself over to something. *Madness?*"[74] He is "pulled apart by two desires, to seize Ajany and shake her back to lucidity, and to protect Nyipir from this, the image and likeness of lunacy."[75] It is clear to him, though, that the Oganda women have been consumed by something even he, who has been present for them for so long, cannot understand; in this case, Ajany's desire to paint Odidi's absence, even as it is so plainly explained by his corpse, and then unexplained by Akai's question and disappearance. His decision, therefore, is to protect the family patriarch from the propagation of this madness, and, although he is compelled to exorcise it altogether at first, Nyipir's assignment for him to kill Isaiah prompts him to send the young man after Ajany instead, perhaps hoping to reign in at least some of the madness. As Isaiah leaves in the middle of the night, bag and hand-drawn map in hand, "Galgalu spits resentment: 'You open quiet graves and think the dead won't also look for you?'"[76]

On the bus from northern Kenya, Ajany's phone comes to life as she enters Nairobi again, but she deletes her new messages without reading them, determined to "find Odidi.

[71] Owuor, 105.
[72] Owuor, 106.
[73] Owuor, 106.
[74] Owuor, 106.
[75] Owuor, 117.
[76] Owuor, 133.

Listen to his stories."[77] The next morning, she calls for a taxi: "Destination, the University of Nairobi, Department of Civil Engineering and Material Sciences, near the street where Ajany last smelled Odidi's student-budget cologne."[78] Her first meeting is with Engineer Opirr, Odidi's former lecturer at the university, a man who was "in the first of the Mboya-Kennedy airlifts. Excelled of course. The Americans had never met anyone like [him]. Top of [his] school of course. Much courted. Abandoned the banquet of Western tables to come home."[79] The old man's nostalgia captures the quintessential bourgeois returnee from the diaspora that Ajany is not – one whose loyalties never left Kenya, and whose devotion to country was rewarded with a series of academic and professional accolades and a large, happy family following in his footsteps. Amidst the narcissistic nostalgia for the earlier days of this idyllic trajectory, he does manage to locate the brother Ajany left behind in an unfamiliar city marked by, he gravely reports, historic assassinations, political dis/order and economic inequality:

> Moses Odidi. Infatuated with the geometry of life. Loved beautiful things. An aesthete – do you love beautiful things? Do you know the boy redesigned a ditch carrying effluent into the Nairobi River so that it generated potable water? Very grateful slum people […] They renamed the ditch for him, what? K'Ebewest in Korogocho or one of those other ridiculous Nairobi 'K' settlements – Korogocho or Katina – no, Kawangware. KKK… Kibera? That ditch rebuilt under the nose of a city councillor who vowed to *behead* him. Who are these sociopaths? Such *calicoes.* Behead? What ugliness […] M'fraid when they killed Tom we lost all sense of our… *elegance*. Whatever given in exchange for his soul – poor man – opened gates for a viscid stygian presence to roam our land unfettered, trading in baubles, lies, and blood for lives.[80]

After that, Opirr lost touch with Odidi, but recalls a friend, another young man and star student of his, Musali:

> Musali and Odidi. Good team. Final-year project became Tich Lich Engineers, a company.' A frown. Opirr's jowls collapses in a downward movement, eyes whiten with subtle unhappiness. 'Oh what do you do when you are made to wade through political sludge? Terrifyingly ugly, Odidi's little sister. Soul-corroding […] No moral gumption among men today, m'afraid, few noble testicles around – forgive the crudity – we're spawning tawdry thieves, hitmen, and gigolos who love nothing!' Opirr wheezes, plucks

[77] Owuor, 121.
[78] Owuor, 141.
[79] Owuor, 143.
[80] Owuor, 144.

> out a car, and hands it over to Ajany. 'Little sister, when you find Moses, tell him his old teacher would be so pleased to meet him, what?'

It is important to note that the sociopolitical terrain of Odidi's life in Nairobi that Ajany first walks into, is the phallic geography into which he settled, at least at first. This version of truth about what happened to Odidi is a story of a city of men, their gains and their downfalls, and contains several clues about Odidi himself and the corporate political culture that thrives in urban Nairobi, including its anti-poor orientation and neoliberal developmental imaginary. As a student, Odidi made note of an instance of structural violence – a ditch that carried sewage right into a river – and designed a system to fix it for who Opirr identifies as grateful slum people. The 'best and the brightest' model of elitist Kenyan imaginaries fits young Odidi's profile to the T – "a myth that tethers individual achievement to social development"[81] – but it is obvious that Opirr knows, but will not share the details, that Odidi's life did not keep up the same trajectory after he left school with Musali. Instead, Opirr rambles, making overarching allusions to the apparently nameless and faceless sin of corruption that nearly disposed of Odidi's goodness, then sends Ajany in the direction of Musali and Tich Lich Engineers.

After she leaves Opirr's office, *Dust* treats us to a description of Ajany's first walk through the city in years, which I read as an attempt to frame the phallocratic city Opirr described in ways that she can understand, if not partially control:

> She walks faster than the unmoving traffic all the way to City Park, where someone's loud, bombastic praise music – *pakruok* – fills the air. Lively food, touchable juiciness. Two hopeful vervet monkeys peek through doors. Cashew nuts, aubergines, and chili-tomato sauce. Braised meat, braised chicken, and fish. Dried fish. Ohangla music next door to Mzee Ngala's sedate bango beats. Ajany eats with her fingers, tasting flavours for the first time as portions of Odidi accumulate around her. *A treasure*. She smiles.[82]

For the first time since she arrived in Kenya, Ajany is smiling. She is in a good mood because she has found a fragment of Odidi on her first try and, while Opirr did not reveal much, the feeling of this small success is what finally opens Ajany up to Odidi's city, whose sounds and tastes tell her things about his life that no teacher, colleague or friend – particularly of the elite social class in which he belonged, almost – will ever do. Michelle Angwenyi

[81] Keguro Macharia, "Kenya's Best and Brightest," *Gukira* (blog), Aug 15, 2008, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/kenyas-best-and-brightest/.
[82] Owuor, 145.

explains this feeling as the epistasis of the city: "something akin to blinking lights, or even a music score, the sound as a resultant phenotype. There are absences, silences in music, or pauses, notes that are returned to […] the rhythm of the City – what don't we hear and what do we hear instead?"[83] As if answering this question, Ajany's heartbreak compels her investigation to heed Angwenyi's observations by plugging into the soundscape of the city in order to absorb the quotidian details of her brother's life. While her memory has faithfully led her to a muted and sanitised section of Odidi's past life – which, in turn, will take her to Tich Lich associates – it is the attention she pays to the city she is learning anew, through sight and sound, that will form a different lead in her investigation.

Tich Lich's offices are in Lavington, a bourgeois Nairobi suburb. In the reception, there is a photo of five men, a tall, gap-toothed Odidi in the middle – the most recent picture of him she has seen yet. Desperately, she makes her identity as Odidi's sister known to the receptionist, then sits to wait however long she must to speak to Musali, despite attempts to deter her. Finally, he appears, a brace around his neck, to confront Ajany's question with yet another version of the truth: "Where's my b-brother, Musali?"[84] Not knowing that she knows of Odidi's death, he disingenuously replies with a question of his own: "Hasn't he contacted you?"[85]

This is what Musali shares with Ajany: through Odidi's efforts, Tich Lich had won a government contract to repair Kenya's dams – Ksh. 275 million. It was a significant milestone in the lifespan of the company, and in the personal lives of its engineers, who bought big cars to show their marked rise in wealth and status. Soon after the deal was made however, they were summoned to an urgent meeting where they "were given a paragraph to recite. An oath of secrecy, subject to the Official Secrecy Act […] Odidi, as chief engineer, received top-secret instructions to silt the dams contract to 'service the turbines' – in other words, render them incapable of delivering power to the public."[86] The point of this elaborate scheme was to create an artificial water shortage that would necessitate a national power-rationing plan, while, "as if by coincidence, obsolete diesel generators from Europe and Asia had happened to be aboard cargo ships on their way to Kenya [which would] take care of the shortfall in power at 3,000 percent above the usual cost."[87] Tich Lich's job description shifted

[83] Michelle Angwenyi, "Epistasis of the City," (*Wanakuboeka FeelHarmonic*, Nairobi, July 2018), 9.
[84] Angwenyi, "Epistasis of the City."
[85] Owuor, 160.
[86] Owuor, 160.
[87] Owuor, 161.

from fixing the dams to installing and servicing the expensive equipment, in exchange for five percent of profits for ten years.

Odidi, Musali explains, was righteously against the entire conspiracy, and set out to try make it right. First, he tried the managing director, but the MD was the one to sorrowfully, deceitfully break the news, on TV, about the rising cost of electricity. Next, he went to the Minister of Energy offices, where the minister listened, then told him to document his anger. Optimistically, naively, or both "Odidi wrote a letter to the minister headed *Acts of Treason Against the People and Nation of Kenya* backed with data and evidence, dates and figures."[88] No response, so he took his protest to the media. The media ignored him. He tried to record a statement with the police, was even ready to take it to the president, all while generators flooded the market, tax-free. He tried to get the Tich Lich board to resign and expose the scandal. The other members, already living off the fruits of it, voted against the idea. When he resorted to non-institutional measures – breaking into offices, loudly claiming treason – he was voted off the board. Tich Lich reregistered the company as T.L Associates Engineering and Odidi was effectively fired while "national power shortages worsened. Companies closed down. Utility bills exploded. Citizens paid up. The managing director held a party to celebrate his first personal billion shillings."[89] It is evident that Musali thought that his friend's moral compass, though well-meaning, was misplaced in the vast and complex criminal network they came into when they left the university. This was the real world, not rugby nor a place to be a martyr. Musali justifies it in the predictable parlance of Kenya's elite: "We have to survive. This thing of mahonour ama patriotism, man – you must be practical. Mortgages, *mbesha*. Y'know? This was big. Really big. When you see something like this, man, you say yes or you die, y'know? […] After you make money, you can afford to be an activist."[90] As T.L. Engineering Associates grew, they even deposited a year's salary in Odidi's account. Musali implies that when he last heard from Odidi, his friend was well off and the company was redeemed for its evil work.

But here is what Musali does not tell Ajany: that seven months after he was forced to leave, Odidi had called him for money and a place to stay because the bank had recalled his mortgage, repossessed his house and thrown him and his things out. That no lawyer would help Odidi fight a case against the state, that Odidi was slowly and systemically criminalised: threatened, followed, summoned, booked for loitering with intent. That even the NGOs he

[88] Owuor, 161.
[89] Owuor, 163.
[90] Owuor, 163.

visited "made the right sympathetic noise but emphasised to him that AIDS, women, malaria, girl children and boreholes were priorities"[91]—that they could not or would not see the relationship between rising energy costs and their chosen fields of social justice. That on the night of the carjacking, he had called the police, that Odidi had shouted, "Musali, bro, help me,"[92] that he knows Odidi is dead. He does not say these things, but he does break down crying right there from the guilt of it and Ajany, who is learning to listen to the white noise that's been trying to silence bits of Odidi's life, "absorbs the story and everything that has not been said. She needs a body scrub […] *Why hadn't she known her brother's suffering?*"[93]

When Ajany eventually gets back to her room at the guesthouse, she is "weary of scrubbing tears away. She needs a destination. Maps made from the matter of memory."[94] For all intents and purposes, she has been given a relatively detailed answer to what happened to Odidi, all on her first day, but we are reminded that while this was a part of her investigation, the central mission is still largely unaccomplished. She has located a part of Odidi's life, as it has been framed by the law and classed moral publics, but the mission to *find* Odidi, that is, his whole and complex life, and to map the city that wound up swallowing him in small increments until all of him was gone, is still on. Feeling threatened by the largeness of the project at hand inside the smallness of her room, Ajany leaves the guesthouse, this time on foot, dashing through Nairobi's early evening, during which "passersby see a smallish woman in a yellow dress. Some watch her tilt her head as her hands open in question. Others hurry past in wide arcs with single, cautious sideways glances. She does not see any of them."[95] Instead, she is "speaking to Odidi, of Odidi, for Odidi"[96] in what I read as an attempt to counter the truncation of Odidi's life Musali gave her, thus a refusal to end her investigation with that version of truth.

After her encounter with Musali and her aimless traipse through evening-time Nairobi, Ajany turns to her art the next day in order to "[service] a new addiction, that of collecting her brother's shadows."[97] In between drawing, painting and sculpting the tales she has heard, she dips and weaves in and out of the city, creating her own memory map by carrying and sharing posters of Odidi to back up her questions. In the middle-class circles that she and Odidi partially grew up in, such as the old schoolmates she bumps into at the

[91] Owuor, 163.
[92] Owuor, 164.
[93] Owuor, 164.
[94] Owuor, 165.
[95] Owuor, 165.
[96] Owuor, 165.
[97] Owuor, 178.

mall where she buys her art supplies, Odidi is still alive and somewhere in the city, and Ajany never refutes the presumption. But in other spaces, not so far from these sheltered, precariously unaffected malls and restaurants, she easily admits that

> 'my brother, Moses Ebewesit Odidi Oganda is lost. Have you seen him?'
> […]
> From Ngong to Komarock, asking existences-in-squalor if they have seen her brother […] No one acts as if her questions are strange. A few think it is funny to send her looking where there is nothing.
> Traders information in exchange for cash or phone credit, or a fuck. She says, 'Bring my brother first, I'll do anything.'
> And she would.
> The desperate and the mad believe in magic.
> […]
> Some warn her of the times in which they live: 'Others, too, are lost,' they say.
> She listens.
> 'Many are dying.'
> She listens.
> 'Nothing special about you.'
> 'He's my brother,' she says.
> 'Others have brothers, too.'
> 'This one's mine.'[98]

Curiously, we as readers never once encounter a helpful answer from the people Ajany approaches, but the narrative makes it clear that the audible lead she follows eventually yields solid answers – either about Odidi or about men who resemble Odidi in looks, stature, economic background or residential neighbourhood – that guide her closer and closer to the exact site of Odidi's death. Soon enough, in Baba Dogo, an informal settlement in Eastlands,

> Ajany becomes a face in a mob staring down at a man shot in the head by policemen for impersonating a policeman. A man in a blue-and-red shirt laughs and points at the bleeding corpse. No one to affirm dignity in the bleeding out of a former man.
> She starts to sob aloud.
> She runs away.
> Shambles across the railway lines into a now familiar space. There is Gloria's God Gives' buxom owner.
> 'Babi!' She screams at Ajany.
> Ajany, wiping her face, thinks, *Shitty city*. [99]

[98] Owuor, 180.
[99] Owuor, 180.

Ajany's movements through the soundscapes of the city have been bringing her closer and closer to the experiences that constituted Odidi's life as a fallen and poor figure, and to the actual site of his death – not too far from the murder she witnesses in Baba Dogo, an informal settlement east of the shitty city's CBD. But the circulating whispers that guide her madness there also alert the police, and one day, when she returns to the guesthouse from her search, she is greeted by the imposing figure of the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Petrus Keah.

Of course, Ajany does not know him, but Petrus knew Nyipir once, still knows Ali Dida Hada now and knew of Odidi. In the years since he had falsified Nyipir's death, Petrus gathered intimate knowledge regarding powerful men, rose through the ranks of Kenya's police system, and is now long past retirement age, but too powerful to be forced out of his job. Now, in the guesthouse, he presents Ajany with one of her posters, asking: "The truth is not as you saw it?"[100] Ajany is both defiant and ashamed to be alive when she responds, "No."

But there is a lot Ajany has not seen, and will not know; for instance, a year and a half earlier, Petrus had learned of

> an urban gang named Jokadhok, all-purpose criminals who were forerunners of the city's cyber-crime networks. They made the police look foolish […] Petrus had evolved a profile and acquired a grumpy respect for the criminals. He soon had a grainy picture from an ATM heist, and connected the image to that of a man gone amok who years back had damaged the dam authorities' offices: Moses Ebewesit Odidi Oganda.[101]

Through Ali Dida Hada, Petrus delivered a message of warning to Wuoth Ogik, not expecting Nyipir to return from the dead to beg his old torturer to save his only son. In order to silence the ghosts that Nyipir dredged up with him, and to cancel out the violence he inflicted on him so many years ago, Petrus promoted Ali Dida Hada to monitor the cyber-crimes case and to find Odidi so they could repatriate him to Wuoth Ogik. Unfortunately for Petrus, his intended transaction was inconvenienced by Odidi's death. He had arrived at the scene when Odidi was already dying, and had quietly coaxed Odidi into final sleep. The truth is not as Ajany saw it, but Petrus' visit functions as an explanation for what we, the readers, saw at the crime scene at the very end of Odidi's life: a high-ranking plainclothes policeman who took a gun and cell-phone from Odidi's pocket, thus tampering with evidence, so that Dr Mda could later sign off on this death as a non-police case.

[100] Owuor, 182.
[101] Owuor, 183.

With Ajany, however, his answers are neat and measured as he deploys the state's ritual of truth – remember, Ajany, did not hear it on the news – about what happened, even as he is secretly affected by Odidi's death: "Gun battle. Odidi lost."[102] The ensuing exchange very plainly takes issue with the shoot-to-kill notices and orders periodically declared by the government:

> 'You murdered my brother?'
> 'No.'
> 'Then who?'
> Petrus pops his knuckle. 'Some police.'
> '*You* are p-police'
> 'Yes.'
> 'So?'
> 'Odidi was a key figure in a crime situation.'
> […] Teeth gritted, Ajany says, 'Yesterday, I saw a man shot for wearing a p-policeman's uniform. He died on the pavement alone, surrounded by people treating him as they might an insect […] Erased as if he n-never existed. *Why*? Doesn't his life matter?'
> Petrus' eyes slant. 'He chose death.'
> 'That's it?'
> 'Every crime story begins with a decision.'
> 'And a finale that is a d-death sentence?
> 'It happens.' Petrus positions his hands behind his head.
> 'A summary execution.'
> 'Maybe he attacked our officers. Maybe he was resisting arrest. Maybe he was a mad dog? A terrorist. Maybe he was planning a raid, too.' In his soft voice, Petrus asks, 'We have a million reasons, *nyar* Oganda. And we can apply these to you, too.' In his soft voice, Petrus asks, 'Therefore, madam… would you like to make an official statement about everything you know about this police impersonator?'
> Stillness.
> 'Ajany's knees shake. She reaches for the chair. Her ear aches. The world looks foggy now.
> 'Would you?'
> Ajany's shoulders droop.
> 'We can go to the station now. I'll say we have a witness, a person of interest who has details about a criminal who has been impersonating policemen with a view to committing heinous crimes. Come with me.'
> 'N-no.'
> 'No what?' Petrus asks.
> 'I d-don't want to make an official statement.' Her nose is bleeding.[103]

While it is hardly a truthful confession, Petrus' responses textually counter the police public relations response typically regurgitated in the mainstream media, such as Mombasa

[102] Owuor, 184.
[103] Owuor, 184-185.

County Police Commissioner Nelson Marwa's claim that "those are people that… those are not the kind of people who you try and catch with a 'smoking gun'… you just finish him on the spot."[104] Petrus makes it clear to Ajany that he is well-practiced in the justifying and violently problematic rhetoric that enables extra-judicial killings that the Kenyan police force have been repeatedly charged with, especially since the 2007-2008 post-election violence; his callous admission that the police are responsible for Odidi's death reflects the state's faux concern in its acknowledgement, such as in the TJRC report, of the dangerous, systemic method of its ideological functionality.

Macharia's words on fugitivity bear repeating here: the rules are never enough, not when faced with the heartbreaking excesses of human life under conditions like these. Like Mumbi Kanyogo and many other Kenyans, Ajany's accusations clearly reject the uneven shift of blame onto her brother by both the state and NGO-isation of resistance by insisting on naming that which has happened to her brother, and to the young man in Baba Dogo, as murder, a summary execution. And true to form, just as Kanyogo points out, Petrus, who had also "overseen the washing of the blood-spattered Wagalla runway, had arranged burials in secret sites, had terrorised would be witnesses into what should have been eternal silence,"[105] quickly demonstrates that he has the institutional power to script death as he wants to. This includes Odidi's, the young man's, even Ajany's own, should she keep looking for her brother instead of leaving Nairobi.

Petrus leaves behind a terrified and exhausted Ajany but, before he drives off, he makes a small allowance to make up for the grief he has caused, and leaves a hand-drawn map at the reception for her. The next day, she follows his directions to the exact spot where Odidi died, right in front of Gloria's God Gives Hair Salon:

> She scrapes fragments of her brother's dried, rusted blood onto a small piece of paper. She scratches the potholed, grey-black tarmac of a Nairobi side road into which a driver has squashed a fat, mottled bullfrog. The frog's life has contaminated the scene of the crime. Does not matter. No witnesses apart from those who are consumed by an eternal vow of silence. The frog's entrails poke out of the ground like a portent. She has just noticed the sullied petals of a crushed lily when the acrid loathing surges from her body, gushes out of her mouth, and mingles with the chaos on the ground.[106]

[104] Al Jazeera, "Killing Kenya," YouTube video, 26:00, Sept 24, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cTm9aJm8wA.
[105] Owuor, 322.
[106] Owuor, 189.

Ajany's first conscious interaction with the crime scene is a sickening meditation on the banal nature of disposability – a bullfrog's corpse now lies where Odidi's once did, an unremarkable symbol of the type of death that happened there and an equally unremarkable omen of the others that likely will, in future. Everything is dead or waste on this spot: Odidi's blood, the flattened frog guts, Ajany's vomit, all normal in

> an unreasonable season – when a nation has smoldered inside the small egos of broken men who would be kings, and when rabid men with spiked clubs circumcised small boys to death, and seventeen heads without bodies were roadblocks across a national highway, and people used ballpoint pens to accuse next-door neighbours who would then be slaughtered and burned while they sorted out the earthly goods they wanted from homes – a small woman scrubbing blood off a potholed road is nothing to marvel at.[107]

As Ajany hovers, heartbreak so visceral and ordinary, an orange cement lorry bears down on her, honking, and "seeing it, she admits to helplessness before this thing that has no words […] Simple thing, this lying down, dropping it all, even the anger. Allow, become tarmac, become nothing."[108] But there is a flower, too, and though it, too, is dying, the subtle presence of its life resists the finality of the frog's fate. Unbeknownst to Ajany, she has interfered with Justina's daily pilgrimage by entering this space, and while Ajany feels she may have reached the end of her investigation and her own life now that she has found the end of Odidi's life, Justina, who is watching, has other plans for her. She sends Gloria to pull the heartbroken Ajany into the salon.

Getting her hair done at Gloria's allows her the access she needs into Odidi's post-Tich Lich life, this time through the lens of women residents and customers in the community in which he lived. Throughout her wash, towel dry and braiding, Ajany shifts from being 'Babi' to the gentler, more familiar 'Aunty', and for four and a half hours, she listens to feminised narratives about the elite and phallocratic governing/criminal class of Kenyans that beg the question "If-these-men-cannot-keep-their-families-how-will-they-keep-the-country?"[109], and when Gloria is done, she directs Ajany to a shack with a dark-blue corrugated iron door. Here, Ajany finds a long-limbed pregnant woman painting on canvas when she walks into the shack with the dark-blue corrugated iron door. In this space are Odidi's most recent intimacies: the smell of his big shoes, the Ajua board he played with

[107] Owuor, 189.
[108] Owuor, 190.
[109] Owuor, 191.

Justina the day he was killed, a baby in Justina's belly, his brown, leather rugby ball, hummed fragments of another Évora song.

It cannot be surprising, not after what she has learned about Odidi's socioeconomic downfall, and yet her initial disdain echoes resembles Opirr's earlier contempt for 'grateful slum people', especially as evening approaches and she learns that not only is Justina a sex worker, but that this home – *Her, This Place, This*[110] – was where Odidi had finally landed when his life changed over a scandalous project. But Justina's succinct account of what happened, which features the police who make money from gangs like Odidi's, and the murder of the particular officer held responsible for Odidi's death, answers her questions by highlighting the complex network of criminality that functioned here, too, as it had in Odidi's previous life. And while Ajany is looking for Odidi, Justina keeps vigil every day waiting for him to come back because "he wasn't supposed to die;"[111] there were plans to go visit Ajany, plans to get married, plans for better things.

The two women spend two nights together, one indoors and one at Twilight 333, during which Ajany "guzzles down what she learns from the woman who had known this part of his life."[112] On the first night, this involves crying and not much else; during the day after, it is the stories Justina recalls and shares over ginger tea and mandazi; and on the second night, at Twilight 333, Ajany makes her way to the dance floor Odidi danced on and

> cannot stop moving. When she dances, the dread dies. When she moves, she is not lost […] there is no absence. When the music moves her, there is such life she laughs. The antics of a firefly caught in the memory of a once-perfect flame. Ajany dances. She dances with a hard-bodied Namibian doctor who is in town and looking for a good time. His arms wrap around her; her head pinned on his shoulder. She dances away until she is three steps from the DJ. There she sways until it is daylight, the last one on the dance floor. Then she just stops.[113]

McKittrick and Weheliye remind us that "responses and alternatives to injury are awful and difficult and forever; they emerge as song, story, grooving, crying, fighting, jumping, quietness, laughing, poem. And more. Always more. This is living, necessary living, and finding our way through earlier modes of heartbreaking damage that comprise the mattering of Black life, though not exclusively so."[114] Ajany now has an alternative to

[110] Owuor, 197.
[111] Owuor, 195.
[112] Owuor, 199.
[113] Owuor, 200.
[114] McKittrick & Weheliye, 18.

kneeling over the exact spot on which Odidi was murdered; she dances over the exact spot Odidi once danced, which also involves untethering her own body, for the first time in over four years, from the encompassing dread that is Bernardo. Necessary living brings her to laugh and dance for the first time since she stabbed her lover, and to recognise a fragment of her brother's life that was not yet, not while he danced, beholden to death. She is so close to Odidi now, and whatever loosened inside her as she danced makes it possible to obituarise her brother the next day:

> Moses Ebewesit Odidi Oganda of Kalacha Goda. 1964–2007. Cherished son of Nyipir and Akai, only beloved brother of Arabel Ajany. Lover of water, rugby and Kenya. Father-to-be. So deeply missed. So terribly longed for.[115]

Notably, despite the fact that Ajany's efforts have been reinvigorated by the access Justina has granted her into Odidi's last life, Justina is not mentioned at all in Ajany's short and somewhat victorious article. Yet Ajany, hungry for more of the cadences of Odidi's life, begins to stalk Justina, waiting her out at Twilight 333. As explored in Chapter Two, their second encounter is classist and ugly, with Ajany laying claim to Odidi's baby but rejecting the fact that this was Odidi's standard of living, and Justina vowing to kill the baby if Ajany ever tries to find it. Trying to buffer herself from Justina's rejection with the good vibes from the night before, Ajany returns to the dance floor, probably to seek out the feelings from the night before. But heartbreak does fail the heartbroken. The victory from her discovery, and from her obituary, is short-lived, especially now that she has forcefully entered Odidi's world by discarding Justina while simultaneously exploiting her heartbreak. Feeling sick in the gut, she calls a cab and goes back to the guesthouse.

Ajany's obituary, however, serves another function elsewhere in the city: it makes it possible for Isaiah to track her down. He finds it by chance right before his visit to Vigilance House, the police headquarters in Nairobi, and now armed with the photo of Odidi, he finally comes face to face with both Ali Dida Hada, Petrus Keah and a pile of old files from a forty-year-old case. As he explains to the two officers that he is looking for Hugh Bolton, he reveals the biggest and most obvious fault in Ali Dida Hada's dated investigation. I have already unpacked Ali Dida Hada's relationships with Akai, Wuoth Ogik and Hugh Bolton in Chapter One, but it bears repeating that the realisation that forms at the intersection of two ongoing investigations into the whereabouts of dead men emphasises the limitations of official state investigative practices and their way of seeing. Granted, all those years ago, Ali Dida Hada

[115] Owuor, 212.

was infatuated with Akai and bored by the task of tracking down a colonial officer in the new and disorienting post-colony, and then was later distracted by his illegal business with Nyipir. But it is only the fact of his inability to find Bolton that makes it into the official state file, and not the details about "patterns and clues scattered in plain sight. So obvious, he had missed them. *The books!* He had touched them. He could have asked a simple question – *Akai, how did you come to be in this house*?"[116]

Ali Dida Hada has little to say, but Petrus draws another map – this time, it is to Ajany's guesthouse – and gives it to Isaiah, perhaps hoping the two of them will leave together. By the next morning, Isaiah has checked himself into a room two doors down from Ajany, and is pounding on her door, now convinced that *she* is the woman in Hugh Bolton's painting. Ajany, hungover and eager to get back to sleep, finally reveals to him that Hugh's muse is actually her mother, Akai and Isaiah, who has already drawn some conclusions of his own regarding the ownership of Wuoth Ogik, finally finds a way to force himself into Ajany's investigation:

> 'Would be worth knowing how and when your mother got to be my father's whore.'
> Her first effort slices open his nose. His fist deflects her arm, but the skin below his left ear is bleeding. He grabs her hair. Her hands are around his neck. A tug, and her hair escapes from his grasp.
> […]
> As he walks out, he lifts the painted rectangle. 'Vulgar, my dear. Such pornographic attention is sordid. Wouldn't you say?
> Ajany wants to speak. She struggles for the right adjective in which to couch insults. All she needs is sound. Her mouth opens.
> She spits.
> It is a direct hit.
> […]
> She spits the way Akai-ma used to, then cackles as Odidi would have.
> 'Urgh, *shiiit*!' Isaiah howls, scrubbing his face.
> 'No, spit,' Ajany corrects.
> […]
> Ajany slams the door shut. Locks it.[117]

Isaiah is certainly a narcissistic, misogynistic disruption in Ajany's present trajectory, but I am more interested in the portrait's return to the investigation because it draws attention to two important fragments at the crime scene in the text's prologue: the first mention of the

[116] Owuor, 217.
[117] Owuor, 231.

bookmark with Akai's image, referred to only as "an alien painted vision"[118] in Odidi's memory, and the first mention of Isaiah, a stranger boarding a flight from Heathrow to Nairobi. If these two things were important to Odidi in his final few minutes alive, then they warrant our attention as they have manifested in the text of Ajany's investigation, and while they were apparently put on hold while Ajany unpacked the story of Odidi's life, Isaiah's arrival at Ajany's door, and his treatment of her mother's image, insist that the historical, gendered dimensions of this investigation can no longer be pushed aside.

But Ajany will not do this on Isaiah's terms. Despite his claim that Wuoth Ogik does not belong to the Ogandas, and his demand for a title deed,

> Ajany has been shading in the outline of Wuoth Ogik on art paper in red, blue, black, and green ballpoint ink. Little details. A cairn under which she writes the name *Engineer Moses Ebewesit Odidi Oganda, 1964-2007*. Four shapes to represent Nyipir, Akai-ma, Galgalu, and herself. Koroli springs. She outlines Ali Dida Hada. *Water Singer*, she writes. The backdrop is Odidi's face.[119]

Even though Ajany can no longer overlook the fact that Isaiah's surname and his possession of a book that was part of Wuoth Ogik's library does cast the original ownership of the house into doubt, the diagram, which she intends for Odidi's baby, archives the "re-created myths of beginnings" she and Odidi produced because there was nobody to tell them how *it* had been.[120] Should Odidi's future child(ren) ever look into what happened to their father, this will be their point of departure; it is not a legal document, but it is an assertion of space – a marginal space, in many regards – against the postcolonial impulse for colonial nostalgia. Notably, the image does not bear an image of Obarogo; in the imagined future of Odidi's progeny, Ajany has already vanquished the ghoul. The rest of the text sets out to show us how she attempts to do this.

Isaiah is waiting for her when she finally emerges from her room, ego bruised, and insists on following her to Twilight 333, where she goes to lie in wait for Justina again. As soon as Justina appears, Ajany gives her the envelope and disappears into the club, leaving Isaiah to be Justina's problem. When they finally spot her in the crowd in the club,

> Ajany is dancing. Justina watches Ajany as she has before. Finds Odidi's stormy abandon in Ajany's gestures, in her sinuous moves. Ajany is

[118] Owuor, 10.
[119] Owuor, 244.
[120] Owuor, 7.

> unconscious of her complete otherness. She is not of this place. Just like Odidi Ebewesit […] She is up against the steel pole. Hearing melodies that had been played in Bahia, wanting to throw off the weight of her world and its realities, she dissolves like wax into the music, feels it become her body. Now she is simply Arabel, and the other side of the song is silence, and its roots are in eternity.[121]

This exchange between Justina and Isaiah affirm McKittrick and Weheliye's case that these extra-human devices – in this case, the DJ's Hi-Life mixes – "expose navigation without dwelling on its oppression-resistance poles, they expose what kind of mechanisms and schemas and sounds and instruments (musical and not) help make this world navigable for those who are, in most instances, disciplined and surveyed and always imagined as static-in-place."[122] Indeed, Ajany's body enters the music and refuses to be tracked by the linear rationality of patriarchal entitlement, represented in part by Isaiah, but also by an aesthetically similar scene, back in Brazil. There, she was "just Arabel" [123] and she danced so hard to prove to Bernardo she was necessary; Here, she is simply Arabel, still dancing but no longer beholden to the manifestation of Obarogo she both loved and feared, because in this ethereal extra-human terrain – as Justina sees it, but Isaiah cannot – she is dancing for herself, in her own world, as per her own un-rules.

Very early the next morning, straight from the club, Ajany returns to the guesthouse to pack her bags. Isaiah, however, is insistent, and he shows up once more, hoping to return Ajany to his version of sensible; instead, they wind up brawling again on the guesthouse floor. But the tender losses they have been accumulating have become increasingly palpable overnight, which makes the angry tempo unsustainable, and this time, the scuffle dissolves into grief and intimacy and yearning. They talk, they lie beside each other in silence and eventually, they make love, an experience that encompasses "[groping] secrets, [sharing] unanswered questions and infinite presences […] [and dancing] between tombs of demoniacs."[124] Ajany, having danced as *simply Arabel*, can now open her body up to shocking tenderness, and can also share with Isaiah what she knows. For four days after they sleep together, then, with the help of a photo of Hugh acquired from Isaiah,

> a skull acquires its own eyes. Fingers mould contours and crevices, drawn from worlds of feeling she has known and that she imagines […] Ajany has done this before, always returning to the memory of the cave for meaning. She

[121] Owuor, 248.
[122] McKittrick & Weheliye, 31.
[123] Owuor, 79.
[124] Owuor, 253.

> wipes down the plaster of Paris; her fingers shape eye orbits. More certain now of how to build the nose and mouth, she shapes the nasal opening and spine. Tingle in her arms, glow in her heart, *Ajany becomes the shaping, the finding, the becoming.*[125]

In response to Isaiah's desire for a narrative he can control – "*How do you know? Where do I look? How can you know? Where is he?"* [126] she tells him, "This is what I know."[127] Obarogo finally has eyes – the victory here is that they are not Ajany's, but that she fashioned them herself, finally, after so many years of trying, and running away from. But Obarogo, we must recall, is inextricable from another phantom whose name has been an audible feature of Ajany's sleep, and Isaiah persistence frustratingly leads into another line of inquiry: he wants to know about Bernardo. And perhaps because Ajany has finally won her battle with Obarogo, she is able to speak about what happened in Brazil for the first time:

> '[…] We were together four years. More.'
> 'Not long.'
> 'Long enough.'
> 'For what?'
> 'To get lost.' Her face is pinched.
> 'You're here.'
> 'I cut myself out.'
> 'Cut?'
> An empty-eyed look, speaking with reluctance. 'From him. His ghost […] Had to cut myself out. Had to.'
> Isaiah leans toward Ajany. 'Meaning?'
> […]
> 'Was tied up inside him. Had to cut myself free.'
> 'So? How?'
> 'I… uh… the knife… uhm…' No other way to put it. And there was an odd relief in speaking the truth aloud. '…stabbed him,'
> […]
> Isaiah says, 'You were afraid.'
> 'No.'
> 'Why stab?'
> She says, 'The knife was there. Next to the big-boobed woman's golden thong. My replacement.'
> 'Anger,' Isaiah says.
> 'No.'
> 'Why stab?'
> She squirms. 'To loosen myself.'
> 'You could have gone.'
> 'He always finds… found me.'

[125] Owuor, 264.
[126] Owuor, 264.
[127] Owuor, 266.

> […]
> Ajany's lips tremble.
> Silence.[128]

Incidentally, Ajany's admission bears some similarity to what happened to Hugh, but neither one of them knows this yet. Isaiah reads it, or her, as madness; really, it is knowledge that exceeds what he can know. Ajany, however, is at least partially unburdened – in all likelihood, this investigation is slowly, painfully teaching her to organise her life through the heartbreak, be it through dance or sex or sculpting or confession. So as if rejuvenated by her confrontation with Obarogo-the-skeleton and Obarogo-the-ex-lover through the sculpture, Ajany returns to the scene of Odidi's death one last time. While there,

> she had gone to seek Justina, to breathe all that was in and of her that was also Odidi's. She had found herself wandering from door to door, had discovered that not one of the doors was familiar. 'Justina?' she asked passersby.
> *No.*
> Not even stout Gloria could remember that Justina had existed.
> 'But I saw her… you showed me…'
> 'Are you sure, Mami? Can I fix your hair?'
> […]
> The kiosk man had frowned. '*Ai*! Madam, Justina?' Ajany had examined the bland look on the man's face. A shield.[129]

As far as Justina is concerned, the investigation is over now that she found Odidi in Ajany's movement, and she has kept her promise of elusion, taking with her what was left of Odidi's life in the city. Her version of justice, as discussed in the previous chapter, refuses the objecthood and invisibilisation that Ajany's heartbreak subjects her to. Unable to follow Odidi wherever he has gone with Justina and triggered by the blood-like redness of a bottle of wine Isaiah brings to their final supper, Ajany takes off to the only other place in Nairobi that may mitigate the freshness of this heartbreak: the morgue. The last time she was there, Nyipir had sang Odidi a lullaby until the radio prattle intervened, and Ali Dida Hada declared that security forces had taken over the election centre, and against the background of all this noise, she had been prompted to look for herself. Yet despite all she has seen and heard and learned, even despite the fact that she has found Odidi and restored him to some kind of wholeness so he may rest easier, heartbreak fails the heartbroken. Now,

> Fading voices.

[128] Owuor, 268-269.
[129] Owuor, 275-276.

> Fading traffic sounds.
> […]
> Shadows within the grevillea upon which, not too long ago, a metallic-mauve bird sang.
> Memory's voice – sounds like a groan.
> […]
> And mutterings from in-between people: the Newly Dead.
> […]
> Whistling; breathed prelude of a shared desert song. She listens and feels Odidi as a flame without light. But where her heart should have stopped – swallowed by painful joy, she hears, *Choose*, and she is poised before the red caves entrance. She is standing by a roadside, seeing herself in Odidi's eyes.
> Swirling fog.
> Waits three seconds too long.
> That, too, is a decision.[130]

This is the closing soundtrack to her investigation in Nairobi, and to letting Odidi go. Heartbreak will not stop creating new questions with every answer it yields, but what is left of Odidi's ghost presents her with a choice; she can chase after them, or she can go home, like he had wanted to. She and Isaiah spend that night in a church, buy Odidi's flowers before dawn and that same afternoon, Ali Dida Hada arrives at the guesthouse offering space on a flight back to Wuoth Ogik, where he, too, is going.

When the three of them get to the Oganda homestead, they find that Nyipir and Galgalu have built a second cairn for Hugh's old bones, and that Akai has still not returned. Ajany shares with Nyipir a condensed, somewhat sanitised account of the versions of truth she picked up in Nairobi: that Odidi left a legacy with his work at the engineering firm, that his time with the gang was born out of the heroic idealism he learned from Fela Kuti, that Kenya, incapable of understanding his vision for a different future, had killed him, and that there is a woman, Justina, and a baby on the way.[131] And in exchange for the fragments of a life he has gotten back, Nyipir shares with Isaiah an equally condensed and sanitised version of truth about the bones he has buried: that Hugh Bolton died when he accidentally dropped his gun and shot himself.[132] Disoriented by the sudden fact of his father's death, he leaves with Ali Dida Hada, who is under instruction to bring back the animals, and only the animals; finding Akai is no longer Nyipir's concern.

But, of course, there is a more detailed version of what happened to Hugh, or, from Ajany's perspective, of how Obarogo came to be resident in the red cave, and as Nyipir shows

[130] Owuor, 279.
[131] Owuor, 287.
[132] Owuor, 292-294.

a new willingness to understand how Ajany sees and shapes the world, she confronts him with a particular brushstroke: "B-baba, when we were children, Odidi and I… we went into the red cave and saw bones and a face."[133] In response, Nyipir suggests they finally finish digging Odidi's grave, and while they work, he starts his story in 1969, the year of Tom Mboya's assassination, and works backwards until his tenure with Hugh and their eventual meeting with the young Akai, the woman in the portrait. But Nyipir holds back from telling his daughter about "the nightmare of a returned wet-eyed, frantic, and newly damaged woman with a look of such death that [he], without thought, threw his fate and destiny into her hell, even if it would mean his damnation. Which he did."[134] Informative as Nyipir has been, he leaves unexplained the painting, the pregnancy, and what happened soon after. It is only when Akai finally returns to the Oganda homestead that "skin to skin, face touching face, heart to heart, now Ajany can taste sorrows woven into Akai-ma. They have always been there; she has just not known how to look before. Feeling its hugeness, Ajany understands how much shelter it has needed. Why it needed to detach from Wuoth Ogik and wander."[135]

Akai's story about herself, which necessarily contains the story about what happened to Hugh Bolton, has been explored in greater detail in relation to the colonial violence in Chapter One, but for Ajany's sake, it serves two main purposes. First, it provides an affective context for Obarogo's persistent spectre, accounts for the "inherited guilt,"[136] that kept Ajany on the move almost all her life, and offers affirmation for Ajany's own fugitivity. Secondly, as Akai's version of the truth – a violent man she once loved, too, intimate experiences with state violence, recurring instances of failures as a mother – comes to a close, a song from Clube Dorival slips into the narrative through Ajany:

> '*A morte é uma cançao velha, profunda'* (Death is a deep old song), *'braços eternos, curvados sobre as penas'* (eternal hands cupping sorrows).

The boom-bap-blonk-clap of Ajany's and Akai's heartbreak – a sorrow song, translated, edited and embellished by Galgalu for Isaiah's sake – brings Ajany's investigation to a close. The violence now untangled, she now knows who Obarogo was before she and Odidi found him, and how he came to be in the red cave; and even why Bernardo so easily embodied the

[133] Owuor, 298.
[134] Owuor, 317.
[135] Owuor, 341.
[136] Owuor, 350.

skeleton of a man who terrorised her mother. None of these conclusions bear any kind of resolution, nor were they ever expected to; in fact, they are so heartbreaking, Wuoth Ogik is now both physiologically and psychologically uninhabitable, and the final answer to the text's most persistent question is, for the first time, a promise. "*What endures?* Echoes of footsteps leading out of a cracking courtyard, and the sound a house makes when it is falling down. *What endures*? Starting again."[137]

By the end of the text, almost two fortnights later, Ajany has exited the narrative with Isaiah, and we readers do not know if she has left Kenya altogether, or kept her heartbroken promise to Odidi to stay. But as "the winds blunder toward Nairobi and become the tail end of an evening storm, the suddenness of which startles a pilot whose packed plane carries a lofty man from Brazil with a jagged scar that traverses his right hand and disappears up his sleeve."[138] Bernardo. The text has led us to believe thus far that Ajany killed him; now, and perhaps he will find her again. As the plane lands, *Dust* accompanies his arrival with the final track in its playlist: "*Hakuna mwingine zaidi yako, ni wewe, ni wewe wa maisha, moyo wangu na mapenzi yangu nimekuwachia…*"[139] There is no ignoring the sinister undertone extended by the novel to Fadhili Williams' love song within the context of Bernardo's flight to Nairobi – heartbreak sounds, and we are left (still) burst apart. Heartbreak is still, as Ajany has shown us repeatedly, 'Here.' After all, the postcolonial post-mortem neither set out to nor comes to a close by attempting to suture the heartbreak with her post-mortem or her case findings; it reminds us that the heartbreak just might be forever.[140]

[137] Owuor, 361.
[138] Owuor, 366.
[139] Owuor, 366 – *trans.* There is nobody else but you/you are the one for life/I have left you my heart and my love…
[140] McKittrick & Weheliye, 18.

Conclusion:
This Is Also Being

> What do we want from each other
> after we have told our stories[1]
>
> *What endures?*
> *Echoes of footsteps leading out of a cracking courtyard, and the sound a house makes when it is falling down.*[2]

Less than two weeks before the 2017 General Election, Chris Msando, the ICT manager of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), was assassinated, an event that solidified typical pre-poll anxieties about voter fraud and stolen votes in what was supposed to be, once again, a 'free and fair' election. His body was found in a forest on a Saturday morning alongside that of Carole Ngumbu, a 23-year-old nutritionist. According to government pathologist Johannsen Oduor, Msando was tortured and strangled to death while Ngumbu was hit over the head with a blunt object and died of ligature strangulation.[3] The poor attempt at a cover-up – that this was a love affair gone wrong – was fairly obvious, yet even though public imaginaries were quick to label Msando a martyr, the similarly brutalised Ngumbu was held responsible for her own death. In typical victim-blaming rhetoric, her murder was wielded as a cautionary tale against Kenyan women; here was yet another young woman (slay queen, campus girl, sugar baby, 'blessee', take your pick) killed for her sexual waywardness. Memorialising Ngumbu in an article that updates Cohen's and Odhiambo's masculinist ledger of assassinations to reflect its gendered and quotidian dimensions, Aisha Ali problematizes this trope by cogently arguing that "it is clear that this country still refuses to reckon with its violence against women."[4]

This thesis has demonstrated how *Dust* attempts to account for and reckon with this violence via a number of conceptual and empirical interventions into post/colonial constructions of criminality as a condition that makes and takes away Black life. Using Akai,

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[1] Audre Lorde, "There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women," in *Our Dead Behind Us*, (New York: Norton, 1986).
[2] Owuor, 362.
[3] NTV Kenya, "Government pathologist reveals how Carol Ngumbu who was killed alongside Chris Msando died," YouTube video, 1:32, Aug 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfJzCH8YzcY.
[4] Aisha Ali, "No Excuses: Women's Lives Matter," *The Elephant* Oct 12, 2018, https://www.theelephant.info/reflections/2018/10/12/no-excuses-womens-lives-matter/.

Justina and Ajany as proxies, the novel explores the complex experiences of citizenship, mobility and violence in ways that are consistently attentive to the human figure rather than the state's accumulative logic of development and security in the novel. In this analysis, therefore, I have tried to heed Cherríe Moraga's call to pay attention to political memory "so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever-inventors of our revolution."[5] In Chapter One, I used Akai Lokorijom's movement and memory to consider the figure of the ghost and the function of haunting in a postcolonial nation that weaponises and justifies a killing machine put in place by colonial fears and fantasies about Blackness – for as long as colonial structures exist, colonial spectres linger. Centring the Black mother's madness as fundamental knowledge-making in this fiction about Kenya, Akai highlights the gendered continuities of state violence between colonial and post-colonial Kenya by teaching us that "to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects."[6]

In Chapter Two, Justina's figure further disorders Kenyan law, which excludes or disposes of her, by challenging its gendered anxieties about rampant sexualities. By juxtaposing the white supremacist construction and genealogy of the overrepresented Man with fictional and non-fictional accounts of urban womanhood in Kenya, this chapter argues that Justina's assertions and movements account for the precarious conditions of care work, resistance and survival that make up Black lives in Kenyan constructions of disposability. And finally, through Ajany's heartbreaking investigation, Chapter Three sutures the discursive terrain between Akai's and Justina's figures through the errant detective, who refuses to embody or abide by the ways of seeing that hegemonic political vernaculars employ to justify its dehumanising strategies. By reading her as a detective, I explore how the sensual politics invoked by her investigation – looking and listening for ourselves – are crucial to the heartbreaking navigation of the postcolonial post-mortem.

The impossible domestic, Moten writes, "is outside the house she structures and makes possible by entering, and she is outside her own impossible home within this 'national' homelessness by leaving."[7] Even before the homestead is finally emptied of people, the women in *Dust* enact departure in different ways that challenge the order of the heteronormative, patriarchal family that inhabits Kenyan law as the foundational unit of nationhood and the default model for living. Wherever they go – and *Dust* demands extensive

[5] Cherríe Moraga, introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Colour* (Fourth Edition), eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: State University of New York, 2015 [1981]), xix.
[6] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 190.
[7] Fred Moten, "Uplift and Criminality," in *Next to the Colour Line*: *Gender, Sexuality and W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 342.

speculative labour through these feminised perspectives – women's "Here", as emphasised by Ajany's methodology, unsettles the generic expectations and resolutions of historical, transnational and crime fiction so as to elucidate the criminal state's dehumanising extra/judicial and carceral praxes. Here, everybody is a criminal, everybody is a witness and everybody is a victim. Whereas the state's dismissal of the TJRC Report pardons the postcolonial nation of the crimes it committed and then set out to investigate, *Dust* does not let anyone off the hook. As Knepper puts it, "the very act of upholding the law [becomes] suspect, even 'criminal'."[8]

If the deteriorating Wuoth Ogik lives up to its name – 'journey's end – for the very last time, it also marks another beginning. While the answers yielded by the text have offered some clarity regarding murder and its attendant politics, *Dust* is not a story about healing – we must recall that heartbreak cannot be recuperated – and the crumbling house is thus representative of the irreparability of some things, so in order to mark the end of Ajany's investigation, all the people gathered at the increasingly uninhabitable homestead prepare for their departure in different directions. As Akai, who is the first to go, puts it, "weariness has gobbled up even the words that should bridge […] [and] we reached the end of our strength […] so we turned into mutes."[9] But Akai also extends a promise to the future, a claim that accompanies the silence which endures; to Ajany's question, "What remains?" she answers, "Stories? When we meet again."[10]

During its process, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission took great pride in its 'gender sensitivity', a term it uses to mean the inclusion of women's stories at women-only hearings. The report confidently states that "the majority of women who attended the hearings felt comfortable sharing their most traumatic stories," and laments that women-only hearings, though necessary, meant "an opportunity was lost to reach out and educate men."[11] Reading and re-reading *Dust*, I find the TJRC's first claim questionable, not because I doubt the content of the stories, some of which are excerpted in the report – although I do bristle at the word 'comfortable' – but because the second claim proceeds to invisibilise the daily storytelling work Kenyan women undertake, where we untangle the violence for and/or with those who listen, over and over again. It also inadvertently spectacularises violence and trauma as a pedagogy that the patriarchal imaginaries that inflicted them apparently cannot

[8] Wendy Knepper, "Confession, Autopsy and the Postcolonial Postmortems of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," in *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective* eds. Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen, (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 42.
[9] Owuor, 354.
[10] Owuor, 354.
[11] Report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, Vol I, 94.

do without. Women's bodies, women's psyches, are not didactic tools. But the "forms of care, intimacy and sustenance exploited by racial capitalism, most importantly, are not reducible to or exhausted by it;"[12] recognising this, *Dust* positions this care and repair work as central to its storytelling praxis, and thus to the creation of potential conditions of justice.

As she walks away from Wuoth Ogik with Ali Dida Hada, "Akai Lokorijom dispossesses herself even of the stories she has buried in the earth."[13] These stories – sometimes, I imagine they are about the places she disappeared to and what she did there – are outside the narrative's textual scope; Macharia suggests they could be unhearable. Still, they extend our imaginative framework into the space they have cleared in the future. Stories, Lorde writes, are a currency with which to buy time; *Dust* demonstrates how they lay claim to "these temporalities we are being told not to encounter, not to think about, not to act on."[14] Its confessional narratives, as we have seen, take apart rigid, masculinist histories so that they can undergo forensic analysis again and again so that social truths are recalled and re/examined from the perspective of impossible domesticity. Its tentative promise of new beginnings gestures to the thousands of stories that exist outside its textual parameters.

As the novel comes to a close, a bluster of air currents scatters the dust once more, marking, as it does, the continuities between what has already happened and these new beginnings it has gestured towards: the acacia tree that sprouts green life within site of the two graves at Wuoth Ogik, the twin babies Justina is birthing, and the plane landing in Nairobi with Bernardo aboard. Witness #145 in the ICC Witness project aptly notes that "it continues/ not/ to/ end."[15] These new beginnings are burst apart and laid bare to speculations that must bear in mind, to appropriate *Dust*'s questioning mantra, that heartbreak, haunting and humanity (*homo narrans*) co-endure 'Here'.

[12] Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labour," *Souls* 18, no. 1(2016): 171.
[13] Owuor, 361.
[14] Keguro Macharia, "Fear & Stuckness," *Gukira* (blog), May 26, 2013, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2013/05/26/fear-stuckness/.
[15] ICC Witness Project, Witness #145, *ICC Witness Project* (blog), April 7, 2016, http://iccwitnesses.tumblr.com/post/142419103421/witness-145.

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