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HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHARACTER FORMATION

IN YVONNE OWUOR’S DUST

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the student

This project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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Declaration by the supervisors

This research project has been submitted with our approval as the University supervisors.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my dear parents Samuel Karumba and Annah Wanjiru who believed in me from the word go. To my dear husband, Dr Njogu Kagema, for his undeterred devotion and whose moral and financial support are immeasurable. Finally to our three beloved children: Mitchell Wangui, Collins Kagema and Raphael Karumba: for you dear ones, I have the strength to face tomorrow.
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To you all, I say thank you and GOD BLESS YOU.
This study investigates the role played by historical consciousness in character formation and identity as presented by Yvonne Owuor in *Dust*. The desire for an individual to identify with a certain group of people whether politically, ethnically, or culturally drives this study to interrogate whether this desire is motivated by the individual’s historical consciousness. This consciousness is gained from experiences that are narrated by the people who were directly affected by the historical events. The study is an analysis of historical consciousness as a thematic concern and an examination of how this has been achieved. It interrogates the relationship between historical consciousness, character formation and identity. The researcher analyses selected characters in *Dust* who rely on the history learnt from their parents or other sources to shape their identity. It thus adds knowledge to the existing studies on identity and hybridity since it explores the cause of identity crisis in post-independence African literature. The research has based its argument on postcolonial theory with specific references to ideas advanced by Homi K. Bhabha on hybridity. The study is textual in nature; the researcher has employed textual analysis of the primary text. This has involved intensive reading and critical interpretation of the text. The study proves that there is a relationship between characters’ knowledge of their past and their identity.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Historical consciousness in this study refers to an understanding of one’s history and past events through narrated historical events. This history can also be learnt through rumours and/or other written material. Kenneth J. Gergen in a study “Narrative, Moral Identity and Historical Consciousness: A Social Constructionist Account” states that “an individual identity is configured or implicated in historical narratives” (15). He argues that historical narratives influence the identity of a character. These historical narratives constitute historical consciousness. The narration is made by the people who had a first-hand experience with the historical events. The identity of a character who did not directly experience the historical events is thus influenced by historical consciousness.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues that a literary writer is guided by what happens in his or her environment. In Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language and Literature he compares the writer to a surgeon who operates the “heart and soul of a community” (ix). On her part, Owuor says her short story Weight of Whispers was inspired by her encounters with refugees in the streets of Nairobi and she was moved by their tales which imaginatively became her short story. C. L. Innes observes that the historical construction of a state and the historical experiences of her people create fertile grounds for literary thought to thrive (11). These historical experiences include political injustices meted on people by their leaders. For instance, assassination of public figures like Argwings Kodhek, Tom Mboya, J. M. Kariuki and mysterious disappearances of others remain etched in people’s minds.
People who were greatly affected by death of these public figures express their loss through narrating their experiences about these fallen heroes to their offspring. Through the narration, they are remembering their heroes. The assassinations of public figures constitute the history of the state. This history therefore has ripple effects. It impacts on the people who directly experienced it and their offspring. The offspring’s understanding of this history constitutes historical consciousness. Since these offspring did not experience this history directly, they are thus affected by historical consciousness. In the struggle to assert themselves culturally, racially and socially and to gain their sense of identity, the offspring end up in a hybrid state. Historical consciousness therefore plays a role in the formation of the characters’ hybrid identities.

Amos Funkenstein in a study “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness” argues that a nation should remember her heroes (5). This then means that remembering these fallen heroes constitutes historical consciousness. He adds that “historical consciousness is created from consciousness of historic origins.” Remembering the past therefore edifies the identity of characters. Therefore, the identity of a character is formed by the historical consciousness since one associates oneself with the hero who is part of one’s history.

H. I.M Haile Selassie in a speech to the OAU in 1963 African Summit argues that a person’s personality and identity are influenced by the awareness of the past. The past constitutes a person’s history. He feels that yesterday’s person is in transition to today’s and tomorrow’s person. This means that our present relies on our past and the present determines the future. Ngugi concurs with Selassie. In *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi concurs with Selassie when he posits that a writer is a product of history and therefore his/her
subject matter is history (73). In an attempt to change ones environment and past, one consequently changes oneself. If the voice of the writer, who is a product of history represents the voice of the people, then one may argue that the current individual identity is determined by one’s history and historical experiences. If these experiences are narrated to the individual, then the identity of the individual is determined by one’s historical consciousness.

Francesca Cappelletto in a study “Long-term Memory of Extreme Events: From Autobiography to History” asserts that collective memory is informed by consciousness of the past which affects the present (241). He traces the identity of the Second World War survivors to their personal experiences which he argues exist in memories of the past. He argues that the consistent narration of these experiences have shaped the community’s memory. The memories of people who personally experienced the effects of the war are remembered by those to whom the experiences have been narrated. Narrated experiences of other people constitute historical consciousness. This historical consciousness plays a role in forming the present character.

Alicia Arrizon in a review of Jose Esteban Munoz’s book, *Disidentification: Queers of Theory and the Politics of Performance*, argues that a character is dominated by whatever one wants to identify with and therefore dominate what one wants to ‘disidentify’ oneself with (507). A person is therefore on the move to a people or place which one wants to identify with; leaving the people and place he wants to ‘disidentify’ with, longing for a past which he does not understand. This place or people exist in the individual’s past.
This shared consciousness of the past has a great role to play in the formation of a character’s identity.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The existing studies on Owour’s fiction deal with underlying causes of identity crisis and gender issues. This study focuses on her novel, *Dust*, and is specifically concerned with analysing historical consciousness as a thematic concern. The study examines the presentation of historical events in the novel. It also interrogates the relationship that exists between historical consciousness, character formation and identity and seeks to demonstrate the link between characters and their past.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study will be to:

i. Investigate the presentation of historical consciousness as a thematic concern.

ii. Examine how historical consciousness has been presented as an aspect of form.

iii. Assess the relationship between historical consciousness, character formation and identity.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study proposes to answer the following questions:

i. How has historical consciousness been thematically presented in the text?

ii. How has historical consciousness been presented as an aspect of form in the text?

iii. What role does historical consciousness play in the formation and identity of a character
1.4 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The study makes the following assumptions:

i. Historical consciousness has been presented as a thematic concern.

ii. Historical consciousness as an aspect of form plays a vital role in enriching the text under study.

iii. That historical consciousness influences the formation and identity of a character.

1.5 JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Owuor’s short story *Weight of Whispers* won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2003. After winning this prize, she said in an interview with Kimani wa Wanjiru (14) that she had a passion to write. She says she is also inspired by her parents’ writing; her late father was a writer and her mother is still writing. This strong desire to write gives rise to her other short stories and novel. This study conducts a critical analysis of her novel, *Dust*. Her contribution to the literary field is recognized even in other areas. For instance, she was named the Eve Woman of the Year by the *Eve Magazine* in Kenya in 2004. She has also received accolades through the many reviews conducted on *Dust*. *Dust* was also nominated for the Folio Prize in 2014. The novel won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Fiction in 2015.

Owuor’s *Dust* has not received much critical attention. Much of what has been done exists mostly in reviews. Stephen Derwent Partington expresses his disappointment since *Weight of Whispers* seems to have escaped the attention of many scholars despite winning the prize. The same view applies to *Dust* also. *Dust* is a description of Kenya’s history from colonial era to the present. The ubiquitous description of Kenyan history
through factual and fictitious characters presents the researcher with a variety of areas to explore on history and the effect this history has on the characters. Published at the time Kenya was marking fifty years of independence, *Dust* is therefore a relevant and informative novel in understanding historical consciousness. Evan Mwangi in his article “Why University Dons Should Take a Second Look at Owuor’s *Dust*” says that the book is an excellent depiction of Kenya’s history, betrayal, mistrust and despair that have persisted since independence (20). This study therefore offers insight to critical studies on this celebrated short story writer and winner of the Caine Prize. The study also contributes to the growing body of critical works dealing with identity.

1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study has limited its arguments on *Dust*. The study has been carried out within the boundaries of historical consciousness. The researcher investigates the role played by historical consciousness in character formation and identity. A critical analysis of selected characters namely Odidi, Ajany and Isaiah has been carried out in order to determine how the formation of a character is influenced by historical consciousness. The selected characters belong to the young generation who did not have a one-on-one experience with historical events. The arguments in this study have been based on postcolonial theory with specific reference to ideas advanced by Bhabha on hybridity.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.7.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this section, a review of critical and scholarly works dealing with issues related to identity and historical consciousness has been carried out. The works selected help in
offering a scholarly insight to the current study and bring out the gap that the current study fills.

In an interview with Kingwa Kamenchu, (Saturday Nation – 6th December 2014) Wambui Kamiru, an artist, argues that failure to own up or possess their country makes Kenyans lose their identity. Her project “Who I am Who we Are” aims at helping Kenyans understand their identity. Just like Owuor, she describes a country that is celebrating its fiftieth year after independence (26). The country is faced with midlife crises and Kenyans are so concerned about their identity. The idea of ‘them’ (referring to a different ethnic community) versus ‘us’ means that our identity is based on the opinion and principles of others and what they think about us. Our identity is placed between who we think we are and who the others think we are. She argues that to have self-identity means identifying who one is and what one stands for. Since we rely on the others to determine who we really are, we therefore do not exist as our original self or as the others who determine who we are. The position one takes between oneself and the determinant is referred to by Bhabha in his book Location of Culture as the Third Space (36). This study examines if the formation of a character and if the character’s identity is influenced by historical consciousness.

Franck Salameh in his analysis on what constitutes a Lebanese identity, argues that the true identity of a Lebanese or what Lebanon is cannot be clearly explained (41). He explains the many faces of Lebanese or Lebanon arguing that it could be all or none at all. According to him, the many faces explain the ambivalence which makes it complex in describing the identity of a nation or its people. He argues that, a nation is built on “collective self-awareness of being one” (76) and not religion, race or language.
Collective self-awareness arises as a result of collective memories. Collective memories of historical events are passed on from one generation to the other through narration. This evokes historical consciousness in those who were not directly affected by the historical events. According to Funkenstein, collective self-awareness creates identity (6). This study investigates the role of collective awareness, which arise from historical consciousness in the formation of a character.

Abungu Maurice Tawo in his thesis “Character Transformation and Socio-Historical Awareness in the Novels of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye” argues that a person’s character is influenced by the historical forces around him/her. These may include the character’s personal history and experiences. He argues that involvement in the political space is equivalent to an individual’s search for identity and autonomy. The female characters in Macgoye’s novels develop from naivety and gradually mature through political involvement (76). According to Abungu, the character is ready to venture into any kind of development after maturity. The developed female character therefore has her roots in historical awareness. The strong historical sense in Macgoye’s novels help in the formation of the identity of the characters she presents. Whereas Abungu’s study focuses only on the effect of historical experiences on the female character in a patriarchal society, this study investigates how historical consciousness influences the formation of identity of both male and female characters.

Partington carries out a study ‘Making Us Make Some Sense of Genocide: Beyond the Cancelled Character of Kuseremane in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s Weight of Whispers’. He analyses the political and ethnic identities in Owuor’s Weight of Whispers. He relates the issues addressed in the short story to those affecting the Kenyan post-independence
literature. The short story discusses issues related to Rwandan postcolonial issues. These issues include curtailed freedom of expression. He argues that the failure to speak out about past personal experiences plays a great role in creating ethnic and political differences (110). The curtailed freedom of expression also denies the younger generation a chance to understand the past. The past thus remains in the memory of those who directly experienced it. Funkenstein observes that the secrets retained in the memory of those who had a one-on-one experience leads to identity crisis. Using Owuor’s *Dust*, this study investigates how these historical experiences which are not disclosed by those who experienced them influence one’s identity.

Another issue discussed by Partington which is relevant to this study is the ethnic differences between the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwanda. He argues that these differences were started and supported by the colonialists for their own benefit. The differences have continued to affect the younger generation. The offspring of the colonialist and the offspring of the colonised don’t understand the source of the conflict between the coloniser and colonised. The little information the offspring get from their parents seems inadequate. To get their sense of identity, the offspring dissociate themselves from their parents as a way of contesting their discontenting identities. This study illustrates how differences which are historically rooted lead to formation of characters with hybrid identities using *Dust*.

Paul Meredith in his analysis of the tension between Pakeha and Maori communities in New Zealand concurs with Partington and argues that historically created tension results in hybridity (4). In a study “Hybridity in the Third Space: Re-thinking Bicultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand” Meredith argues that the tension between Pakeha and Maori
communities forms characters with hybrid identities because they take a position between the two communities. He observes that if characters with hybrid identities were able to positively define who they are, they would be able to overcome these historically rooted tensions. This is because they understand and embrace the ‘rules and institutions’ that guide each community. This understanding happens in a space that exists between the two communities. This space, as mentioned earlier, is what Bhabha refers to as the “Third Space”. This study attempts to interrogate how historically created tension between older generation (represented by parents) and the younger generation (represented by the offspring) forms characters with hybrid identities.

In his analysis of the protagonist in V. S Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*, Sanjiv Kumar observes that Salim, who is the hero, learns his history through reading books written by Europeans. Salim’s historical consciousness is therefore aroused by a history from a European perspective. Since the writer and her subject are a product of history, then, according to Kumar, Salim’s identity is influenced by the European history. Salim therefore acquires a European identity which is in constant collision with the native identity existing in his sub-conscious self. Through this collision, Salim takes the position between the European culture and the native culture. He therefore acquires a hybrid identity. In relation to this, this study illustrates how historical consciousness influences the formation of a character’s identity using *Dust*.

Justus Kizito Siboe Makokha in his M A thesis “The Worlds In-Between of an Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M G Vassanji” focuses mostly on the writer. Makokha analyses the effect the writer’s in-betweeness character has on his writing and the characters he creates. Makokha argues that postcolonial writers
are “located in the historical experience of our postcolonial world” hence Vassanji’s in-between character and his creative works are informed by the historical experiences and realities of the Asian African communities (15). He further observes that these communities are neither White nor Black and they therefore belong in a space between the whites and blacks. He relates this to the colonial and postcolonial experiences of the Asian African communities in East Africa. Their in-betweeness is also as a result of being in East Africa thus making them feel that they don’t belong. The geographical space in this case has resulted in identity crisis. According to Makokha’s argument, the historical experiences and position of the writer influence the formation of his identity. Unlike Makokha’s study which focusses on the writer, the current study examines how historical experience and consciousness influence the formation of a character’s identity.

Jonathan Rutherford observes that movement in geographical space influences the formation of a character’s identity (9-10). He argues that if one moves from a place to another, the other place may represent a different race, class and sex. The geographical space is historically rooted. The people occupying this space may have a different past. In an attempt to guard the geographical boundaries, one character becomes hostile towards another. The hostility between the two different characters creates division between them.

Rutherford further describes a psychological space which leads to cultural uncertainties (10). The other place may have a different culture which one struggles to embrace thus dropping the original culture. The new culture may not be fully embraced. Traces of the original culture are also retained by the self. Rutherford argues that an interaction of the old and the new culture leads to cultural uncertainties. The character thus belongs to the
old culture but wants to dissociate from it at the same time; he thus does not belong. The character is thus positioned in a space between the old and the new culture.

The idea of geographical space is also discussed by Derek Alderman, Maoz Azaryahu and Reuben Rose-Redwood. They argue that the memory of the past which we identify with is related to the landscape (161). They observe that the memory we identify with is influenced by social and geographical space. The social space describe people’s interactions and their attitude towards a similar subject. According to Funkenstein, the historical consciousness is built on the collective memory of a people.

Radek Glabazna in a paper “Theatre of Identity: The Buddha of Suburbia” analyses identity of Kamir Amir, the protagonist. Glabazna argues that formation of Kamir’s hybrid identity results from the two historical eras: that of his mother on the one hand and on the other, that of his father. Kamir is described as a ‘funny kind of Englishman’ (66). Kamir acquires a hybrid identity from birth because he is born to an English mother and an Indian father. As Glabazna argues, Karim who is ever on the move is in search of his happiness. This will give him an identity and contentment. His father’s history has greatly affected the formation of his character. Glabazna contends that identity is informed by the historical experiences and the bitter realities of the past. The struggle and desire to escape from these realities lead to hybridity. Glabazna has traced formation of a character from historical experiences basing his study on the novel Buddha of Suburbia. This study illustrates how historical experiences and consciousness influence the formation of a character basing its argument on Owuor’s Dust.

Theresa Robinson in a paper “A Collective Reckoning with the Past” observes that a history full of violence and trauma affects the memory and identity of the nation (178).
She observes that violence divides the nation and in an attempt to reconcile the different communities, a new identity is forged. Reconciliation according to Robinson means accepting the past in order to make a new and just future. The past and the present can only reconcile through memory (178-9). She argues that history plays a crucial role in understanding divided memory. The historical understanding leads to collective self-awareness which consequently helps in forging a new national identity. This study investigates how this understanding of the past has influenced the identity of selected characters in Dust.

Historical experiences which had closely affected a person’s identity either socially or culturally are subsequently remembered and narrated to younger generations. Those which brought shame and guilt are secretly guarded never to be narrated to the younger generation. Jose Luis Gonzalez Castro argues that from the narrated events the younger generations can get a sense of belonging. The younger generation is also affected by those experiences which are retained in the memory of the older generation (12). These experiences from other sources for example rumours and written materials. The historical experiences are interpreted through the historical consciousness of the younger generation. This study carries out a critical analysis of Owuor’s Dust in order to determine if historical consciousness plays a role in character formation and identity.

Barrack Obama in his memoir Dreams from My Father observes that his search for his absent father brought workable meaning to his life. This happens when he sits on his father’s grave and imagines that he is communicating with him. Through this illusionary conversation with his father, he understands and confirms the stories he heard in his childhood, about himself and his family. He had thus acquired his sense of belonging
through an understanding of his past which was represented by his dead father. This study analyses how an understanding of a character’s past shapes his identity using *Dust*.

### 1.7.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.7.1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study has been guided by the postcolonial theory. Ann B. Dobie observes that postcolonial literature mostly addresses loss of identity (187). Both the author and the characters in the literary piece are portrayed as people who have been culturally displaced. There is a clash between a superior and a less powerful culture as the superior one imposes its practices on the less powerful one. The characters thus find themselves lost between the two cultures and they therefore occupy a space between these cultures. This in-between space is what Bhabha refers to as the Third Space. Hybrid identities occupy this space.

Dobie further argues that the subject matter of postcolonial literature is history (187). The postcolonial writer and the characters in the fiction created come to learn of their histories from their elders who experienced this history directly. The characters are faced with changes which they try to respond to in order to change themselves. They find themselves being affected by the past (represented by their parents) and the present. The combination of the past and the present becomes a challenge to these characters who have to make a choice of who they want to be. The characters are thus in a dilemma because they embrace their past, and at the same time they want to live independently from this past. This influences the formation of their characters. These arguments have guided the
researcher in determining whether the challenge of making a choice between the past and the present influences the formation of a character.

James D. Fearon defines identity as a way of defining oneself or how one is defined by others depending on race, religion, language, ethnicity or culture (7). Since the subject matter in postcolonial literature is history, then the identity of a character in this kind of literature is influenced by his/her history. This study investigates how formation of a character’s identity is influenced by historical experiences. It also interrogates how undisclosed historical events influence the formation of characters. Since the parents are unwilling to discuss some crucial information about the past, the undisclosed history may be understood from rumours or written materials. The arguments in this study are specifically based on Bhabha’s ideas on hybridity.

1.7.1.1 HYBRIDITY

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define postcolonialism as generally a study of the influence of colonialism on cultures and societies (186). Postcolonialism therefore interrogates the cultural, political and ethnic subjugation and the struggle of the ‘inferior’ group of people (the colonized) to regain their original self from the superior (the colonizer). A combination of the oppressor’s culture and that of the oppressed breed cultural hybridity. Hybridity therefore refers to the duality emerging as a result of an interaction between the two forces. The resistance of the colonized and the dependence on the colonizer leaves the subjects in an in-between space which, as earlier discussed is referred to as ‘Third Space’. This is the position occupied by characters with hybrid identities.
In an interview with Rutherford, Bhabha argues that hybridity contains “traces of the feelings and practices of those who inform it” (211). This means that a subject’s identity is interfered with by these traces. This results in doubts and uncertainties. He points out that to gain identity, the subject tries to identify with and through another object which happens to be the superior force in the interaction. The object’s identity is thus pegged on the superior force. Since neither the superior’s nor the inferior’s identity is retained in its pure or original form, a hybrid identity is thus formed out of the interaction.

Bhabha further argues that colonialism is the “fantasy of difference” (85). This is because colonialism existed in the past and is presently experienced through postcolonial leadership. Colonialism was initially exercised by the whites on blacks while after independence, postcolonialism is exercised by the ruling elites on their fellow subjects. Postcolonialism is thus hybrid since it is placed in a space between the past colonialism and ‘postcolonial colonialism’. It is thus not original as it only exists through repetition and difference. Characters born in the postcolonial era, therefore, find themselves in a hybrid status and hence acquire hybrid identities. This is because the characters learn about colonialism from the narratives of the older generation. The authority exercised on this young generation by the postcolonial leaders is copied from the colonizers. There is a difference between the original form of colonialism and the copied colonial authority. The present generation therefore occupy a third space that is the boundary between the original colonialism and copied colonialism. The character who occupies this third space form characters with a hybrid identity.
Bhabha observes that in an attempt to move away from the racial, gender and generational identity, the character seeks autonomy (1). The character thus seeks to move beyond the limitation of race, gender and generation. By so doing, the characters become aware of their position. One might decide to move away from the past experiences which determine the identity of their parents’ generation. The formation of such a character’s identity is influenced by the past experiences of the parents. Although the characters dissociate themselves from their parent’s understanding of the past to forge a future, their new status remains attached to their parents’ past. They thus find themselves in an in-between space existing between their parents’ past and the present. Bhabha observes that this in-between space helps them to “initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (1-2). The characters, though they define themselves differently from the older generation, are influenced by their parents past. 

Meredith in his study “Hybridity in the Third Space: Rethinking Bi-cultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand” observes that the third space is an “ambivalent site which produces new forms of cultural meaning” (2-3). Bhabha posits that Third Space represents an in-between space where hybrid identities exist (218). This hybridity arises from an interaction between two cultures one of which is superior to the other.

Ngugi observes that postcolonial literature depicts a culture that is diluted. He argues that it is written in the language of the colonizer through which the person becomes fully dominated (9). The culture of the colonised exist in the past. It is thus embraced and practised by the older generation. The younger generation may however find this culture archaic. The desire to be independent leads to the emergence of a ‘modern’ culture. This
modern culture is neither the original culture of the older generation, nor is it the original culture of the colonizer. The offspring of the older generation therefore practise a hybrid culture that is between their parents’ culture and the colonizer’s culture. The current study carries out a critical analysis of Dust in order to determine whether the struggle between the past culture and the present influences the formation of a character.

Robert J. C. Young argues that hybridity is itself a hybrid concept since it brings together and separates at the same time (19). This is because a hybrid identity has traces of the original and traces of the dominant culture which makes it hybrid. The strong struggle to fight the dominant culture creates a double consciousness resulting to hybridity. He posits that “hybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a ‘doubleness’ that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation” (21). This study investigates if this hybrid identity is related to historical consciousness.

The ideas on hybridity therefore become relevant to this study. These ideas have helped the researcher to understand the duality of characters arising from an awareness of the past. This is the past which the characters under analysis did not experience directly. The past is thus understood from narrated experiences of the parents.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a textual analysis of Owuor’s Dust which has involved an intensive reading and critical interpretation of the text. The choice of the primary text has been arrived at after considering the view that it has not received much critical attention. The text also addresses historical events which took place during colonial and postcolonial era. These historical events are analysed to determine whether they play a role in formation of
characters who did not have a one-on-one experience with the events. The characters under analysis are Odidi, Ajany and Isaiah. To get an integrated overview of the study, the primary text has been complemented with other related secondary texts and supplementary information from other scholarly works. This information has been sourced from library research in national and institutional libraries.

A critical analysis of the text has been carried out through an in-depth exploration of the major ideas which guide this study. These are historical experiences and consciousness, identity and character formation. Related secondary texts and materials have also been referred to. These are the texts which address the ideas in this study in order to justify and support the arguments raised. This analytical approach aims at helping the researcher demonstrate the role played by historical consciousness in character formation and identity.

The analysis and interpretation are based on the postcolonial theory with specific reference to Bhabha’s concept of hybridity. This concept offers a background towards understanding the aspects which inform this study. The study has a maximum of four chapters which include an introduction and conclusion. The other two are the analytical chapters. Chapter Two analyses historical consciousness and the forms through which it is realised, that is, lived, narrated and imagined. This chapter therefore answers the first and second research questions. Chapter Three focuses on historical consciousness and the role it plays in character formation. This chapter therefore answers the third research question. Chapter Four is a conclusion that summarises the findings of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

RETRIEVING ROTTING STORIES FROM THE DUST OF HISTORY

2.0 Introduction

Dust can be described as a historical novel. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines a historical novel as one whose setting is a period of history with historical facts. This history includes reference to historical personages and events. The historical facts may be advanced through the use of fictitious or factual characters. The historical personages and events constitute historical fact. This historical fact is intertwined with fictitious past of the characters to achieve realism. The historical fact and the past experiences evoke historical consciousness in the characters.

Funkenstein argues that historical consciousness is created from consciousness of historic origins. Historical consciousness is thus a people’s awareness of their history; a conscious knowledge of its existence. It is an awareness of the past in the present. Most individuals are always importing their past to their present. They are always trying to reconnect their past with their present lives. G.W.F Hegel refers to this as pragmatic reflexive history (19). He argues that the deeper import of, and connection to the past makes the past to be virtually present. He points out that reflections of the past are part and parcel of the present. The past and the present are thus inseparable. The historical past and the characters’ past experiences evoke historical consciousness.

In this chapter, the focus is on how historical consciousness is treated as a thematic concern. We are also going to discuss how the characters become conscious of both spoken and unspoken history. Under analysis are the historical events and the characters’ past experiences that continue to haunt the present.
2.1 Lived history as a source of historical consciousness

Experiencing an action or an event as it unfolds constitute a lived narrative. According to Gergen, lived narratives lead to emotional expressions which may convey the character’s bitterness towards a particular subject. A lived narrative may be a strong trigger to a historical or a past event which a character had chosen to forget, or has stuck in a character’s memory. To such a character, the lived narrative becomes an inference to a past or historical event. Lived past narratives constitute lived history which haunts a character’s present.

In *Dust*, history is treated as the core of the characters’ present life. The story centres around Odidi who dies on his way home. He is running to save his life from soldiers who are pursuing him. He is Akai and Nyipir’s only son. Odidi’s death triggers a series of bitter memories in his father’s life. In a series of flashbacks, *Dust* portrays the characters as being subjected to violent events, betrayal and mistrust. Some of these events had been orchestrated by government sycophants some of who had been Nyipir’s colleagues. The violence, betrayal and mistrust are historical injustices which continuously haunt the characters. The death of Odidi opens up the wounds which were gradually healing.

The Second World War is a fundamental historical fact in the lives of Nyipir and Petrus Keah. During this war, some Africans were taken from the British colonies to fight in the jungles of Burma against the Japanese. Nyipir’s father and brother are among the men taken from Kenya. As a young boy, Nyipir had run after the train carrying Agoro, his father and Theophilus, his brother, until it was out of sight (155). When he brings Odidi’s body home, Nyipir reaches out to his father and big brother to presumably get consolation and encouragement (154). The death of Odidi revives the feelings of loss
and dejection Nyipir had experienced when the father and the brother were taken away. Nyipir is thus preoccupied with his past which is represented by his father and brother. This fact is integral to Nyipir’s present life. From the time he is in school to the time he is leaving Wuth Ogik, Nyipir is going to Burma, to get Agoro and Theophilus, his father and brother respectively. He has been reciting “Mandalay, 21° 51’N 96° 6’ E, Rangoon, 16° 47’ N 96° 9’ E” as an invocation to them. He is thus going back to his past.

Keah’s name is derived “from the acronym for the King’s African Rifles – KAR” (310). The intention is to conceal his ethnicity. Dust portrays differences existing along ethnic lines as a historical fact that has continuously affected Kenya. A name which could not be associated to any ethnic community was of great significance especially during the blood hunt of 1969 (310). This is after the death of Tom Mboya when certain communities strongly felt that they were being targeted by the ruling class. During the Second World War, KAR was composed of units from Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland (now Malawi), Somaliland (now Somalia) and Tanganyika (now Tanzania). Since a person’s ethnicity is associated with his/her name, Keah’s ethnicity or even the country of origin is thus unknown. He is expected to torture Nyipir probably to death but he rescues him. Keah’s name is thus a reminder of the history that took the Africans to the Second World War.

Burma exists in the historical consciousness of Nyipir. As a pupil “Long ago in his class” his curiosity leads him to locate Burma on the map “Mandalay, 21° 51’N 96° 6’ E, Rangoon, 16° 47’ N 96° 9’ E” (166). Long ago means an indefinite time in the past. Nyipir’s conception of Burma is mythical since this is where his father and brother can be traced. The timelessness implied by ‘Long ago’ indicates that the events that took place
that time are still fresh in his mind. Time has not healed the pain of loss caused when his father and brother were taken away. When he is unable to continue with his education, he wants to go to Burma and bring his father and brother home and this is the impetus that drives him to look for a job. He gets a job in a mission. To supplement his wages, he joins Warui where they secretly bury people at night. In Nyipir’s mind, every cent he earns, draws him closer to Burma (167). Burma is therefore a representation of Nyipir’s past.

In his old age, Nyipir still thinks of Burma (292). As he is leaving Wuoth Ogik, he is under the illusion that he is going to Burma and tells his daughter, Ajany that he is not aware of when he would return (360). He is thus unaware of when this part of his past will stop haunting him. Ajany sees the past in his eyes as he requests her to draw pictures of the entire family. In the drawing Agoro and Theophilus are shaded in colours that reveal shades of longing in Nyipir (361). This is a longing for a past, a past that Nyipir is always conscious of. The drawing would fill the gap existing between the past and the present. In Burma he would join his father and brother and hence reconnect with his past. In his mind, he has been ‘travelling’ to Burma throughout his life. The past which he experienced as a child has therefore affected Nyipir’s life to the present.

When he gets traumatised by the awful sight of the unidentified bodies he buries, Nyipir reports to a corporal. Nyipir is deployed to the camp where he does odd jobs and gets to see more ugly sights of dead people. That is when he realises that there is war. This war may represent physical war or the war between the different classes of people. He endures the awful sight of the dead decaying bodies because he wants to achieve his goal of going to Burma. Working with other officers in the camp introduces Nyipir to the
basic skills of a soldier. He finally becomes a soldier. As a soldier, he meets Hugh Bolton. Hugh Bolton was a visiting officer coming to study the lives documented by Nyipir (176-7). Through Hugh Bolton, Nyipir meets Akai who later becomes his wife. The effects of the war that Nyipir had experienced continue after independence. These wars lead to deaths of innocent characters. As he digs Odidi’s grave, secrets of fifty-year-old burial grounds of the bodies he had buried stir (47). The deaths arising from these wars haunt Nyipir. The wounds left by the deaths are reopened by the death of Odidi and the memories of the burial ground sites are refreshed by his grave.

Burying people secretly leaves emotional and physical scars in Nyipir. These memories, as mentioned earlier, resurface when he is digging Odidi’s grave. When he hits the hard ground, the scars on his hands stir him up and Akai’s name comes to his thoughts. The emotional and physical scars are therefore symbolic of bitter memories of a past that he went through. The unidentified people Nyipir was burying had died in the hands of armed officers. This is the same way Odidi has died. The hard ground also reminds Nyipir of the hard life he has lived with Akai, his wife. He had saved her from Hugh Bolton who had wanted to murder her. According to Nyipir, Akai is a “hard, salt tear ball stuck in the back of his throat” (57). He says he had thrown his fate and destiny into her hell which had become his damnation (317). Saving Akai from Bolton has made Nyipir live a life of psychological torture. The emotional and physical scars arising from burying people secretly, and the scars arising from living a hard life with Akai are a constant reminder of his bitter past which haunts his present.

Indiscriminate killing continues even after Kenya gains her independence. After independence, competition within the political circles led to assassination of public
figures like Tom Mboya. David Goldsworthy in his book *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* describes Tom Mboya as an indefatigable champion of the common man, a pragmatic thinker and a man of action. Goldsworthy argues that Mboya’s pragmatism, charisma and championing for the interests of the common man could have been some of the reasons why certain groups within Kenyan ruling elite wanted him eliminated.

Historical facts are at times misrepresented and mitigated with the aim of concealing the truth which may ‘interfere’ with the peaceful coexistence of different communities. At other times, historical facts might wrongly be presented to fit the character’s line of thought. Gloria Mwaniga in her article “Do not Always Believe ‘Facts’ in History Books” points out that “states and individuals have been known to attempt to twist history to fit certain narrow narratives” (20). For instance in *Dust*, Tom Mboya is a significant historical figure who is deified by characters like Nyipir, Petrus Keah and Oppir. To them, historical successes are achieved through Tom Mboya. On one hand, Engineer Oppir says “when they killed Tom we lost all sense of our…elegance” (145). In Oppir’s context, ‘we’ refers to the one community which felt targeted by the ruling elite. ‘They’ refers to the rival political group apparently belonging to a different ethnic community. Oppir was a beneficiary of the 1960 mass education airlift which was organized by Tom Mboya. Oppir associates his current status to his past which is shaped by Mboya. Since Mboya is a national figure, his death is a national loss but not a loss to one community as portrayed by Oppir.

On the other hand, Nyipir says that his Kenya ceased to exist the time Mboya was assassinated; he “had lost his Kenya in July 5, 196.” According to Nyipir, Kenya is
represented by Mboya. During the independence celebrations, Tom Mboya stands out among the other men on the podium. Nyipir outlines the achievements of Tom Mboya, for example, the designing of the Kenyan flag and the mass education airlift (25). Immediately after independence, Kanu had wanted its flag to be the national flag but Mboya, who was then the Justice and Constitutional affairs minister, had thought this was risky and he and other party leaders had crafted another one that looked almost similar to the Kanu flag. The flag symbolises independence and therefore in Nyipir’s mind, independence is attained through people like Mboya, his hero. When Mboya is murdered, the independence in Kenya is lost and the entire nation ceases to exist. Nyipir can be said to be living in the past. To him, every day is a representation of what happened on the day Mboya died; “Often, for him, it was still 1969” (275). The history represented by Mboya’s assassination remains fresh in Nyipir’s mind.

Nyipir who belatedly realises that he has spoken concerning the death of Tom Mboya, finds himself in trouble. *Dust* describes those who had been associating themselves with Tom Mboya and his name as being “hunted down like vermin” (234). Nyipir is accused of “indiscipline, insubordination, and criminal activity; failing to protect civilians, stealing police equipment and stock, absconding from duty; protracting military conflict…verdict: dishonourable discharge” (275). Nyipir’s skewed reasoning towards a freedom of expression that comes with independence makes him remain in the past. He had thought that independence opened avenues where one would freely express him/herself. He should have remained silent over the death of Mboya despite their close association. According to Nyipir, as mentioned earlier, Kenya as a nation is viewed in the person of Tom Mboya. Nyipir says that 1969 was a hard year for him. This is because he
was tortured for associating himself with Mboya. This hard year is repeated in Nyipir’s life in 2007 when Odidi dies. The events of 1969 have not been erased from Nyipir’s mind.

In the torture chambers, Nyipir goes through much shame and pain in the hands of Petrus. He believes he might lose his life. For speaking out, he meets Petrus in the torture chambers. Tom Mboya is thus the force that unites Nyipir and Petrus. Petrus tells Ali Dida Hada that Nyipir’s darkened, twisted fingers were as a result of the torture that he went through under him. In their discussion, Petrus tells Ali that they (Petrus and Nyipir) were both there before the death of Mboya in 1969. Dust describes shame as a factor that is believed to seal secrets (300). The pain and shame of the torture is a fact that continuously haunts Nyipir. The painful torture, the crying and the pleading for mercy is a part of his past which he decides he cannot reveal to Ajany. This is because it is bitter and shameful. This shame is described as “creeping and crawling making Nyipir to shiver. Ajany sees old season’s shadows crisscrossing in her father’s face as a result of the invisible, dreadful secret” (300). The old shadows symbolise the bitter memories of the past that is haunting Nyipir, and which should be kept a secret.

Petrus later tells Nyipir that he had been tortured because of a photo found in Nyipir’s file; a photo of Nyipir carrying a Kenyan flag on a black horse (311). This was during the celebrations for independence. This, on one hand, portrays Nyipir’s patriotism. On the other hand, the flag symbolises the close attachment between Nyipir and Tom Mboya. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the flag had been designed by Mboya. Carrying the flag arouses jealousy in the head of state (25). The flag which should be a symbol of
national unity becomes a divisive force that brings about ethnic and class differences. This explains the reason why Nyipir is tortured because of the photo.

The Kenyan flag is also portrayed as a historic symbol. Nyipir says he had carried the Kenyan flag “Long ago” (84). Long ago, as mentioned earlier, refers to an indefinite time in the past when Nyipir was comfortable in a country he had hopes in. The timelessness implied by ‘Long ago’ indicates that Nyipir is nostalgic of this past. That time the flag was not as heavy as it is now. He had carried it during the celebration for independence in 1963 (24). Kenyans had been united during the independence celebrations. The excitement Nyipir experienced during the celebrations and the hope of a better life have now died as he watches the same Kenyans killing each other. The weight of the loss is too heavy on his shoulders now that Odidi is a victim of these killings. The pain he is undergoing is contrasted with the spectacle which brought excitement at the time they were celebrating independence. The flag reminds him that dying had started “long ago” before the deaths of his heroes – Pio, Tom, J.M and Argwings (46). The deaths of public figures and historical personalities does not end through gaining independence. Independence is symbolised by the flag. The flag is therefore a constant reminder of the feelings of loss that had been experienced earlier. The death of Odidi, which happens more than four decades after independence, revives the grief that was experienced in the past; before and after independence.

Petrus is portrayed as one of the law enforcers who the ruling elite used to ensure that the political crimes committed remained secret. The trader, a new comer in Wuoth Ogik and whose roots remain a secret, reveals that Petrus was a member of the Kenyan interrogation squad from 1968 to 1989 (322). Historical events like torture of people who
spoke about the death of Tom Mboya in 1969, the attempted coup of 1982. The Wagalla massacre of 1984 among others saw the culprits transferred to the torture chambers. The main intention of this torture was to intimidate people and ensure they remained silent. Nyipir goes through this torture in the hands of Petrus. When Petrus fails to protect Odidi as requested by Nyipir, the latter is embittered. The death of Odidi therefore reopens the wounds of torture that Nyipir went through in the hands of Petrus.

Some past injustices are carried forward to the present. The trader remembers how his wife and children had lost their lives for lack of water. He had asked for assistance from the Jacobses (those in charge of the mission), but they had refused calling him a heathen. For the death of his wife and children, the trader revenges by murdering all the patients and medical practitioners at the mission place. Petrus murders him since the trader seems to understand too much of the past atrocities some of which he had been directly involved in. Some of these atrocities include the torture of people after the assassination of Tom Mboya in 1969, after the attempted coup in 1982 and during the Wagalla massacre in 1989 (322). The trader also reminds Keah that Nyipir is among those whom he tortured. Witnesses of these atrocities and anybody who had an idea of what had happened are expected to remain silent. The trader is thus eliminated for speaking out and his home is set ablaze by Petrus. Petrus believes that this would wipe out traces of the trader’s existence and, consequently, erase the past.

_Dust_ compares the blood of innocent Kenyans, shed during the Wagalla massacre, to the blood shed during the fight for independence. The February 1984 massacre was started as an effort to disarm the ethnic Degodia clan following a clan-related conflict in the region. This massacre is considered as one of the worst historical injustices in Kenya. The
Kenyan government is thought to have played an active role in these brutal killings. Shedding of innocent blood is repeated during the 2007-8 post-election violence. Although the postelection violence arises from the disputed presidential polls of 2007, it is largely portraying a country that is divided along ethnic lines. This ethnicity is first experienced, as explained earlier, after the assassination of Mboya. The citizens are at the mercy of the ruling elite and this means that the freedom people fought for was just a mirage. The indiscriminate killing of innocent Kenyans is thus a historically rooted phenomenon.

In *Dust*, silence is said to be the language of the last resort (12). The language of silence is in use during the colonial era and has continued after independence. Baba Jimmy, a returnee from Burma, advises Nyipir to sing to stop him from asking questions about the army. The old stories are therefore turned “into songs without words” (156). The old stories symbolise the past experienced in Burma and this past is thus retained in the memory of Baba Jimmy. The songs without words can be interpreted to mean silence. Memory and silence become the language that Baba Jimmy employs to make the inquisitive Nyipir forget about his father and brother and forge ahead. Nyipir says that during the fight for independence, silence’s oath is maintained through the “seductive promise of memory loss” (68). Silence is meant to forcefully conceal the past but this past keeps resurfacing. Nyipir says that even if another story is planted in silence, “the buried thing returns to ask for its blood from the living” (69). Silence is therefore an intimidating force that safeguards the past albeit temporarily.

After independence, Silence as a language is portrayed as a form of postcolonial domination since the ruling elite and their sycophants want to shut down the existing,
emerging and imagined voices that are opposing or challenging them. With the assassination of Mboya and later the murder of J. M. Kariuki for allegedly speaking out, the official languages become English, Kiswahili, Silence and memory (276). Owuor, in an interview with Kamenchu in an article “Yvonne Owour on ‘Dust’ and why the language of silence is growing in Kenya” argues that the language of silence in the postcolonial Kenya is arising as a result of the powerful eliminating those who oppose them in an attempt to “shut down the independent voices that cannot be controlled” (20). Those entrusted with the implementation of the set draconian laws also ensure that Silence is the language through which past atrocities are concealed. For instance, the trader is murdered by Petrus Keah since he seems to understand his involvement as a member of the Kenyan Interrogation Squad from 1968 to 1982 and in the Wagalla massacre of 1984. The main objective of the interrogation squad was to ensure that those who spoke about the past were eliminated. The bitter past is supposed to be retained only in the memory of those who experienced it. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi in her article “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting” argues that silence brings about amnesia and forgetting. Since this past is shared by several individuals, the silence creates a notion of collective memory leading to collective silence. The main intention of this silence is to mute the past; it is a way of suppressing or destroying the memory. Silence as a language acts like a sieve that the cruel government uses in an attempt to stop the past from being discussed by the oppressed subject.

Akai, Odidi’s mother, is described as a volcanic mountain that is likely to erupt any time (33). The bomb blast of August, 1998 reveals Akai’s fear for her son. This was the first time that Nyipir and Akai had had a conversation over the whereabouts of Odidi. The
mother fears that her son might be caught up in the city troubles. Odidi on the other hand is depicted as a criminal. Akai had then decided to go in search of her son but Nyipir had promised to do so instead. Later when Odidi dies and Nyipir is about to inform Akai of her son’s death, he hears echoes of the conversation they had had in 1998. When Odidi is felled by a bullet, the author says that the bomb blast incident should have forewarned Nyipir that the son would die under such circumstances (33). The past represented by the bomb blast is a wound that is reopened by the death of Odidi.

Odidi is described as a bright university student with a promising future. Opirr describes him as the most excellent engineering student who attained “First-class honours”, the top ten best marks in the university’s history (144). His lecturers had had high hopes in him but he does not live long enough to be productive to his nation. He thus represents the Kenya that Nyipir had hopes in before independence. John Mwazemba in his article “Adhiambo’s ‘Dust’ Best Depicts the Place of the Historical Novel” argues that Odidi is a metaphor that represents Kenya. The excitement Kenyans had during independence is short lived. According to Mwazemba, the independent Kenya had “degenerated into something unrecognisable, sometimes terrifying”. This is the Kenya that Nyipir had celebrated during independence. In December 12, 1963, Nyipir had led the other soldiers in the spectacular independence celebrations (25). When Odidi loses his life in independent Kenya, Nyipir’s hope is completely lost. There is therefore no sense of the freedom that Nyipir had waited for.

The killing of Odidi arouses memories of public figures who had been assassinated. These include “Pio, Tom, Argwings, Ronald, Kungu, Josiah, Ouko and Mbæ and other ‘disappeared unknown’” (23). The assassination of these people forms part of the history
that haunts Nyipir. Failing to speak out about these painful losses keeps tormenting him. The forgotten heroes are described as frog-marching Nyipir “into a lake of histories to retrieve rotting stories” (69). This means that the death of these heroes cannot be erased in Nyipir’s mind. This also indicates that Nyipir has all through been living in the past. This history has thus become part of Nyipir’s present.

As Nyipir is taking his son’s body home, the journey he undertakes with his children brings back memories of the past. He is described as traveling with these memories. This journey is compared to the journey Kenya has taken from the time she celebrated her independence. Before Odidi dies he has made a decision to go back home but he does not make it home. His journey is realised when the father takes the body home for burial. Just like Odidi who goes home in a casket, Kenya too has travelled to her worst state since she acquired her independence. The country during the celebration of independence is contrasted to the country during the postelection violence. During the celebrations, a few individuals, represented by Mboya, are working tirelessly to elevate Kenyans whereas during the postelection violence people are setting their country on fire. Petrus argues that forty years after Mboya’s national educational airlift, no other Kenyan has given the country such a big dream yet some Kenyans are waiting for any excuse to light up the nation again (257). There is also a description of betrayal as Nyipir watches people on the podium during the celebrations. He had thought that some of these people were dead. He experiences the same feeling of betrayal when his son is murdered. Nyipir’s journey is also juxtaposed with the journey being undertaken by the chubby man (Mwai Kibaki) who is taking an oath to be the president of a “burning, dying country” (24). The oath fuels the violence and there are more killings. While Nyipir is undertaking a journey to
take his son’s body home for burial, the ‘chubby man’ is taking a journey to the peak of his achievement oblivious of the pain that this is causing to his subjects. The journey to take the son home therefore has a historical significance for Nyipir.

There is a close resemblance between the deaths of Tom Mboya and that of Odidi. In both, there is betrayal that leads to their elimination. They are both described as extraordinary characters who seem to outdo those they associate with. The deaths can be compared to what is described in Dust as a haemorrhaging miscarriage (97). Haemorrhage can be used metaphorically to describe a situation that is getting out of control. Haemorrhaging miscarriage therefore means that there is indiscriminate shedding of innocent blood leading to termination of life. The premature deaths of both Mboya and Odidi represent the lives of innocent citizens that are cut short before they can achieve their objective in their seemingly promising future. The grief that Nyipir had suffered when Mboya was assassinated in 1969 is replicated in 2007 when Odidi dies. The death of Odidi is a personal loss to Nyipir since he directly comes to terms with the pain of death. He is nursing his frustrations of losing a son in the “nameless wars” (271). The nameless wars refer to the postelection violence. Odidi’s death revives the historical secrets which Nyipir had been retaining in his sub-conscious mind. Odidi dies at the time when Kenyans are experiencing the cruelty and brutality of indiscriminate killings, some of which are caused by law enforcers. Though Odidi dies when he is shot after a foiled robbery, Nyipir relates his death to the death of innocent Kenyans in the postelection violence. Time had thus not healed the wound of loss in Nyipir. The death of Mboya has continuously haunted him and the death of Odidi only reopens the wound that has
‘refused’ to heal. The deaths of Tom Mboya and Odidi symbolise an “independent” Kenya that is under postcolonial oppression in spite of independence.

The independence that Nyipir had celebrated is juxtaposed against the mourning of his son’s death. The excitement during the historical independence celebrations is later replaced by contempt for the elected government. The independence has become an illusion. Soon, people are oppressed, others are murdered by the same people they put in power. Odidi’s death is the culmination of this oppression and indiscriminate killing of those considered to be enemies of the state. More than fifty years after the much celebrated independence, people have nothing to be proud of. Odidi’s death therefore signifies the death of people’s hopes for better lives in an independent country.

After independence, neo-colonialism is experienced through the oppression of the subjects by the ruling elite. Ngugi in his essay “The Writer in a Neocolonial state” argues that independence brought no fundamental changes to the ordinary people. Independence created a new ruling class which was not different from the colonial rulers. Political assassinations like the murder of Tom Mboya, J M Kariuki among others are experienced in an ‘independent’ country. Mass disappearances and curtailed freedom of expression describe a people who are still under neo-colonial oppression. This is a satirical presentation of a country that is independent. The torturing of people considered to be enemies of the government forms part of a bitter historical past. Characters like Nyipir who have gone through the colonial and postcolonial eras find no difference in the two eras. Nyipir always compares the present experiences with the past experience. The past is thus affecting his present.
Ethnicity is described as a historical wound that keeps recurring. It is also the cause of the atrocities being experienced in the present. The ethnically initiated wrangles witnessed in the country are historically rooted. For instance, discrimination of people along ethnic lines had begun in the colonial era. The mission wanted to hire a reliable, good, Christian boy, a non-Kikuyu. At the time, Kikuyus were aggressively fighting the colonisers to regain their land. The Kikuyu community were therefore considered as enemies of the whites and could therefore not be trusted. Keah’s name is also indicative of a country that is ethnically divided. As mentioned earlier, it is derived from the acronym KAR – Kenya African Rifles. This is meant to conceal his ethnicity. Concealing of the identity had been significant in 1969 after the assassination of Tom Mboya.

Inter-ethnic rivalries and resentment over political dominance continue after independence. Post-election violence for instance, is portrayed as a repetition of the fighting witnessed after the assassination of Tom Mboya. In a discussion between Petrus Keah and Ali Dida Hada, Petrus wonders if there will be a local tribunal and if they would be asked to testify. A local tribunal is expected to be set up after the postelection violence to deal with those who instigated the violence and deliver justice to the victims. Petrus also wonders if the peace march from Dandora to Kangemi would have any effect since as a people they don’t seem ready to live together. Dandora and Kangemi are estates within the Kenyan capital city, Nairobi, which were among those that were greatly affected by the postelection violence. He refers to the postelection violence as “unfinished Kenya business” which began in 1969 when Mboya died (257). ‘Kenya business’ refers to the destruction of a state through ethnic differences which lead to violence. This means that a repetition of what happened after the assassination of Tom
Mboya in 1969 is still expected. Robinson argues, as mentioned earlier, that trauma and violence affects the memory of an individual and consequently the nation is divided. The violence becomes an unforgettable fact in the individual’s mind. For instance, after the assassination of Mboya, one community is described as being displaced from specific areas. A repeat of the displacement and mass movement of the same community is experienced during the post-election violence (67). The discrimination along ethnic lines and selective murders are demonstrated with the killings of innocent people in Naivasha (83). The fisherman’s two wives and eight children are burnt to death in a house. The killings of innocent Kenyans and displacement during the postelection violence is a reminder of the innocent people who died during the fight for independence and after independence, specifically after the assassination of Mboya. The postelection violence therefore revives the history that characters like Nyipir and Petrus had wished to forget.

The socio-political conflict existing between communities started with the first generation of the ruling elite in independent Kenya. This enmity has been carried over to the third generation of rulers after independence. This leads to the post-election violence in 2007-8. After the assassination of Tom Mboya, there is displacement of people from certain regions; “central province was emptied of a people who were renamed cockroaches and ‘beasts from the west’” (272). West refers to the Lake Victoria region which is Tom Mboya’s home ground. The same displacement is replicated during the postelection violence where people are chased from their homes and those who remain are cut up and burned (67). There is mistrust between the community represented by Nyipir, his family and allies, and the other communities. This mistrust has existed since independence. This mistrust does not only arise from ethnic differences but also from differences in political
and social classes. Characters like Nyipir are conscious of this history. When the same displacement is repeated during the postelection violence, Nyipir feels that his community is targeted.

*Dust* describes the national loss arising from post-election violence. After the disputed polls in 2007, Kenya was thrown into turmoil since it was hard to determine who between Mwai Kibaki (referred to by Galgalu as Chibaki) and Raila Odinga (referred to as Agwambo by Nyipir) (83) had won the presidential election. Many innocent Kenyans lost their lives. By coincidence, Odidi dies at the time that the post-election violence is at its peak. As mentioned earlier, he dies when he is shot after an aborted robbery but not as a result of the post-election violence as Nyipir claims. The effects of this violence are therefore personally felt by Nyipir who loses his son. When the postelection violence erupts, the past is said to be persistently beckoning (25). The violence thus reopens the bitter wounds of loss Nyipir had experienced when Mboya was assassinated. Just like Mboya, Odidi had a vision which did not materialise. Ajany tells her father “the stupid state did not have the capacity to grasp Odidi’s vision and had destroyed him instead” (287). She and her father feel that Odidi was innocent and was targeted for elimination by the state. According to them, the assassination of Tom Mboya, the death of Odidi and the killings of innocent Kenyans describe a country that has a history of eliminating her heroes.

Another pertinent issue discussed in *Dust* is the reconciliation and peaceful coexistence of different ethnic communities (281). For instance, the relevance of Article IV popularly referred to as (Agenda IV) in The Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation Agreement of 2008 is discussed. Article IV encourages dialogue as a way of ensuring
reconciliation between the Kenyan ethnic communities. Coexistence is reinforced through the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008. This Act is expected to foster national accord and reconciliation after the post-election violence. It is also thought of as a preparation for a better future for Kenya. The warring communities are expected to reconcile and co-exist. Robinson argues that after violence, there must be reconciliation in order for the country to forge ahead. Reconciliation is a way of accepting the past and moving forward to a just future. The past and the present reconcile through memory, that is, the historical injustices and a present full of discontentment should be viewed positively to avoid the feelings that one is unjustly being targeted. This reconciliation does not seem to work. For example, Nyipir differs with Isaiah when Isaiah comes looking for Hugh Bolton. Isaiah claims that his father had lived in Nyipir’s homestead and therefore he would be able to explain Hugh Bolton’s whereabouts. He is sent away and when he refuses to leave, he is threatened with death. He leaves expecting to get answers to his questions from Ajany. When he comes back to Wuoth Ogik in the company of Ali Dida Hada and Ajany, it is expected that he would also reconcile with Nyipir. The historical differences between different communities should therefore be a thing of the past.

Regional inequality and poverty abound in postcolonial Kenya. National equality and reconciliation is thus an issue that needs to be addressed. Article IV should also deal with regional imbalances. The northern frontier which is marginalised is expected to develop economically and favourably compete with other regions. At the time Ajany and Odidi are in school, their schoolmates wonder if the place Ajany and Odidi come from is in the map. According to them, Odidi and Ajany cook dust to eat (14). The schoolmates
also claim that people from northern Kenya cannot climb trees because they have no trees to climb (43). Five years after the Act became law, Dust describes the northern frontier district as an area where regional and economic equality have not been achieved. The region remains the same as it was when Ajany and Odidi were in school. Ajany, Ali Dida Hada and Isaiah have to carry re-treaded tyres, newspapers and a sack of mangoes and oranges from Nairobi. These items are not available in the northern frontier district. Historical regional inequalities have therefore not been dealt with.

Wuoth Ogik is described as a place where forces converged and where people left stories which were passed on from one generation to another (240). For instance, Ali Dida Hada goes to Wuoth Ogik in search of information involving the disappearance of Hugh Bolton. Ali Dida Hada does not fulfil his mission because he is carried away by Akaima’s beauty, they get intimate and finally he does not carry out the investigations. He is brought back to his senses as a cryptanalyst later, when Isaiah reveals Hugh’s books and painting found in Nyipir’s house. These are a clear evidence that Hugh was in that house. Ali Dida Hada’s past inefficiencies are thus brought to the fore in Wuoth Ogik.

Nyipir goes to Wuoth Ogik in the company of Hugh Bolton. It is in Wuoth Ogik that Nyipir meets Akai and after the death of Hugh Bolton, she becomes Nyipir’s wife. Nyipir and Akai’s past together can thus be traced to Wuoth Ogik. This past remains etched in Nyipir’s mind, since every time Akai disappears, he regrets having made her his wife.

As Odidi is dying, he fees the weapon tacked under his shirt and throws it away. He remembers it was a gift from a Somali warlord in compensation for water songs. These songs “Desert ghost of Yesteryear / Dredge the dunes / Draw sweet truth out” are a reminder of a past which the warlord remembers with nostalgia. The name of the person
who had taught Odidi the songs comes with a “torrent of buried history” (4). Just like poetry, these songs evoke powerful emotions and memories of the past. William Wordsworth defines poetry (song) as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. The songs are therefore rich in Ali Dida Hada’s (who had taught Odidi the songs) history and a forceful reminder of the past to Odidi. The song of the Kormamaddo, the sky camel is a kind of an evocation to the past in order to reveal the hidden facts which would “draw sweet truth out.” The songs had evoked nostalgic feelings of past pastoral days of the warlord. He had talked about a clan: Degodia. This is the clan that was targeted for disarmament during the Wagalla Massacre. The rifle reminds Odidi of this bitter history that is revealed via Ali Dida Hada through the songs.

As Ajany sings the water songs she has over-heard Ali Dida Hada teaching her brother, Ali Dida Hada says that in her voice, he could hear his mother. He says these were their old songs. The songs remind him of his past. Edward Okinda points out that “Songs embody history, cultural values, philosophies and beliefs of the people” (9). The old songs therefore represent Ali Dida Hada’s history. The mother symbolises Ali Dida Hada’s past. This part of his past, which includes his original name, is closely guarded until the time he is leaving Wuoth Ogik when he reveals it to Akai in a whisper. In Wuoth Ogik therefore Ali Dida Hada reveals and reconnects with his past. This water song had been sung in Wuoth Ogik.

Isaiah too traces his past to Wuoth Ogik, specifically in the Oganda’s house. This is the house that Bolton had built for Selene, Isaiah’s mother. The house and the books in the library are a source of the past that Isaiah is craving for. The books connect Isaiah to
Bolton, who is part of Isaiah’s past. Being in the house presents him with a past that Bolton and Selene had experienced. It is in Wuoth Ogik that Isaiah learns from Akai that there was a sour relationship between Selene and Hugh and therefore Hugh Bolton was not his father.

The lived narratives and the stories of the “long ago” are a significant connection between the past and the present, evidence that the history cannot be forgotten nor erased. The constant reference to these stories constitute the characters’ historical consciousness.

2.2 Narrated history as a source of historical consciousness

Gergen states that formation of the present era character is achieved through “long-standing traditions of storytelling, oral history, accounts of personal memory, and a variety of literary genres including historical writing, the novel, …” (2). Characters like Ajany and Isaiah understand their history and their past through narrated accounts of their history and their past from characters who lived this history. James H. Liu and Denis J. Hilton in an article “How the Past Weighs on the Present: Social Representations of History and their Role in Identity Politics” argue that history provide us with narratives that tell us who we are, where we are coming from and where we are going. The historical narratives therefore help in understanding the identity of an individual or a group identity.

Dobie argues that the subject matter of postcolonial literature is history (187). Postcolonial literature refers to the writing and/or criticism which took place after the colonial rule. The writings are affected by the imperial processes from the moment of
colonization to the present. *Dust* can thus be defined as a postcolonial novel. Some of the characters in postcolonial literature learn of their histories from different sources. These sources may include elders who directly experienced this history. James A Ogude in a journal article, “Ngugi’s Concept of History and the Post-colonial Discourse in Kenya” observes that fiction is a representation of history and that both fiction and history rely largely on narration (88). Characters who lived through the historical events remembered their experiences through narrating them to the younger generation. Characters like Ajany and Isaiah learn of their history from what is narrated to them by characters like Nyipir, Akai, Galgalu, Petrus and others who experienced this history.

The trader, a new comer in Wouth Ogik and whose roots remain unknown, says that he speaks because “unshared story can break a heart that carries it alone for too long” (127). Speaking out is thus a way of lessening the pain caused by the past suffering. Cappelletto argues that speaking out is a hopeless attempt to come to terms with the memory of the atrocities [of the Second World War] (244). Speaking out, therefore, does not only reduce the pain but also serves as a reminder of the painful past that the victims went through. Speaking out also serves to inform those who did not live through the history, of what the others had gone through. According to Funkenstein, historical consciousness results from an understanding of the past and giving it a meaning. The trader believes that through speaking, he reduces the psychological pain in the characters he interacts with through narrating to them what he hears. He says he repeats what the radio says and therefore whatever he narrates is what is heard from another source.

Agoro and Theophilus, Nyipir’s father and brother respectively, were taken to Burma by the British to fight in the Second World War. Nyipir wonders if Ajany can see them.
Carol M. Sicherman points out that involvement in personal history is a prerequisite for involvement in public history (363). Agoro and Theophilus are part of Nyipir’s personal history which he narrates to Ajany. Through the narration, he believes that in Ajany’s present life, the history represented by Agoro and Theophilus is understood and remembered. According to Ajany, the grandfather and the uncle are only visible in her father. If Ajany understands her father’s personal history, she would understand the importance of Burma in Nyipir’s life. She becomes aware of this history since her father shares it with her. She feels she could draw a bridge of cairns from bottom to a higher aground. The cairns would mark the way and the stones would “connect absent from now” (298). The cairns hold the dead who clench the past which Ajany is expected to understand. The knowledge of the past is thus absent from Ajany and she can only understand it if it is narrated to her. Bridge is thus the narration which symbolises the pathway through which history will get to Ajany.

Cappelletto argues that the narration of those who survived during the Second World War is a recollection of the past genealogies since the dead family members occupy a central part in the mind of the living (246). In order to remember the dead and to let the young generation know about their dead relatives, the survivors keep narrating their experiences during the war. He says the narration is a testimony to the persistence of a distant past that has refused to distance itself from the present. By talking about Agoro and Theophilus, Nyipir is narrating his past to the daughter. Since Agoro and Theophilus are members of Ajany’s family, they are part of her past too. Dust treats this narration as a passageway to understanding a person’s history. Nyipir believes that if he narrates his past to Ajany, it will connect her to her past. Nyipir’s father and the brother have
remained in his memory. Their absence haunts him to the present. It is described as having penetrated “the soul and never left” (299). Agoro and Theophilus are not dead according to Nyipir. He believes that they are still alive in Burma. Telling Ajany about them keeps the memories fresh in Nyipir’s mind.

Ajany looks for body marks which would make her understand the truth about her past. The body marks on Akai’s wrist are interpreted by Ajany as “scars of resistance against suffering” (176). These are scars that represent the unspoken past. The scars ‘narrate’ the mother’s past suffering. They act as a constant reminder of the painful past which haunts Akai’s present. They are referred to as “old histories which have refused to rest in peace” (175). These histories are what Ajany has been searching for in order to understand her family’s past. Just like the marks on Nyipir’s arms, the marks on Akai’s wrist conceal a past which Ajany understands when it is narrated to her by her mother. Akai tells Ajany that Hugh Bolton had slashed her using a pen knife. Through understanding the source of the marks, Ajany is able to understand how the relationship between her mother and Hugh Bolton had ended. The end of this relationship marks the beginning of Nyipir and Akai’s life together.

Ajany nurses nostalgic feelings about her past. Her desire to understand her past is described as a “history of longing” (37). Vinitzky-Seroussi argues that narratives may report the past, make it interesting, simplify it and hence make a bitter past palatable to those narrating and/or listening to it (1111). Ajany can only come to terms with her past if it is narrated to her. The history of her birth is thus narrated to her by her mother. Akai says she had learnt very late that she was expectant. She therefore had no hope for the unborn child and had thus distanced herself from it even before it was born (341-2). This
means she had not felt any maternal attachment to it. When the child is finally born prematurely and feverish, Akai does not give the baby a name. This explains why Akai referred to Ajany as “that one” (75). Ajany’s birth is a painful past that remains fresh in Akai’s memory. Through this narration, Akai recollects her past and at the same time, Ajany understands her past. According to Akai, Ajany remains the tiny, feverish baby that she had not given a name at birth.

When Ajany refused to suckle, the mother had lost hope in her. Akai moved away from the unnamed baby leaving it to die. The baby had been rescued by Odidi and Galgalu (343). She had grown being protected by Odidi. After his death, Ajany feels the shame and loneliness arising from being rejected by her mother. When Nyipir narrates to her the story of the black leopard that used to escort him, Ajany realises later that her mother’s disappearances coincided with the narration of this story. The leopard left whenever Nyipir reached home (41-2). The story explains why Akai used to keep on disappearing and appearing. Whenever Ajany is present, Akai moves away from her. The fact that Akai had detached herself from her baby and left it to die haunts her. Ajany’s presence fills her with contempt for Ajany and makes her feel guilty. When this fact of Ajany’s past is narrated to her by her mother, Ajany understands why her mother keeps on appearing and disappearing. Her mother’s disappearing and appearing is connected to the past; it is a rejection that had started immediately after Ajany was born. Ajany suffers in this rejection until the past is narrated to her and instead of treating her mother with contempt she empathises with her.

According to Akai, Ajany seemed to have little or no chances of survival and this makes Akai to have little or no attachment to her daughter. When Odidi dies, Akai’s
concentration is on her dead son. She has to be reminded by Nyipir that she has another child, Ajany (339). She compares the birth of Odidi and that of Ajany. She tells her that she had been born hot, meaning she had a fever and therefore was unlikely to survive while Odidi was born cool, meaning he was healthy. She believes that those who are born hot die, while those who are born cool survive. She had not expected Ajany to survive. She had been sustained by the fact that she had a son, Odidi. When he dies, she is saddened and does not seem to recognise the presence of Ajany. The narration about Ajany’s past, coupled with the fact that Odidi is dead opens the wound left by the death of her other children: Ewoi and Etir. Instead of her being comfortable in Ajany’s presence, her survival reminds her of the other children who died.

Akai narrates to Ajany the relationship that existed between Nyipir and Hugh Bolton. From this narration, Ajany understands that apart from working together “long time ago” Nyipir and Bolton had one thing in common: their interest in Akai. Nyipir had fallen in love with Akai when she had appeared to them at a watering hole. Akai had instead fallen for Hugh Bolton. This had made Nyipir jealous. Nyipir had later protected Akai from Hugh Bolton whenever he mistreated her. Nyipir had been bitter when Akai was stripped by him so that he could paint her. Through the narration by her mother, Ajany understands the source of the marks on Akai’s body. The marks explain the physical and psychological torture Akai had gone through in the hands of Hugh Bolton. He had insulted and slashed her using a penknife (346-50). This understanding of the past makes Ajany empathise with her mother.

Akai also unravels another mystery surrounding the death of Hugh Bolton. Nyipir tells Isaiah that Hugh Bolton died by a gun. Isaiah wonders if it was an accident or suicide.
Akai reveals to Ajany that Hugh Bolton was shot by Nyipir to save her from being shot by Hugh (350). Hugh Bolton wanted to murder her when she told him the babies she had been expecting were twins, Ewoi and Etir, and that they had died. Hugh Bolton had denied being the children’s father and insulted her calling her a harlot. She also tells Ajany how Ewoi and Etir, Ajany’s brother and sister, had died when Akai had fallen out with her mother. The mother had cursed her and sent her and the children away. On her way from Kalacha to Wuoth Ogik, the children had died of thirst. This past is unknown to Ajany until it is narrated to her by Akai. Ajany thus becomes aware of her other siblings. Her past is thus contained by Ewoi, Etir, Odidi, her parents and Hugh Bolton.

Akai narrates the past regarding Isaiah’s birth. She reveals to him that a sour relationship existed between Hugh Bolton and Selene. Out of the loneliness that had engulfed Selene, one of her male servants had come to keep her company. Isaiah’s birth had thus been occasioned by this companionship. Isaiah’s complexion had therefore been darker than that of the other family members. His mother had called it a throwback gene (332). The complexion explains the past which is represented by his parentage. Through Akai’s narration, Isaiah understands that Hugh Bolton is not his biological father. The narration therefore reveals a past that Isaiah has been searching for.

2.3 Recreating the past through painting and imagination

Some historical events are retained in the memory of those who experienced this history. These events are described as “secret things of the parents’ fears, throbbing shades of the past” (6). Silence is described as the language of the last resort (12). The older generation therefore chooses to remain silent when nothing else seems to work in their favour. As discussed earlier, those events which brought shame and bitterness to those who
experienced them are not narrated to the younger generation. Ajany learns to paint in order to cover “shame with vivid colours” (14). Painting is a way of expressing herself and coming to terms with the past. Through painting, she explicitly describes what had been concealed by her parents.

The past is said to be buried “with covenant of silence” (68). Nyipir says the oaths of silence erase secrets and evil is buried with covenants of silence since the oaths are administered with spilled human blood. The past which had not been shared left children with no choice but to try and create their own history. Ajany and Odidi are said to have “mapped their earth with portions of wind…piecing the tales from stones… They lived in the absence of elders afflicted with persistent memories: no one to tell the children how it had been, what it meant, how it must be seen or even what it was” (7). This means that some past events are not narrated to the children since the parents are unwilling to divulge the information. The children therefore create their own stories in order to understand their past. For instance, Odidi narrates stories of imagined siblings and other relatives. These are referred to as “stories of Elsewhere” (117). ‘Elsewhere’ in this context describes a place that only exists in their imagination. The imagined siblings may refer to Etir and Ewoi who exist in Ajany and Odidi’s unknown past.

At birth, Ajany is described as seeming to understand every word that was uttered. Later in her life, Ajany is very keen on what her father says and what he doesn’t say. What her father doesn’t say is painted in order for her to understand why it is not said. She tries to interpret what her father says. This portrays Ajany as observant, a trait that she has acquired since her birth, her past. Her eyes are said to have connected to invisible things. She creates through imaginations what is concealed from her and puts it into painting.
This may explain why Ajany is able to paint her history; a history she only understands through imagination.

Music and painting are said to lessen the pain related to memories (14). Nyipir wonders how Ajany knows what to draw. She reveals to him that she and Odidi had visited the red cave when they were children. They had seen bones and a face and through imagination, she is able to paint Hugh Bolton. Hugh Bolton exists in Ajany’s past and therefore Ajany understands her past through painting. Odidi urges Ajany to keep painting and tells her that every crevice contains a story. Every painting would then represent a story that would provide the needed information, which would in turn reveal the truth about their past. She paints history the way she understands it and expects her parents to praise her just as she had been praised in school after her paintings won the first prize in the national art show. The portrayal of her historical consciousness represented in the painting hurts her parents. The parents’ reactions are described thus:

Akai-ma and Nyipir saw panels of techno-caricatures of ghosts, the black leopard, and fire makers. They saw the stories as they would see secret nightmares. In the faces and patterns their daughter had conjured, her parents recognised their enemies and some of the devils that haunt them (51).

Ajany puts her parents’ memories and the untold secrets into painting. The secret nightmares, enemies and devils represent the painful past that the parents would like to forget. The black leopard represents the leopard in her father’s narration. This past has ‘refused to die’ and therefore haunts her parents. The past is so painful that the parents reprimand her. When reprimanded she almost gives up but her brother, Odidi, encourages her to “paint a river out of Wuoth Ogik. Then paint an ocean and a ship, me and you going Far Away” (52). This means they would distance themselves from this past that they don’t understand.
Wuoth Ogik represents Odidi and Ajany’s past. The river that Odidi advises Ajany to draw represents the route they would take from this past. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey compares the movement and rhythm of the ocean to the movement in space and time. The ocean that Ajany paints may represent the vastness of the past they hope to understand or the present that they wish to explore. The oceanic tides represent their movements from Wuoth Ogik (the past) to a fulfilling present. The ship symbolises the vessel through which Odidi and Ajany would travel as they move from their unknown past to the present. Painting would therefore bring contentment through an understanding of the past or a freedom from the past to the present.

Ajany’s painting fills the gap that is left when the other relevant information in her past is untold by those who lived it. For instance, Nyipir tells Ajany of how he and Hugh Bolton had moved to the Northern Frontier District “a long, long time ago” (313). Long time ago refers to a remote past which remains fresh in the mind of Nyipir. Since her father is not willing to reveal the relationship between Hugh Bolton and Akai-ma, Ajany sketches Hugh Bolton’s image so that she can ‘visualise’ the place her mother had occupied in Hugh Bolton’s life. Hugh Bolton and his relationship with Akai exist in the past. Ajany is thus making sketches of the past in order to understand it. Through this imagination, she begins to get comfortable with the past.

Nyipir becomes restless when he is unable to explain to Ajany why he did not go to Burma to bring his father and brother home. Ajany paints her father’s restlessness. When Agoro and Theophilus were taken to go and fight in the white man’s war, Nyipir was distressed. The death of his mother later leaves him grief-stricken. When his uncle withdrew him from school later, he becomes restless. He continues reading and re-
reading old school books so as to understand where, and what was in Burma as he awaited the return of his father and brother. He had expected that after completing school, he would earn and this would enable him to go to Burma and bring his father and brother home. The restlessness therefore results from Nyipir’s past, the pain of losing his relatives, and emotional suffering. When painting the restlessness, she hopes to understand her father’s state and relate it with his past.

The red cave is a source of history to Ajany and Odidi. The cave holds crucial information relating to the past. This is where Nyipir and Akai had hidden Hugh Bolton’s body. It is thus referred to as cave of memory (264) because memories of Hugh Bolton’s death and the beginning of Nyipir and Akai’s lives together can be traced there. When Odidi and Ajany get into the cave, Odidi is described to have understood “where secrets are born” (12). Their curiosity to unravel the mystery that surrounds their past drives them to this forbidden cave. The visit to the red cave reveals to them a skull and other bones. Odidi tells his sister that they belong to the Obarogo, which, according to him, is a monster. Monster in this context may be a crux of information about their past. This may also mean that they are faced by a monster of missing information existing in undisclosed historical facts which they may not be able unravel on their own.

While in Brazil, Ajany takes most of her time painting and filling in the missing parts of the skull. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines skull as the bones of the head which surround the brain and give the head its shape. Nyipir says death does not keep its secrets well (69). Killing Hugh Bolton and hiding his body in the cave does not conceal the past completely. His presence at Wuoth Ogik is revealed by the skull. The skull symbolises the past, therefore, Hugh Bolton is a part of Ajany’s past. This is the
past that she wants to understand and which would shape her and Odidi’s character. The missing information about her past, represented by the missing parts of the skull is what she wants to fill through her painting. The mouth and the nose have not acquired their final shape as she is leaving Brazil. This means that she has not fully understood her past. The skull plays a vital role in helping her understand her past. This painted form is described to have “journeyed with her for seven years…waiting for dimensions, nuances, completion, and a name” (48-9). This means that since she and Odidi discovered the skull, the past represented by the skull has been accompanying her present.

Ajany fills in the missing details in the skull through imagination. *Dust* describes her as drawing from “worlds of feeling that she had known and that she imagines” (264). The drawing gets its shape and meaning since whenever she is drawing, she keeps returning to the memory of the cave. The cave of memory, as mentioned earlier, holds crucial information about Ajany’s past. When Isaiah shows her Hugh Bolton’s photograph, her mind returns to the cave and its skeleton. Using Hugh Bolton’s photograph, she applies clay to the “broken skeleton from the cave of memory” (265). In her imagination, the image she gets belongs to Hugh Bolton. Odidi had told Ajany that the skeleton belonged to Obarogo. Hugh Bolton is thus Obarogo. He is a past that remains a mystery in Ajany’s life, until she understands his relationship to her family. Obarogo in this context means that most of the mystery surrounding Ajany and Isaiah can be unravelled through an understanding of Hugh Bolton’s life. Her imagination reveals to her that the skull and the broken skeleton belong to Hugh Bolton.
2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have demonstrated how *Dust* has thematised historical consciousness. We have illustrated this by highlighting various historical events and some of the characters’ past experiences which have evoked historical consciousness in a number of characters. Most of the history and characters’ past experiences are surrounded by shame, bitterness and death. Shame and bitterness are not eliminated by death. An attempt to conceal shame and bitterness through death only serves as a temporary solution. Nyipir says “Death does not keep its secrets well” (69). It thus keeps haunting the living: the dead and buried are said to be persistently coming to ask for their blood from the living. Those who lived through the history are unable to hide it in silence because they are haunted by this history. Death has not completely concealed it. History and the past experiences must thus be narrated to those who did not live through it if they have to understand it. Since silence has become a language of expression, some historical happenings are not understood because they are neither lived by, nor narrated to the younger generation. Such history is imagined by the younger generation in order to create meaning for the characters.

We have also examined how the past is transmitted by those who lived it, and conceived by those who are searching for it. Characters are conscious of their history and past experiences if they lived it, if it was narrated to them by those who lived in the past or through imagining and creating stories to fill the blanks left by lack of exposure. Living the history, narrating the history to those who did not live through it and imagining/creating history are the three forms through which characters become conscious of their history. We have therefore discussed lived, narrated and imagined
history as sources of historical consciousness. This has been achieved through characters like Nyipir, Akai, Ajany, Odidi, Isaiah, Petrus Keah, Ali Dida Hada and others. Some of these characters have understood their history because they lived through it, others have understood it because it has been narrated to them while others like Odidi and Ajany create their own history. Through analysis of the text, we have demonstrated that historical events and past experiences of the characters discussed have evoked historical consciousness.
3.0 Introduction

Historical consciousness refers to a character’s understanding and preoccupation of the past and constant reference to this past. The characters rely on this past in shaping their future. Barrack Muluka in an article “Note to Politicians: Here’s Why We Must Study Vasco da Gama” (26) argues that history shapes a character’s identity and those who are not interested in learning their history destroy themselves (26). History is thus fundamental to a character since it assists him/her in understanding and coming to terms with him/herself.

Rutherford observes that identity is not static, and that the present contains traces of the past (24). It is dynamic and keeps on changing whenever a character learns something about his past. In Dust, a character’s identity does not endure. Galgalu advises Ajany that the moon falls into pieces and becomes whole again (117). This means that a character may lose his/her sense of belonging due to a misunderstanding or lack of information arising from a gap created through space and time, and then regain it through an understanding of the past. The character’s identity is thus affected by the knowledge of the past which is gradually revealed by those characters who lived through this past.

In Dust, the historical events and the characters’ past are described as playing a vital role in shaping the identity of characters. The effects of the historical events have ripple effects and are therefore felt by those who did not live through the said history. In the novel, characters like Nyipir, Akai and Ali Dida Hada who experienced historical events narrate them to the younger generation characters who are interested in understanding
their past. Jeffrey Weeks in his analysis of the differences between character identities points out that behind the quest for identity are different and conflicting values. These conflicts may be between different communities or within the individuals (88). Isaiah wonders, “What if every human is born with a volume of madness to resolve? They all have a past they would wish to unravel. ...Some seize and drive those forces into an inner coral.…. – like Ajany and Isaiah. Others are overwhelmed; they submerge and quietly drown – like Odidi who dies” (Italics mine) (268). The madness may refer to the mysterious past which the characters are struggling to resolve.

This chapter critically analyses how the past influences the formation of character in the younger generation. The characters under analysis are Odidi, Ajany and Isaiah.

3.1 Odidi’s conception of his past

As children, Odidi had suggested to Ajany that they should visit the forbidden cave where they would find the source of a stream they could hear but not see. He says they would find water at the base. The ‘source’ and ‘the base’ indicate the beginning of the stream. The stream is symbolic of the course of their lives. They thus understand their present but they don’t understand the course their lives have taken to the present, that is, they don’t understand their past. By getting to the source, therefore, they would understand their past which is concealed from them. In the cave, they find “the imprint of the world’s record of laughter - open-mouthed toothiness carved into ancient rock” (12). There is therefore a permanent engrave of the past which is unearthed when they visit the cave. In the cave, Nyipir and Akai had kept the body of Hugh Bolton. As discussed in chapter two, Hugh and the cave are a source of Odidi and Ajany’s past. The water at the base therefore, symbolises the facts they have been searching for about their past.
Coming into contact with this past gives them immeasurable joy. This ‘water’ therefore quenches their thirst and gives them contentment.

After visiting the cave, Odidi and Ajany’s lives in school change. Dust describes Odidi as re-energized and he becomes a sports star in school. He has found belonging and he becomes the hero among his schoolmates. This is because he has understood a part of his past which had earlier been concealed from him. The timidity when among his colleagues is overcome. He joins the rugby club and transforms it (14). He thus becomes contented while among the other players. This past has therefore shaped Odidi’s character.

Odidi and Ajany have a feeling of homelessness. This state of homelessness indicates that they have no sense of belonging. To fulfil their desire to belong to a family with relatives, Odidi narrates stories of imagined siblings and other relatives. These are referred to as “stories of Elsewhere” (117). ‘Elsewhere’ in this context describes two children who are lost; they are unaware of their identity and they get temporary fulfilment in fictitious stories. In the fictitious stories, Ajany inserts their longing to leave. She expresses the desire to leave through her paintings. They thus want to ‘disidentify’ themselves from the imagined siblings and relatives. Arrizon argues that characters disidentify themselves with what they don’t like (507). Since characters are dominated by everything with which they become identified, the character must dominate and control everything in order to disidentify themselves. Ajany and Odidi must therefore accept the fact that the imagined relations do not exist and if they do, they exist in their unknown past. To gain their sense of identity, therefore, Odidi and Ajany must disidentify themselves with these unknown siblings and relatives who belong to their imagined past and forge a future that does not include them.
While at university, Odidi identifies with historical characters like Fela Kuti, Thomas Sankara and Patrice Lumumba (10). He finds contentment in songs by the Nigerian musician Fela Kuti. John Dougan in “Fela Kuti’s Biography” describes Kuti as a political radical and outlaw who criticised corruption and oppression of the powerless worldwide. The contentment he gets from these songs portrays Odidi as a character who is liberalised. Some of Kuti’s songs which are described in Dust as “compacted with rage” (10) put Odidi at loggerheads with Nyipir. This leads to a fight where Odidi is beaten by Nyipir amid shouts that he can’t live in the songs of people who don’t know his name. As mentioned earlier, a character will disidentify with what he doesn’t like and, therefore, Odidi disidentifies himself with his father’s past and identifies himself with Kuti’s past. According to Nyipir, Odidi cannot identify with people whose past he is not related to; he can only identify with the past of his people. Since Kuti’s past is the one Odidi has chosen to identify with and it is disregarded by his father, he leaves home. By dissociating himself from his father’s past and by extension his [Odidi’s] past, he loses his identity.

Thomas Sankara is another historical character who Odidi wants to identify with. At the university Odidi had appointed himself Thomas Sankara’s heir. Sankara’s parents had wanted their son to be a priest but he had opted to be a military man. He had taken over presidency in Upper Volta after the coup in which the president, Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo, was overthrown. He had fought to eradicate corruption, and liquidate imperial domination. Sankara had then changed the county’s name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso meaning “land of upright people”. He was later assassinated in a coup led by one of his friends, Blaise Compaore, on 15th October 1987. This foreshadows the fact
that Odidi would be shot after being betrayed by his college friend and business partner. Appointing himself Sankara’s heir therefore means that Odidi’s character is formed through an understanding of the achievements and radical changes associated with Sankara. This historical figure has thus changed Odidi’s view of himself. He too wishes to revolutionise his reasoning, his colleague students and that of his father’s, and liberate himself. This creates antagonism between him and his father.

Odidi’s character is also shaped by Patrice Lumumba. At the university he wears non-prescription lenses like those worn by Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba was the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo from June to September 1960. Lumumba is described as a man of strong character who wanted to pursue his policies regardless of the enmity this would create. Born in the small Batetela ethnic group, he wanted a Congo that was not divided along ethnic or regional lines. Nyipir’s advice that Odidi should not live in the songs of people who did not know his name means that Nyipir is advocating for divisions along ethnic lines. This also means that Nyipir is prejudiced in his reasoning since he is only interested in the history of ‘his people’ unlike Odidi who is interested in learning and embracing the history of others. The chanting, “Aye, aye, aye… I no go agree make my brother hungry, make I no talk…” (10), indicates that Odidi does not support his father’s ethnic stance. Lumumba defined his short regime as a return to African values, and rejection of any imported ideology. A return to the African values means embracing African culture, and rejecting the imperialist’s culture. By so doing, the character would gain an identity which is informed by their past. When Odidi wears lenses which resembles Lumumba’s, therefore, it means that he has embraced his ideologies which advocated for nationalism.
The three historical characters; Fela Kuti, Thomas Sankara and Patrice Lumumba have one thing in common – moving against the mainstream forces to rebuild themselves and achieve their objectives. They also died at their prime age when their voice of revolution is being felt. Odidi tries to emulate them by going against his father’s beliefs and ideologies. He wants to forsake the past that is embraced by his father and forge a future which would make him come to terms with who he really is. Since the father’s reasoning is biased and is ethnically motivated, Odidi chooses to move away from this and diversifies his interaction with other people’s past. Embracing the past of these historical figures gives Odidi an identity, albeit temporarily because, as Nyipir says, they “don’t know his name”. This means that they don’t belong to the past which is embraced by his father. His choice for diversity is a form of defiance of his father’s reasoning and therefore his present is shaped by the past that is represented by his father. The diverse reasoning and embracing a past that is considered foreign by Nyipir is the source of the conflict between the past represented by his father and the past represented by these historical figures. Like the three figures who die prematurely, Odidi also dies young due to his liberalised ideological stance. Failure to embrace the collective past of his people has therefore made him lose his sense of belonging and this has consequently led to his death.

Before Odidi dies, he has made up his mind to go home. Odidi is away from home since he could not embrace the past to which his father belongs. He had freed himself from the past that the father had been holding onto, a past that did not give him contentment. As he runs away from his pursuers, memories of Wuoth Ogik are aroused. He thinks of his people reaching out for him, the cowbells, goats, mountains and Kormamaddo. He
reassures himself that he is going home. He thinks of his mother, Akai-ma whom he feels is able to wrestle God just for her son’s sake. He remembers his father’s words: “You can’t live in the songs of the people who don’t know your name” (6). All these remind him of the life he had lived in the past. He makes a decision to go home and protect his family. Kimberly Dovey in an article, “Home and Homelessness: An Introduction” defines home as a place where identity is continually evoked through connections with the past (6). Home represents Odidi’s roots and thus his past. Home is therefore portrayed as mythical, a physical and mental construction that defines a character. Home makes one to have a sense of self and identity (25). As he goes home, therefore, he is going back to the past he had wished to forget.

Odidi’s achievements as a rugby hero, his success and fame when he is at the university, and being an engineer do not make him contented. As an engineer, broken business contracts have led him to misery, and the misery leads him to Justina’s shack. When he is with Justina, his lover, he gets temporary contentment. As he runs to save his life, he is heading towards Justina’s shack, incidentally to protect her. The pain from the gun-shot wounds, the desire to protect Justina and his unborn child and the feelings of betrayal describe a character who has lost his sense of self. Rutherford posits that “If we cannot establish that sense of selfhood, only retreat and entrenchment are the viable alternatives to a schizophrenic and disturbed existence. Only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised – this is home, this is belonging” (24). The character therefore retreats to and gets entrenched in his past and this past can only be traced at home. Before Odidi dies, he has made a decision to return home to his
people. Home is where Odidi would belong since that is where he would reconnect with his past.

When Ajany meets Justina, Odidi’s lover, they want to talk about Odidi. Through this, they are interacting with the past represented by him, and they feel they belong together. Odidi therefore becomes a uniting force between Justina and Ajany. As they argue, Ajany claims that her brother was going home, a fact that Justina refutes (221). Justina argues that Odidi was in a better place in her shack. As discussed earlier, Odidi has left home after a fight with his father. Since the idea of home indicates a connection between a person and his past, he has thus dissociated himself from his past and therefore does not understand his parents’ past nor his own. Rutherford observes that younger generation characters who are unconscious of their collective and personal past lack a sense of belonging (24). Odidi does not understand his father’s past, meaning that he does not understand the past which would connect him to his people. He does not also understand his past which he has cut himself off from. He finds no meaning in that past and is therefore not attached to it. Justina’s shack is in the present and has no connection whatsoever with Odidi’s past. Therefore, as long as Odidi is in this shack, he will not gain his sense of identity.

Ajany argues that Odidi was an engineer and a sports person. In Justina’s shack, he had kept his rugby ball and some Springbok player’s signature in a wooden cupboard (197). These remind him of his heroic achievements in school. According to Justina these achievements did not make Odidi happy. As long as Odidi’s present is not interlinked to the past, his present situation does not give him comfort and contentment.
Odidi who completely cut the links between him and his parents, and between him and his home, dies a discontented character. His future which lecturers at the university describe as promising, his heroism in rugby, his profession as an engineer and a would-be happy family between him and Justina come to an abrupt end. This is a result of detaching himself from the past which would have shaped his identity. Failure to embrace his past has therefore led to the loss of his sense of identity and consequently his death.

3.2 Ajany and Isaiah’s character formation and sense of belonging

Ajany is born in a hostile environment. Akai had emotionally detached herself from the unborn child after she had learnt that she was expectant. When Ajany is born, her mother does not give her a name believing that the baby would die. Ajany, therefore has no identity according to her mother. This explains why Akai refers to Ajany as “that one” (75). When Akai later leaves her to die, Ajany is saved from death by Odidi and Galgalu. Saving Ajany from the jaws of death is described to have taken place “once upon a time, long, long ago” (9). This indicates an indefinite time in the past. From this time in the past, Ajany had grown closely attached to Odidi. She feels secure in his presence. She trusts him and feels that he can solve all her problems. At school she gains her sense of belonging when Odidi succeeds in rugby. Her former schoolmates describe her in relation to her brother – the sister of Odidi ‘Shifta the Winger’ (175). Ajany therefore identifies herself with Odidi.

Ajany understands the past about her birth when it is narrated to her by her mother, as discussed in Chapter Two. Dan P. McAdams in an article “Narrative Identity” argues that an evolving story of a person’s past helps to explain how a person came to be and where her life is heading. According to him, the character forms an identity by internalizing the
evolving story thus gaining a sense of unity and purpose in life. Gergen argues that lived narratives and emotional expressions are essential in determining a character’s identity (11). Ajany’s character is formed through an understanding of the past that is narrated to her by her mother. She understands why her mother does not recognise her as her child, and the close-knit relationship that exists between her and Odidi.

When the past surrounding Ajany’s birth is narrated to her by Akai, she [Akai] overlooks the bitterness surrounding the birth and she is able to embrace her. She can even call her by name, Arabel Ajany (354). Benedicta Windt-Val in an article ‘Personal Names and Identity in Literary Contexts’ states that a person’s name gives him a sense of identity and self. He further argues that the choice of a name influences the development of the personality of the child. Ajany feels the warmth of her name from her mother’s voice. The name had been given by Odidi and Galgalu after they saved her when Akai had left her to die. Understanding the origin of her name is equivalent to understanding a part of her past. She understands why Akai has never referred to her by her name. Since to name something is to bring it to life (35), when Akai refers to her using the name Arabel Ajany, the name gives Ajany comfort and she comes to terms with who she is in relation to her name. The name also gives her an understanding of whom she is in relation to her mother. The narrated story of Ajany’s past has thus given her contentment. The name becomes Ajany’s new acquired identity.

The red cave is a forbidden place for Ajany and Odidi. The cave, referred to as the cave of memory, holds memories of the past since it is in this cave that Hugh Bolton’s body had been kept by Akai and Nyipir. Odidi and Ajany’s curiosity arouses the desire to understand what is in the cave. Their search for answers to questions regarding their past
begins when they find a skull and other human bones in the cave. As mentioned earlier, after the visit to the cave, Odidi becomes a sports star and Ajany gains self-confidence while among her colleagues in school since she reflects in her brother’s glory (14). The red cave unearths a part of their past which had been concealed from them. This past has thus transformed the character of Ajany. Her life in the school changes because she is left in peace by her schoolmates who looked down on her.

Despite Ajany’s willingness to untie herself from the past, there is too much pressure within her to understand and reconnect with it. Dust describes her as having been exhausted by the mysteries of her life, confusing answers, bad dreams, drowning in unknown sensations and accumulation of silences (277). Failure to understand her past is a source of conflict within herself. She describes her father as standing “where the outside world separated itself from the inside melee” (49). Her father, who represents the past, is thus portrayed as an impediment to Ajany’s understanding of this past which is concealed in oaths of silence. She is thus surrounded by mysteries of the past. The conflicting desire to understand the past, and to run away from it, is a source of her inner confusion.

The desire to unravel the mystery surrounding Odidi’s death is a yearning to understand the past represented by him. Memories of Odidi, belong to Ajany’s past. She goes to the morgue where she and her father had collected Odidi’s body. “The corroding wire of the padlocked gate cuts into Ajany’s fingers”. She wishes she would climb over the gate and “never have to return to this side again” (278). The undisclosed past makes her uncertain about who she really is. The desire to understand this past psychologically tortures her. She is therefore in search of any facts that would reveal it to her. The corroding wire
symbolises a past that is gradually being ‘eaten up’ by the silences and mysteries. The more Ajany delves into it, the more it hurts her. Hurt by the desire to gain her sense of belonging, the other side of the gate may mean that she longs for death. Death would relieve her of the pain of searching for her sense of belonging. The other side of the gate may also represent her past, which is concealed through silences. Her death would mean that she has been overwhelmed by the mysteries of the past and thus she has lost the battle just like Odidi. Alternatively, when she gets to the other side of the gate, she will be connected with her past.

Unable to gain access to the other side, Ajany is overwhelmed by memories. She hears echoes of the desert; she sees herself before a red cave’s entrance; she thinks about Obarogo. She is standing by a road side, seeing herself inside Odidi’s eyes. She feels Odidi as a flame without light. This gives her ‘painful joy’ (279). The red cave, Obarogo, the desert songs and Odidi are memories of her past that haunt her. The entrance of the red cave ushers her into the mysterious world of her past. The memories evoke a sense of warmth and happiness. The flame without light and the painful joy paradoxically explain her inner struggle to either embrace the past or dissociate herself from the same past. The painful joy can also be interpreted to mean the feeling of contentment that she gets when she comes to terms with her past.

Ajany’s desire to understand the root cause of Odidi’s death takes her to her father’s old friend, Petrus. She does not accept the fact that Odidi is dead. She is carrying a poster with Odidi’s portrait. Ajany wonders if it is wrong to build a bridge into Odidi’s underworld. The bridge is the passageway that connects her to the past represented by Odidi. She carries the past, represented by Odidi’s portrait, with her. Petrus sympathises
with her and tells her that she will find no truth in his office that would set her free (182). The truth, which translates to an understanding of the past regarding Odidi’s death, would give Ajany a sense of closure. Since Odidi is dead, he exists only in Ajany’s mind. Petrus advises her to go home. Home evokes a reconnection with one’s past. The search for the past in Petrus’ office will not give Ajany a sense of belonging.

Ajany uses painting as a way of coming to terms with her present. *Dust* describes music and painting as a way of cancelling memories (14). At the time Ajany and Odidi are in school, the problems and suffering in the northern land are temporarily forgotten during the annual school music festivals. Through painting, she finds a new way of expressing what she has been battling with (51). She paints the past the way she understands it. Since Ajany and Odidi do not understand their past, they create their own past through narration of fictitious stories. Odidi reminds her that every crevice in the painting contains a story and every story pointed north. North represents the direction of their home. Through the painting, Ajany hopes to find her way home (43). Since home is where she would reconnect with her past, she would get her sense of belonging and acquire her identity. Through painting therefore, the untold story would make her discover herself.

Rutherford observes that one thinks of identity when in a crisis, and when one thinks that everything is settled, doubt and uncertainty arise (43). Ajany comes to terms with her past when she paints. She puts her parents’ memories and the untold secrets into painting expecting to be showered with praises by her parents. When reprimanded by her parents, she almost gives up. She is therefore in a state of confusion until Odidi encourages her to “paint a river out of Wuoth Ogik. Then paint an ocean and a ship, me and you going Far
Away (52).” The tidal waves and the rhythmic movement of the ocean represent their journey out of Wuoth Ogik. Moving away from Wuoth Ogik means that they are dissociating themselves from their past. The course of the river symbolises the route they would take from Wuoth Ogik, their past. The ocean is a symbol of vastness. The vastness of the ocean indicates that they want to free themselves from an identity that is only attached to their past, and forge a new identity that has no limitations. By going far away, therefore, they would be going in search of a new identity.

In Ajany’s search for autonomy, she moves to Brazil. She had earlier been advised by Odidi to choose where she wished to live. She chooses to leave Wuoth Ogik but Odidi chooses to remain to “live out a belonging he had become accustomed to” (15). Ajany’s choice to leave arises from a discontentment in her present state. She feels that Wuoth Ogik does not give her a sense of belonging and therefore she hopes to establish an identity in a new environment. She has thus moved from the generational identity, that is, the identity acquired through the past represented by her parents. As mentioned earlier, she realises herself through painting but while in Brazil, she does not paint until she is called by Odidi and is encouraged to continue painting. Whenever she is painting, she revisits the memories of the cave which give shape to her drawing. She continues painting and filling the missing details in the skull they had found in the cave as a way of reconnecting to her past. When she receives the news of Odidi’s death, she leaves a half-finished sculpture in her Brazil studio (61). The half-finished sculpture indicates that she does not succeed in establishing an identity by moving to Brazil. It is thus clear that no matter how far she moves away from her past in search of a new identity, it will not be forthcoming. She goes back to Wuoth Ogik where she is able to fill in the details of the
skull using Hugh Bolton’s photograph she gets from Isaiah. By moving from Wuoth Ogik to Brazil, she had thought she would cut herself off from her unclear past and acquire a new identity. Back home, she realises that the un-an answered questions still remain; her past remains a mystery. She starts afresh, digging into her past in order to get answers to this mysterious past. It is only in Wuoth Ogik, that the mystery surrounding this past can be unravelled. Home is where she is going to acquire a sense of herself because she will reconnect with her past.

When Akai tries to shoot Ajany, Ajany says she can paint this and also paint the ‘nothing’. She then “twists her neck to glance at the purpling sky. Not trusting thought. Finding nothing to trust. In that moment, she stops waiting to be born. She is willing to re-enter her half-death, aches for fire that may return her to silences” (37). In this context, ‘nothing’ symbolises the gap represented by the information concealed by the parents who would rather retain the painful history than reveal it to their daughter. The painful history includes the mystery surrounding her birth, and the grudge that Akai holds against her. This is coupled with the fact that Odidi, Akai’s favourite child is dead. Ajany does not understand her past since the painful history is concealed in silence. She awaits the time when this past would be revealed to her so that she can understand who she really is. With her mother’s rejection and the surrounding silence, Ajany is embittered and becomes confused. Her willingness to return to her half-death state explains her desire to free herself from the bonds that kept her chained to a past she did not understand. She is thus seeking autonomy by dissociating herself from her parents’ past and forging a new beginning.
Apart from painting, Ajany is contented when dancing. *Dust* describes music and painting as a way of bandaging soul-holes (14). Music and painting would thus relieve the character of the painful indefinite yearning for an understanding of the past. Music, as a work of art makes her believe that all is well. “The DJ mixes in some Hi-Life. She finds the present….She finds Kormamaddo the sky camel. Tears. She must return to Wuoth Ogik” (248). Hi-life is defined in Encyclopaedia Britannica as music which incorporated elements of local music traditions and jazz. The Hi-life music which started in the 20th century was a marriage of African, African-American and European musical aesthetics. The music gives her temporary contentment. Tears symbolise discontentment and a strong yearning for the past. The Hi-Life music, therefore arouses memories of the past. Kormamando is the name of the camel that Ali Dida Hada had given to Akai in exchange for a herder’s job. He had done this to disguise himself since he had come to carry out investigations of Hugh Bolton’s whereabouts. As discussed earlier, the song of Kormamaddo is a kind of an invocation of the past. Ajany had overheard Ali Dida Hada teaching Odidi the songs. Kormamaddo symbolises the past and since the songs were taught in Wuoth Ogik, Ajany is nostalgic about this past. At Wuoth Ogik, she hopes to reconnect with her past.

Ajany gets contented when she dances to the tunes of the music of the yesteryears. When she dances, there is no dread in her, she is not lost and feels no absence (200). After she dances till morning, she is described thus:

Ajany slumbers through the morning, still savouring yesterday, which was the opposite of limbo. Yesterday she discovered was Far Away. Yesterday she discovered that the tendrils wrapped around her body had loosened and she had lost the will to tie herself up in them (201).
Ajany is in conflict with herself since she wants to understand her past, which haunts her, and run away from it at the same time. She dissociates herself from her past and intends to forge a future which is not tied to this past. The past represented by ‘Yesterday’, can only shape the present but cannot be clung to since it is ‘far away’ and she does not understand it. The tendrils symbolise an attachment to the past and since they are wrapped around her body, they represent her desire to understand and embrace this past. The loosened tendrils mean that the past she has been attached to is gradually losing meaning in her life. The desire to embrace this past is a form of enslavement which she has to detach herself from. An understanding of the past should assist in shaping the present. She should hence forge a future that has been shaped by this past.

At the age of eighteen Odidi finds Akai’s painting tucked in the inner pages of a book which contains Hugh Bolton’s signature (10). The painting is described as glued into the page by age. Hugh Bolton had forced Akai, who was expectant at the time, to strip in the rain and he had painted her. This had infuriated Nyipir and he had sworn to protect Akai whenever she was mistreated by Hugh Bolton. Nyipir later shoots Hugh Bolton in order to save Akai who is about to be murdered by Hugh Bolton. He then gets intimate with Akai who becomes a source of embarrassment to him since she keeps disappearing. When asked about the painting by Isaiah, Nyipir is bitter because it arouses bitter memories of a past he would rather forget. As long as the painting is glued in the book, it conceals the relationship that had existed between Akai and Hugh. The past represented by the painting has thus been mutely guarded because if the past is revealed, it may be shameful. Just like the historical facts that are concealed in oaths of silence, the knowledge of circumstances surrounding the painting are retained in the minds of those
who witnessed it being painted: Akai and Nyipir. The nude image of Akai in the painting, and the signature of Hugh Bolton in the book where the painting is found, arouse Ajany and Isaiah’s desire to interrogate the relationship that existed between Akai and Hugh Bolton, and the relationship between Hugh Bolton and Nyipir’s house. When Odidi sends the book which bears Hugh Bolton’s signature and the painting to Isaiah, Isaiah’s interest in finding his father is aroused. This brings him to Kenya “to retrieve the first ghost…to bring it home” (31). Since Hugh Bolton’s name exists in Isaiah’s past, the ghost is a mental representation of his past. A search for the ghost means a search for his past which will shape his identity. Later, when the painting is exposed, Ajany and Isaiah learn the truth about the painting and they come to terms with the past that had been concealed from them.

Hugh Bolton is the only link between Isaiah and Oganda’s family. The desire in Ajany, Isaiah and Odidi to understand the kind of a relationship that existed between Hugh and Akai (the nude woman in Hugh’s paintings) is a desire to unravel the past and gain their sense of identity. The circumstances surrounding the relationship that existed between Hugh Bolton and Akai is retained in the mind of Akai and Nyipir. Therefore Odidi, Ajany and Isaiah do not understand why Akai’s nude image forms part of Hugh Bolton’s art. Nyipir is so bitter when Isaiah asks him if he knew the woman in Hugh’s painting (125). Isaiah later learns that the woman in the painting is Akai. He probes Nyipir further, and Nyipir is quick to clarify that at that time she was not his (Nyipir’s) wife. The painting reveals that Akai is pregnant at the time she is being painted but Nyipir refuses to tell Isaiah if there was a child between Hugh Bolton and Akai. Isaiah had earlier been unable to tell Ajany from Akai. When he learns that the relationship between Akai and
Hugh Bolton had taken place before she was married to Nyipir, Isaiah tells Ajany that he is able to tell the difference between Ajany and Akai. He had probably thought that Ajany is the baby Akai was expecting at the time she was being painted. His contemptuous attitude towards Ajany and the entire family changes. This gives Isaiah a new understanding of the Oganda’s family and consequently a new understanding of himself.

Galgalu sends Isaiah to Ajany who would tell him everything. She, like Isaiah is lost and is searching for an answer that would reveal the past to her. They are thus two characters who belong to the present and are frantically searching for any information that would make them understand their past and consequently gain their sense of belonging. Isaiah will therefore not get any assistance from Ajany. They are both not contented with their present status and do not fit in the past where Nyipir and Galgalu belong. To have a sense of themselves they must learn about the past which edifies their present selves, embrace it and forge a future which is independent from the same past. Their forged future exists in a space between the newly acquired knowledge about their past and the present which has not given them contentment. In this space their new identity is hybrid, because it is independent of, but attached to their past and their present.

The inquisitive Isaiah does not get the answer he is searching for from Ajany. She insists she knows nothing; she does not also understand the past. The thought of talking about the red cave makes her wonder how she is going to relate it to Wuoth Ogik. She would also be forced to imagine how the skull got into the cave and who it belongs to. Ajany does not understand the relationship between the red cave (which is a source of her past) and Isaiah’s past. Talking about the cave would be failing to honour Odidi’s wish that they should keep quiet (266). The past thus dictates that she remains silent and Isaiah will
thus not understand this past. Just like the past which is concealed in oaths of silence by Nyipir and others who lived through it, she also conceals the past knowledge about the red cave through silence. This past therefore does not help Isaiah in acquiring an identity.

Isaiah’s search for the man he thought was his father takes him to Ali Dida Hada’s office. He has been directed to Ali Dida Hada’s office by Galgalu who feels that he holds the secret to Isaiah’s past. Ali Dida Hada had investigated Hugh Bolton’s case. The missing father in this case could be interpreted to mean the missing past which Isaiah wants to identify with. Since the formation of a character is shaped by his past, and the present has traces of the past, an understanding of this past makes Isaiah come to terms with his present self.

Isaiah uses Hugh Bolton’s books and paintings as documented historical evidence. He believes that the books, art and the house indicate that Hugh Bolton was there (215). Isaiah’s presentation of the nude woman’s painting to Ali Dida Hada makes the latter feel guilty that he could not unearth the riddle behind Hugh Bolton’s disappearance even with such glaring evidence. According to Isaiah, the painting links Hugh Bolton to the woman. His life can therefore be understood by Isaiah through the scanty information he gets from his ‘father’s’ books and art work. The mutely guarded facts about the relationship between Akai and Hugh Bolton are a hindrance to Isaiah’s understanding of his past. His quest to understand this past is driven by a desire to reconnect with and embrace it so that he could attain a sense of self. Galgalu tells Isaiah that he opens quiet graves and advises him that the dead might also look for him if he does not leave (133). This means that he brings back painful memories of the past and this past will also torment him. For his part, Isaiah says he cannot leave without talking to Nyipir. By talking to Nyipir he
wants to understand his past. Galgalu warns him that he might die if he does not leave. He is scared when death is mentioned because he is far away from home. Death signifies the end of an earnest search of his past that has borne no fruit. He will thus not understand his past which would reveal who he is. Far away from home means that too much which would make him understand his past is lacking.

Hugh Bolton exists in the memory of Akai and Nyipir. Ajany and Odidi know of his existence when they see his name and signature in the books in their house. When they enquire from their parents, Hugh Bolton is referred to as ‘someone else’ (54). Nyipir’s family thus distances itself from Hugh Bolton’s existence. Isaiah Bolton, bumps into Ajany as he comes to Wuoth Ogik in search of Odidi. When Nyipir learns of Isaiah’s presence, he is frightened and declares that Isaiah would get no help in that house. This means that the past which Isaiah hopes to understand and identify himself with would not be forthcoming. This is because nobody is willing to answer the numerous questions he is asking concerning his ‘father’ and the relationship between Hugh Bolton and Akai. He has to piece together the little information he gets from whichever source in order to understand the past. He has come to Wuoth Ogik to look for his father; a father who only exists in his memory. A search for the father symbolises a desire to understand his past and hence come to terms with his identity. Nyipir does not welcome him and scolds him when he is unable to pronounce the name Wuoth Ogik. Failure to pronounce the name emphasizes the fact that Isaiah is different from Nyipir and his family, that is, they don’t share the same past. The name Wuoth Ogik, meaning where the journeys end, was Nyipir’s idea. After eliminating Hugh Bolton, Nyipir had possessed his land and house. He had also taken Akai who had preferred Hugh Bolton instead of him. The presence of
Isaiah is, therefore, not welcome as this would be reopening the scars of the past. He thus feels offended since the intended meaning of Wuoth Ogik is not achieved with the wrong pronunciation of the name; the journey to his struggle has not come to the end yet as long as Isaiah is present. Failure to pronounce the name too, indicates that Isaiah does not belong to the past represented by Wuoth Ogik.

Without a knowledge of his past, Isaiah’s only identity is the fact that he is “English” (214). This fact does not give him contentment since his ‘Englishness’ is questionable too. He thus has no identity until he understands his past. When he learns of the past he has been searching for about his father, he feels that he has gained a sense of belonging although the ‘father’ is dead. He thinks of the dead ‘father’ and reflects and defines himself through him. This is temporary because the coming back of Akai brings back memories of his childhood. Akai tells him that Hugh was not his father. Isaiah thinks of the many glances the relatives had stolen at him. He was darker than the other family members. Petrus Keah, Ali’s colleague, describes him as a funny English man. He says Isaiah does not look English (214). Justina too contends that Isaiah does not look English (247). His mother had described his skin colour as a “Throwback gene. Your great grandfather was a Hindu” (332). Selene’s mother had said Isaiah was “not as English-looking as he could be” (333). Isaiah gets confused and is not sure what to believe. He therefore has to forge a future that is independent of the past; a past that has placed him at crossroads.

When Nyipir decides to tell Isaiah about Hugh Bolton, he uses the analogy of the lake. Nyipir had asked the boatman how the latter found his way while in the lake. The boatman had replied that to find the way one should ask his eyes to guide him. The
boatman had later said: “Go to the beginning. Every lake holds the memory of its mother, it is to her it strives to return, imagining roads that we follow home” (292). The beginning represents the past. The rhythm and movement of water represents movement in space and time. The movement of the lake would thus take him to the beginning. The past holds the secrets to one’s origin and it is there that one’s search for identity begins. Nyipir tells Isaiah that he (Isaiah) is in Wuoth Ogik because that is where Hugh Bolton is. Hugh Bolton had built the house in Wuoth Ogik for Selene, Isaiah’s mother. In addition to this, Hugh Bolton’s bones are still in Wuoth Ogik. Isaiah’s beginning is thus in Wuoth Ogik.

When Nyipir buries Hugh Bolton’s skeleton, Isaiah feels that he should unearth the bones and request for a forensic investigation. Isaiah is still concerned about how Hugh Bolton met his death. He says his ‘father’s’ bones could answer the numerous questions he has. The bones are the tangible evidence of the past, a past which remains concealed in silence by those who understood it. This explains why Nyipir insists on carrying Hugh Bolton’s bones alone (270); they are a reminder of the past which he does not intend to reveal to Isaiah. Isaiah feels that the forensic investigation will reveal to him a fact he has not yet understood. By conducting a forensic investigation, he is digging into the past so that he could understand it. Isaiah believes that Hugh Bolton is his biological father. Isaiah’s past is represented by Hugh Bolton. This is the past which shapes his character and identity. Since Hugh is dead, Isaiah must forge a future that is independent of Hugh.

Before Isaiah comes to Wuoth Ogik, he is surrounded by emptiness even in the presence of Raulfe, his stepfather. When he learns that his ‘father’ is dead, he invokes his mother’s name and says he is weeping for and with Selene. As for Raulfe, Isaiah feels that he (Raulfe) could not measure up to a ghost. To the mother, Hugh Bolton belongs to the
past. This past, she said, has been erased from her mind. To Isaiah, Hugh Bolton exists only as a name in his memory. Raulfe belongs to Isaiah’s present; the present does not make him contented. He yearns for the past which he feels will create in him a sense of belonging. This explains why he demands for his “truest daddy” (90). Until then, he remains the “nocturnal character of exile, the incessant darkness of no-place-ness” (153).

According to Isaiah, Raulfe is insignificant. Hugh Bolton, who Isaiah considers his truest daddy is more important to him even in death. The ghost which Isaiah feels is worth than Raulfe represents Hugh Bolton whom Isaiah has never met. Living in exile and in darkness of no-place-ness means that he has not acquired his sense of identity.

The trader advises Ali Dida Hada to look for Hugh Bolton in Wuoth Ogik since such a house “would know about wazungu” (238). Hugh Bolton had built the coral house in Wuoth Ogik for Selene, Isaiah’s mother. The house and the books in the library are therefore part of Isaiah’s past. In Wuoth Ogik, he feels the presence of his parents. By interacting with the house and the books, Isaiah imagines that he is interacting with his parents, hence his past. The books are said to reveal destinations (14). They thus lead him to what he considers as his ‘father’s’ entity. These books also remind him of his past since they connect him with his ‘father’. Isaiah “can salvage sanity” (107) from these books. Salvaging sanity in this context means that Isaiah will get a sense of identity in this house.

In the house, Isaiah:

“sits on a dust-dotted sisal mat, and draws up his knees. He invokes his mother Selene. I’m here….Traces squiggles in margins, mountains, water, trees, and stick figures, feeling for messages, imagining warmth. He has brought books to his nose and thought he detected a whiff of old cigar smoke. Brushing fingers on
black fountain-pen strokes, lingering on a twisted old-fashioned “g”, imagining that he was touching his father’s hand” (72-3).

The imagined warmth provided by the ‘parents’ presence’ indicates that Isaiah has become contented. This is because he has identified himself with what he considers to be his past. Hugh’s signatures on the books make Isaiah convinced that he is in his ‘father’s’ house. He has therefore attained a sense of belonging. Despite the feeling that he belongs there, Isaiah needs someone to talk to about his father. He still needs to be assured by someone else that he belongs there.

A tinge of jealousy can be detected in the tone of what Dust describes as senses (284). Isaiah wonders “how outsiders who fall out of life and end up here imagine they are the first to have ever done so” (284). In Isaiah’s feelings, Ali Dida Hada and the others like Nyipir proudly possess Wuoth Ogik as if they are the original inhabitants but they are ignorant of the fact that Hugh Bolton had trudged on the same ground. Isaiah has thus possessed ‘his father’s’ house and items which connect him to ‘his father’. As Nyipir moves into his room and sees Hugh Bolton’s leering face, he feels like he no longer belongs there. Nyipir thinks of Burma, his father and brother – his past. (291). Isaiah on the other hand is sleeping and is thus portrayed as contented while in the house. Weeks observes that identity is about belonging and having a sense of personal location and is fundamental to a character’s stable individuality (88). Wuoth Ogik represents the past and in this house, Nyipir is losing his sense of belonging while Isaiah acquires his. He wants to sit in the house, jealously guarding his father’s things (286). He thus possesses his past which gives him contentment.

Isaiah portrays a keen interest when the trader tells him of his oldest longing. Isaiah interprets this to mean the longing to understand his past. The trader tells Isaiah that
Hugh Bolton had been close to Nyipir’s home. Dovey points out that home, which is a symbol of the past, reflects and shapes the identity of its inhabitants. The trader’s words peel away the scars, thus opening the secret wounds (106). This is because after the death of Hugh Bolton, Nyipir had possessed what the former had owned but when the trader directs Isaiah to Nyipir’s house, he revives the past that Nyipir had chosen to forget. The trader further advises Isaiah not to trade in a name (87). As mentioned earlier, a person’s sense of identity and self are related to his name. The name Bolton is the only connection between Isaiah and Hugh Bolton. The home, which is a representative of the past, and Hugh Bolton’s name, therefore shape Isaiah’s identity.

In a sarcastic remark, Nyipir calls Hugh Bolton’s new home Wuoth Ogik meaning “the journey ends” (316). Nyipir had become weary of the tireless, endless journeys he had made with Hugh Bolton. Hugh Bolton’s new home meant a new beginning for him but for Nyipir, the tireless journeys were coming to an end. In Wuoth Ogik, Nyipir had shot Hugh Bolton. The death of Hugh Bolton automatically brings the journeys to an abrupt end. After Hugh Bolton’s death, Nyipir and Akai had kept his body in the cave but Nyipir had later retrieved his bones and buried them next to Odidi. Hugh’s journey therefore ends in Wuoth Ogik. Odidi’s final journey also ends at Wuoth Ogik. He has been coming home when he was shot dead. His remains are finally brought to Wuoth Ogik for burial.

The home holds all the mystery that surrounds Ajany’s and Isaiah’s past. When Ajany tells Odidi she wants to go to Canada, he tells her they belong there: at Wuoth Ogik. This is their home where their past can be unravelled. It is at Wuoth Ogik that Ajany learns about her past; the past which is released to her in bits. It is at Wuoth Ogik that Isaiah’s tormenting journey of trying to find his father ends when Nyipir reveals to him that Hugh
Bolton is dead. Looking for his father has been equivalent to searching for his sense of belonging. Before coming to Wuoth Ogik, he believes that Hugh Bolton is his father. At Wuoth Ogik, Isaiah learns from Akai that Hugh Bolton is not his biological father. He also understands how Akai’s nude photo found its way into Hugh Bolton’s past. This is the past he has been searching for and which brings him to Kenya. Therefore, Ajany and Isaiah’s journey in search of their past ends in Wuoth Ogik. They choose to detach themselves from this past and they set out in search of a new beginning. Their new sense of self is thus shaped by the knowledge of this past.

Ajany’s stream of consciousness takes her back to her past which is occupied by Ewoi, Etir, Odidi, her parents and Hugh Bolton. She becomes conscious of the past represented by Ewoi and Etir when it is narrated to her by her mother. She also thinks about Kormamaddo. She learns that Wuoth Ogik did not belong to her father and therefore she should detach herself from it. This is the time she realises “she has lost her home to Isaiah…to its true heir. Homelessness is where Far Away is” (353). She had grown attached to this home and this is where she had connected to her past. The fact that Wuoth Ogik does not belong to her father makes her feel that she is being disconnected with the past which has been shaping her sense of self. Homelessness therefore translates to a state of disillusionment where she must reconstruct herself in order to become contented. The knowledge about her past that she has gained in Wuoth Ogik is the force that drives her to search for a new self away from the same past. To gain her lost sense of self, she must forge a new beginning so as acquire her identity.

Bernardo, Ajany’s former lover, argues that her madness is not African enough (140). Peter, the taxi driver, also tells Ajany that she doesn’t look like she is from Northern
Kenya (141). This has happened to Isaiah too. According to his grandmother, he does not look as English as he should. Their looks therefore betray them. Their looks are indicative of their past which has its roots in their parentage. They acquired hybrid identities from their birth; Ajany’s mother and father are from different ethnic backgrounds; the mother is a Turkana while her father is a Luo and Isaiah’s mother is English while his biological father, his mother’s former servant, is an African. Their parentage represents a past they have not yet come to terms with. If they understand this past, they would embrace it and be comfortable with who they really are.

Akai’s story to Ali Dida Hada foreshadows the coming together of Ajany and Isaiah: “The lion and the fox went to live together. They put their flocks together and went on a journey until they got to a place that they liked and where they built their hut…” (242). Both Isaiah and Ajany are surrounded by mysteries about their past. ‘Flocks’ would thus symbolise these mysteries and Isaiah and Ajany embark on a journey in search for an understanding of who they really are. Isaiah hopes to have a conversation with Ajany. He wants to ask her about Wuoth Ogik “finish things so that they could return to their lives in peace” (249). This would mean that the enmity existing in the past from the time of their parents is forgotten and the two forge a future together.

In their first intimate encounter after a physical confrontation, Isaiah’s whispering to Ajany’s mouth is described as a search for light (251). Light would mean that he understands his past and consequently gets a sense of belonging. The moment of intimacy arouses Isaiah’s memory:

Slow-motion memory patchwork, the times in his life when disbelief was like certainty, illusion had become real. Once upon a time, when he was failing and
being abandoned he had run and screamed and howled a name. Then limped home to wait for normal to return. It never came (251-2).

If to name something is to bring it back to life (35), then screaming and howling out a name means that Isaiah had thought that his past (represented by once upon a time) would give him a meaning of who he is. Since Isaiah is abandoned, he goes home (to reconnect with his past) expecting that normalcy would return but it doesn’t. He thus does not understand who he is. His home in England where his mother had lived with Raulfe did not give him an identity and thus he left; moving away in search for his sense of belonging.

Ajany’s and Isaiah’s moment of intimacy too reminds them of their past. Ajany remembers Odidi and Isaiah wonders when the dead will stop haunting her. They are described thus “They will grope secrets, share their unanswered questions and infinite presences” (253). By so doing they are inquiring into their past since their present is a void. They then find peace within themselves. Their ‘outside’ is metaphorically described:

Outside, a small wind and shards of washed-out red light. Outside, a cracked lamp attempts to cast out light. Outside, a huge moth with feathered black wings immolates itself on glass-covered light bulbs” (254).

The small wind is sweeping away their yearned for yet unknown past. The cracked lamp could be interpreted to mean an opening which is leading to the realisation of their identity. Light represents contentment and an acquiring of their sense of belonging. Moth, on one hand, represents maturity meaning they are making progress in their search for identity. On the other hand, the moth that immolates itself symbolises death. This compares to the dying coral house in Wuoth Ogik. At the time they think they have gained their identity after understanding their past, they realise that they cannot live in the
past they have been searching for even though it makes them comfortable after realising who they are. They have to forge a new beginning. They thus have to leave the burning house in Wuoth Ogik and build their hut as Akai tells Ali Dida Hada in the story mentioned above. Isaiah has the title deed indicating that he is the true heir of Wuoth Ogik and had sworn to rebuild a legacy for Hugh Bolton. Though they are leaving, they are bound to Wuoth Ogik and therefore, as they venture into a new world of their own, they will be attached to the place that has shaped their present.

In another moment of intimacy, Ajany and Isaiah find peace in and from one another. At first they take a long route through the city centre. This explains the struggle they have gone through before they learn about their past. Ajany wants to stay lost while Isaiah has nowhere else to go. They then sit together like two lost children, holding hands and hoping to be found. Being lost means that they have not realised their sense of identity. When they get intimate, the difference in their skin colour does not seem to count. They are described as engrossed with each other “crushing spaces of distance, the limits of skin….Entangled, secured, and warm, they both sleep once” (280). They become comfortable while in each other’s company. The feeling of acceptance from each other makes them feel that they belong together.

They are ‘found’ when they learn the truth about their past. Isaiah, having learnt that he might not be Hugh Bolton’s biological son refers to himself as an impostor. He reminds Ajany about Bernardo, her former lover. Bernardo belongs to a past that is “still lodged somewhere inside her” (357). Bernardo is a past that still haunts her. Isaiah’s presence makes Ajany to forget about Bernardo; Bernardo’s odour fades away and she scrubs what persists (254). This means that the past represented by Bernardo has been replaced by the
present represented by Isaiah. She says she had lived with Bernardo in Bahia “to get lost” (267). Through interacting with Bernardo that she was running away from realities of her life (when she could not get a sense of belonging). When she could neither be happy nor get her contentment while in his presence, she murders him. She had earlier been warned by Odidi to leave Bernardo but she had claimed she loved him (223). For Ajany to settle her identity, this past represented by Bernardo must be replaced by a more meaningful present. When Ajany and Isaiah entangle and Bernardo is replaced by Isaiah, he tells her there is nothing more to run away from. This is because they have understood their past and they have discovered themselves together.

When the past is emptied to Ajany by Akai, the departure begins with Akai bidding her daughter farewell. Ajany must thus disentangle herself from the past, represented by her mother. Isaiah shows Ajany the title deed for Wuoth Ogik. She asks him: “Will you learn the faces of our stones or the passageway of old footsteps and repeat the prayers of our earth-covered dead? …May I still visit Odidi here?” (356). Ajany wonders if Isaiah will understand and preserve the history of this land, and if this history would be of any significance to him. The dead, including Odidi, are part of her past which haunt her present. She hopes that Isaiah will be able to preserve her past so that she can be revisiting it whenever she wishes. It is at Wuoth Ogik where her past has been born and her present and future depends on this past; the past that has shaped her present and future.

The moment of departure from Wuoth Ogik comes and all the characters are leaving. Wuoth Ogik symbolises the past and therefore this departure means dis-engaging from the obsession with the past and embracing the present. When Akai narrates the past to
Ajany, she leaves assuring her that stories remain (355). Since stories are a narration of the past, they would share more when they met. Sharing more when they meet indicates that as they are leaving, the past has not been fully revealed to Ajany and it will remain in their memory. This past and the present are inseparable. The present has been shaped by the knowledge of the past and the burning of the house means the past has been appeased.

As Nyipir is leaving, he gives his daughter a safety-deposit notebook and advises her to begin something new, which belongs to her (361). Leaving the old means accepting the past and forging the future. This means she gets a new identity arising from an understanding of her past. The picture she is advised by her father to paint about them would be a constant reminder of what her past was. To retain the memory of her father’s past, she gives him a sketchbook with Theophilus and Agoro and a photograph of Odidi. She says that the sketchbook and the photo represent the departed Agoro men together and who, according to her, belong to the past. Ajany therefore appeases the father with the past while she reshapes her identity from this past.

Isaiah traces his past in Wuoth Ogik, specifically in the Oganda house – a house which is dying (284). The house is creaking; the empty water tank in the house is groaning, and the gate is described as falling. The questions that have been holding Isaiah’s life are described as gathering under the shadow of the coral house. So much information about Isaiah’s past has been concealed within the four walls of the house. Isaiah watches light make patterns on the house’s disintegrating walls (294). The dying house describe a revelation of history which had been concealed in the coral house. He has understood that Hugh Bolton is dead and that Hugh Bolton is not his biological father. He has also understood the relationship that existed between Akai and Hugh Bolton, and why Hugh
Bolton’s books are in the house. Light therefore, symbolises a revelation and an understanding of the past he has been yearning for. The mystery surrounding his past is thus solved through an understanding of this past.

Ajany and Isaiah have re-shaped their identities after learning about their past. Since they belong to the present, they feel they belong together. They have to leave Wuoth Ogik; a past they do not belong to, but which has helped in shaping their future. Their journey in search of the past has ended. The dying house that has been holding the past is destroyed by fire. This fire is symbolic of the strong force that has driven them to their new beginning. The flash floods they encounter on their way out of Wuoth Ogik sweep away the past which has been haunting them (363). The flash floods rip apart the ancient bridge of the Ewaso Nyiro. The ripping off of this bridge symbolises that they have been torn apart from the past they had yearned to understand and that which has led to the realisation of who they are. The movement of the floods indicate the movement they take out of Wuoth Ogik, away from the past. The past, represented by Wuoth Ogik, which has been the home for Hugh Bolton, the Oganda’s family and, finally, to Isaiah portrays an impression of impermanence, a prove that nothing endures. The shining of Ajany’s eyes indicate that she is contented with herself as she leaves Wuoth Ogik. Her voice is described as smooth as a new born. New born represents a new birth, a newly found confidence and a new identity.

3.3 Conclusion

Through the analysis of the three characters, namely Odidi, Ajany and Isaiah, we can conclude that the formation of a character is influenced by an understanding of their past and the historical events which affected them either directly or indirectly. Their search for
the historical facts which their parents went through and the past that shaped their present
is interpreted as a search for a sense of belonging. An understanding of the past makes
Ajany and Isaiah contented. Through the understanding of this past therefore, they have
acquired their sense of belonging.

Ajany and Isaiah dissociate themselves from ethnically, racially and culturally skewed
identities and forge a new beginning. Ethnic, racial and cultural identities are the forces
that have been embraced by the older generations and which have shaped the identities of
the younger generation where Ajany and Isaiah belong. Isaiah and Ajany, ‘disidentify’
themselves from these forces to gain new identities, that is, they forge a new beginning
by moving away from the past represented by their parents. Their acquired identities are
placed between the past which they gradually learn about and their current understanding
of themselves.

Ajany and Isaiah are also portrayed as affected by the memories of the dead. These
memories become a part of their shared past. Their identities are shaped by Odidi and
Hugh Bolton respectively. Ajany, for instance, is deeply affected by her brother’s death
and as she is mourning him, she seems to be redefining herself because she reflects on the
past she had shared with Odidi. Isaiah is also portrayed as affected by the realisation that
Hugh Bolton is dead. The memories of Hugh Bolton, whom Isaiah had considered as a
father, have changed the perception of who he is and gives him the drive to explore and
re-discover his new self.

We also conclude that characters who understand their history have their identity shaped
by this history. Though the characters may move away from this past, their new sense of
selves cannot be entirely detached from it. This happens to Ajany and Isaiah who come to
terms with whom they really are through an understanding of their past. Those who are not interested in learning their history end up ruining themselves. For instance, Odidi who dissociates himself from the past to which his parents belong, loses his life while ‘coming home.’ He has realised that he can only belong here, where he would be in touch with his past. Though he comes home in a casket, he has finally landed where his past is; this is where he belongs.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this study, we were interested in examining how Owuor has thematised historical consciousness in *Dust*. We have confirmed that historical injustices have negative effects on the characters. Some past events result to collective feelings of shame, guilt and bitterness in those who experienced this past. Historical events like assassination of public figures and the subsequent torturing of those suspected to have understood what happened, for instance, the torture Nyipir experiences in the hands of Petrus Keah, and past experiences like the murder of Hugh Bolton, are kept as top secrets. The outcome of this is a collective silence which mutely guards the past that brought the feelings of shame and guilt. Some of the silences arise from a deliberate attempt to conceal the painful and humiliating past which if shared would portray a character as weak. Other silences are as result of a forceful attempt by those at the helm of power in order to conceal the ills and atrocities that innocent citizens are subjected to. Other silences arise a result of guilt, for instance the murder of Hugh Bolton. Revealing this past would be an indicator that Akai and Nyipir murdered Hugh Bolton with selfish motives. The silences are thus not as a result of forgetting but as a way of exonerating themselves from blame.

*Dust* has described Kenyan history from colonial era to the postcolonial era. During the colonial era, Kenyans are at the mercy of the colonisers and their collaborators. Most Kenyans were optimistic that after gaining their independence they would get an equal share of the national cake and oppression would be a thing of the past. The treatment of the historical content describes a discontented group of people who have lost hope of ever
realising their dreams in independent Kenya. The freedom brought about by independence has remained a wishful thought and an illusion since majority of Kenyans are still suffering, even at the time Kenya is celebrating her fiftieth anniversary since she gained her independence. The characters are preoccupied with the historical events which they have experienced and which have influenced their current status. The effects of these historical happenings are also felt by those who did not experience them directly. We have concluded that the haunting experiences from these events and an understanding of the same constitute historical consciousness.

This study has also focussed on historical consciousness as a factor that influences the formation of a character. Character formation is a complex process which brings on board several factors. The formation of a character may be greatly influenced by a major factor which the character chooses to pursue in search of contentment. We can compare formation of a character to the formation of a nation. Owour describes Kenya in the colonial and the postcolonial eras. The history that has helped the country to evolve from these two eras is the same history that seems to affect the formation of individual characters. When the painful history is repeated later on in life, some characters affected during the colonial and the post-colonial eras feel targeted and side-lined. The reaction of the characters to injustices is contrasted since during the colonial and early post-colonial eras, there is a forceful silencing and concealing of the past. At the time Kenya is celebrating her fiftieth anniversary, the enlightened activists of revolution, fight for democracy and those with ambitions to rise to the top politically counter the oppression through demonstrations which consequently lead to death of innocent citizens and displacement of many.
The postelection violence brought destruction of the nation built over the years. This is equivalent to the burning coral house which, through its inhabitants has been holding a very rich history. The burning house loses its strong foundation and purpose. Just like the country forges ahead after it burns during the postelection violence, the inhabitants of the burning coral house which is a symbolic representation of the past, are prompted to move away from Wuoath Ogik. They (Ajany and Isaiah) forge a future away from the ‘burning’ past but a future that is attached to the same past. We therefore conclude that the past shapes the formation of the character just as it does to the nation.

Death is a strong trigger of the bitter memories of the past. Through death of character, history is consciously or unconsciously evoked and re-lived by those who had directly experienced this history. For instance, the death of Odidi revives bitter memories of Tom Mboya’s assassination in Nyipir. A current death is, therefore, closely compared to the past deaths; it revives the memories of those who had died in the past. Death is therefore an obsession in the mind of the bereaved. The dead are portrayed as ideal characters. Since characters define themselves through others, the death of a character they have associated with creates a void that continuously affects their present. The attempts to fill the void is a way of revisiting the past in order to create meaning from it and bring a sense of closure. An attempt to come to terms with what happened in the past makes the survivors talk about the effects of that painful event in their lives. Along the same vein, the death of public figures and experiences from the torture chambers become sources of a historical union that exists between characters like Nyipir and Petrus Keah. We have therefore concluded that Odidi’s death has re-ignited the pain and tension experienced after the death of the historical figures.
Through the study, we can also conclude that death is an inescapable fact, just as the past is an inescapable part of the character’s present. A character who chooses to ignore the past and runs away from it, is faced with uncertainties of life and the challenges thereof. Since this study has demonstrated that a character’s identity is influenced by their past, running away from the past means that the character has not come to terms with who he/she really is. This is because there is a disconnection between the past and the present and, hence, no hope for a future. Therefore, failure to embrace the past leads to lack of self-realisation and consequently the death of individual identities.

Through this study, we can also conclude that history becomes a form of a narrative that defines and determines what the characters are, explains what the characters have been or where they are coming from. The characters who had been optimistic that change of an era would make them reputable citizens are forced to give up this hope and in its place bitterness, resulting from the historical injustices they were subjected to. Worse still, the newly elected ruling class is determined to ensure that those with any knowledge of the past injustices are either eliminated or tortured so that they do not disclose or share this knowledge with others. In this silence, memories of the past linger on and when they cannot be contained any more, they are narrated to the younger characters. This narrated history connects the characters to their past and thus aids in character formation.

Silences become haunting memories, resulting from a grudge which elicits a strong desire in the wronged characters to revenge. When the past cannot be concealed any longer, it is shared in form of historical narratives. The past cannot, therefore, be silenced or ignored. The narration of bitter and painful past testifies to the fact that this history is persistently present in the mind of the affected persons. The recollection of these memories and the
representations of the same through narration are therefore a relief to the person who has been harbouring these memories in silence. According Gergen narratives create a sense of “individuated selves with particular attributes and self-referential capacities” (10). Through the narratives, whether fictitious or historical narratives, the life of the characters acquire meaning. We therefore conclude that the identity of a character who had not experienced the history is acquired through the narratives.

When history is narrated to the characters who did not live through it, those who embrace it and forge a new beginning gain an identity that is informed by the same past. ‘What endures’ is a phrase that is repeatedly used in Dust. In the analysis of the text, it has been proved that a character’s identity is not static and therefore it does not endure. Only memories of the past endure, and these are transmitted from one generation to the next through narration. In the pursuit for an understanding of the course characters have taken to the present, the piecemeal revelation of the past keeps changing the way they perceive and define themselves. The character’s perception of every piece of the past that is revealed determines the kind of character that emerges from an understanding of this past.

The study has revealed that a character’s perception of the past defines his/her identity. Representation of the unspoken collective memories through painting and other works of art, for instance, music helps in unravelling some of the past experiences. The paintings and music are an imaginary representation of the past. The characters whose past is represented by these works of art are therefore positioned between their real world, which is represented by their parents, and their imagined world, replaced by the paintings. Their identity is hybrid.
A character’s physical journey through space and time and his/her subconscious journey through time has been compared and described as journeying from the past to the present. This physical journey is at times a form of escapism since the character, for example Ajany, is running away from the past which she has not yet understood and a present that does not make her contented. She runs away from this past and later comes back and reconnects with it. This past neither has meaning nor does it bring contentment to the character who does not understand it. The journey is also a way of drawing the characters closer to the source of their past, for instance in the case of Isaiah. He comes to Wuoth Ogik where he reconnects with the past. This journey has consequently led to the acquisition of a character’s identity.

Through this study, it has been demonstrated that the past and the present are inseparable. Francis Imbuga in *Betrayal in the City* argues that the future is a reflection of the past; the future must be seen in the past (65). Formation of a character is determined by his understanding of the past. A character who understands this past through whichever form should make a choice of what to embrace and what to distance from. This subsequently defines the kind of a character that he becomes. Through the guidance of postcolonial theory and Bhabha’s ideas on hybridity, making a choice to embrace the past and forging a future that is shaped by, but independent from this past, forms a character with a hybrid identity. The hybrid identity has given the characters contentment and a strong ability to overcome challenges that arise as a result of parents’ failure to disclose the past. We therefore conclude that representation of history is fundamental in the formation of a character.

In general, the study has confirmed that:
1) obsession with historical events and character’s past experiences constitute historical consciousness.

2) the formation of a character is influenced by the past that the character experiences either directly or indirectly. The identity of a character is influenced and determined by the kind of a past that a character experienced and the way he/she chooses to deal with this past.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

*Dust* is a novel that is so rich in both form and content which literary scholars can explore. This research has not exhaustively tackled the issue of identity since it has dealt with only one factor which has influenced the formation of the analysed characters. For further research, therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1) Other factors that influence a character’s identity apart from historical consciousness which has been the index of analysis in this study can be researched on. These may include issues on nationality, cultural and ethnic identities.

2) The relationship between amnesia, forgetting and silence can also be interrogated.
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