SILENCE AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN KENYAN YOUNG ADULT FICTION: A STUDY OF MUTHONI WA GICHURU'S *BREAKING THE SILENCE* AND ANTHONY MUGO'S *NEVER SAY NEVER*

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND COMMUNICATION

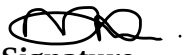
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DECLARATION

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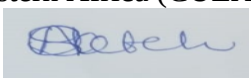
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father Joseph Ngala, whose unwavering support made this academic journey possible. Your belief in the value of education, your guidance, and your sacrifices have shaped my path in more ways than words can express. Thank you!

ACKNOWLEGMENTS

I express my sincere gratitude to Catholic University of Eastern Africa for providing an environment that nurtured my academic growth and made this research possible. I also extend my appreciation to the Head of the Department Dr Rose Mavisi for the guidance, encouragement, and support offered throughout my studies.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisors, Dr. Jane Wakarindi and Dr. Selline Oketch, for their invaluable guidance, patience, and encouragement throughout this research journey.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their love and support throughout this journey. To my mother Annah Maloba, thank you for your care, encouragement, and constant presence. To my sister, Sandra Vivian , thank you for standing beside me through every high and low. Although the details of my research were often unfamiliar to you, you understood the person behind the work. Your encouragement during moments of doubt gave me the strength to keep going.

I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to my classmates, Joy Makingu, Sr. Margaret Khaemba, Br. Christian Obaje, Joan Oira, Faith Ruto, Catherine Nafula and everyone who shared this journey with me. We supported one another through long days of research, countless revisions, and moments of self-doubt. The friendships we built through this shared academic experience are among the greatest gifts of this programme.

Finally, I thank everyone who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the successful completion of this thesis. Your support, encouragement, and belief in me have left a lasting impact on this journey.

ABSTRACT

Kenyan Young Adult Fiction (YAF) has grown steadily, yet critical studies have focused mainly on themes such as poverty, gender-based violence, and institutional failure, leaving the formal construction of these conditions underexamined. This study addresses this gap by examining silence as a deliberate narrative mechanism controlling what young protagonists say, who hears them, and who they become. It analyzes Muthoni Wa Gichuru's *Breaking the Silence* (2009) and Anthony *Mugo's Never Say Never* (2012), selected purposively from contemporary Kenyan YAF. The study explores how narrative silence is constructed, how it functions as resistance and identity formation, and the techniques used to represent it. It applies narratology, drawing on Genette's concepts of voice and mood and Bal's focalization and characterization. A descriptive-analytical literary design within a qualitative approach guided close reading. The study found four recurring mechanisms: withheld information, delayed revelation, characterization without narrative authority, and plot resolution independent of whether the protagonist is heard. Silence also enables resistance and identity formation within patriarchal and institutional structures. Five techniques recur across both texts: focalization, ellipsis and omission, narrative voice, temporal manipulation, and characterization. The study contributes to Kenyan YAF studies by demonstrating silence as a deliberate narratological construction and extending Genette's and Bal's frameworks to a Kenyan YAF context.

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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms will be used with meanings in this study. Each definition below reflects how the term functions within the study's analytical and literary framework.

Young Adult Fiction (YAF): A literary classification for fiction that centers the consciousness of a young adult protagonist, typically aged between twelve and eighteen, and engages thematically with identity formation, social transition, and the exercise of power over young lives as represented in narrative. The term is used throughout this study to refer to the genre to which the two selected texts belong.

Young adult: A person between the ages of twelve and eighteen as represented in literary fiction. In this study, the term refers to the protagonists of the two selected texts: Wanjiku in wa Gichuru's *Breaking the Silence* and Daniel in Mugo's Never *Say Never*. The term is used in its literary sense throughout and is distinct from the developmental and sociological terms defined below.

Adolescent: Describes a young person in the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, a phase characterised by biological, psychological, and social transition. In this study, the term refers to the developmental condition that the genre of YAF represents in literary form. Where the study engages with adolescence as a developmental category, the term is used in this sense; where it refers to the protagonist as a character in a literary text, the term young adult is used.

Young person: A general descriptive phrase used in this study when referring to a character or individual who occupies a social position not yet recognised as fully adult, without reference to a fixed age range. The term is used where neither young adult nor adolescent applies with precision.

Youth: Demographic and policy term referring to a broader age grouping than the twelve to eighteen range used for young adults in this study. This study uses the term only in the context of policy literature that employs it in this demographic sense.

Narrative silence: A structural condition in literary narrative through which the text controls whose voice is heard, whose perspective governs what the reader perceives, and whose interiority the text makes available. Narrative silence is produced through the formal choices a text makes about voice, mood, and focalization; it is a feature of how a story is built, not simply of what it is about. In this study, the term refers to this structural condition as it operates in the two selected texts, where silence functions not only as a condition imposed on characters but as a site of resistance through which Wanjiku and Daniel refuse institutional and patriarchal definition and form identity against constraint

Identity construction: The process through which the sense of self belonging to a character is produced, shaped, or constrained by the narrative choices of the text. In this study, identity is understood as something the literary text constructs through its formal mechanisms of voice, focalization, and characterization, not as a pre-existing quality that characters bring to the narrative. Identity formation in the selected texts is examined specifically as it occurs through silence: the formal withholding of voice becomes the condition within which Wanjiku and

Daniel construct and protect a self that the authoritative structures around them cannot fully occupy

Narratology. The systematic study of how literary narratives are structured. As applied in this study, Narratology examines not what a text represents but how it is built: the formal choices of voice, mood, focalization, and characterization through which narrative meaning is constructed.

Focalization: The narrative mechanism that determines whose perspective governs what the reader perceives within the story world. The focalizer is the agent whose viewpoint shapes the narrative; the focalized is the object of that perspective. A character who is consistently positioned as the focalized occupies a structural form of silence, present in the narrative but denied the authority to narrate their own experience. In this study, focalization is examined as both the mechanism through which silence is imposed on Wanjiku and Daniel, and the mechanism through which their resistance to that imposition is legible: the refusal to become a transparent focalizer for an institutional or patriarchal gaze is itself an act of identity formation.

Narrative voice: The narrative mechanism that determines who tells the story and from what position. The choice of narrator shapes what the reader knows, what they are withheld from knowing, and whose experience the text treats as central. In this study, narrative voice is examined as a mechanism through which silence is formally produced in the selected texts.

Characterisation: The process through which a literary text builds a character by determining what that character is permitted to say, what others say about them, and what the narrative withholds from them. In this study, characterization is examined as a formal mechanism

through which silence is constructed and through which resistance and identity formation are produced: what a character is denied by the text and what they withhold from the structures around them are both sites where identity is formed against constraint in the selected texts

Resistance: Refers to the ways in which characters oppose, evade, or refuse dominant institutional and patriarchal structures through silence. In this study, resistance is examined as a narrative effect produced through the control of voice, focalization, and characterization.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by laying out the context and concerns that give rise to the research, it covers the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives, and the research questions that guides the study. The chapter also sets out the significance of the study, its scope and limitations, and closes with the theoretical framework that guides it.

1.1 Background to the Study

YAF has grown into one of the most closely watched genres in world literature. Scholars value it for the way it stages identity, power, belonging, and transition through protagonists who are neither children nor adults (Trites, 2000; Hintz and Tribunella, 2025). Adolescence describes a developmental transition from childhood dependency to adult autonomy (Arnett, 2024; Syed & McLean, 2021), while YAF names a body of texts defined by narrative structure, readership, and thematic concern (Trites, 2000; Stephens, 2022). This distinction matters as it allows a YAF protagonist's silence to be read as a narrative choice, not a symptom of age.

Global studies converges on a shared premise: identity in YAF is built through narrative choices about whose voice a text authorizes, not simply reflected from a fixed self (Hintz and Tribunella, 2025; Behrens, 2025; Vanhove and De Backer, 2025). The studies differ on where that construction happens. Trites (2000) locates it in institutional authority, treating the forces that constrain a young protagonist's self-expression as the central site of negotiation. Behrens (2025) and Vanhove and De Backer (2025) locate it instead in naming practices, narrative levels, or the narrative environment itself. What unites these positions, despite the

disagreement over location, is the finding that withholding a protagonist's voice or interiority does not simply describe marginalization. It produces it.

A narrower body of narratological research tests that finding directly against the mechanics of silence. Jahn (2025) locates silence at three levels: story, discourse, and narration. Kapadia et al. (2026) read linguistic fragmentation as a means of reclaiming identity. Mukherjee (2025) reads non-linear structure as a private space for reconstructing identity outside institutional control. Zeidanin et al. (2025) read embedded storytelling as a means through which child characters resist authority and process trauma. The four studies use different textual mechanisms, but they arrive at the same conclusion: silence is active, not passive. It works simultaneously as resistance to institutional definition and as the means through which identity is formed against constraint.

Taken together, this is the current state of studies on silence as a site of resistance and identity: the field has established that silence in YAF is constructed rather than incidental, and that this construction does double work, it resists institutional definition and it builds identity in the space that resistance opens. What the field has not established is whether this holds outside the West. None of the five studies above examines Kenyan YAF, and none asks whether these patterns survive when the institutional pressures at work are poverty, patriarchal family structure, and state processing, rather than the developmental concerns these scholars study.

The African literary tradition offers the closest precedent for extending this work beyond the West. Gikandi (1987), reading Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat,* and *Petals of Blood,* shows that withholding narrative voice is a formal operation through which colonial and postcolonial power is inscribed into a text, and that characters also choose silence to protect themselves from systems that would use their words against them. Osei-Nyame

(1999) extends this along gendered lines, showing that African fiction consistently denies women characters the position of knowing, narrating subjects, and that female characters answer this by choosing silence as a refusal of imposed identity. Sackeyfio (2024) confirms the pattern persists across generations of African writing. Together, these three studies establish that silence in African fiction is agentive, not incidental. Their shared limitation is age. All three examine adult fiction. None asks how the same mechanism functions for young protagonists, who lack the institutional authority an adult character already holds.

Regional studies narrows the picture toward East Africa. Wakota (2024) shows that four Tanzanian YAF texts place protagonists in conditions of liminality that produce narrative silence as a defining structural feature. Jani (2026), comparing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o with Abdulrazak Gurnah, confirms that East African narrative returns consistently to silence as the mechanism through which power shapes identity. Both studies treat silence as a condition the text reflects rather than an effect it produces through deliberate choice. Both name that silence matters without naming the narrative mechanisms, voice, mood, focalization, and characterization, that construct it.

Kenyan scholarship confirms the same pattern closer to home, against a genre whose boundaries are still being settled. Wakarindi (2023) shows that terminological imprecision has obscured Kenyan YAF's identity as a genre in its own right. Within that unsettled genre, Mutie and Rutere (2023) show that silence in Kenyan life writing is strategically deployed to protect identity from institutional and patriarchal definition. Njeru (2013) establishes that narrative silence in Kenyan YAF is structurally tied to a protagonist's loss of identity, not incidental to it. Together, these three studies agree that silence in Kenyan literary texts is deliberate and

politically weighted. They stop at documenting that it matters, without examining how it is built.

Kenyan YAF places these unexamined mechanisms at the center of its concerns. The genre inherits the same stakes as its global and African counterparts, yet it remains one of the least critically examined bodies of literature within Kenyan literary studies. This study reads that concern through narratology, the study of how narrative structure produces meaning, using Gerard Genette's (1980) concepts of voice and mood and Mieke Bal's (1985) concepts of focalization and characterization as the analytical lens, detailed fully in the theoretical framework below.

Taken together, these bodies of research, global, African, East African, and Kenyan, leave three gaps open. The progression across these bodies of scholarship also reveals an important difference in emphasis. Global YAF scholarship has developed precise ways of examining narrative structure and the distribution of narrative authority, while African literary scholarship has demonstrated the political and identity-related significance of silence. East African scholarship brings these concerns closer to the regional context, but gives less attention to the formal mechanisms through which silence is produced. Kenyan scholarship moves closer still by establishing the significance of silence in local literary texts and by identifying its relationship with identity and institutional power. The studies therefore provide complementary insights, but they do not yet bring these three dimensions together: narratological construction, resistance, and identity formation within Kenyan YAF.

This distinction is important for the present study because identifying silence as significant does not explain how a narrative produces it. A character may be described as silenced, marginalized, or denied institutional authority, but a narratological analysis asks how the text

creates that condition through its organization of voice, perspective, information, characterization, and time. The present study therefore shifts attention from what silence represents to how silence is formally constructed and what its construction permits the young protagonist to do within the narrative.

Global studies built the analytical tools for reading silence but applied them to Western texts, not African or Kenyan ones. African scholarship confirmed that silence is formal and agentive but stopped at adult fiction. Kenyan scholarship established that silence matters in these texts without asking how it is constructed, how it functions as resistance and identity formation, or what narrative techniques represent it across the genre. This study addresses these three gaps by bringing Genette's (1980) and Bal's (1985) narratological frameworks to *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*, pursuing three objectives: The two selected novels provide a focused comparative basis for examining these questions because both belong to the defined population of contemporary Kenyan YAF while presenting different young protagonists and narrative situations. Examining them together makes it possible to identify both text-specific differences and recurring narrative patterns without treating either novel as representative of the entire Kenyan YAF corpus. The study therefore uses the two texts as a purposively selected comparative sample through which the construction, function, and representation of silence are examined in depth.to analyze how narrative silence is constructed in the selected texts, to examine how silence functions as a strategy of resistance and identity formation, and to evaluate the narrative techniques used to represent silence across them.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The background establishes three gaps. Global narratological scholarship built the tools for reading silence as resistance and identity formation, but tested them only on Western texts.

African studies confirmed that silence in fiction is agentive, not incidental, but confined that finding to adult protagonists. Kenyan studies

established that silence in these texts is deliberate and politically weighted, without examining how it is constructed or what it accomplishes.

Kenyan YAF sits at the center of all three gaps. It places the identity struggles of young people at the center of its narratives, yet remains one of the least critically examined bodies of literature within Kenyan literary studies. Existing critical engagement with the genre documents what these texts represent, the social and institutional concerns they address, without examining how those concerns are produced through narrative structure. The field acknowledges that silence exists in these texts and that it matters, but has not examined it as a site of resistance and a tool of identity formation, and has not asked what patterns of resistance and identity formation it reveals across the genre.

Existing Kenyan research on YAF rarely applies narratological analysis to examine how silence is built into these texts as a structural feature. Global narratological research holds the tools this analysis requires, but has rarely engaged with Kenyan YAF, leaving the social and literary conditions that give narrative choices their meaning in these texts unaddressed. The result is that the mechanisms through which silence constructs resistance and shapes identity in Kenyan YAF remain unexamined.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study analyzes how narrative silence is constructed in Kenyan young adult fiction, examines how that silence functions as resistance and identity formation, and evaluates the narrative techniques used to represent it across the selected texts. It applies Genette's (1980)

concepts of voice and mood and Bal's (1985) concepts of focalization and characterization as its analytical framework.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study pursues this purpose through three objectives, addressing in turn how silence is constructed, how it functions, and what techniques represent it across the selected texts. The study objectives include:

i. To explore how narrative silence is constructed in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*.
ii. To examine how silence functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation in the selected texts.
iii. To evaluate the narrative techniques used in representing silence in the selected texts.

1.5 Research Questions

These objectives translate into three research questions. The research questions of the study include:

i. How is narrative silence constructed in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*?
ii. How does silence function as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation in the selected texts?
iii. What narrative techniques are used in representing silence in the selected texts?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to literary scholars by providing a narratological analysis of Kenyan YAF, applying the same structural rigor to the genre that has long been applied to adult fiction.

It demonstrates that Kenyan YAF encodes resistance and identity formation through formal narrative choices, that silence in these texts is a constructed mechanism and not an incidental absence, and that the genre sustains structural analysis.

The study contributes to the literature review on Kenyan YAF by closing the gap between thematic and structural criticism. Existing studies identify what these texts represent. This study examines how texts build those representations through formal narrative choices, shifting the terms of future literature reviews from content to construction.

The study contributes to research methodology by demonstrating how narratological frameworks apply productively to African YAF. Applying Genette's concepts of voice and mood and Bal's concepts of focalization and characterization to Kenyan texts establishes a methodological precedent for comparable analysis across African literary contexts.

The selected texts have received institutional recognition through literary prizes and adoption as school readers, yet their narrative structures have not been examined with analytical rigor. By demonstrating how the literary representation of silence and identity is achieved through narrative mechanisms, the study gives curriculum developers and educators a scholarly basis for including these texts as objects of serious literary study in secondary school and university syllabuses.

Narratological analysis has been productively applied to British, American, and German YAF, establishing the method as standard for reading the genre. Its application to YAF from African contexts remains limited. This study extends the global narratological conversation on YAF into the African literary context, opening space for further comparable analysis across the continent.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations

This study is confined to the analysis of narrative silence, resistance, and identity formation in Kenyan YAF. Its theoretical scope is limited to Narratology, specifically the concepts of voice, mood, focalization, and characterization; other literary theories are excluded. Thematically, the study addresses only those concerns that intersect directly with silence and identity formation; broader themes such as poverty or gender-based violence are engaged only where they bear on those narrative mechanisms. The study is geographically limited to Kenyan YAF and does not examine YAF from other East African countries. It is limited by genre to YAF, excluding children's literature, adult fiction, and genre fiction. The study examines written literary fiction only; oral narrative, film, and other media forms are excluded. Reader reception, author biography, and publishing history fall outside its scope.

Limitations

The study faces two anticipated limitations. First, previous narratological studies on the selected texts are scarce, so the analysis proceeds with limited methodological precedent specific to these works. Second, a corpus of two texts cannot represent the full range of Kenyan YAF. The patterns of silence, resistance, and identity formation identified here may not account for all the narrative strategies the genre employs. Future research will need to extend this analysis to a wider corpus.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Narratology is the study of how narrative structure produces meaning. It emerges from Structuralism, a tradition that originated in early twentieth-century European thought and holds that all human narratives share underlying structures that can be identified and studied

systematically (Onega and Landa, 2014). Where Structuralism examines the systems underlying any form of meaning-making, Narratology narrows that inquiry to structures specific to narrative, treating story, discourse, and narration as its units of analysis. Vladimir Propp (1928) anticipated this approach by showing that folktales that appear distinct on the surface share a common underlying structure of narrative functions. Tzvetan Todorov (1969) coined the term narratology to name the resulting science. Roland Barthes (1966) argued that narrative is universal and deserves systematic scientific study. A.J. Greimas (1966) contributed the actantial model, identifying deep structural roles that characters occupy in any narrative.

Narratology rests on three tenets. Narrative structure is not neutral; it produces meaning through formal choices. Identity in narrative is constructed through what a text permits or denies a character, not simply reflected from a fixed self. Silence is not absence but a structural effect, created through narrative mechanisms rather than left by omission. Gerard Genette and Mieke Bal advance the discipline by developing precise analytical methods for examining how individual texts are constructed and how narrative choices produce meaning, and this study selects their frameworks because, together, they cover both who is denied narrative authority and what that denial does to a character's identity.

Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980) is selected because it isolates voice and mood, the two mechanisms that determine who speaks and how much interiority a reader is granted. Genette structures his framework around three levels: story (the narrated events), narrative (the textual discourse representing those events), and narrating (the act of narration itself), analyzed through five categories: order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice. Voice identifies who narrates and whose perspective controls the telling. Mood determines how much access the reader has to a character's interiority, operating through focalization. This study applies voice

and mood to Objective One: in Chapter Four, they identify who is denied the right to narrate in each text and how narrative distance withholds a protagonist's interiority.

Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985; 5th ed. 2025) is selected because it extends Genette's framework with focalization and characterization, the two mechanisms that determine what a denial of voice does to a character's identity. Focalization distinguishes the focalizer, the agent whose perspective shapes the narrative, from the focalized, the object of that perspective; a protagonist focalized by institutional or patriarchal authority is seen but not seeing, known but not knowing. Characterization examines how characters are built through choices about physical description, speech, action, and thought, so that when a text withholds a character's speech or thought, characterization becomes the mechanism through which silence enters the formal representation of identity. This study applies focalization and characterization to Objective Two: in Chapter Four, they identify how protagonists resist by withholding their interiority from institutional view, and how identity forms in what the narrative refuses to reveal.

Genette and Bal complement each other at one precise point: Genette names who is restricted from speaking, Bal reveals what that restriction does to how the character is seen and known. Applied together to Objective Three, they give the study a consistent analytical language across two independently written texts, allowing it to examine whether voice, mood, focalization, and characterization produce convergent patterns of silence as resistance, and whether those patterns form a recognizable feature of Kenyan YAF.

Silence, in this framework, is not absence but construction, a deliberate formal effect produced through the narrative choices a text makes about who speaks, who sees, and whose interiority the reader is permitted to enter. When a text withholds narrative authority from a young adult

protagonist, that withholding constructs silence as a formal property. When a protagonist exercises that same silence by refusing institutional structures access to their interiority, silence becomes the mechanism through which resistance is enacted and identity is preserved from external control. When Wanjiku and Daniel are denied voice, focalized by others, and characterized through what they withhold rather than what they reveal, their identities are formed in the space between institutional demand and narrative refusal.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the theoretical and empirical foundations for the study's three objectives: to explore how narrative silence is constructed in the selected texts; to examine how silence functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation; and to evaluate the narrative techniques used in representing silence in these texts. Section 2.1 addresses the first objective, the construction of narrative silence. Section 2.2 addresses the second objective, silence as a strategy of resistance and identity formation. Section 2.3 addresses the third objective, the evaluation of narrative techniques used to represent silence, and situates the selected texts within Kenyan literary and institutional recognition. Sections 2.1 through 2.3 review the studies relevant to each objective in turn, moving in each case from global scholarship through African and East African studies to Kenyan scholarship before identifying the gap that objective leaves open. Section 2.4 clarifies the study's use of "young adult" against neighboring categories. Section 2.5 establishes the narratological frameworks that guide the textual analysis. Section 2.6 research gap summary.

2.1 The Construction of Narrative Silence

Global Scholarship Narratological research consistently treats silence as a structural feature of narrative rather than mere absence. Jahn (2025) argues that silence operates at three levels: in the events of the story, in how the story is told, and in the act of narrating itself. Kapadia, Singh, and Patel (2026) push this argument further into linguistic form, showing that when characters speak in broken or incomplete language, they are not simply reflecting trauma but resisting institutional attempts to define them through complete, coherent discourse. Mukherjee (2025) locates the same resistance in temporal structure rather than voice, demonstrating that postcolonial narratives deploy non-linear chronology to fragment the colonial timeline that would otherwise impose coherence on characters' lived experience. Zeidanin *et al.* (2025) identify a further site, showing that child characters in trauma narratives use embedded storytelling as a healing mechanism, which suggests that silence's structural opposite is not speech but control over one's own narrative frame. These four studies differ in analytical focus, taxonomy, linguistic form, temporal structure, embedded narration, yet converge on the same finding: silence is active, not passive. The difference among these studies lies primarily in where each locates the production of silence. Jahn (2025) provides the broadest structural account by locating silence at the levels of story, discourse, and narration. Kapadia et al. (2026) Narrow the focus to linguistic form, while Mukherjee (2025) identifies temporal organization as the source of narrative disruption. Zeidanin et al. (2025), in contrast, locate the effect within embedded narration and control over narrative framing. These differences are useful because they demonstrate that narrative silence does not depend on one technique. It may emerge through the distribution of speech, the organization of time, the control of narrative frames, or the availability of coherent language. For the present study, this convergence provides a basis

for examining silence through several narratological mechanisms rather than treating it as a single textual phenomenon. The convergence is instructive, but the studies share a common blind spot. Each derives its model from European or Western narrative traditions, and Kapadia's premise in particular, that speech is the norm from which silence deviates, may not hold where oral narrative patterns structure written prose differently.

Wakota (2024) supplies a closer test case, showing that four Tanzanian YAF texts place young protagonists in structural in-between spaces where voice is neither fully authorized nor fully silenced, a condition that maps onto Genette's category of mood even though Wakota does not use Genette's or Bal's vocabulary to name it.

Njeru (2013) reads *Never Say Never* thematically and establishes that Daniel's loss of voice is structured into the text rather than incidental, tying his silence directly to his loss of identity, but stops short of asking through which choices of voice, mood, focalization, and characterization the text builds that effect.

The absence of that vocabulary is the gap this study closes the relationship between Wakota (2024) and Njeru (2013) is particularly significant for the present study. Wakota establishes the structural condition of silence in East African YAF, while Njeru identifies its relationship with identity in a Kenyan text. Neither study brings structural construction and identity formation together through a systematic narratological examination of the selected texts. Their findings therefore provide a foundation for the present study rather than a complete account of how silence operates in Kenyan YAF. for the Kenyan case. That is precisely where this study's first objective, to analyze how narrative silence is constructed in the selected texts, takes up the inquiry Wakota and Njeru leave open.

2.2 Silence as a Strategy of Resistance and Identity Formation

Global studies a parallel debate concerns identity rather than structure. Trites (2000) argues that power is the defining feature of young adult fiction, where institutional and adult authority constrains protagonists' capacity for self-expression, making voice distribution both a formal mechanism and a site of constraint. Hintz and Tribunella (2025) push back, arguing identity in YAF is constructed through the choices a protagonist makes rather than imposed by surrounding structures. Behrens (2025) reconciles the two positions rather than choosing between them, showing that naming practices in German YAF are the mechanism through which identity is authorized or withheld, which suggests identity is negotiated at specific structural sites instead of being either fully constrained or fully chosen. Vanhove and De Backer (2025) reframe the debate again, arguing that YAF constructs identity through the testing ground the narrative environment provides, making context rather than power or choice the operative category. Schoofs et al. (2025), working from adolescent psychology rather than literary study, arrive at a strikingly similar premise from outside the discipline: adolescents build identity by negotiating contradictory cultural narratives imposed on them, not by discovering a fixed self, a finding that closes some of the distance between how literary and developmental research explain identity formation at this age. What holds these positions together is a shared premise: identity in this age group is constructed through negotiation with surrounding narrative and cultural structures, not simply discovered. What separates the literary scholars from each other is only which textual mechanism does the constructing. The disagreement among these scholars is therefore less about whether young people construct identity and more about the conditions and mechanisms through which construction occurs. Trites (2000) emphasizes institutional power, Hintz and Tribunella (2025) emphasize

protagonist agency, Behrens (2025) identifies naming as a site of authorization, and Vanhove and De Backer (2025) emphasize the narrative environment. These positions are complementary for the present study because silence may operate through both constraint and agency. A young protagonist may be denied narrative authority by an institution while also using silence to retain control over an aspect of selfhood. Examining this tension is necessary for understanding silence as both an imposed condition and a strategy of resistance.

2.2.1 Silence and Resistance in African Narratives

The premise that identity is negotiated through surrounding narrative and cultural structures strains once the corpus shifts away from Western fiction, since the structures African children negotiate differ from those the global studies above assumes. Serpell (1993) shows that African childhood socialization is organized around relational and communal identity, where selfhood is defined through responsibility to the group rather than individual autonomy. A pattern Naudé and van Damme (2024) confirm still holds three decades later, finding that South African adolescents continue to experience identity as a negotiation shaped by significant others and social context rather than as an autonomous, individually authored process.

Nieuwenhuys (1994) adds that the school-based, protected childhood Western YAF assumes rarely describes African childhoods, where children work, contribute economically, and carry social responsibility from an early age. Read against Trites, Hintz and Tribunella, and Vanhove and De Backer, this means the power relations, choices, and testing environments those scholars theorize may function differently once poverty, family survival, and institutional processing replace the developmental concerns their models assume. This study takes that mismatch as a working hypothesis rather than a conclusion, applying Trites's structural model to Wanjiku and Daniel to test whether institutional power constrains them as predicted, then

reading the results through Hintz and Tribunella to ask whether their silence also functions as chosen resistance rather than pure constraint.

Gikandi (1987) supplies the first sustained answer to how that resistance operates in African fiction, establishing that the withholding of narrative voice is formal architecture, not thematic content, through which colonial and postcolonial power inscribe themselves into the text. His reading of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Petals of Blood* treats silence as double sided: imposed on characters by colonial authority, and chosen by characters as protection from systems that would weaponize their speech. Osei-Nyame (1999) extends the same double reading to gender, showing that African fiction's characterization strategies deny women the position of knowing, narrating subjects, so that their silence becomes architectural rather than incidental, and is redeployed by female characters as a refusal of the identities patriarchal systems would otherwise impose. Sackeyfio (2024) confirms the pattern persists across generations of African writing, and Siby (2025), reading Achebe, Dangarembga, and Ngũgĩ alongside South Asian postcolonial fiction, arrives at the same conclusion from a wider comparative base: silence in postcolonial narrative is not a narrative deficit but a deliberate, insurgent strategy that reclaims narrative space from colonial and patriarchal discourse. Jani (2026), comparing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o with Abdulrazak Gurnah, narrows the same finding to East African fiction specifically, showing that silence fractures and reshapes identity there under colonial and postcolonial power. Read together, these studies confirm that silence as both constraint and resistance is not a one-off finding but a recurring structural fact of African and East African narrative.

Their shared limit is the corpus. The significance of these studies for the present research lies in their shared demonstration that silence operates through narrative form as well as through

social and political conditions. Their combined findings establish a basis for examining silence as both constraint and resistance, while their focus on adult protagonists leaves open how these processes operate when the silenced subject is a young person whose identity is still being formed. All four analyze adult protagonists, who carry an institutional authority young adults do not. An adult's refusal to speak proceeds from a position of already-authorized subjectivity. A young adult's silence proceeds from a position where that subjectivity is still being negotiated, which is precisely the condition this study tests in Wanjiku and Daniel.

Mutie and Rutere (2023), examining Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* and Koigi Wa Wamwere's *I Refuse to Die*, show that silence in Kenyan life writing is strategically deployed against political forces, effectively describing what Genette would call voice, who speaks and from what position, without naming it as such. Wakarindi (2023) adds an institutional dimension, arguing that Kenyan YAF's own marginalization as a genre mirrors the narrative silencing of its protagonists, so that genre and character voicelessness reinforce each other.

Taken together, this body of Kenyan scholarship agrees that silence is deliberate, politically weighted, and tied to who is permitted to speak, but consistently stops at documenting that silence matters rather than examining the narrative mechanisms, voice, mood, focalization, characterization, through which it is built and through which it comes to function as resistance and identity formation. That is the gap this study closes for *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never* specifically.

2.3 Evaluating Narrative Techniques Used to Represent Silence

This study's third objective, evaluating the narrative techniques used to represent silence, rests on a prior methodological question: does narratological method itself travel beyond the Western fiction it was built on, and does silence function the same way across literary

traditions. Mqwebu (2024), working in South African adult fiction, answers this directly, showing that narratological frameworks built in Western academic traditions remain applicable and productive in African literary texts, provided the analyst stays attentive to the social and cultural conditions that give narrative features their local meaning. Mqwebu does not examine YAF, but the demonstration itself, that asking how a text is built produces meaning as reliably in African contexts as in Western ones, validates the methodological choice this study makes. Gikandi (1987) and Osei-Nyame (1999), already central to the discussion of resistance above, do the same work from a different angle: both show that structural readings attentive to voice and focalization reveal dimensions of African narrative that thematic reading alone cannot reach. Neither examines YAF either, so what these three studies jointly establish is a methodological precedent rather than a finished analysis, precedent this study extends into a genre none of them has tested. The methodological significance of these studies lies in their demonstration that formal analysis provides information unavailable through thematic description alone. A thematic reading may establish that a character experiences marginalization, trauma, or institutional control, but a narratological reading asks how the text positions the character in relation to the reader and to the act of narration. This distinction is central to the present study because its concern is not simply whether Wanjiku and Daniel experience silence, but how the narrative constructs their restricted or controlled access to voice, perspective, and interiority.

Wakarindi (2018), in her PhD thesis *Young Adult Fiction in Kenya: A Genre Struggling to Be Born*, supplies the institutional account that precedent still needs. She shows that Kenyan YAF has developed under structural disadvantage: publishers favor children's literature and adult fiction over YAF, schools have not consistently built it into reading programs, and Kenya's

low reading culture, tied to the socio-economic conditions of book access and literacy, has limited the genre's capacity to build readership. Her concept of paratextuation, the role publishers, book councils, and prize bodies play in supporting or suppressing a genre, explains why *Breaking the Silence* (Wa Gichuru, 2009) and *Never Say Never* (Mugo, 2012) can be adopted as school readers and, in the former case, receive prize recognition, while the genre around them remains marginalized. Both texts are published by East African Educational Publishers, whose catalogue targets exactly the secondary school readership YAF addresses, which confirms their institutional standing rather than explaining it.

Wakarindi's account is necessary and rigorous on its own terms, but it answers a different question than this study asks. Institutional analysis explains why a genre circulates the way it does. Textual analysis explains what a text does once it is being read, how its choices of voice, mood, focalization, and characterization produce meaning. Wakarindi's account of why these texts are recognized leaves untouched the question of what narrative techniques earned that recognition in the first place, and that is the question this study takes up. Wakarindi's discussion therefore provides an institutional perspective that complements, rather than duplicates, the narratological approach of the present study. Her analysis explains the conditions under which Kenyan YAF gains visibility, while this study examines the internal narrative structures of texts already circulating within those institutional spaces. The distinction is important because institutional recognition and narrative construction operate at different levels of literary analysis.

2.3.1 Recognition and Institutional Standing of the Selected Texts

Breaking the Silence carries prize recognition and set text status in Rwanda, alongside its place in the East African Educational Publishers catalogue built for the secondary school readership,

as Section 1.1 establishes with reference to Mutu (2020). *Never Say Never* holds a parallel standing through its adoption in Kenyan secondary schools under the same publisher. Wakarindi's (2023) concept of paratextuation explains why this recognition carries weight beyond marking quality. Publishers, book councils, and prize bodies decide which YAF texts reach readers and classrooms and which do not, and Wakarindi shows this genre competes at a structural disadvantage against children's literature and adult fiction for the same limited channels. Against that disadvantage, prize recognition and set text status are rare outcomes, not routine ones.

This recognition justifies the selection of both texts for the present study on two grounds. First, wide readership within Kenya, and in the case of *Breaking the Silence* beyond it, means the narrative construction of silence these texts carry has reached actual readers rather than remaining a feature visible only to a specialist reading the text in isolation. Second, institutional selection marks both texts as representative rather than marginal within the genre, which matters directly for the gap claim built across Sections 2.1 through 2.3: that no prior research has examined the narrative mechanisms of silence in Kenyan YAF. That claim carries more weight when tested against texts the genre's own institutions treat as central.

Wakarindi's account explains why recognition happened. It does not explain what in the narrative construction of these texts earned it. That distinction marks where this study moves from institutional standing to narrative analysis.

2.4 Childhood, Youth, Young People, and Young Adult

This study uses "young adult" to refer to individuals aged 12-18, the age range indicated by the publishers' classification of both texts. East African Educational Publishers markets *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never* as YAF suitable for secondary school readers, while

the National Book Development Council of Kenya classifies both texts within the same readership category. This 12-18 age range corresponds to the Kenyan secondary school population and reflects the developmental stage of the protagonists in both novels. Wakarindi (2023), establishes that Kenyan publishers and literary institutions use "young adult" to designate fiction written for secondary school-age readers, distinguishing it from children's literature on one side and adult fiction on the other. This classification aligns with international YAF genre conventions, where Hintz and Tribunella (2025) define YAF as narrative centered on protagonists aged 12-18 navigating the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Other terms exist: "youth" often appears in policy documents to describe ages 15-35 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), while "young people" functions as an umbrella category in social research. "Childhood" denotes ages 0-12, a categorization supported by developmental psychology (Erikson, 1950; Arnett, 2007) and childhood studies scholarship (James and Prout, 1997), which identify this period as characterized by dependence on adult caregivers and exclusion from formal institutional responsibilities.

These distinctions matter because the protagonists in the selected texts occupy a specific developmental stage. They navigate institutional power (schools, families) without adult autonomy, yet face adult consequences for their choices. Wanjiku in *Breaking the Silence* is subjected to adult judgment for sexual violence committed against her, while Daniel in *Never Say Never* is processed through institutional systems (remand homes, approved schools) that treat him as accountable for his circumstances. Both characters occupy the liminal position Trites (2000), identifies as definitive of YAF protagonists: old enough to be held responsible, but too young to possess the institutional authority to speak on their own behalf.

The narrative silence this study examines operates precisely at this threshold. Characters cannot speak as children do (their silence would be dismissed as immaturity) or as adults do (they lack the authority). The 12-18 age range marks the period where silence becomes a deliberate narrative strategy rather than a function of age alone. Children under 12 are expected to remain silent in most institutional and family contexts, which makes silence unremarkable in narratives centered on that age group. Adults possess institutional voice through legal majority, professional roles, and social standing. Young adults aged 12-18 occupy neither position: they are denied the institutional voice of adults but are no longer granted the protected silence of children.

2.5 Review of Genette's and Bal's Narratological Models

This study is guided by three objectives: to analyze how narrative silence is constructed in the selected texts, to examine how silence functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation, and to evaluate the narrative techniques used in representing silence in the selected texts. Genette's (1980) and Bal's (1985) narratological frameworks, reviewed in this section, supply the analytical tools through which the study pursues these objectives.

Narratology consolidated its identity as a formal discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, growing out of Structuralism. This broader intellectual movement argued that cultural phenomena, including language, myth, and narrative, operate according to underlying rules that can be identified and analyzed systematically. Scholars began asking not what stories mean but how they are built and what mechanisms produce meaning. Vladimir Propp (1928) provided an early demonstration in his analysis of Russian folktales, showing that apparently different tales share a common structure of thirty-one narrative functions performed by fixed character roles. Propp established that narrative structure is systematic, not accidental (Onega and Landa,

2014). Tzvetan Todorov coined the term *narratologie* in 1969 to describe a science devoted to studying narrative as a system. Roland Barthes (1966) argued that narrative is universal across cultures and historical periods, making it deserving of systematic scientific study. A.J. Greimas (1966) contributed the actantial model, identifying deep structural roles characters play: subject, object, helper, and opponent. These early contributions established Narratology as a science concerned with narrative's universal grammar. Gerard Genette and Mieke Bal moved the discipline from studying narrative universals toward analyzing how individual texts are constructed and how their narrative choices produce meaning.

2.5.1 Genette's Framework

Narrative Discourse (Genette, 1980), provides the first set of analytical tools this study applies to the question of how narrative silence is constructed. Genette structures his framework around three distinct levels: story (the narrated events), narrative (the textual discourse representing those events), and narrating (the act of narration itself). He applies five core analytical categories across them: order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice. Voice addresses the narrator's identity and perspective, revealing whose experiences the text centers while marginalizing or silencing others. Mood examines narrative distance and perspective, controlling how much the reader knows and how they know it. Together, voice and mood make it possible to identify where and how a narrative withholds a character's subjectivity and constructs their silence as a structural feature.

2.5.2 Bal's Framework: Evolution and Extension

Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (Bal, 1985; 5th ed. 2025) extends Genette's framework by introducing a rigorous elaboration of focalization. Bal distinguishes

between the focalizer (the agent whose perspective governs what the reader perceives) and the focalized (the object of that perceiving).This distinction allows the analyst to ask not just who sees, but who is seen, and what the relationship between seeing subject and seen object reveals about how identity is constructed. A character consistently rendered as the focalized, seen, assessed, and managed by others rather than a seeing, knowing subject, occupies a position of structural silence even when appearing on every page. This condition is itself narrative silencing, and Bal's framework makes it visible and analyzable. Bal's concept of characterization examines what a text gives a character to say, what it gives others to say about them, and what it withholds from them.

Both frameworks share core tenets. First, narrative structure is not neutral but produces meaning through formal choices. Second, identity in narrative is constructed through what the text permits or denies a character. Third, silence is not absence but a structural effect created through narrative mechanisms. The frameworks complement each other at precise points. Genette's voice and mood identify the mechanisms of narrative control. Bal's focalization explains the power relationships those mechanisms create. Where Genette names the restriction, Bal reveals its consequences. Where Genette establishes who narrates, Bal establishes who is seen and who sees. Applied together, they provide a comprehensive analytical approach for examining how narrative silence is constructed, how it functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation, and what narrative techniques represent these patterns across the selected texts.

2.5.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Framework

The principal strength of Genette's framework lies in its analytical precision. By distinguishing between story, narrative, and narrating, and by developing five discrete analytical categories,

Genette equips the analyst with vocabulary fine-grained enough to locate and name narrative choices. Where impressionistic reading might observe that a character "seems" silent, Genette's framework identifies the precise mechanism: an ellipsis, a restriction in mood, a shift in narrative level, or a suppression of voice. Jahn (2025), confirms that Genette's categories retain their analytical power across literary traditions and generate productive readings of how texts control what readers know and what they are denied.

Bal's contribution lies in its explanatory extension. Where Genette names the mechanism, Bal explains what it does. Her distinction between focalizer and focalized enables the analyst to trace the power relationship a narrative establishes between the one who sees and the one who is seen, and to connect that structural relationship to questions of identity construction. Ryan (2021), confirms that Bal's concept of focalization remains one of the discipline's most generative tools because it bridges the formal and the interpretive: it names a structure and simultaneously reveals its stakes.

The frameworks carry acknowledged limitations and have attracted sustained critical scrutiny, particularly from scholars working in postcolonial and feminist literary traditions. The persistent criticism is that both Genette and Bal developed their frameworks primarily through analysis of European prose fiction. Fludernik (1996), argues that classical Narratology's preoccupation with formal categories produces culturally thin readings when applied to texts produced outside Western literary traditions. Herman (2009) extends this concern, arguing that Narratology's taxonomic character risks treating narrative structure as universal grammar, effacing the local, historical, and cultural specificity that gives particular narrative choices their meaning. Applied to African literature, this criticism carries weight: narrative conventions of Kenyan fiction do not always map onto models Genette derived from his readings of European

texts. Further criticism comes from feminist narratology. Lanser (1992), argues that classical Narratology's treatment of narrative voice as a formal category systematically obscures the gendered dimensions of who is permitted to speak in a text and whose speech the narrative authorizes as reliable. This critique bears directly on this study's examination of *Breaking the Silence,* that the narrative encodes at the level of structure. Treating voice as purely formal risks missing those social conditions.

This study addresses these limitations by applying Genette's and Bal's frameworks as instruments for analysis, not as interpretive conclusions. Each narrative mechanism identifies, a restriction in focalization, a suppression of voice, or an ellipsis, examined in relation to conditions reflected in the text and literary conventions of Kenyan YAF. This includes how social realities such as gender expectations, poverty, and institutional pressures shape characters' opportunities to speak, and how Kenyan YAF conventions organize narrative voice, perspective, and identity construction. The study also maintains attention to gendered and powerful dimensions of narrative authority, integrating Lanser's feminist critique to ensure that formal analysis does not overlook who is permitted to speak and whose voice is marginalized. Following Bal's guidance, the study moves from identification of structural patterns to interpretation of their literary function, assessing how these patterns shape young adult protagonists' identities and how they recur across Kenyan YAF. By situating expected formal findings within conditions of production and meaning in Kenyan texts, the study uses the frameworks responsibly, turning acknowledged limitations into precise analytical strategies.

2.6 Research Gap Summary

This chapter identifies a precise and consequential gap. Global research on YAF, represented by Hintz and Tribunella (2025), Trites (2000), Behrens (2025), and Vanhove and De Backer (2025), has developed narratological tools needed to examine how literary texts construct silence and identity through voice, mood, focalization, and characterization. These scholars establish that identity in YAF is textually constructed, not discovered, and that narrative structure is the mechanism through which that construction happens.

Continental African research, represented by Gikandi (1987), Osei-Nyame (1999), Mutie and Rutere (2023), Sackeyfio (2024), and Mqwebu (2024), establishes both the social and historical context within which silence in African narrative must be understood and the methodological precedent for applying narratological tools to African literary texts. These scholars show that silence in African texts carries historical weight connected to colonial and postcolonial power relations, and that narratological analysis works productively on African texts when used with attention to local conditions.

Regional East African research, represented by Wakota (2024) and Jani (2026), establishes that silence and liminality are recognizable features of East African YAF. Kenyan research, represented by Njeru (2013), Wakarindi (2023), and Mutie and Rutere (2023), identifies that silence and identity are central concerns of Kenyan literary texts, including Kenyan YAF. Njeru establishes that silence is structured into *Never Say Never*. Wakarindi demonstrates that the genre itself has been institutionally marginalized, and that specific texts have received prize recognition and school adoption even while the genre as a whole remains under critiqued.

What these bodies of research share is a common finding: silence matters in African and Kenyan texts. What they also share is a common limitation: they identify silence as a condition

but do not examine the narrative mechanisms through which it is constructed, how it functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation, or what narrative techniques represent these patterns across the genre. The gap is methodological and contextual. It is methodological because existing Kenyan research on YAF has rarely applied Genette's and Bal's frameworks to examine how silence is built into texts as a structural feature. It is contextual because existing global narratological research has not examined Kenyan YAF, which means the local social conditions that give narrative choices their meaning in these texts remain unaddressed in that scholarship.

Global scholars developed precise analytical tools but applied them almost exclusively to Western YAF, missing how silence functions in contexts where poverty, institutional processing, and patriarchal control operate as narrative forces distinct from Western developmental concerns. African scholars identified silence as historically and politically weighted in adult fiction but did not examine whether young adult protagonists, who lack institutional authority adults possess, deploy silence differently. East African scholars observed liminality and ambiguous narrative positioning in regional YAF but did not name the narrative mechanisms, voice suppression, focalization restriction, mood control, through which that liminality is constructed. Kenyan scholars documented that silence exists and matters in Kenyan texts but stopped at identification, treating texts as records of social experience rather than as literary objects with analyzable narrative architectures.

Scholars have rarely examined how Kenyan YAF constructs silence through narrative mechanisms, how that constructed silence enables protagonists to resist institutional and patriarchal definition while forming identities those structures cannot fully occupy, or what narrative techniques represent these patterns when the same mechanisms appear across

independently written texts in the genre. This study addressed this gap by bringing Gerard Genette's (1980) and Mieke Bal's (1985) frameworks to *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never,* examining not what these texts are about but how they are built, and demonstrating that silence in Kenyan YAF is not incidental absence but a deliberate narrative construction through which Wanjiku and Daniel resist definition and form identities against constraint.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology through which the study pursued its three objectives. It sets out the research design and its suitability for the study, defines the study population together with the unit of analysis and unit of observation, and describes the sampling procedure, data collection technique, and data analysis procedure applied to the selected texts. It closes with the measures taken to establish consistency and credibility in the analysis and the ethical considerations relevant to a study conducted on published literary texts.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical literary research design within the qualitative research approach. A descriptive-analytical literary research design is concerned with the systematic description and interpretation of literary texts to explain how meaning is produced through narrative structures. This design was appropriate because the study sought to identify and analyze the narratological mechanisms through which silence is constructed in the selected texts, examine how those mechanisms function as a strategy of resistance and identity formation, and evaluate the narrative techniques that represent silence across both novels. The qualitative approach situates this design within a broader concern with interpretation and meaning-making in textual and cultural contexts rather than measurement or statistical generalization. Together, the design and approach allowed the researcher to work with the full complexity of literary language without reducing it to quantifiable units, and to apply a

consistent analytical framework across texts in a manner that is both rigorous and sensitive to the meanings that formal choices generate within their cultural and literary contexts.

3.2 Study Area

The two primary texts that formed the analytical corpus were Wa Gichuru's *Breaking the Silence* (2009) and Mugo's *Never Say Never* (2012). Both novels are works of Kenyan YAF that place the identity struggles of young adult protagonists at the structural center of their narratives and engage directly with the social and institutional conditions of Kenyan life.

3.3 Study Population

In a documentary literary study, Bowen (2009) defines the study population as the body of documents relevant to the research problem. The study population for this study was contemporary Kenyan YAF: written literary texts identifiable as Kenyan YAF by virtue of being written for a young adult readership, structurally centering young adult protagonists whose processes of identity formation drive the narrative, and set within recognizable Kenyan social and cultural contexts.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The study applied purposive sampling to select its analytical corpus. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique in which the researcher deliberately selects items based on characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This technique was appropriate for the study because it did not seek a statistically representative sample of all YAF texts; rather, the researcher selected texts that were particularly suited to illuminating the research problem under investigation.

The study selected Wa Gichuru's *Breaking the Silence* and Mugo's *Never Say Never* as the primary data based on three criteria. Firstly, both novels are identifiable as Kenyan YAF, meeting the genre classification of works intended for a young adult readership and set within recognizable Kenyan social and institutional contexts. Secondly, both texts have received institutional recognition through school adoption. Thirdly, the sample size of two primary texts reflects the depth of narratological analysis undertaken in the study, which is based on close, systematic, and theoretically grounded reading of the selected novels.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through systematic textual extraction and close reading of both primary texts. Close reading, as the principal instrument of data collection in literary narratology, requires the researcher to attend carefully and systematically to the language, structure, and narrative choices of each text, identifying textual markers, silences, and narrative gaps whose formal features are relevant to the research questions (Bowen, 2009).

In the present study, close reading was not impressionistic but directed. It focused on specific formal features as defined by the analytical framework, including instances where a character's voice is suppressed or absent, where focalization is transferred away from the young adult protagonist, where narrative mood restricts the reader's access to the protagonist's interiority, and where characterization withholds from the protagonist the status of a narrating subject. These formal features constitute the textual markers through which silence is embedded in each text's narrative architecture, and their systematic identification across both novels produced the primary data for analysis.

The secondary data, comprising academic research, theoretical works, and critical sources reviewed in Chapter Two, provided the interpretive context within which the extracted primary data was examined.

The data collection procedure followed a three-stage protocol. The first stage was Initial Structural Mapping, in which the researcher conducted an exploratory reading of each primary text to identify key segments where the young adult protagonist's voice is absent, suppressed, exercised as deliberate refusal, or transferred to another narrative agent. This stage produced a provisional structural map of each novel's narrative architecture in relation to silence as both construction and resistance.

The second stage was Targeted Extraction, in which the researcher isolated narrative units, including scenes, dialogues, and passages of internal monologue, that display restricted focalization, narrative ellipsis, or suppression of character voice as defined by Genette (1980) and Bal (1985).

The third stage was Systematic Documentation, in which each extracted unit was recorded with its precise page reference, the narrative mechanism it displayed (voice suppression, focalization transfer, ellipsis, or restricted characterization), and the protagonist to whom it belonged. This process produced a structured, text-anchored inventory of formal instances of silence across both novels, which then served as the raw data for analysis.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The study address both reliability and validity as conditions of trustworthiness. Reliability, in qualitative research, refers to the consistency and dependability of the analytical process: a reliable study applies its instruments in the same way across data, so that another researcher

following the same procedure would produce comparable findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2023).

The study promotes reliability by applying the same analytical framework, Genette's (1980) categories of voice and mood and Bal's (1985) concepts of focalization and characterization, to both primary texts using the same three-stage data collection protocol. The frameworks are well-documented and their key concepts are defined precisely in Chapter Two, which means the analytical procedure is replicable and the researcher's decisions at each stage can be tracked and assessed.

Validity refers to the accuracy and credibility of research findings. A study is considered valid when it investigates what it purports to examine and when its conclusions are supported by the evidence generated from the data (Mirza *et al.,* 2023). In this study, validity is enhanced through three key measures. First, all analytical claims are grounded in textual evidence derived from the primary data. Interpretations are based on specific passages and excerpts from the selected novels, ensuring that conclusions remain closely linked to the source texts and reducing the likelihood of unsupported inferences.

Secondly, the study utilized two independently authored primary texts. Findings that emerged consistently across both novels are considered to have greater evidential strength than those identified in a single text. The convergence of themes across works written by different authors and situated within different social contexts one focusing on gendered patriarchal silence and the other on institutional silence associated with poverty supports the interpretation of silence as a broader literary and social phenomenon. This convergence suggests that silence functions as a mechanism of resistance and identity formation at a genre level rather than merely reflecting the stylistic choices of an individual author.

Third, the findings are interpreted in relation to the scholarly literature reviewed in Chapter Two. By situating the analysis within existing academic discourse, the study ensures that interpretive decisions can be evaluated against established knowledge, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the conclusions.

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

The study applied a deductive approach to data analysis, where the theoretical frameworks of Genette (1980) and Bal (1985) served as the analytical lenses through which the extracted primary data was examined. The deductive approach was appropriate in this study because the analytical categories voice, mood, focalization, and characterization were established in advance by the theoretical framework and were applied to the data rather than being generated inductively from it.

To move systematically from raw text to narratological findings, the analysis proceeded through four operations drawing on the thematic analysis principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), adapted here to a deductive literary analytical context. The first operation was Familiarization. The researcher read both primary texts in their entirety in order to gain a thorough understanding of each text's narrative architecture before any analytical extraction began. This stage corresponded to Braun and Clarke's (2006) first phase and ensured that all subsequent categorization was grounded in a complete reading of the data.

The second operation was Categorization. The researcher sorted the extracted textual units into two structural positions using Genette's (1980) categories of voice and mood as the categorization instruments. The first position was Narrative Silence, which refers to instances where a character's voice is absent, suppressed, or mediated by another narrative agent. The second position was Narrative Speech, which refers to instances where a character's voice is

authorized, direct, and self-presenting. This process produced a structured inventory of moments in each text where silence was formally present as a narrative condition.

The third operation was Interrogation. The researcher analyzed how shifts in focalization specifically the movement from the young adult protagonist as focalizer to an adult narrator or institutional gaze as focalizer and how the protagonist's strategic return to silence when that gaze intensified operated as a site of resistance and a tool of identity formation. Genette's concepts of voice and mood were used to identify the mechanisms of narrative control. Bal's (1985) concept of focalization was used to explain the power relations produced by these mechanisms and to examine the consequences for the protagonist's identity. Each shift was interrogated in relation to Bal's distinction between focalizer and focalized: when a young adult was rendered as the focalized, the analysis examined both what this structural position cost the character in terms of identity and how silence within that position functioned as the character's primary means of self-protection. Bal's concept of characterization was also applied alongside focalization to examine what the text allowed each protagonist to say, what it allowed others to say about them, and what it withheld.

The fourth operation was Synthesis. The researcher compared findings across both primary texts in order to identify patterns of resistance and identity formation that silence, as a narrative construct, produced across YAF. This operation corresponded to Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of generating, reviewing, and defining themes, adapted here to a deductive literary context. Rather than generating inductive themes, the researcher assessed whether the narrative mechanisms identified in Objective One produced convergent functions of resistance and identity formation as examined in Objective Two, and whether those convergences constituted recognizable narrative techniques at the genre level as required by Objective Three. All

findings were presented in a thematic and analytical format organized around the three objectives and the key narratological concepts, with direct textual evidence from the primary texts supporting each interpretive claim.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study analyzed two published literary texts as opposed to collecting data from human participants, the ethical considerations relevant to it are narrower than those required for research involving human subjects. The study nonetheless secured a research license from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation before commencing, in line with the regulatory requirement for research conducted in Kenya (NACOSTI, 2023).

Beyond this formal requirement, two commitments governed the study's conduct: intellectual honesty, observed by citing every consulted source in accordance with APA conventions and attributing every idea or wording drawn from another author (Bhandari, 2022); and fidelity to the primary texts, observed by representing the plot, dialogue, and characterization of both novels accurately and without distortion in service of the study's argument. These two commitments meet the standard of academic integrity appropriate to a documentary literary study conducted on texts already in the public domain.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This study was prompted by problem statement and the gap identified in Chapter Two: existing studies on YAF documents the social and institutional conditions these texts represent without examining how those conditions are formally constructed through narrative structure. To address this gap, the study set three objectives: to analyze how narrative silence is constructed in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*, to examine how silence functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation in the selected texts, and to evaluate the narrative techniques used in representing silence across both novels. This chapter presents the findings produced by the four-operation analytical procedure described in Chapter Three, Familiarization, Categorization, Interrogation, and Synthesis, applied to both primary texts using Genette's (1980) categories of voice and mood and Bal's (1985) concepts of focalization and characterization. The Categorization stage produced the structured inventory of narrative silence and narrative speech presented in Section 4.1. The Interrogation stage, which examined shifts in focalization between protagonist and institutional gaze, produced the findings on resistance and identity formation presented in Section 4.2. The Synthesis stage, comparing patterns across both texts, produced the cross-textual findings on narrative technique presented in Section 4.3. Section 4.4 concludes the chapter by relating these findings to the scholarship reviewed in Chapter Two and summarizing their implications. Throughout, the analysis attends to the precise narrative mechanism at work in each instance and to what that mechanism reveals about how Wanjiku and Daniel resist definition by the institutional and patriarchal structures that surround them. Each subsection follows the same analytical chain: textual evidence is

identified, the narrative technique it exhibits is named, that technique is read through the relevant Genette or Bal concept, the concept's consequence for Wanjiku's or Daniel's identity or resistance is drawn out, and the resulting finding is then set against the studies reviewed in Chapter Two to show where it agrees with, diverges from, extends, or complicates existing scholarship.

4.1 Construction of Narrative Silence

This section examines silence as a constructed feature of narrative form rather than an incidental absence in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*. Following Genette (1980) and Bal (1985), construction here refers to the specific formal choices, what a text withholds, when it withholds it, how it positions a character within the narrating structure, and how plot sequences the release of information, that produce silence as a textual effect rather than a gap left by accident. Wanjiku's silence in *Breaking the Silence* and Daniel's silence in *Never Say Never* are each the product of identifiable narrative decisions, and this section isolates four such mechanisms in turn. Subsection 4.1.1 examines narrative gaps and withholding, the moments where the text declines to supply information available to it. Subsection 4.1.2 examines temporal arrangement, analyzing how the delay or reordering of revelation shapes what the reader knows and when. Subsection 4.1.3 examines characterization, asking how each protagonist is rendered a silent subject through the narrating voice's management of their experience. Subsection 4.1.4 examines plot structuring, considering how the sequencing of events itself enforces silence independent of voice or temporal arrangement. Across all four mechanisms, the analysis treats silence as something the text does, not something that merely happens to its protagonists.

4.1.1 Narrative Gaps and Withholding

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"Even then, I did not really think the worst could happen to me. After all, these were my classmates… Macharia wrestled me to the ground while the others cheered him on. He pulled me into the bush. That is when I realised that he wanted more than a kiss."(p.4)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"Our destination, I later learnt, was the District Children's Services Office… We walked outside the gate; then an alarm went off in my mind. We were heading for the police station." (p. 17)*

Both novels withhold information the narrating voice already possesses, so the reader's uncertainty mirrors the protagonist's own. In *Breaking the Silence*, ordinary classroom detail precedes any sign of intent. Macharia's assault is narrated as event before the reader is given cause. *Never Say Never* withholds through institutional misdirection, and the misdirection runs longer than a single scene. Daniel is thrust bodily into a government Land Rover, its engine already running, leaving his mother screaming at the gate (p. 14 to 15). He is deposited at the District Children's Services Office, told nothing, then escorted to a police cell and locked in for the night with Kabangi, a stranger who falls immediately asleep (p. 16 to 18). The following day he is paraded to a Law Court without being told what crime he is answering for (p. 19 to 20). Only after this sequence does the matatu journey to Getathuru follow.

That journey repeats the same withholding pattern at a smaller scale. Daniel is given breakfast he cannot taste because his mind is elsewhere, then walked through a city whose scale and disorder he records in close visual detail: the height of the buildings, the boys sitting at tyre fires with bottles in their mouths, the piles of filth on the alleys. None of this detail explains where he is going. His escort himself loses the route and has to stop a newspaper vendor for directions before they board a matatu. The destination arrives only as a signboard, Getathuru Reception and Discharge Centre, read after Daniel has already been pulled through the door

and lost two shirt buttons in the process. He learns what the place is at the same moment the reader does, from the same object, the sign, rather than from any adult's explanation.

What is withheld in each case is not incidental detail but the fact the scene depends on: sexual violence in Wanjiku's case, criminal processing and institutional transfer in Daniel's. The delay puts the reader in the same position of not knowing that the protagonist occupies. This matters past suspense. A reader denied the fact needed to interpret an event cannot judge it as it happens, and judgment arrives only once the text permits recognition, the same position Wanjiku and Daniel occupy in relation to the adults who process them without explanation. Jahn (2025) locates this silence at the level of telling rather than event, but the effect the novels produce with it is more specific: they train the reader into the deferred understanding both protagonists live under, so recognition comes late and correction comes later still. Genette's (1980) account of mood, the text's regulation of what the reader is permitted to know, describes the device; what the novels do with it is make the child's delayed understanding legible as structure rather than as a failing of the child.

4.1.2 Temporal Arrangement and Delayed Revelation

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"Mother, I have been raped by three boys."… "What!… I mean, how?" (p. 8–9)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"My mother grabbed me, shouting at the top of her voice… 'We have come for him. We want him to get an education.'"(p.17)*

Both novels place information out of chronological order, delaying revelation past the point logic would put it. Wanjiku names the act before her mother, or the reader, can process it, and the scene refuses to advance on that knowledge. Instead her mother's repeated incomprehension stretches a single moment of recognition into an extended sequence in which

Wanjiku, and the reader with her, waits for a response that does not come. *Never Say Never* delays through action before explanation: abduction, screaming, a forced door, and only then the line that reframes it, "We want him to get an education." Mukherjee's (2025) point that postcolonial texts use non-linear chronology to deny readers a coherent timeline applies directly here, since both novels supply the institutional frame only after the reader has already processed the scene as violence. The consequence is not just narrative disorientation. It reverses the burden of interpretation the institutions themselves impose: Wanjiku's mother and the officials at Daniel's door both act first and explain later, if at all, and the delayed revelation asks the reader to feel the cost of that order rather than simply observe it. Genette's (1980) account of order as independent of story chronology names the mechanism; here it recreates, for the reader, the experience of an authority that acts before it accounts for itself.

4.1.3 Characterization and Silent Subjectivities

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"I remember the experience vividly… The pain was unbearable and seemed to go on forever… How could I let whoever was passing find me in that state?"*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"I could hardly see why she was so mad. To my young mind, it was much ado about nothing."*

Both novels withhold access to the pain of the experiencing self even while narrating that pain occurred. *Never Say Never*'s adult narrator converts the six-year-old's fear into retrospective comic irony, a perspective the child did not possess at the time. *Breaking the Silence* performs a related withdrawal at a moment of greater violence: the narrating voice announces vivid memory, then retreats into procedural notation rather than sustained interiority, before pivoting after the assault toward shame instead of injury. Osei-Nyame (1999) reads this withholding of female interiority as a standing feature of African fiction's characterization of women;

Wanjiku's own narrating voice performing that same denial on her own experience shows the mechanism working from inside a woman's first-person account, not only from outside it, which complicates Osei-Nyame's framework rather than simply confirming it. The consequence for identity is specific to each protagonist. Wanjiku's shame displaces her own injury from the record even in a text she narrates herself, so the silence Osei-Nyame locates in patriarchal structures survives inside a first-person, ostensibly self-authored account. Daniel's comic retrospection does the opposite work, protecting the adult narrator from the child's terror rather than protecting an institution from Daniel's account. Bal's (1985) distinction between perceived and expressed experience clarifies both cases: each novel shows suffering as event without granting the reader access to what the child felt while it happened.

4.1.4 Silence through Plot Structuring

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"It was agreed that the parents of the three boys would pay four goats and two sheep each in fines." (p. 93)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"He was escorted outside the building and into the evening sun… 'Well, take him across for the night.'"*

Both novels resolve conflict through plot sequencing that proceeds whether or not the protagonist's account enters the record. In *Breaking the Silence*, the case against Wanjiku's attackers moves through complaint, confession, and compensation to settlement without her testimony entering the proceeding. *Never Say Never* runs a parallel institutional chain: removal, processing, the order to hold him overnight, each stage a precondition for the next, with no point soliciting Daniel's account. Trites (2000) frames institutional authority in YAF as constraining a protagonist's self-expression through exactly this kind of narrative choice, over who speaks and whose account counts. What the plot sequencing does beyond confirming

that constraint is remove the protagonist from the causal chain altogether: resolution in both novels would proceed identically whether Wanjiku or Daniel spoke or stayed silent, since neither account is a variable the plot needs. That is a stronger claim than institutional silencing. It means the protagonist's voice was never a structural requirement for resolution in the first place, only for the reader's understanding of what resolution cost. Genette's (1980) concept of order at the level of plot names this: sequence determines whose account counts toward resolution, and here it counts for neither Wanjiku nor Daniel.

The findings for Objective One, to analyze how narrative silence is constructed in the selected texts, show that in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*, silence is built through four distinct formal choices: information withheld from the reader that outpaces the protagonist's own understanding (Section 4.1.1), revelation delayed past the point chronology would place it (Section 4.1.2), characterization that narrates a protagonist's suffering without granting access to the experiencing self (Section 4.1.3), and plot sequencing that resolves conflict independent of whether the protagonist's account enters the record (Section 4.1.4). In the two texts examined in this study, each mechanism produces silence as an architectural feature of the narrative rather than an absence the story merely reports.

4.2 Silence as a Narrative Strategy

Where the preceding section examined how silence is constructed in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*, this section examines what that constructed silence does once it is in place. Silence in both novels is not only a condition imposed on Wanjiku and Daniel but a resource each protagonist draws on, withholds, or breaks at specific moments, with consequences for how they resist the structures around them and how their identities take shape under pressure. Subsection 4.2.1 examines silence and resistance, analyzing the moments where breaking

silence functions as an act against the systems that previously processed each protagonist without requiring their voice. Subsection 4.2.2 examines silence and identity negotiation, considering how each protagonist's sense of self is renegotiated through proximity to extreme institutional power and through models of survival the text places before them. Subsection 4.2.3 turns to focalization, examining how the distribution of perspective across each narrative shapes what readers are permitted to know about silence as it operates. Subsection 4.2.4 considers reader positioning, analyzing how the gaps and silences identified throughout this chapter require the reader to produce meaning the text itself withholds. Together, these four subsections treat silence not as a static condition but as an active narrative strategy with consequences for both protagonists and readers.

4.2.1 Silence and Resistance

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"I had broken the unwritten rule in our village. Someone had finally paid for sexually abusing a woman. I had broken the silence." (p. 93)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"One of these days, I will kill that rascal… I sat there staring at him in bewilderment. How could one adapt so quickly to such a situation?" (p. 19–20)*

Both novels stage moments where breaking silence acts against institutions that had previously processed the protagonist without requiring a voice. In *Breaking the Silence*, the courtroom reverses Wanjiku's earlier silencing, converting her account into formal acknowledgment of harm, and her own framing names resistance directly as the novel's achievement. *Never Say Never* stages resistance through survival rather than confrontation: Daniel's cellmate models a defiance Daniel has not yet adopted, and Daniel's terrified silence is not capitulation but the only self-preservation available to him in that cell. Gikandi (1987) reads withheld speech in African fiction as protection against systems that would use a character's words against them;

Daniel's silence fits that reading exactly, chosen self-protection rather than enforced absence. The two novels therefore locate resistance at opposite ends of the same spectrum. Wanjiku's resistance requires an institution willing to hear her, however belatedly, while Daniel's requires no audience at all, which suggests resistance in these texts depends less on the protagonist's will than on whether an institution exists that can register it. Genette's (1980) account of voice as structural clarifies the difference: what changes across the two novels is not the protagonist's capacity to resist but the narrative's willingness to let a voice, present or modeled, register as consequential.

4.2.2 Silence and Identity Negotiation

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"The guilt I felt when I learned of his death was overwhelming. I almost felt as if I had killed him." (p. 93)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"I found myself formulating my defence… I interpreted his smile to mean the judge's foul mood had thawed." (p. 20)*

Both novels use institutional confrontation to unsettle identity rather than resolve it. Wanjiku's identity after the trial is destabilized by guilt over Macharia's death, not settled by the verdict. Daniel negotiates identity through confusion about guilt itself, building a version of himself capable of answering a charge he cannot name, reading a cellmate's smile as the only evidence available to him. Hintz and Tribunella (2025) argue identity in YAF is produced through the protagonist's choices rather than imposed by surrounding structures; both novels narrow that claim, since the choices available to Wanjiku and Daniel at these moments are constrained past the point where choice does the work Hintz and Tribunella's framework assumes. Wanjiku's guilt arrives unsolicited, without a choice preceding it, and Daniel constructs a defence with no reliable information to build it from. What both novels show, past the point Hintz and

Tribunella's model reaches, is that the institutions never intended for identity formation to be a fair contest: guilt and confusion are what the encounter leaves behind, not raw material a protagonist gets to shape. Bal's (1985) focalization through the perceiving rather than acting subject fits both moments: identity is not resolved by plot outcome but stays contested against what that outcome cost or never explained.

4.2.3 Focalization and the Representation of Silence

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"I would not want my sister to attend a school where students take drugs and rape fellow students." / "…they still had to pay for the crime they had committed."(p.40)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"I found myself formulating my defence. This was not easy because I did not know what crime I had committed." (p. 20)*

Both novels stage conflict between competing interpretations of the same event. Headmaster Munene and church elder Muiruri each focalize Wanjiku's assault as reputational hazard or sin rather than crime, while the narrative grants Wanjiku's own focalization superior clarity by reporting her retort and her mother's correction directly. *Never Say Never* builds a comparable structure through Daniel's inability to focalize his own situation at all. Wakota (2024) identifies this ambiguous positioning, where a protagonist's perspective is neither fully authorized nor fully suppressed, as recurring in East African YAF. The two texts diverge on how that ambiguity resolves. Wanjiku moves from suppressed to authorized focalizer across the narrative, so the reader's trust in her interpretation grows with the plot. Daniel never makes that move; his focalization stays unauthorized to the novel's end, which means the reader's sympathy for him has to form without ever being confirmed by the narrative's own interpretive authority, a harder position for a reader to hold than the one *Breaking the Silence* asks of its

reader. Bal's (1985) distinction between focalizer and focalized names the contrast precisely: Wanjiku moves toward focalizer, Daniel stays focalized.

4.2.4 Reader Positioning and Meaning Production

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"I had broken the silence." (p. 93)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"I found myself formulating my defence." (p. 20)*

The gaps, delays, and competing focalizations traced through this chapter require the reader to produce meaning the text declines to state. No character in *Breaking the Silence* connects the village's compensation customs to the courtroom's formal sentencing directly. The reader assembles that connection from juxtaposed scenes. *Never Say Never* places the reader inside Daniel's interpretive vacuum without mediation, since neither Daniel nor the reader knows the charge against him. Zeidanin et al. (2025) argue that when trauma narratives deny characters control over their own frame, readers must do the interpretive work the character cannot, which is the position both novels put the reader in. That transfer of labor is not neutral. It makes the reader complicit in the same interpretive gap the institutions in both novels exploit: just as no adult explains customary law to Wanjiku or criminal charges to Daniel, the text does not explain its own juxtapositions to the reader, so understanding the novel requires the reader to do, in miniature, the work of sense-making that the institutions in the story refuse to do for their protagonists. Genette's (1980) account of mood as regulation of reader knowledge describes exactly this transfer.

The findings for Objective Two, to examine how silence functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation, show that in the two texts examined in this study, silence operates differently for each protagonist while producing comparable structural effects. Wanjiku's silence converts into institutionally registered resistance once an audience exists

willing to hear it, while Daniel's silence functions as self-protection requiring no audience at all (Section 4.2.1). Both protagonists' identities remain unsettled rather than resolved by institutional confrontation (Section 4.2.2). Focalization determines whose interpretation the reader is permitted to trust, and the two novels resolve that uncertainty differently for each protagonist (Section 4.2.3). The resulting narrative gaps transfer interpretive labor onto the reader in a way that mirrors the interpretive burden each protagonist carries within the story (Section 4.2.4).

4.3 Narrative Techniques of Representing Silence

The preceding sections established that silence in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never* is constructed through specific formal choices and functions as a strategy of resistance, identity negotiation, and reader engagement. This section isolates the discrete narrative techniques responsible for these effects, treating each as a distinct formal device available to both novelists rather than as a byproduct of construction or function already discussed. Subsection 4.3.1 examines focalization as a technique in its own right, attending to how perspective is assigned and withheld across scenes. Subsection 4.3.2 examines ellipsis and omission, the specific textual mechanics through which information is excluded from the narrative. Subsection 4.3.3 examines narrative voice, analyzing who is granted the authority to narrate and under what conditions that authority shifts. Subsection 4.3.4 examines temporal manipulation, consolidating the chapter's findings on delay and reordering into a focused account of technique. Subsection 4.3.5 examines characterization as a technique, isolating how textual description, dialogue allocation, and narratorial commentary combine to produce silent subjectivity. Taken together, these five subsections demonstrate that the patterns identified earlier in this chapter are not incidental features of two unrelated novels but recurring technical

choices shared by both texts, which this study reads as evidence of a recognizable narrative approach to representing silence in the two texts examined here.

4.3.1 Focalization

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"He then told us that we should try and settle the matter with the village elder and the parents of those boys, 'kinyumbani'(p.8)… I could not believe it. He was not even going to arrest them!"*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"He seized my mother and strangled her to death before my eyes, then walked to the police station. To this day, I still see him do it in my sleep." (p. 82)*

Focalization operates as a discrete technique through the specific perspective each authority figure brings to the protagonist's situation. The chief's redirection of Wanjiku's case toward customary settlement demonstrates focalization functioning as categorization, rendered through simple juxtaposition with Wanjiku's disbelief rather than authorial commentary. *Never Say Never* demonstrates the same technique by briefly transferring focalizing authority to Daniel's dormitory companion, whose trauma is focalized entirely through his own retrospective horror. Jahn (2025) confirms that focalization at the level of narrating, where the act of telling itself determines which perspective the reader inhabits, is the site where institutional power most consistently inscribes itself into narrative structure; both novels demonstrate this through authority figures whose focalizing choices redirect the protagonists' situations without the text offering authorial correction.

4.3.2 Ellipsis and Omission

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"…kinyumbani," as he put it. (no further explanation given)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"The administration was silent on our fate." (p. 82)*

Ellipsis functions as the deliberate exclusion of explanatory material the narrative could supply but withholds. The chief's instruction is delivered without narrated justification, no explanation of customary law, no account of why a clinical officer's advice is undercut. *Never Say Never* constructs a comparable omission around institutional process, naming the silence explicitly rather than dramatizing it. Mutie and Rutere (2023) find that silence in Kenyan texts functions as a strategically deployed condition that protects characters' identities from institutional definition; the ellipsis in both novels operates the same way at the level of narrative structure, declining to supply the institutional reasoning that would make those systems legible and therefore normalizable. Ellipsis here is distinct from the gaps in 4.1.1, where information was withheld temporarily; here it is never supplied at all.

4.3.3 Narrative Voice

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): "I wondered what the case had to do with the village elder."

Text 2 (Never Say Never): "Personally, I didn't know my father. He divorced my mother before I was born because she was not educated." (p. 82)

Narrative voice as technique includes moments where first-person narration yields space to direct, uninterrupted speech from another character, or retains evaluative command despite institutional override. Daniel's dormitory companion narrates his own trauma in his own words; Daniel's own disclosure answers in the same plain register. Wanjiku retains her voice as evaluative center even as the chief's authority overrides her. Kapadia et al. (2026) demonstrate that characters who speak in direct, unfragmented language at moments of institutional pressure are not simply reporting experience but actively claiming the right to narrate their own lives, which is what both Daniel's companion and Wanjiku perform here.

This confirms Genette's (1980) account of voice as a question of who narrates and from what position.

4.3.4 Temporal Manipulation

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): "Every time I started to fall asleep, I would start seeing those boys again and I would jerk awake… I dreamt I was being raped all over again." (p. 8–9)

Text 2 (Never Say Never): "Armed with my books, five hundred and thirty seven shillings which I had earned in nine years… the ride to town brought back memories of my journey to the reception centre nine years before." (p. 134)

Temporal manipulation compresses or expands narrative duration to produce specific interpretive effects. *Never Say Never* compresses nearly a decade into a single transition, then folds present onto past explicitly. *Breaking the Silence* manipulates time through compression of consequence rather than years, a single night of fractured sleep rendered so duration matches psychological experience rather than clock time. Mukherjee (2025) argues that non-linear and compressed temporality in postcolonial texts is not stylistic ornament but a formal refusal of the ordered institutional timeline; Daniel's nine-year compression achieves this refusal by making the approved school system illegible as a developmental sequence, reducing it to a monetary figure, while Wanjiku's stretched night refuses to let the assault be absorbed into past tense.

4.3.5 Characterization

Text 1 (Breaking the Silence): *"…kinyumbani," (one-word recharacterization of the case)*

Text 2 (Never Say Never): *"We were heroes… The administration was silent on our fate." (p. 82)*

Characterization as technique isolates how textual description and institutional non-response combine to produce silence as formal effect. *Never Say Never* characterizes Daniel's position through the absence of institutional voice following achievement. *Breaking the Silence* achieves a comparable effect through the chief's one-word recharacterization of rape as domestic matter. Njeru (2013) establishes that silence in *Never Say Never* is structured into the text rather than incidental to it, and that Daniel's loss of voice connects directly to his loss of identity; the characterization technique identified here shows the precise mechanism through which that connection is built, since it is the absence of institutional response to achievement, not the presence of institutional hostility, that finally confirms Daniel's voicelessness. Both confirm Bal's (1985) account of characterization as a function of what a text permits to be said measured against what the situation demands.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings for Objective Three, to evaluate the narrative techniques used to represent silence in the selected texts, rank the five techniques identified in Section 4.3 by their explanatory power. The five techniques identified above do not carry equal weight in producing silence, and treating them as interchangeable understates what each contributes. Focalization and characterization do the most explanatory work, since both operate at the level of who is permitted to know and to be known, the register Genette (1980) and Bal (1985) treat as foundational to voice and mood. Ellipsis and temporal manipulation are narrower tools by comparison. Ellipsis removes a single piece of explanatory material at a specific point, as with the chief's "kinyumbani," while temporal manipulation reshapes duration across a passage, as with Daniel's nine years compressed into one line. Both are local effects nested inside the broader focalizing and characterizing choices that determine whose perspective the reader

trusts across the whole novel. Narrative voice sits between the two groups: it produces silence only when paired with a shift in focalization, as when Daniel's cellmate briefly narrates his own trauma, which means voice alone, without the focalizing shift that licenses it, would not carry the same effect. Ranked by explanatory power, then, focalization does the most to organize silence across both novels, characterization follows closely by fixing what kind of subject each protagonist is permitted to be, and ellipsis and temporal manipulation function as the local instruments those two broader techniques direct.

This ranking also answers why the same event, institutional processing without protagonist testimony, produces different effects in the two novels: *Breaking the Silence* relies more heavily on characterization to keep Wanjiku legible as a moral subject even while institutions silence her, while *Never Say Never* relies more heavily on focalization withheld outright, which is why Daniel's silence reads as more total than Wanjiku's despite both protagonists facing comparable institutional indifference.

This chapter has examined narrative silence as a constructed, functional, and technically produced feature of *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*, using the four-operation procedure described in Chapter Three to move from raw textual data to the findings presented across Sections 4.1 through 4.3. The findings for Objective One, to analyze how narrative silence is constructed in the selected texts, are established in Section 4.1: silence in both novels results from identifiable formal choices, withheld information, delayed revelation, characterization that grants speech without authority, and plot sequences that resolve conflict independent of the protagonist's voice. These findings extend Gikandi's (1987) account of silence as formal architecture and complicate Osei-Nyame's (1999) gendered framework by showing a structurally comparable pattern operating on a male protagonist. The findings for

Objective Two, to examine how silence functions as a narrative strategy of resistance and identity formation, are demonstrated in Section 4.2: this constructed silence functions strategically, confirming Gikandi's claim that silence operates as chosen resistance as well as imposed constraint, while supplying the narratological specificity the global silence studies reviewed in Chapter Two did not provide. These findings are extended by the analysis in Section 4.3, which isolated the specific techniques, focalization, ellipsis, voice, temporal manipulation, and characterization, that recur across both novels, extending Njeru's (2013) thematic findings into formal analysis and confirming the complementary relationship between this study's textual focus and Wakarindi's (2023) institutional account of the genre.

Read together, these findings confirm that Wanjiku and Daniel are silenced and given voice by the same narrative architecture, applied to different forms of harm, sexual violence in one case, institutional displacement in the other. This consistency across two independently authored, otherwise distinct novels indicates that in the two texts examined in this study, narrative silence is not incidental to either text but a shared formal strategy through which both authors stage resistance and identity formation under conditions of institutional power. The findings from these two texts suggest, though a larger sample would be needed to confirm this across the genre, that narrative form, not only narrative content, may shape how resistance is enacted and identity is negotiated by young adult protagonists more broadly in Kenyan YAF. More directly, these findings address the gap identified in Chapter Two between thematic and structural approaches to Kenyan YAF: where prior scholarship documented what these texts represent, this study has shown how *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never* construct that representation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter closes the study. It summarises the findings against the study's research objectives, draws an overall conclusion and states the study's limitations, and sets out recommendations and directions for further research that follow from those findings.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study set out to explore narrative silence as a constructed, functional, and technically produced feature of *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never*, applying Genette's (1980) categories of voice and mood and Bal's (1985) concepts of focalization and characterization to two Kenyan YAF texts not previously examined together through this theoretical lens. The following subsections summarize the study's findings against each of its three objectives.

5.2.1 The Construction of Narrative Silence in the selected texts

The study found that narrative silence in *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never* is systematically constructed through narrative gaps and withholding, temporal arrangement, characterization, and plot structuring. These mechanisms consistently restrict protagonists' narrative authority while shaping readers' understanding of their experiences. Both novels withhold information the narrating voice already possesses, delay or reorder revelation relative to story chronology, grant protagonists speech without narrative authority, and resolve plot independent of whether the protagonist's account is heard. These mechanisms recur across both texts despite their different plots, Wanjiku's sexual assault and Daniel's institutional

displacement, which indicates that narrative silence in Kenyan YAF is produced through identifiable formal choices rather than occurring as an incidental feature of either story.

5.2.2 Silence as a Strategy of Resistance and Identity Formation

The study established that silence functions as a strategy of resistance by allowing protagonists to preserve agency and negotiate identities within patriarchal and institutional structures. Breaking silence operates as resistance once institutional structures finally permit a protagonist's voice to register, as in Wanjiku's courtroom testimony, while silence itself functions as resistance through survival, as in Daniel's observation of his cellmate's hardened defiance. Both protagonists' identities are negotiated rather than resolved by these confrontations: Wanjiku's vindication is complicated by guilt over Macharia's death, and Daniel's self-understanding is constructed through inference rather than knowledge. Focalization distributes credible perspective unevenly, authorizing Wanjiku's account over competing adult reframings while confining Daniel to the position of the focalized rather than the focalizer, and these same gaps require active interpretive work from the reader rather than supplying resolved meaning directly.

5.2.3 Narrative Techniques used to Represent Silence

Focalization, ellipsis and omission, narrative voice, temporal manipulation, and characterization also recur as a narratological pattern in the selected Kenyan Young Adult novels. Each technique operates independently of the others and is demonstrable in both novels despite their separate authorship. The consistency of these five techniques across two independently written texts indicates that they constitute an approach shared by both texts

examined, rather than features specific to either novel individually. Whether this pattern extends to Kenyan YAF more broadly is a question this study's two-text corpus cannot answer.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings summarized above support three conclusions, one for each objective, followed by an overall conclusion about what they establish together.

Objective One's findings yield the first conclusion: the recurrence of the same four mechanisms, withholding, delayed revelation, characterisation without narrative authority, and plot sequencing that resolves independent of testimony, across two independently authored texts indicates that narrative silence in these texts is constructed rather than incidental. This closes part of the gap identified in Chapter Two, where existing Kenyan studies established that silence carries weight without asking how it is built.

A second conclusion follows from Objective Two. Silence functions differently for Wanjiku, breaking silence as resistance once an institution is willing to listen, and for Daniel, silence itself as resistance through survival, which indicates that resistance in these texts depends on whether an institutional audience exists to register a protagonist's voice, not on the protagonist's will alone. That both identities stay contested rather than resolved after institutional confrontation extends this conclusion further: identity formation under these conditions is constrained by structure before it is shaped by choice.

The third conclusion comes from Objective Three. The presence of the same five techniques, focalization, ellipsis, narrative voice, temporal manipulation, and characterization, in two independently written texts indicates that these are not particular to a single author's style but a shared formal repertoire for representing silence in the texts examined, though whether that

repertoire holds across Kenyan YAF more broadly remains a question for research with a larger corpus.

Read together, these three conclusions extend Genette's (1980) and Bal's (1985) narratological frameworks, developed primarily through engagement with Western fiction, to a Kenyan YAF corpus shaped by poverty, patriarchal control, and institutional processing rather than the developmental concerns the frameworks were built to register. This is the study's central contribution: not that silence matters in Kenyan YAF, which existing scholarship had already established, but how it is built and what it accomplishes.

That contribution comes with a limitation. The study applies frameworks developed primarily through engagement with Western literary traditions to two texts produced within a specifically Kenyan institutional and cultural context. The frameworks identified consistent and demonstrable patterns across both texts, but they carry assumptions about narrative form developed apart from oral storytelling traditions, communal modes of address, and customary institutions (the village elder, the chief, the extended family) that shape how silence operates within the selected texts. This limitation means the study's findings should be read as an application of narratological categories to Kenyan YAF rather than as evidence that those categories are fully adequate to the cultural specificity of the texts examined. This theoretical limitation stands alongside the corpus limitation inherent in a two-text qualitative study, which cannot establish that the identified patterns generalize to Kenyan YAF as a genre without further comparative research.

5.4 Recommendations

The first recommendation follows from Objectives One and Three. Silence in both novels is produced through four specific narrative mechanisms and represented through five specific techniques, rather than through theme alone, so curriculum designers and publishers recommending Kenyan YAF in school settings should treat *Breaking the Silence* and *Never Say Never* as texts that reward close formal reading, not only thematic discussion, with curricula attending explicitly to how narrative structure produces silence.

A second recommendation follows from the same findings under Objective One. Delayed revelation and withheld testimony place the reader in the same position of not knowing that the protagonist occupies, so teachers and counselors using these texts with students should make space in classroom discussion for the gap between what a character says and what the institutions around them permit that speech to accomplish; students who have experienced comparable institutional silencing may recognize their own situations in that gap.

A third recommendation, aimed at policy rather than pedagogy, follows from Objective Two. Institutional response in both novels, the village elder's compensation scheme, the chief's redirection of a rape case toward customary settlement, and the school administration's silence following Daniel's academic success, consistently withholds explanation from the protagonist. Policy makers in child protection and education should treat this pattern as fictional evidence worth weighing when designing reporting and response procedures that require young people to be told, not just processed.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

These findings point toward several directions for further research. A larger corpus of YAF would test whether the four mechanisms and five techniques identified here hold across the genre, and whether the asymmetry this study found in focalization, authorizing Wanjiku's account while confining Daniel to the position of the focalized, tracks gender across a wider set of protagonists, extending Osei-Nyame's (1999) gendered reading of silence into YAF specifically. Comparing Kenyan YAF with YAF from other East African countries would establish whether the narratological construction of silence and its role in resistance and identity formation is a regional literary phenomenon, extending the East African scholarship already engaged in Chapter Two. Applying additional narratological concepts, such as narrative time, frequency, narrative distance, and unreliable narration, would investigate dimensions of silence beyond the voice, mood, focalization, and characterization examined here. Integrating African-centered literary theories with narratological approaches would address how culturally specific understandings of silence, identity, and resistance shape YAF, responding to the theoretical limitation acknowledged in Section 5.3. Finally, since this study analyzed the texts themselves rather than their reception, further research should investigate how young readers interpret narrative silence and whether these narratological strategies shape their own understanding of resistance and identity formation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Approval Letter (CUEA)

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

AMECEA

28/05/26
To whom it may concern

RE: KAMELITER MARKLINE NGALA REG NO. 1064349
It is our pleasure to inform you that Kameliter Markline Ngala is a student in our Department of Languages, Literature and Communication undertaking a Masters of Arts in Literature. She defended her proposal entitled*: SILENCE AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN KENYAN YOUNG ADULT FICTION: A STUDY OF MUTHONI WA GICHURU'S* BREAKING THE SILENCE *AND ANTHONY MUGO'S* NEVER SAY NEVER. She is due to collect data and l therefore request that she is accorded the necessary assistance.

Yours faithfully



Dr. Rose Mavisi

HoD Languages, Literature and Communication

Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Appendix B: Nacosti letter

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