EVOLUTION OF KENYAN RESISTANCE NARRATIVES: A COMPARATIVE GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *MATIGARI* AND OWUOR'S *DUST*

JOY MAKINGU

REG NO: 1064760

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree at any other university or institution of higher learning.

Joy Makingu

Reg. No. 1064760

Signature:  **Date: 25/09/2026**

Supervisors' Approval

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as university supervisors:

Dr. Selline Oketch

Department of Languages, Literature, and Communication

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Signature:  **Date: 25/09/2026**

Dr. Jane Wakarindi

Department of Languages, Literature and Communication

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Signature:  **Date: 25/09/2026**

Dr. Rose Mavisi

Head of Department

Department of Languages, Literature and Communication

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Signature:  **Date: 25/09/2026**

DEDICATION

To every generation that inherits an unfinished struggle and must find the courage to carry it forward in whatever language, memory, or silence they have left.

To the writers who teach us that to name what has been lost, to mourn what has been silenced, and to tell what the powerful wish to see forgotten is not merely an act of literature; it is an act of love.

And to Matigari, still walking the roads asking where justice lives, and to Ajany, still carrying her brother's story across oceans, refusing to let the earth have the final word.

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ABSTRACT

The African novel has long served as a platform for political insurrection and social transformation. However, comparative generational analyses that bring postcolonial writers and contemporary writers into dialogue remain rare, and peace narratives are seldom examined alongside protest literature. This study addresses these gaps by comparing Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* (1987) and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust* (2014). The challenge is that existing scholarship treats these texts in isolation and marginalises indigenous frameworks of restorative peace. The objectives are: (i) to explore the evolution of resistance narratives in the two novels; (ii) to examine ideological differences of resistance between the two generations; and (iii) to evaluate similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language to foster restorative peace. The study is grounded in Postcolonial Literary Theory, particularly using the tenets of Ngugi's decolonisation and Spivak's subalternity. The research design utilises a qualitative comparative literary analysis approach. Purposive sampling is employed to select *Matigari* (1980s independence generation) and *Dust* (2010s post-transition generation) because the two texts are occasioned by distinct national crises within Kenya postcolonial history, each responding through a different generational logic of resistance. Data collection involves close reading and annotated rereading of the selected texts. Data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analytical framework, organising findings into themes aligned with the three objectives. Ethical considerations include proper citation (APA 7th edition), textual representation, cultural sensitivity, and institutional permissions (CUEA & NACOSTI). The study reveals a three-part evolution across resistance narrative, ideology and cultural-linguistic practice. First, resistance evolves from the collective, confrontational mobilisation of *Matigari*, rooted in armed struggle and class antagonism against neocolonial appropriation, to the memory-based reconstruction of *Dust*, in which resistance takes the form of recovering suppressed histories and reconstructing fragmented identities in the aftermath of Kenya's 2007-2008 post-election violence. Secondly, this evolution corresponds to an ideological shift from the revolutionary materialism that frames *Matigari's* vision of liberation through collective political action and class struggle, to the intersectional, trauma-informed sensibility of *Dust*, which foregrounds gender, ethnicity, and diasporic experience while still affirming the dignity and agency of the dispossessed and a shared suspicion of truth. Thirdly, both novels converge in their deployment of ritual, oral storytelling, naming, and indigenous language (Gikuyu in *Matigari* and Luo-inflected English in *Dust)* as mechanisms of cultural reclamation that restore communal dignity and continuity in the aftermath of violence. The study concludes that Kenyan protest literature constitutes a continuous yet dialectically evolving tradition: each generation inherits and transforms the strategies of the one before it in response to the changing forms of state violence, while sustaining a shared, indigenously rooted understanding of restorative peace as the recovery of memory, dignity, and cultural continuity rather than the mere absence of conflict. On this basis, the study recommends that African literary texts be recognised as cultural resources within post-conflict recovery and educational policy, that indigenous epistemologies of healing be integrated into literary scholarship and curricula, and that future research extend generationally comparative and intersectional approaches to African protest and peace literature beyond the Kenyan context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION i
DEDICATION ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii
ABSTRACT iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS v
OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS ix
CHAPTER ONE 1
INTRODUCTION 1
1.0 Introduction 1
1.1 Background to the Study 1
1.2 Statement of the Problem 6
1.3 Research Objectives 7
1.4 Research Questions 7
1.5 Significance of the Study 8
1.6 Scope of the Study 9
1.7 Theoretical Framework 10
1.8 Conclusion 13
CHAPTER TWO 15
LITERATURE REVIEW 15
2.0 Introduction 15
2.1 Evolution of Resistance Discourses 15
2.2 Ideological Differences of Resistance Between Generations 18
2.3 Deployment of Cultural Practices, Ritual, and Language for Restorative Peace 19
2.4 A Review of Postcolonial Theory 22

2.5 Summary of Knowledge Gaps 23
CHAPTER THREE 26
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 26
3.0 Introduction 26
3.1 Research Design 26
3.2 Study Area 28
3.3 Study Population 28
3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size 29
3.5 Data Collection Techniques 30
3.6 Validity and Reliability 30
3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation 31
3.8 Ethical Considerations 32
3.9 Conclusion 33
CHAPTER FOUR 34
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 34
4.0 Introduction 34
4.1 The Evolution of Resistance Narratives 34
4.1.1 Resistance from Revolutionary Confrontation to Memory-Based Reconstruction 36
4.1.2 Comparative Analysis of Continuities and Ruptures 40
4.2 Ideological Differences in Resistance Between the Two Generations 43
4.2.1 The Ideology of Resistance: From Revolutionary Materialism to Memory-Based Reconstruction 45
4.2.2 Ideological Commonalities and Transformations 49
4.3 Similarities in the Deployment of Cultural Practices, Ritual, and Language for Restorative Peace 50
4.3.1 Ritual as Restoration of Dignity and Communal Cohesion 51
4.3.2 Oral Cultural Practices as Counter-Discursive Strategies 55

4.3.3 Language as Cultural Reclamation and Epistemic Restoration 60
4.3.4 The Convergence of Postcolonial Resistance and Restorative Peace: A Synthesis 63
4.4 Summary 65
CHAPTER FIVE 67
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 67
5.0 Introduction 67
5.1 Summary of Findings 67
5.1.1 The Evolution of Resistance Narratives in the Two Novels 67
5.1.2 Ideological Differences in Resistance Between the Two Generations 69
5.1.3 Similarities in the Deployment of Cultural Practices, Ritual, and Language for Restorative Peace 72
5.2 Conclusions 74
5.3 Recommendations 77
5.3.1 Promotion of African Literature as a Resource for Cultural and Epistemic Restoration .. 77
5.3.2 Integration of Indigenous Epistemologies into Postcolonial and Literary Scholarship .. 78
5.3.3 Curriculum Development and Educational Policy 78
5.3.4 Encouragement of Intersectional and Generationally Diverse African Literary Scholarship 79
5.3.5 Support for African Authors Writing Across the Intersections of Protest and Peace 80
5.4 Areas for Further Study 81
5.4.1 Extending the Comparative Generational Framework to Other East African Postcolonial Literary Traditions 81
5.4.2 Gender, Subalternity, and Cultural Reclamation in Contemporary African Women's Writing 82
5.4.4 Postcolonial Counter-Narratives and the Deconstruction of Colonial Binaries in African Digital and Multimodal Cultural Production 84
5.5 Chapter Summary 84
REFERENCES 86
APPENDICES 92

Appendix I: CUEA Introductory Letter 92

Appendix II: NACOSTI Research Permit 93

Appendix III: Plagiarism Check 94

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Comparative Generational Analysis: the analytical framework employed in this study, which investigates how two literary works created in different historical contexts, *Matigari* (1987) and *Dust* (2014), address analogous themes of protest and peacebuilding from divergent generational perspectives. The postcolonial generation denotes writers influenced by the immediate post-independence period and direct encounters with neocolonial governance, whereas the contemporary generation signifies writers interacting with post-transition Kenya, marked by cycles of political violence, globalisation, and digital cultural creation.

Evolution of Resistance Narratives: the adaptive transformation through which successive generations of writers preserve the fundamental postcolonial commitment to justice and cultural dignity whilst reshaping the strategies, forms, and ideological frameworks of resistance in response to the changing historical and political conditions of their respective moments. It denotes neither a linear progression nor a simple rejection of what came before, but a dialectical process in which each generation inherits, tests, and transforms the literary resistance tradition of the preceding generation.

Protest Literature: narrative fiction that utilises aesthetic elements, such as metaphor, characterisation, plot, and language, to contest and oppose repressive social, political, or cultural systems, while also imagining more equitable social arrangements.

Resistance Discourse: the narrative methods, rhetorical selections, characterisations, and thematic elements through which literary writings formulate and express opposition to oppressive structures. These encompass colonial legacies, neocolonial governance, patriarchal systems, and state-sanctioned violence.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter delineates the background to the study, articulates the statement of the problem that guides the research, presents the research questions, and outlines the study's objectives. This chapter also addresses the importance of the research, its scope and limitations, and the theoretical framework that guides the study.

1.1 Background to the Study

The African novel has long served as a tool for cultural change, political revolt, and social critique. Misrule, marginalisation, exploitation, deprivation, forced labour, slavery, and subjugation inflicted by colonialists and neo-colonialist governments have given rise to a rich tradition of literary protest against colonial land appropriation in East Africa, apartheid system in South Africa, and the marginalisation of indigenous peoples by British colonialists in West Africa, as well as against the neo-colonialist forces that continue to treat others inhumanely across the continent (Killam & Rowe, 2016). Within this broad tradition, novelist-activists Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor use narrative to reclaim suppressed histories, contest injustice, and imagine peace. Their writings belong to a broader literary tradition that regards narrative as a means for societal healing and political engagement.

At the global level, protest and resistance literature is increasingly recognised as a critical site where gender, culture, and politics converge to challenge oppression and envision more just social orders. Mohanty (2003), argues that feminist literature across the Global South serves as a critical site of resistance against colonial and patriarchal oppression, showing how women writers use narratives to challenge homogenising discourses and reclaim agency by articulating diverse, context-specific experiences. Building on this, Rao and Sandler (2021), examine how the intersection of gender, race, and postcolonial identity shapes resistance narratives in Global South literatures, arguing that transformative political change requires a simultaneous critique of multiple interlocking systems of oppression.

For these scholars, protest and resistance literature becomes a space in which marginalised communities articulate visions of liberation that dominant political discourse cannot accommodate. In a similar vein, Butler (2015) theorises public protest as a performative act of assembly through which bodies and voices, including those represented in literature, constitute political subjects and challenge the structures that render certain lives precarious.

Alongside protest, the relationship between literature and peacebuilding has attracted growing scholarly attention. Andrews and McGuire (2025) argue that narrative, including art, fiction, and oral storytelling, is an indispensable medium for articulating what formal peace processes routinely overlook: the emotional, symbolic, and communal dimensions of healing and reconciliation. They demonstrate that writers and artists play a generative role in post-conflict societies by creating the imaginative conditions through which communities envision coexistence and renewal. Complementing this, Shange (2025), highlights how abolitionist and decolonial literary traditions cultivate a transformative

imagination and a sustained engagement with alternative social orders that disrupt cycles of violence and erasure. Thus, the African novel functions not merely as a mirror of social conflict but also as a medium through which communities actively work toward justice and reconciliation.

Regionally, protest and peace narratives are deeply shaped by the legacies of colonialism, postcolonial state failure, and ongoing struggles over cultural identity, gender justice, and political legitimacy. Chipiro (2023) examines how youth movements, literature, and digital activism in Nigeria's #EndSARS movement contest state violence and redefine citizenship, illustrating how contemporary African protest literature engages with new technological and cultural platforms, while remaining rooted in older traditions of narrative resistance. In the East African context, Ali, Mohammed & Tadesse (2024) reveal how cultural norms and digital polarisation hinder women's participation in peacebuilding in Ethiopia, showing that themes of reconciliation, healing, and memory are increasingly important yet underexplored in African cultural and literary studies. Their findings highlight a structural tension: while women are most directly affected by conflict and its aftermath, they remain systematically marginalised from formal peacebuilding processes, underscoring the need for literature as a vital alternative space in which women's voices, memories, and visions of peace can be articulated and preserved.

Equally significant is the insight from Jackson (2015) and Oswald Spring (2021) that indigenous peace ontologies, including storytelling, communal memory, and oral tradition, remain marginalised within dominant frameworks of peacebuilding scholarship, yet they are essential for envisioning genuinely post-conflict futures rooted in local cultural logics. Furthermore, Okech (2020) outlines how gendered power dynamics, cultural norms, and

political shifts shape protest across the continent, demonstrating that resistance is deeply connected to women's rights, cultural identity, youth mobilisation, and new forms of political agency. Okech's analysis underscores that protest is not monolithic; it is differentiated by geography, generation, and gender, and literary works are among the primary spaces where these differentiated experiences find articulate expression.

At the local level, the literary tradition has long been characterised by an engagement with the politics of language, land, and belonging. Ngugi has consistently challenged colonial and postcolonial power structures through his literary works. His earlier novels, *Weep Not Child* (1964), and *The River Between* (1965), focus on colonial oppression, while *Petals of Blood* (1977), and *Devil on the Cross* (1980), offer revolutionary critiques of capitalism and neocolonial elites. His nonfiction *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), argues for the centrality of oral traditions and native languages in reclaiming African identity and consciousness. Ngugi's decision to write in Gikuyu rather than English, exemplified in the composition and publication of *Matigari* (1987), was itself a political act of linguistic decolonisation, to protest the cultural hegemony embedded in the colonial language and a reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems, as legitimate sites of literary and political authority (Ngugi, 1986). Most significantly for this study, Ngugi (1987) advocates for women's agency as a force for social transformation. The intersection of gender, class, and resistance is evident in protagonists such as Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Jacinta Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, who subvert conventional gender roles and actively pursue justice rather than exist as passive victims.

Owuor addresses political violence, memory, identity, and cultural fragmentation through a poetic and historically sensitive lens. Her novels, *Dust* (2014) and *The Dragonfly*

Sea (2019), illuminate how individuals and communities confront and survive political turmoil, state brutality, global forces, and intergenerational trauma.

Owuor portrays women at the centre of cultural negotiation and healing: Ajany in *Dust* and Ayaana in *The Dragonfly Sea* embody resilience, agency, and the pursuit of belonging within fractured societies, demonstrating how stories serve as acts of resistance against erasure, silence, and historical amnesia (Owuor, 2014). Through her essays and interviews, Owuor calls on Africa to reclaim narrative sovereignty from foreign fantasies (Owuor, 2024). Critics have noted that her work addresses unacknowledged national ghosts (Guernica, 2014) and performs an 'autopsy on colonialism' (Image Journal, 2021).

Okech (2023) analyses how feminist activism in Kenya has evolved beyond conventional street protests to include social media campaigns, strategic litigation, and constitutional advocacy, demonstrating the cultural and political embeddedness of gendered protest in contemporary Kenya. These shifts are legible in Owuor's fiction, which engages with memory, bodily experience, and silenced histories as forms of activist literary practice.

Despite the richness of the Kenyan literary tradition and the growing body of scholarship on African protest writing, significant analytical gaps persist. Existing studies tend to treat *Matigari* and *Dust* in isolation, examining discrete themes, political resistance, linguistic decolonisation, gendered experience, and historical memory, without integrating these concerns across generational and contextual boundaries. Consequently, comparative generational analysis that illuminates how resistance narratives evolve, how ideological approaches to resistance differ, and how cultural practices are deployed for peacebuilding across postcolonial and contemporary literary moments remains rare. More significantly,

peace narratives encompassing healing, justice, memory, and reconciliation are seldom examined alongside protest literature despite their centrality to any meaningful vision of post-conflict futures (Andrews & McGuire, 2025; Shange, 2025). Indigenous frameworks of peace rooted in storytelling, communal memory, and oral tradition remain marginalised within dominant scholarly discourse (Jackson, 2015; Oswald Spring, 2021), and women's voices continue to be systematically underrepresented in both formal peacebuilding processes and the literary scholarship that accompanies them (Ali et al., 2024).

These overlapping absences point to a clear and consequential gap in the field. The present study addresses these gaps by undertaking a comparative generational analysis of Ngugi's (1987) and Owuor's (2014). By pursuing three sets of objectives, the study reveals how Kenyan literature navigates the terrain between confronting oppression and imagining futures marked with justice, while identifying the seminal role of literature in peacebuilding, not only in conflict resolution but also in fostering gender equality, justice, memory work, and cultural self-awareness.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Literary works serve as powerful vehicles for negotiating resistance, identity, and transformation, expressing both dissent and pathways to peace. Whereas existing scholarship has largely examined postcolonial and contemporary African writers in isolation, treating figures like Ngugi and Owuor as separate rather than as part of a continuous literary legacy of resistance, comparative generational analyses remain rare. While protest has received substantial scholarly attention, the ideological differences in how generations conceptualise resistance, as well as the shared deployment of cultural practices, rituals, and language to foster restorative peace, have been underexamined. This

study, therefore, addresses these gaps by undertaking a comparative generational analysis of Ngugi's *Matigari* and Owuor's *Dust*, focusing on: the evolution of resistance narratives across the two novels, the ideological differences of resistance between the two literary generations, and the similarities in their use of cultural practices, ritual, and language to cultivate restorative peace in post-conflict African communities.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research is guided by the following objectives:

i. To explore the evolution of resistance narratives in *Matigari* by Ngugi and *Dust* by Owuor.
ii. To examine the ideological differences of resistance between the two generations represented in the two novels.
iii. To evaluate the similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language to foster restorative peace in the two literary texts.

1.4 Research Questions

This research responds to the following questions:

i. How do resistance narratives evolve in the two novels across their respective historical and generational contexts?

ii. How do ideological differences characterise the representations of resistance between the two generations depicted in the novels?

iii. Which similarities exist in the use of cultural practices, ritual, and language as mechanisms for fostering restorative peace in the two texts?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to African literary studies by systematically comparing how two generational voices, the postcolonial by Ngugi and the contemporary by Owuor, deploy narrative to address resistance, identity, and peace. Whereas prior scholarship has treated protest and peace as separate domains, this research links them, demonstrating literature's dual function as critique and healing. Specifically, by examining the evolution of resistance narratives, the study illuminates how Owuor's *Dust* both inherits and transforms the anti-colonial frameworks of Ngugi's *Matigari*, offering a nuanced understanding of literary change across East African political contexts. By analysing the ideological differences of resistance between the two generations, the research reveals how contemporary writers respond to post-election violence, state brutality, and globalisation which are forms of oppression distinct from classical colonialism, thereby refining theories of African protest literature. By establishing similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual and language to foster restorative peace, the study challenges the marginalisation of indigenous peace ontologies in literary criticism. This shows how oral traditions, memory and storytelling operate as active peacebuilding mechanisms. Finally, this comparative generational lens advances African feminist and postcolonial scholarship by situating women writers as continuous, rather than peripheral, participants in the literary legacy of resistance and recovery. The findings are relevant not only to literary scholars but also to

practitioners in peacebuilding, gender studies, and cultural policy who seek narrative-based models for post-conflict social transformation.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on a comparative generational analysis of protest and peacebuilding narratives in two Kenyan novels: Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and Owuor's *Dust* (2014). Thematically, the study focuses on three intersecting characteristics of literary activism: gender, culture, and language, which serve as instruments of both protest and peacebuilding. Specifically, the analysis investigates: the evolution of resistance narratives from Ngugi's anti-colonial framework to Owuor's contemporary poetics of trauma and memory; the ideological differences of resistance between the two generations, including their respective conceptualisations of political oppression, agency, and liberation, and the similarities in their deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language to foster restorative peace, encompassing indigenous knowledge systems, healing ceremonies, memory restoration, and cultural reclamation. Geographically, the study is situated within Kenya's socio-political landscape, though its findings speak to wider African and Global South discourses. Temporally, it spans from the immediate post-independence era to contemporary Kenya.

The study is grounded in Postcolonial Literary Theory. From postcolonial theory, it utilises Ngugi's framework of cultural and linguistic decolonisation, alongside Spivak's (1988) notion of subalternity, to analyse how the selected novels formulate resistance discourses through narrative techniques, characterisation, and thematic concerns. This framework provides essential perspectives for analysing how the novels operate as both arenas of

resistance and means for conceptualising an equitable and just future. Alternative frameworks, such as trauma studies, psychoanalytic theory, or critical race theory, are not engaged extensively except where they overlap with the core theoretical foundations.

The study adopts a qualitative, comparative generational analysis approach of the two texts: *Matigari* (1987) and *Dust* (2014). The methodology is interpretive and text-based, employing close reading, thematic analysis, and comparative narrative analysis. The study does not encompass additional works by these authors nor engage in comparative analysis with writers from other African regions. Instead, it prioritises an in-depth examination of the selected novels over a broader scope. Data is derived solely from the primary texts, supplemented by secondary scholarly sources on postcolonial African literature, and feminist literary criticism.

The comparative framework is organised generationally where Ngugi represents the post-independence generation while Owuor represents the contemporary generation, enabling a systematic analysis of continuities, shifts, and divergences in literary strategies of protest and peace.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Emerging from mid-20^{th-} century literary criticism and gaining prominence from the 1970s onward (Said, 1978), postcolonial literary theory challenges colonial hierarchies, fixed identities, and Eurocentric metanarratives. Postcolonial literary theory analyses protest, critiquing neocolonialism, subaltern silence, and the deconstruction of binaries.

Postcolonial literary theory emerged as a direct challenge to colonial ideologies that had long positioned European civilisation, rationality, and cultural forms as universal and superior. Rather than treating colonialism as a closed historical episode, the theory insists on tracing its afterlives in language, identity, and narrative form, and it does so by recovering the voices of the colonised, dismantling the binary oppositions on which colonial rule depended, and affirming identities that are hybrid, fragmented, and resistant to singular definition.

Four figures anchor the theory's development and each contributes a distinct conceptual tool that this study draws upon. Said (1978), demonstrates that Western discourse did not simply describe the colonised world but actively constructed it as an 'Other', exotic, backward, and in need of European governance, thereby making colonial domination appear natural and even benevolent. Spivak (1988), extends this critique by exposing how the most marginalised subjects of the empire, particularly women, are silenced twice over; first by colonial discourse and then again by nationalist and patriarchal structures that claim to speak on their behalf. Bhabha (1994), moves the conversation toward hybridity, arguing that colonial encounters produce a 'third space' in which neither coloniser nor colonised culture remains pure, and where mimicry and ambivalence destabilise colonial authority from within. Ngugi (1986), argues that language itself is a primary site of colonial control, and that the recovery of indigenous languages and oral forms is inseparable from genuine political and psychological decolonisation. More recent scholarship has extended these foundational positions: work integrating memory and trauma studies (Reimagining Identity, 2025) shows how postcolonial identity is shaped by inherited historical wounds, while postcolonial feminist scholarship (Sifting Dust, 2026), foregrounds gendered

subalternity within postcolonial East African narratives specifically. From this body of theory, four tenets guided the present study.

The first tenet, cultural and linguistic decolonisation, holds that the choice of language and cultural form is never neutral; it either perpetuates colonial hierarchies or actively dismantles them (Ngugi, 1986). This tenet bears directly on *Matigari*, which Ngugi originally composed in Gikuyu before its translation into English, a decision that itself enacts the very decolonisation the novel thematises. The text's sustained critique of neocolonial betrayal, in which independence delivers not liberation but a new, indigenous elite that reproduces colonial structures of exploitation, extends linguistic decolonisation into political critique. It suggests that, decolonising the tongue is only the first step in a longer struggle against inherited systems of power.

The second tenet, subalternity and the politics of voice, examines how marginalised groups are doubly silenced, first by colonial discourse and then by the nationalist discourses that succeed it (Spivak, 1988). In Owuor's *Dust*, this tenet is most visible in the novel's recovery of suppressed familial and national histories through a fragmented, multi-perspectival narration that resists any single authoritative voice. By distributing narrative authority across multiple, often marginalised, characters, rather than centring a single dominant perspective, Owuor's *Dust* performs the very act of subaltern speech that Spivak's essay renders so fraught, allowing silenced histories to surface obliquely, in fragments, rather than through direct testimony.

The third tenet, deconstruction of colonial binaries, interrogates oppositions such as civilised/savage or tradition/modernity, revealing them not as neutral descriptions but as

ideological justifications for domination. Both novels resist these binaries. *Matigari* (1987) refuses to cast tradition and modernity as opposed forces, instead showing how neocolonial elites manipulate both to entrench their power, while *Dust* (2014) dissolves the opposition between past and present, showing how historical violence continues to structure contemporary Kenyan life rather than remaining safely confined to a 'traditional' past.

The fourth tenet, counter-narratives and the rejection of colonial metanarratives, affirms local, oral, and subjugated knowledge against Eurocentric progress narratives. This is where Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity becomes most useful. *Dust*'s (2014), fragmented, multi-perspectival structure is itself a hybrid narrative form, blending oral storytelling traditions with modernist narrative techniques to construct a counter-narrative to official state history. *Matigari* (1987), meanwhile, draws on Gikuyu oral tradition and allegory to construct its own counter-narrative to the metanarrative of postcolonial national progress.

Taken together, these four tenets, decolonisation, subalternity, binary deconstruction, and counter-narrative, provide the theoretical scaffolding through which this study reads and interprets *Matigari* (1987) and *Dust* (2014), as complementary, though historically distinct, interventions in the postcolonial East African literary tradition. Where one confronts the immediate betrayals of the independence era, and the other excavates the deferred and layered traumas that persist into the present.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter lays the foundation for a comparative generational analysis of protest and peacebuilding narratives in Kenyan literature, focusing on Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and

Owuor's *Dust* (2014). It provides the necessary contextual, and theoretical orientation for the study, thereby situating it within the broader academic conversation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter delves into prior related research and materials around this research topic, guided by the research objectives. It captures the strengths that align with the current research and identifies gaps in existing scholarship. The main purpose is to fill the gaps. Research materials related to the theory guiding this study are also reviewed in this chapter to harness its strengths as needed while addressing its weaknesses within the capabilities and context of this research.

2.1 Evolution of Resistance Discourses

Protest literature has long been recognised as a vehicle for social critique and change. Lee (2025), examines how such literature deploys humour, irony, and hyperbole to challenge injustice, arguing that these rhetorical devices serve both political mobilisation and artistic expression. This tradition spans movements from abolitionism and suffrage to contemporary struggles over climate change and economic inequality.

Comparative and postcolonial approaches have proven particularly illuminating for Global South protest writing. Foster (1997), contends that postcolonial theory offers more flexible frameworks than conventional literary criticism for interpreting such texts, and the interpretive vocabulary developed by Said (1978), Spivak (1988), and Bhabha (1994), shapes how scholars have read African protest narratives ever since.

The evolution of resistance narratives across historical periods has attracted growing scholarly attention. Rao and Sandler (2021), demonstrate that resistance strategies transform in response to shifting political conditions, tracing a shift from anti-colonial liberation movements toward struggles against neocolonial governance and structural inequality. A parallel argument, focused specifically on gender, appears in Mohanty (2003), who traces feminist resistance narratives moving from documenting overt oppression toward more nuanced critiques of intersecting systems of power.

African protest literature in particular has been shaped by the successive experiences of colonialism, independence, and post-colonial disillusionment. Larmer, Zeilig, and Dwyer (2011), observe that struggles over material circumstances remain central to social movements on the continent even as their discontent is often articulated in moral terms, incorporating cultural values and collective identity. The Review of African Political Economy's special issue on struggles in Africa (Banegas, Pommerolle & Simeant, 2010), extends this through case studies showing how popular struggles relate to political, economic, and social transformation, and how Africa's democratic experiments remain under strain.

Generational dynamics within African protest have received comparatively limited attention. Since the 2011 uprisings, North African youth politics and citizenship demands, have dominated regional scholarship, and Chikafa-Chipiro (2023), extends this generational lens to Nigeria's #EndSARS movement, showing how digital activism contests state violence while remaining rooted in older traditions of narrative resistance. Seddon and Zeilig (2005), trace this continuity further back, arguing that although the

targets of African protest have shifted from colonial administrations to neocolonial states and global capital, its narrative strategies, oral tradition, collective memory, and cultural symbolism, have proved remarkably durable across generations.

In Kenya, protest literature is read against the Mau Mau uprising, post-independence authoritarianism, and subsequent democratic struggle. Engels (2015), and Harsch (1998, 2009), examine these Kenyan dynamics directly, while Bratton and Walle (1992), situate them within pan-African patterns of democratisation. Ngugi's protest writing addresses how colonial mechanisms of control persisted after independence, a continuity Leys (1975), documents in his account of Kenyan neo-colonialism, where post-independence rule is described as governance 'by Africans themselves who treat their own people badly.' This continuity between colonial and contemporary rule underlies much of the subsequent literary critique.

Within Kenya, Simatei (2020), traces the evolution of resistance narrative from the independence generation to contemporary writers, arguing that the shift from direct political critique toward memory, trauma, and cultural recovery reflects not a depoliticization of Kenyan literature but a strategic adaptation to new, less overt forms of state power. Okech (2023), extends this account into the present, showing how feminist activism has moved beyond street protest into social media campaigns, strategic litigation, and constitutional advocacy; a shift that correlates with the way Owuor's fiction engages memory, embodiment, and silenced histories as its own form of activist literary practice.

2.2 Ideological Differences of Resistance Between Generations

Various scholars have documented significant ideological shifts in resistance narratives across historical periods. Butler (2015), for instance, theorises public protest as a performative act of assembly, through which bodies and voices constitute political subjects and contest the structures that render certain lives precarious. Building on the shift already traced in 2.1 (Rao & Sandler, 2021), it can be read as a move beyond the singular focus on class struggle that defined mid-twentieth-century revolutionary movements, toward intersectional frameworks integrating critiques of colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and environmental destruction.

This shift is legible in literary resistance narratives, where contemporary writers increasingly foreground identity, memory, and cultural survival alongside, or in place of, direct political confrontation. Shange (2025), describes how abolitionist and decolonial literary traditions cultivate a transformative imagination that disrupts cycles of violence and erasure, emphasising prefigurative politics over the seizure of state power, and healing alongside transformation.

Within Africa, this ideological trajectory has been marked by clear generational shifts. Darko (2000), argues that early postcolonial African literature was ‘heavily laden with nationalist and leftist ideological encumbrances,’ which emphasises anti-colonial struggle and socialist transformation. Albrecht (2021), and Losambe (2022), trace how later generations moved from this explicit political commitment toward more nuanced engagements with identity and belonging; Losambe terms the resulting stance ‘postcolonial agency 2.0’, retaining anti-colonial critique while relocating the site of liberation from the

nation-state to transnational and diasporic solidarities. Akakpo (2023), documents a comparable arc within individual careers, to show how Ngugi's (1987), own critique of dictatorship moved from revolutionary optimism toward more ambivalent positions as post-independence revolutionary projects faltered.

Within Kenya, this generational divide is especially pronounced. Leys (1975) provides the foundational analysis of Kenyan neo-colonialism, arguing that the postcolonial state reproduced colonial structures of exploitation under African elites. This analysis shaped Ngugi's (1987) own ideological framework, which emphasises class struggle and popular uprising against neocolonial capitalism. Kishan and Narayan (2024) argue that contemporary Kenyan writers have since moved away from this Marxist-inflected nationalism toward what they term 'post-ideological' resistance narratives, retaining anti-colonial critique while attending more closely to memory, trauma, and the complexities of belonging. Okech (2023), locates a parallel shift in Kenyan feminist activism, from revolutionary feminism toward what she terms 'strategic intersectionality,' an approach integrating critiques of gender, class, ethnicity, and capitalism while remaining pragmatically focused on achievable policy change. She reads this shift as legible in Owuor's fiction, where engagement with memory and embodiment complements material political struggle, rather than replacing it.

2.3 Deployment of Cultural Practices, Ritual, and Language for Restorative Peace

Postcolonial theory has long emphasised the centrality of cultural practice, ritual, and language to resisting colonial domination and restoring colonised identity. Loomba (2015) frames the reclamation of indigenous cultural forms as an act of epistemic resistance

against colonial erasure, rather than a merely aesthetic choice. Ngugi (1986) develops this position specifically through language, arguing that the colonial suppression of African languages constituted a profound cultural violence. This boycotts the colonised from their worldviews and communal memory, such that recovering indigenous linguistic and cultural practice becomes a fundamental strategy of postcolonial liberation. Spivak (1988) extends this concern to interrogate how Western epistemic frameworks render subaltern communities inaudible, while Bhabha (1994) offers hybridity as a third position, in which postcolonial subjects negotiate identity by combining the coloniser and the colonised cultural forms, generating agency within colonial structures.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) show how postcolonial literatures deploy oral narrative structures, proverbs, and ritual ceremony to write back against imperial discourse, asserting the validity of indigenous epistemologies as counter-discursive strategies. Darko (2000) locates this impulse in early postcolonial African literature's investment in oral tradition as a means of asserting cultural autonomy, an investment that writers, such as Achebe (1987), Ngugi (1986), and Hampate (1991), pursued by incorporating oral narrative, folktale, and ceremony into the novel form.

Ngugi's decision to write *Matigari* in Gikuyu rather than English marks a landmark instance of this practice. As Simatei (2020) argues, this was not a merely symbolic gesture but a radical reorientation of the medium through which African stories are told, hence reclaiming the right to define African realities on African terms and refusing the epistemic violence embedded in colonial languages. Pengfei (2025) extends this argument to

translation itself. He contends that the decision to translate, or withhold translation of indigenous terms, is in itself a postcolonial political act.

Ritual practices, including burial ceremony, ancestor veneration, initiation rites, and healing ritual, have received parallel attention as a mechanism through which literature processes collective trauma and restores social cohesion. Jackson (2015) and Spring (2021) argue that such practices, often marginalised by colonial administration, have been systematically excluded from Western epistemological frameworks, so their reclamation in African literature constitutes a decolonial act that restores cultural authority to African communities.

Kishan and Narayan (2024), compare the use of cultural practice and ritual in Ngugi (1987), and Owuor (2014), directly, finding that although both draw on indigenous cultural resources, they do so in generationally distinct registers: *Matigari* deploys Gikuyu oral tradition, proverb, and naming practice primarily as weapons of resistance against neocolonial capitalism, prioritising their mobilising function, whereas *Dust* deploys comparable resources principally in the service of healing and memory recovery. Okech (2023), traces a further variation in this register within Kenyan feminist activism, describing a strategic traditionalism in which indigenous cultural practice, ritual, and language are selectively deployed to advance gender justice while also critiquing the patriarchal elements of those same traditions.

2.4 A Review of Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial literary theory emerged as a critical framework for examining the cultural, political, and epistemic legacies of colonialism in formerly colonised societies. Its intellectual foundations were laid by thinkers such as Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1961), and Spivak (1988). Said (1978) introduces the concept of Orientalism by demonstrating how Western scholarship constructed dehumanising representations of the 'orient' to justify colonial domination. Bhabha (1994) theorises hybridity and mimicry, showing how colonised subjects negotiate and subvert colonial power through cultural adaptation. Fanon (1961) examines the psychopathology of colonisation, where he argues that decolonisation requires both political liberation and psychological healing from internalised colonial trauma. Spivak (1988) interrogates whether marginalised voices, particularly those of colonised women, can truly be heard within dominant discourses, or whether intellectual representation risks perpetuating epistemic violence.

The central tenets of postcolonial theory include: the critiques of colonial discourse and its enduring effects; the recovery of subaltern voices and suppressed histories; the analysis of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance in cultural production; interrogation of power-knowledge relationships; and the emphasis on linguistic and cultural decolonisation as essential to liberation (Loomba, 2015; Young, 2016). The current study adopts postcolonial theory primarily through the framework of Ngugi (1986), who argues that language remains a central tool of colonial domination and that reclaiming African languages is essential for cultural liberation and political resistance. This framework is particularly suited to analysing *Matigari,* which was written in Gikuyu as a deliberate act of linguistic decolonisation. The study also draws on Spivak's subaltern concept to examine how *Dust*

creates space for marginalised perspectives, women, pastoralist communities, and ethnic minorities to challenge official historical narratives that erase their suffering and agency.

A significant weakness of postcolonial theory is its perceived Eurocentrism; despite its anti-colonial ambitions, the theory, in its canonical formulations, remains indebted to Western philosophical traditions, thereby risking the reproduction of the epistemic hierarchies it seeks to dismantle (Gandhi, 2019). A related criticism is its tendency toward abstraction, privileging discourse and representation over material conditions such as land dispossession, poverty, and structural inequality (Parry, 2004). Spivak's subaltern concept has also been questioned for inadvertently foreclosing the agency of those it purports to recover, risking a form of intellectual paternalism (Spivak, 2018). To address these weaknesses, the current study centres on Ngugi's own African intellectual framework, articulated in Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind*, rather than importing external Western tools. Finally, Owuor's narrative choices are treated as deliberate acts of subaltern self-representation rather than passive victimhood, responding to the paternalism critique.

2.5 Summary of Knowledge Gaps

This chapter surveys existing scholarship on African protest and peace narratives using the funnel method, moving from global to regional (Africa) to specifically Kenyan contexts, and is organised around the study's three research objectives. Despite the breadth of this scholarship on African protest literature, feminist literary criticism, and peacebuilding, four significant and interconnected gaps persist.

Firstly, while the evolution of resistance narratives has received some scholarly attention, sustained comparative generational analyses remain rare. Studies of African protest writing

tend to focus on individual authors, single texts, or specific political events, rather than examining how writers from different generations develop distinct narrative strategies for confronting analogous structures of oppression. Simatei (2020) and Njovane (2023) identify a generational shift, from Ngugi's direct political confrontation toward Owuor's memory-based engagement with suppressed histories and intergenerational trauma, but this shift has received comparatively little sustained comparative attention, particularly in the East African context.

Secondly, although ideological differences between generations of African writers have been noted (Butler, 2015; Losambe, 2022; Akakpo, 2023; Njovane, 2023; Kishan & Narayan, 2024), few studies have systematically traced how ideological frameworks have moved from class-based revolutionary nationalism to intersectional, memory-focused, and trauma-informed approaches. This concern is scarcely addressed in relation to Kenyan literature specifically, and the ideological differences between Ngugi's generation and Owuor's generation have not been examined in any sustained comparative study.

Thirdly, while cultural practices, ritual, and language have each been studied as dimensions of African literary activism (Ngugi, 1986; Fanon, 1961; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994; Ashcroft et al., 2002; Kishan & Narayan, 2024; Njovane, 2023; Okech, 2023), scholarship has rarely integrated analyses of how these elements function concurrently as instruments of resistance and as mechanisms of restorative peace. Research on language politics scarcely ever engages systematically with either ritual practice or peacebuilding, and studies of indigenous peace ontologies seldom analyse how they are represented or deployed in literary texts. As a result, the intersecting ways in which Kenyan writers of

different generations deploy cultural practices, ritual, and language for restorative peace remain under-theorised.

Fourthly, the pairing of *Matigari* and *Dust* as objects of comparative literary analysis addressing these three concerns has scarcely been undertaken. Both texts engage with overlapping concerns, state violence, colonial legacy, memory, identity, and the imagination of justice, but they do so from different generational, historical, and stylistic positions. Reading them in sustained comparative dialogue would illuminate not only the literary development of protest and peace writing in Kenya, but also broader questions of how resistance narratives evolve, how ideological frameworks shift across generations, and how cultural practices can be deployed for restorative peace.

Taken together, these gaps suggest that existing scholarship, while rich on individual themes, has been weaker on their integration. It has been attentive to protest more often than to peace and the evolution connecting them, attentive to individual authors more often than to generational comparison, and largely silent on what a comparative reading of Kenyan fiction across generations might reveal about the evolving literary imagination of resistance, reconciliation, and restorative peace. This study is positioned to address these gaps by pursuing its three interconnected objectives of exploring the evolution of resistance narratives, examining ideological differences between generations, and establishing similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language for restorative peace.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for a comparative analysis of protest and peace narratives in Owuor's *Dust* (2014) and Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987). It outlines how the study systematically examines resistance, activism, gender, culture, and language, and differing visions of peace in postcolonial Kenya. It accounts for the research design, study area and population, sampling procedure and sample size, techniques for data collection, presentation, the ethical considerations and the limitations of the methodology.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative literary analysis research design. This is because the research objectives involve interpreting meaning, examining narrative strategies, and understanding how literary texts represent complex social phenomena such as resistance, ideology, and restorative peace (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research design enables the researcher to engage deeply with language, symbolism, and thematic structures, which are elements that are central to literary inquiry.

Specifically, this study employs comparative generational literary analysis, a design that systematically examines two literary texts from different historical periods to identify continuities, ruptures, and transformations in their treatment of shared themes. This design is informed by the principles of generational literary criticism, which posits that writers from different historical moments produce distinct aesthetic and ideological responses to

analogous social conditions (Simatei, 2020). The comparative design allows the study to contrast Ngugi's 1980s 'independence generation' perspective, shaped by colonial struggle, neocolonial disillusionment, and authoritarian rule, with Owuor's contemporary post-transition engagement with historical trauma, state violence, and cultural fragmentation.

The study also draws on thematic criticism as an analytical strategy within the qualitative design. Thematic criticism involves identifying, tracking, and interpreting recurring motifs, ideas, and ideological positions across literary texts (Griffith, 2011). This approach is particularly suited to the three objectives of this study for the following reasons. With respect to the first objective, that is, the evolution of resistance narratives, thematic criticism enables the researcher to trace how the motif of resistance recurs across both novels whilst undergoing significant transformation in its form, orientation, and cultural grounding, thereby revealing continuities and ruptures that a purely plot-based or biographical reading would obscure. With respect to the second objective, the ideological differences in resistance between the two generations, thematic criticism provides the analytical tools for identifying and comparing the ideological assumptions embedded in each novel's treatment of class, memory, gender, and cultural identity, making visible the deeper systems of thought that shape each writer's understanding of oppression and liberation. With respect to the third objective, which is the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language for restorative peace, thematic criticism is indispensable. It allows the researcher to identify and interpret patterns of ritual, oral tradition, and linguistic reclamation across both texts and to read these patterns not as isolated narrative details but as interconnected expressions of a shared postcolonial commitment to cultural healing and

epistemic restoration. By combining comparative generational analysis with thematic criticism, the research design provides a systematic and theoretically grounded framework for understanding how *Matigari* and *Dust* speak to each other across generational boundaries, differences, and shared postcolonial commitments.

3.2 Study Area

This literary analysis explores the textual and contextual landscape of postcolonial and contemporary Kenya as depicted in two principal works: Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987), initially composed in Gikuyu and situated in the authoritarian milieu of 1980s Kenya, and Owuor's *Dust* (2014), primarily set in contemporary Kenya amidst diasporic movements. The study area is therefore both textual (the narrative worlds constructed by each author) and contextual (the historical and political realities that shape those narratives).

3.3 Study Population

Ngugi and Owuor have both produced substantial bodies of literary work across multiple genres. Ngugi's oeuvre spans novels, plays, essays, memoirs, and children's literature, including *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Devil on the Cross* (1980), *Matigari* (1987), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), alongside plays such as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and a range of critical essays including, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). Owuor's body of work, though smaller, includes the short story, Weight of Whispers (2003), the novels *Dust* (2014), and *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019), and various essays and public addresses on memory, nationhood, and East African political life.

However, the population of this study targets only two novels from these two writers: Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987), translated by Wangui wa Goro and published in the Heinemann African Writers Series, and Owuor's *Dust* (2014). These two texts make up the primary study population, and comparative textual analysis draws its narrative, thematic, and ideological substance from them. They are selected because, read together, they span two generations of Kenyan literary engagement with resistance, trauma, and nationhood, with *Matigari* emerging from the immediate aftermath of the anti-colonial and Moi-era repressive contexts, and *Dust* reckoning with the deferred and unresolved legacies of that history, including the Mau Mau uprising and the 2007 to 2008 post-election violence. The pairing allows the study to trace how resistance narratives, cultural practice, ritual, and language are deployed across a shift in literary generation, ideology, and historical distance from the traumas each text confronts.

The secondary population includes literary criticism on the two novels, theoretical texts on postcolonial literature, resistance narratives, trauma studies, and feminist theory, historical documentation of Kenyan political contexts (including the Mau Mau uprising, political repression, and the 2007 to 2008 post-election crisis), author interviews and essays, and comparative studies on East African protest literature.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

This study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability method for qualitative literary research, to select information-rich texts relevant to research goals (Patton, 2002). Criteria for selecting the primary texts, *Matigari* by Ngugi and *Dust* by Owuor, include authorship by Kenyan writers who have received sustained scholarly attention within African literary

studies, central engagement with protest, resistance, violence, and peace in postcolonial Kenya, and generational diversity.

The sample size of two texts is appropriate as the research aims for depth over breadth. Thus, the two texts allow for deep close reading and sustained thematic comparison without dilution of analytical focus.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

Textual coding is the main data collection method in this study. A careful critical reading of the two texts is also undertaken. The reading of the texts is done three times by the researcher for an in-depth understanding of the forms and contents of the texts, and to achieve the needed data from the texts. To achieve this, textual coding is used; a method for labelling and categorising qualitative data into different themes and determining the connections between them. The choice of using thematic coding is guided by the objectives of this study. Terms or phrases that reflect important, recurrent themes are given labels by the researcher. These labels take the shape of words, phrases, numbers, or acronyms created by the researcher. Here, researcher-generated acronyms are equally employed to facilitate data organisation, skimming, and referencing for the sake of collecting the needed data. To meet the objectives of the study, labels are placed on pertinent words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs across the pages of the two texts. For ease of reference, these coded parts are highlighted in the texts and notes are taken with the relevant page numbers from the texts.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Reliability entails detailed documentation that creates an audit trail of analytical decisions. It also entails peer debriefing with supervisors and colleagues to review interpretations of

the texts. The study also follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to ensure that thematic development is transparent and replicable.

Validity entails triangulation, where multiple sources of evidence, including primary texts, secondary scholarship, and historical contexts, are used to support interpretations. Detailed quotations and textual evidence are also used to support analytical claims.

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

After the careful collection of data from the two texts in use, analysis of the collected data follows immediately through textual analysis. This textual analysis is broken down into thematic, discourse and narrative analyses for the purpose of analysing the collected data. Using thematic analysis, the researcher identifies, analyses, and reports the patterns or themes inside the texts. This method entails reading the literary works and noting down recurring themes, symbols, and motifs. The researcher discovers deeper meanings in the texts by organising these topics carefully. It's especially beneficial for determining how certain components of a tale link to larger social, historical, or cultural contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through the use of discourse analysis, the researcher examines how language is employed in the texts to create meaning, identity, power dynamics, and social norms. This requires the researcher to critically examine the language, style, and tone employed by characters and narrators, as well as how the work reflects or critiques society's ideals (Gee, 2014).

Narrative analysis, on the other hand, allows the researcher to examine the structures of the stories, including how the storyline, characters, and narrative voice are produced. This method investigates how the structure of a narrative influences the interpretation of the

text. It benefits the investigation of character development, plot progression, and narrative strategies, allowing academics to evaluate how these aspects convey meaning and contribute to the broader themes of the work (Riessman, 2008). Data analyses of this study entail all that has been described here, especially as aligned to the research objectives within the frameworks of the theory that guides this study. Language style, plot structure, character development, narrative strategies, identity, power dynamics, social norms/structures, and different themes are all parts of the concerns of these analyses and the theory in use. These themes are organised and coded as described under data collection techniques; then they are analysed as described here, and the findings presented accordingly, allowing inferences, interpretations and conclusions to be drawn as discovered from the texts. Being a qualitative study, data are presented after the analysis in textual forms and not in tabular forms.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study follows academic integrity principles by properly citing all sources in APA 7th edition format to avoid plagiarism; accurately representing scholarly arguments without distortion; acknowledging interpretive limitations; avoiding selective quotations that misrepresent textual meaning; and transparently documenting research procedures to evaluate analytical decisions.

The research respects the authors and their texts by fairly representing their works, acknowledging complexity and avoiding reductive interpretations, maintaining cultural sensitivity to the texts' locations, and discussing gender representations with awareness of both progressive and problematic elements without dismissing the authors' contribution.

The researcher sought the necessary permissions from the Graduate School at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa and authorisation from NACOSTI (National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation) to carry out the study.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter delineates the qualitative, comparative methodology to be utilised in analysing protest and peace narratives in *Dust* and *Matigari*. It illustrates how thematic criticism and textual analysis facilitate the exploration of resistance, activism, and generational perspectives on peace. Qualitative, comparative methodology provides a systematic and ethical framework to guide the ensuing analytical chapters, facilitating credible and significant contributions to scholarship on African protest literature, resistance narratives, and literary depictions of violence and peace in postcolonial Kenya.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings and discussion arising from the comparative generational analysis of Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and Owuor's *Dust* (2014). Guided by the research objectives and their corresponding research questions, the chapter examines: (i) the evolution of resistance narratives across the two novels' distinct historical and generational contexts; (ii) the ideological differences that characterise the representations of resistance between the two literary generations; and (iii) the similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language as mechanisms for fostering peace. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory, particularly Ngugi's (1986) linguistic decolonisation framework and Spivak's (1988) subaltern concept. Textual evidence drawn directly from both primary texts is foregrounded throughout, in dialogue with the secondary scholarship reviewed in chapter two.

4.1 The Evolution of Resistance Narratives

Evolution is understood not as a linear progression from a lesser to a greater form, nor as a simple abandonment of what came before, but as a process of adaptive transformation in which the fundamental commitments of a tradition are preserved whilst its strategies, forms, and emphases are reshaped in response to changing historical, political, and cultural conditions. Applied to resistance narratives, evolution therefore denotes how successive generations of writers, working within the same literary and political tradition, develop distinct narrative responses to analogous structures of oppression, responses that are

simultaneously continuous with and departures from the strategies of the preceding generation. This understanding draws on Simatei's (2020) argument that the shift in contemporary Kenyan literature toward memory, trauma, and cultural recovery represents not a depoliticisation of literary resistance but a strategic adaptation to changed conditions, and on Rao and Sandler's (2021) broader observation that resistance strategies across Global South literatures transform in direct response to the shifting forms that oppression takes across historical moments.

In the two novels under study, resistance narratives evolve along three interconnected dimensions. In the first place, they evolve in their site of struggle: where *Matigari* locates resistance primarily in the public, collective, and material domain, the demand for land, labour rights, and political liberation, *Dust* relocates resistance to the interior, private, and symbolic domain of memory, identity, and cultural recovery. Secondly, they evolve in their narrative form. Where *Matigari* deploys the allegorical clarity and oral directness of Gikuyu storytelling tradition to mobilise a communal readership toward revolutionary consciousness, *Dust* deploys fragmentation, multi-perspectival narration, and hybrid literary form to enact the difficult, incomplete, and oblique recovery of suppressed histories. Thirdly, they evolve in their understanding of what resistance must achieve. Whereas *Matigari* envisions liberation as a structural political transformation, the overthrow of the neocolonial order and the recovery of stolen land and labour, *Dust* envisions liberation as a cultural and psychological restoration, the piecing together of what political violence has fragmented and the restoration of dignity to those whom the state has tried to render invisible and unmourned. Across all three dimensions, however, the two novels share the foundational postcolonial conviction, articulated most forcefully by Ngugi

(1986) and confirmed by Said (1978), that the Kenyan postcolonial state has perpetuated rather than dismantled the structures of colonial domination, and that literature possesses both the responsibility and the capacity to bear witness to this betrayal and to imagine the conditions for genuine liberation. It is within this framework of adaptive, historically responsive, and theoretically grounded evolution that the following analysis of resistance narratives in *Matigari* and *Dust* is undertaken.

4.1.1 Resistance from Revolutionary Confrontation to Memory-Based Reconstruction

Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and Owuor's *Dust* (2014) construct resistance in strikingly different registers, the first as direct, collective, revolutionary confrontation with neocolonial power, the second as the painstaking recovery of suppressed histories, the healing of intergenerational trauma, and the reconstruction of fragmented identity. Read together, the two novels trace an evolution in what resistance is imagined to look like across a single literary generation, and this section takes each point of contrast in turn: how the novels open, how they treat language, how they figure the messianic and the intergenerational, how they deploy symbol and allegory, and how they engage gender and ethnicity, before drawing the trajectory together.

The novels' openings already stage this evolution. *Matigari* begins with its protagonist, 'Matigari ma Njiruungi, whose very name means the patriots who survived the bullets,' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 5), 'emerging from the forest having buried his weapons, believing the war against the settler John Boy's family is over and that it is now time to reclaim what was taken.' The novel quickly establishes that the structures of colonial exploitation have not

been dismantled but merely transferred to a new class of African rulers, and when Matigari asks villagers, 'Which homestead has no people?' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 6), he voices a quest for justice that the postcolonial state has rendered impossible. *Dust* opens by relocating that same quest from the open road and the homestead to a single body. Odidi Oganda is shot dead on the streets of Nairobi, and the entire novel unfolds as his family's attempt to understand and reclaim his history. 'Moses Odidi Oganda. Twenty-eight years old. Shot in the back. Twice' (Owuor, 2014, p. 3). Where *Matigari's* opening asks who still has a homestead, *Dust's* asks what has been done to one body, brown, poor, from the wrong ethnic group, and how the community can bear witness to what the state wishes to forget. The site of resistance shifts, in other words, from the barricade and the forest to the body and the memory.

Both novels also use collective and communal address to frame resistance as more than an individual's task, though they route this collectivity differently. Matigari does not act alone; he gathers around him the dispossessed, the imprisoned, and the silenced: Guthera, the prostitute forced into her trade by poverty and colonial violence, and Muriuki, the street child orphaned by the system's indifference; the novel's oral narrative conventions, including direct address to the reader, reinforce this collective dimension. *This story and its characters are fictitious. However, it is set in a modern African country. All the good things are a mirror reflection of the best of what Africa has produced, and all the bad things are a mirror reflection of the worst that has befallen Africa* (Ngugi, 1987, p. v). *Dust* retains this communal orientation but narrows its lens to a single family's reckoning. Ajany Oganda, the protagonist, a painter who returns from Brazil following her brother's death, brings together who he was, what he was fighting for, and why the state needed him dead.

The collective march of *Matigari's* dispossessed becomes, in *Dust*, the private and artistic labour of one sister, though both are offered as instances of a wider, unfinished national reckoning.

Language marks one of the sharpest points of contrast. *Matigari's* resistance is lodged partly in the choice of language itself. Originally written in Gikuyu, the novel enacts the argument Ngugi (1986) makes in *Decolonising the Mind*, that language is 'the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history,' and that the colonial suppression of African languages amounted to a form of cultural dismemberment (Ngugi, 2009). By writing in Gikuyu, Ngugi refuses the coloniser's language as the medium of cultural expression before the novel's content has even begun. Owuor, by contrast, writes *Dust* in English, and locates her resistance not in the rejection of the coloniser's language but in what that language is made to carry: memory, silence, and the body. The evolution here is not from resistance to acquiescence but from resistance-through-form to resistance-through-content.

A comparable shift is visible in how the two novels handle the messianic and the intergenerational. *Matigari* is repeatedly associated with Christ-like figures of return and redemption, but the novel refuses consolation through individual martyrdom. When Matigari is imprisoned, the questions he asks, 'I am looking for justice and truth. Does anyone know the house of justice?' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 44), are taken up by the community, so that resistance becomes collective and intergenerational rather than dependent on a singular hero, a strategy Simatei (2020) reads as reflecting an explicit political commitment to revolutionary transformation, in which the text conscientises the masses and prepares the ground for material change. *Dust* inherits the same intergenerational premise that the

unfinished business of one generation becomes the burden of the next, but redirects it from mobilisation to mourning. Akai-ma, Odidi's mother, whose displacement as a woman from a pastoralist community that is gendered, ethnic, and economic, embodies a suffering largely absent from *Matigari's* more unitary figure of the dispossessed patriot. 'She had held the bodies of four of her children. She had learned to keen without making a sound' (Owuor, 2014, p. 89). Where Matigari's imprisoned question is taken up aloud by the villagers, Akai-ma's grief is taken up in silence, and the contrast between vocalised and internalised resistance is as much generational as personal.

The two novels' use of symbol and allegory follows the same trajectory, from external structure to internalised structure. In *Matigari*, the house built by the protagonist's labour and occupied first by the settler and then by his African successor functions as a sustained allegory for the theft of land and the betrayal of independence. He writes, 'I built this house and the son of the man I used to work for now lives in it. That's not right' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 17). Lee (2025) argues that protest literature deploys rhetorical devices, including allegory and symbolic confrontation, to persuade and mobilise readers, and *Matigari* does so through the house, the train, the prison, and the uniform, symbols that translate the abstract critique of neocolonialism into visceral experience. *Dust* retains this symbolic density but shifts its objects inward, from the house and the uniform to the body and the archive. It does this through its structural movement between the Mau Mau past, the post-independence decades, and the 2007-2008 post-election crisis, which performs, in Njovane's (2023) terms, a 'memory-based reconstruction' that makes the same argument *Matigari* makes through allegory: that the violence of the present cannot be understood or

resisted without a full reckoning with the accumulated violence of history, done through structure rather than symbol.

Read across these points of contrast, the movement from *Matigari* to *Dust* confirms what Rao and Sandler (2021) describe as the transformation of resistance strategies in response to shifting political conditions, from anti-colonial liberation movements toward contemporary struggles against neocolonial governance and structural inequality. *Dust's* crisis, the 2007-2008 post-election violence that killed over a thousand Kenyans and displaced hundreds of thousands more, is produced not by a foreign coloniser but by the post-independence state's manipulation of ethnic identity, and the novel accordingly does not hold open the possibility of direct revolutionary transformation that *Matigari* still entertains.

The state is too entrenched, the ethnic division too deeply manipulated, and the violence too dispersed and intimate for a singular confrontational response. Instead, *Dust's* resistance operates through what Shange (2025), terms 'transformative imagination,' a steady engagement with memory, healing, and relationship repair. Where *Matigari's* resistance is aimed at seizing back what was stolen, *Dust's* is aimed at restoring the human dignity and communal memory that state violence has destroyed. The same underlying claim to justice, pursued a generation apart, by fundamentally different means.

4.1.2 Comparative Analysis of Continuities and Ruptures

Read comparatively through the lens of postcolonial theory, *Matigari* and *Dust* reveal both significant continuities and decisive ruptures in the evolution of Kenyan resistance narratives. The most important continuity is their shared recognition that the Kenyan

postcolonial state has not dismantled the structures of colonial domination but has reproduced them under African management, what Ngugi (1986) identifies as the central betrayal of the independence era, in which the new ruling elite inherits and entrenches the colonial apparatus rather than dismantling it. Both novels identify the postcolonial state as the primary perpetrator of injustice, and both insist that resistance to this injustice is not only necessary but morally obligatory. This shared political critique is most legible through the first tenet of postcolonial theory operative in this study, cultural and linguistic decolonisation, which holds that the struggle against colonial and neocolonial power is not concluded at the moment of formal independence but must be continuously renewed against the afterlives of colonialism that persist in language, governance, and social structure (Ngugi, 1986). Both novels are, in this sense, interventions in the same unfinished postcolonial project, confronting what Said (1978) identifies as the enduring power of colonial discourse to construct and sustain hierarchies of domination long after the formal withdrawal of colonial administration. This continuity confirms Seddon and Zeilig's (2005) argument that whilst the targets of African protest have shifted from colonial administrations to neocolonial states, the fundamental impulse of resistance has demonstrated remarkable continuity across generations.

The most decisive rupture between the two novels is visible in the mode and scale of resistance imagined, and this rupture maps directly onto the different postcolonial tenets that are most operative in each text. *Matigari* foregrounds the first tenet, cultural and linguistic decolonisation as a collective political act, constructing its counter-narrative to neocolonial power through Gikuyu oral tradition, allegorical confrontation, and the vision of organised popular uprising. Its ending projects a future of continued revolutionary

confrontation. *The child gathered the weapons together. The weapons of the patriots who had fallen in the struggle* (Ngugi, 1987, p. 175), an image of intergenerational transmission rooted in the Gikuyu cultural logic of collective resistance. *Dust*, by contrast, is most powerfully shaped by the second tenet, subalternity and the politics of voice. As *Matigari* centres a singular, allegorically representative hero whose voice carries the collective mandate of the dispossessed, *Dust* distributes narrative authority across multiple marginalised perspectives, Ajany, Akai-ma, and Odidi, resisting any single authoritative account of Kenya's political violence and allowing silenced histories to surface obliquely, in fragments, rather than through direct testimony. This is precisely the narrative strategy that Spivak (1988), theorises as the fraught but necessary performance of subaltern speech. The recovery of voices that colonial and neocolonial discourse has rendered inaudible, not through confident proclamation but through the insistent, partial, and painful piecing together of what the state has tried to erase. Ajany returns to Brazil carrying the knowledge of her brother's history and her family's buried traumas, and the novel closes not with a call to arms but with an image of the land itself enduring all the violence done upon it. This is a resolution that confirms Kishan and Narayan's (2024) observation that contemporary Kenyan writers have moved away from the Marxist-inflected nationalism of Ngugi's generation toward resistance narratives that foreground memory, trauma, and healing.

A further significant continuity, however, is the shared commitment of both novels to the fourth tenet of postcolonial theory, that is, the counter-narratives and the rejection of colonial metanarratives. *Matigari* and *Dust* insist that colonial and neocolonial power operates not only through physical violence and economic exploitation but through the

control of representation, through the suppression of local, oral, and subjugated knowledge and its replacement with Eurocentric metanarratives of progress, order, and legitimate authority. *Matigari* constructs its counter-narrative by drawing on Gikuyu oral tradition and allegory to expose the lie of postcolonial national progress, whilst *Dust* constructs its counter-narrative through what Bhabha (1994) describes as hybridity, blending oral storytelling traditions with modernist narrative fragmentation to create a third space from which official state history can be contested without direct confrontation.

The two novels also enact the third tenet, the deconstruction of colonial binaries, refusing to cast, for instance, tradition and modernity, or past and present, as opposed and sequential forces, and insisting instead that the violence of the colonial and postcolonial periods continues to structure the present rather than remaining safely confined to a completed historical past. It is this shared counter-discursive commitment, the insistence that language, storytelling, and the recovery of silenced voices are essential dimensions of the struggle against injustice, that most fundamentally unites the two novels across their generational distance, and it is the foundation upon which both novels' respective deployments of cultural practices, ritual, and language for restorative peace are built.

4.2 Ideological Differences in Resistance Between the Two Generations

Ideology is understood as the system of ideas, values, and assumptions through which writers interpret the nature of oppression, identify its sources, and envision the conditions and methods of liberation. Within a postcolonial framework, ideology is never politically neutral; it is always shaped by the writer's historical position within the ongoing realities of colonialism, by the specific forms that neocolonial power takes in their moment of

writing, and by the theoretical and cultural resources available to them for making sense of that power. Kishan and Narayan (2024), argue that postcolonial resistance literature responds to the ideological frameworks of colonial and neocolonial domination by developing counter-ideologies, systems of understanding that name the structures of power, recover the knowledge and experience that those structures suppress, and imagine alternative possibilities for human dignity and social justice.

The ideological frameworks through which resistance is conceived are, therefore, not fixed or universal but historically situated and generationally specific. Each generation of writers inherits a set of ideological tools from the preceding generation, tests those tools against its own political conditions, and adapts, extends, or departs from them as those conditions demand. As Njovane (2023) demonstrates in the context of Kenyan literature, the ideological distance between writers of different generations is best understood not as a rupture or a rejection but as a historically intelligible transformation within a shared postcolonial commitment to justice, dignity, and the refusal of obliteration.

In the two novels under study, the ideological differences in the representation of resistance reflect precisely this process of generational ideological adaptation. Ngugi's *Matigari* is shaped by an ideology of revolutionary materialism, grounded in the first tenet of postcolonial theory, cultural and linguistic decolonisation as a collective political act, and oriented toward the exposure and overthrow of the class structures through which neocolonial power reproduces colonial exploitation.

Owuor's *Dust*, by contrast, is shaped by an ideology of memory-based reconstruction, grounded most powerfully in the second tenet, subalternity and the politics of voice, and

oriented toward the recovery of silenced histories, the healing of intergenerational trauma, and the restoration of dignity to those whom the postcolonial state has rendered invisible. These ideological differences are not contradictions but historically intelligible responses to different phases of the same unfinished postcolonial struggle. *Matigari* responds to the immediate and visible betrayals of the independence era, while *Dust* responds to the more diffuse, intimate, and psychologically penetrating forms of violence through which the postcolonial state of the twenty-first century maintains its power. Together, the two novels' ideological frameworks constitute a comprehensive postcolonial literary account of how the structures of colonial domination have evolved across the Kenyan postcolonial decades and of what resistance to those structures has required of successive generations of Kenyan writers. The following analysis examines these ideological differences in detail, tracing their expression in both novels' narrative choices, characterisation, and political vision.

4.2.1 The Ideology of Resistance: From Revolutionary Materialism to Memory-Based Reconstruction

The ideological framework underpinning resistance in *Matigari* is grounded in what Njovane (2023) terms 'revolutionary materialism,' a mode of political analysis that locates the sources of oppression in material conditions, specifically the ownership of land, labour, and the means of production, and which envisages liberation through collective political action. *Dust's* ideological framework represents a decisive departure from this materialism which Njovane (2023), terms it as 'memory-based reconstruction,' an approach that locates resistance not in collective political mobilisation but in the recovery of suppressed histories, the healing of intergenerational trauma, and the reconstruction of cultural memory. Together, the two frameworks mark an ideological evolution across a single

literary generation, shaped on Ngugi's side by his engagement with Marxist thought and by the historical conditions of postcolonial Kenya analysed in Leys' (1975) foundational study of neocolonialism, and on Owuor's side by the changed historical conditions of twenty-first-century Kenya and a broader transformation in the intellectual horizons of African literary resistance.

The two novels locate the mechanism of oppression differently, and this difference organises everything else about how each imagines resistance. *Matigari's* villains, Robert Williams and his African successor John Boy Junior, are defined not by ethnicity or individual moral failing but by class position, as owners of the house, the factory, and the land. Matigari confronts John Boy Junior, in the words, 'Your father and his father before him and all the foreigners used to rob us. Now you, our very own, have taken on their role. You've grabbed the fruit of our sweat. I am simply asking you to return what belongs to me, and the people' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 17). The language of collective ownership locates injustice squarely in economic exploitation rather than in cultural effacement or psychological trauma.

Dust, by contrast, identifies state-sponsored amnesia, the systematic erasure of inconvenient histories, as the central mechanism of violence. The state's power lies not only in its control of land and labour but in its control of memory, of what is remembered and forgotten, of whose deaths are acknowledged and of whose are forgotten. When Isaiah Bolton, the British officer whose presence links the colonial past to the post-independence present, notes that 'he had seen the thing being created around Kenya, what it became, and that he is part of it' (Owuor, 2014, p. 134). The novel frames resistance not as confrontation but as the refusal to let forgetting stand as the final word.

This same contrast shapes how each novel treats the possibility of change through existing institutions and collective action. *Matigari's* ideological horizon is explicitly revolutionary and has no patience for reform or institutional process. When Matigari pursues justice through the court, the church, and the parliament, each is exposed as an instrument of class power, the judge telling him plainly that 'you cannot challenge the right of a man to his property. That's the law' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 70). The novel concludes that transformation must come from below, through organised popular resistance, in a manner that aligns with Butler's (2015) account of public protest as a performative act through which bodies and voices collectively challenge structures of power. This extends to *Matigari's* treatment of false consciousness. The factory workers, initially passive and resigned, must be conscientised through Matigari's example before they recognise their collective power, an ideological awakening which confirms Lee's (2025) argument that protest literature uses rhetorical devices to persuade and mobilise its readers as much as its characters.

Dust is sceptical of exactly this kind of revolutionary mobilisation. Odidi Oganda is associated with a network of political organisers, and the novel acknowledges the legitimacy of his commitment to change, but his death, shot in the back by state security officers, functions not as a martyr's sacrifice that inspires revolutionary consciousness, as a death in *Matigari's* register might, but as a tragedy whose meaning must be recovered through the patient work of memory reconstruction. There is no revolutionary movement to take up his weapons; instead, his sister undertakes the labour of understanding who he was and why he died. This constitutes an orientation toward individual healing and familial reconstruction that Kishan and Narayan (2024), identify as characteristic of a post-

ideological resistance narrative, one that foregrounds memory, trauma, and healing while still retaining anti-colonial critique.

The two novels also differ on how far their ideological frameworks reach into questions of gender and intersecting marginalisation, though the difference is one of degree rather than kind. *Matigari's* primary resistance narrative is class-based, but the character of Guthera complicates a purely economistic analysis. Her prostitution is the direct product of colonial violence, her father killed for refusing to betray Mau Mau fighters, and her resistance takes the form of refusing the moral degradation the system imposes on her, 'I will not kneel before any man' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 71). This refusal aligns her with *Matigari's* broader resistance even as it exceeds the novel's dominant class-based framework. Mohanty (2003) notes that Global South women writers have progressively moved from documenting overt oppression toward more nuanced intersectional critique, and Guthera's characterisation can be read as an early articulation of that trajectory within a novel whose framework remains predominantly materialist.

Dust develops this intersectional dimension far more fully. Akai-ma's experience as a woman from a pastoralist community whose lands have been repeatedly violated, Ajany's experience as a Kenyan woman in diaspora caught between cultural belongings, and Odidi's experience as a young man from a targeted ethnic group together insist that these forms of oppression cannot be reduced to a single determining structure, but must be understood in their intersection, in line with Rao and Sandler's (2021), argument that contemporary resistance ideologies have moved beyond a singular focus on class struggle toward frameworks that integrate critiques of colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and structural inequality.

Across these points, the movement from *Matigari's* revolutionary materialism to *Dust's* memory-based reconstruction traces an ideological evolution in which the source of oppression shifts from the economic to the mnemonic, the path to justice shifts from collective confrontation to patient reconstruction, and the analysis of oppression shifts from a predominantly class-based framework to an explicitly intersectional one, even as both novels remain committed to the same underlying anti-colonial critique.

4.2.2 Ideological Commonalities and Transformations

A dimension of the ideological difference between the two novels that deserves particular attention is their different relationships to the postcolonial state. *Matigari* presents the state as a relatively transparent instrument of class power, and its ideological critique is correspondingly direct, in which case the state serves the interests of the ruling class and must be overthrown by the people. *Dust*, by contrast, presents the state as a complex, diffuse, and partially opaque system of violence whose operations are more difficult to oppose directly. The 2007-2008 post-election violence was not produced by a single class enemy but by the deliberate manipulation of ethnic identities by political elites, media actors, and local instigators, a form of power that is harder to name, organise against, and overthrow. Owuor's novel responds to this ideological challenge by insisting on the political significance of bearing witness and recovering memory, even when direct confrontation is not possible. This aligns with Shange's (2025) argument that contemporary abolitionist and decolonial literary traditions cultivate a transformative imagination oriented toward healing and relationship repair alongside political transformation rather than the seizure of state power.

Despite these significant ideological differences, both novels share a foundational commitment to the dignity and agency of the dispossessed. Both insist that the suffering of the poor, the marginalised, and the ethnically targeted is neither natural nor inevitable but produced by specific structures of power that can and must be challenged.

4.3 Similarities in the Deployment of Cultural Practices, Ritual, and Language for Restorative Peace

The third research objective seeks to establish the similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language as mechanisms for fostering restorative peace in *Matigari* and *Dust*. The analysis that follows is grounded exclusively in postcolonial theory, drawing particularly on Ngugi's (1986) framework of linguistic decolonisation, Fanon's (1961) theorisation of cultural reclamation as a revolutionary act, Spivak's (1988) attention to the cultural idioms through which marginalised communities articulate resistance and survival, and Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity. As the chapter two review establishes, postcolonial theory has long insisted that the recovery of indigenous cultural forms is not merely an aesthetic choice but a political act of epistemic resistance against the expunction imposed by colonial power (Loomba, 2015). It is within this theoretical framework that both novels' deployments of cultural practice, ritual, and language are read as both resistive and restorative, which are acts of decolonisation that recover what colonial and neocolonial violence has sought to destroy. This creates the cultural conditions for genuine healing and communal continuity.

The analysis posits that despite their significant generational and ideological differences, *Matigari* and *Dust* share three fundamental similarities in their deployment of these

elements. Both novels deploy ritual as a mechanism for restoring dignity, processing collective trauma, and re-establishing communal cohesion. Both novels deploy oral cultural practices, including storytelling, proverbs, and naming, as counter-discursive strategies that challenge colonial and neocolonial erasure while restoring collective memory. Lastly, both deploy language as an act of cultural reclamation that restores indigenous epistemologies and affirms the validity of African worldviews on their own terms.

4.3.1 Ritual as Restoration of Dignity and Communal Cohesion

A foundational similarity between *Matigari* and *Dust* lies in their shared deployment of ritual as a postcolonial mechanism for restoring the dignity that colonial and neocolonial violence has stripped from individuals and communities. The novels draw on indigenous ritual practices, burial ceremonies, purification rites, and communal mourning, not as nostalgic evocations of a pre-colonial past but as living cultural resources through which communities reconstitute themselves in the aftermath of violence and dispossession. This deployment of ritual is most legible through the first and fourth tenets of postcolonial theory as applied in this study. This tenet is that of cultural and linguistic decolonisation, which holds that the recovery of indigenous cultural forms is a political act of resistance against the epistemic violence through which colonial and neocolonial power sought to delegitimise African ways of knowing, mourning, and healing (Ngugi, 1986).

Another one is the tenet of counter-narratives and the rejection of colonial metanarratives, which affirms local, communal, and subjugated cultural knowledge against the Eurocentric frameworks that colonial administrations imposed in their place. Fanon (1961) established that authentic decolonisation requires a return to indigenous cultural sources as a

revolutionary act of reclamation rather than a nostalgic retreat. More recently, studies have demonstrated that postcolonial identity is profoundly shaped by inherited historical wounds that cannot be addressed through political or institutional processes alone but require the kind of culturally embedded, ritually enacted healing that both novels foreground. It is within this theoretical framework, understanding ritual not as a relic of tradition but as a living postcolonial resource for the restoration of dignity, communal cohesion, and cultural continuity, that the following analysis of both novels is undertaken.

In *Matigari*, the novel's opening ritual act establishes this logic from the very first page. Having emerged from the forest after years of armed struggle, Matigari performs a deliberate act of ritual purification before re-entering the community. This is done when 'he then took off his belt of bullets and the two guns and put them under a fig tree. He covered them with soil and stones. He then washed his hands in a nearby stream' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 3). This act is structured with the formal deliberateness of ritual, with the sequential movements, removing, burying, covering, and washing, to indicate a transition from the state of war to the state of peace. The washing of hands carries unmistakable resonances with Gikuyu purification practices associated with the ending of conflict and the restoration of communal order. The fig tree, sacred in Gikuyu cosmology as a site of spiritual significance and ancestral presence, is not an incidental detail but a carefully chosen ritual location that roots Matigari's act of transition within an indigenous cultural framework of healing and renewal.

This ritual establishes what the novel understands as the proper relationship between resistance and peace. The desire for justice, the desire to reclaim what was stolen, is itself a form of cultural restoration, and the laying down of weapons is not a defeat but a ritual

expression of the hope that justice can be achieved through better means other than armed force. The postcolonial significance of this ritual act lies in its deliberate grounding in Gikuyu cultural practice rather than in any Western religious or political ceremony. Matigari does not pray in a church or sign a legal document but performs an indigenous rite of passage that asserts the validity and sufficiency of the Gikuyu cultural framework for imagining the transition from conflict to peace. Ashcroft et al. (2002) argue that postcolonial literatures frequently deploy ritual ceremonies to write back against imperial discourse and assert the validity of indigenous epistemologies, and Ngugi's opening ritual enacts precisely this counter-discursive function.

The novel's closing ritual mirrors and completes the opening. When Muriuki recovers Matigari's weapons, 'the child gathered the weapons together. The weapons of the patriots who had fallen in the struggle' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 175), the act reverses the opening purification but does not negate it. The ritual cycle of burial and recovery encodes the novel's understanding of the relationship between peace and justice. The weapons are laid down in hope and taken up again only when the conditions for positive peace, and the structural transformation of the society that produces violence, have been denied. The ritual thus becomes a postcolonial teaching, embedded in indigenous cultural logic, about the inseparability of genuine peace from the prior achievement of justice.

In *Dust*, ritual functions with even greater centrality, focusing on burial and ancestor veneration as mechanisms for restoring dignity to those whom the state has rendered expendable. The entire narrative of the novel is organised around an act of ritual recovery. The effort is to find, name, mourn, and properly bury Odidi Oganda, whose death at the hands of state security forces has been designed to be unremarkable and unmourned. The

postcolonial significance of this organising ritual is clear. The state's violence does not end with the killing but extends into the denial of proper burial, the suppression of the story, and the erasure of the name. These are forms of what Spivak (1988) terms epistemic violence, that is, the rendering inaudible of subaltern experience within dominant discourse. Owuor's novel resists this epistemic violence through the insistence on ritual. The recovery and proper burial of Odidi's body and history is both a personal act of familial grief and a political act of cultural resistance.

The mourning rituals that accompany Odidi's death draw on Luo cultural practices in ways that are precisely analogous to Ngugi's deployment of Gikuyu ritual. They assert the validity and authority of an indigenous cultural framework against the colonial and neocolonial devaluation of African practices of mourning and memorialisation. When Akai-ma mourns her son, the novel renders her grief in ways that are personal and cosmological, as seen in the statement: 'Akai-ma keened and her voice was the sound of the land. She was calling back the dead' (Owuor, 2014, p. 201). The keening, a traditional Luo mourning practice, is here explicitly connected to the land itself, and the act of calling back the dead invokes the Luo understanding of the relationship between the living, the dead, and the ancestral realm as a continuous, mutually sustaining community. This cultural ontology, as Jackson (2015) and Spring (2021) suggest, represents an indigenous knowledge system that has been systematically marginalised by Western epistemological frameworks, and its recuperation in Owuor's novel constitutes a decolonial act that restores cultural authority to a community whose losses the postcolonial state has tried to render invisible.

The similarity between the two novels' deployment of ritual lies in this shared insistence that indigenous ritual practices are not relics of a superseded past but living cultural resources through which communities restore what violence destroys: the dignity of the dead, the continuity of cultural identity, and the capacity for communal solidarity in the face of loss. Both novels confirm what African postcolonial scholars have long argued: burial ceremonies, ancestor veneration, and healing rituals, so frequently denigrated or suppressed by colonial administrations, are in fact sophisticated mechanisms for processing collective trauma and restoring social cohesion (Darko, 2000; Jackson, 2015)

4.3.2 Oral Cultural Practices as Counter-Discursive Strategies

An equally significant similarity between the two novels lies in their shared deployment of oral cultural practices, including storytelling, proverbs, naming, and communal narrative, as counter-discursive strategies that challenge the erasure imposed by colonial and neocolonial power whilst restoring the collective memory upon which cultural identity and communal healing depend. These two novels draw on what Ashcroft et al. (2002) identify as the central strategy of postcolonial literatures, that is, the deployment of oral narrative structures, proverbs, and communal cultural forms to write back against imperial discourse and assert the validity of indigenous epistemologies.

In *Matigari*, the deployment of oral cultural practices is both structural and thematic. At the structural level, the novel is organised as an oral narrative addressed to a communal audience. The narrator frequently addresses the reader directly, using the second person and the inclusive 'we' in ways that mimic the call-and-response conventions of Gikuyu oral performance and position the reader as a participant in a shared cultural tradition rather than a consumer of individual literary production. This structural choice is itself a

postcolonial act. It refuses the individualist assumptions of the Western novel form and instead embeds the text within a communal cultural practice that colonial education had devalued and marginalised.

The oral structure of *Matigari* thus performs what Simatei (2020) describes as the radical reorientation of the very medium through which African stories are told; a reorientation that does not merely represent indigenous oral culture as content but enacts it as form, making the act of reading itself an experience of cultural reclamation. Pengfei (2025) extends this insight by demonstrating that such formal choices carry profound epistemic weight in African literary texts. The decision to organise a written novel around the conventions of oral performance is not an aesthetic preference but a deliberate postcolonial intervention that asserts the validity and sophistication of indigenous communicative traditions against the hierarchies of knowledge that colonial education institutionalised. The oral structure of *Matigari* is therefore not incidental to its resistance politics but constitutive of them. The form and the content of the novel's postcolonial critique are inseparable, each reinforcing the other in a unified act of cultural and political reclamation.

At the thematic level, the novel deploys Gikuyu proverbs and oral wisdom as the primary medium through which its political and cultural values are communicated. When Matigari speaks in the language of proverbial wisdom, 'a person eats where he works' (Wa Thiong'o, 1987, p. 15); 'The owner of the land is the one who tills it' (Ngugi, 1987, p. 16), he is not merely communicating pragmatic truths but invoking the collective moral intelligence of the Gikuyu cultural tradition as the authoritative framework for judging the justice or injustice of the present social order. This invocation of proverbial wisdom as moral authority is a distinctively postcolonial strategy. It asserts that the indigenous cultural

tradition possesses its own coherent ethical system, adequate to the demands of the present moment, and that this system does not require validation by Western legal, religious, or political frameworks. Ngugi argues that oral traditions, proverbs, riddles, and songs constitute the living cultural heritage of the Gikuyu people, and *Matigari's* deployment of this heritage as the novel's moral framework enacts the linguistic and cultural decolonisation that he insinuates.

The novel's deployment of naming as an oral cultural practice deserves attention. The protagonist's name, Matigari ma Njiruungi, 'the patriots who survived the bullets,' is not an individual designation but a collective one, drawn from the Gikuyu tradition of names that carry historical, communal, and spiritual significance. This naming practice is explicitly counter-discursive. Where colonial power sought to erase the memory of anti-colonial resistance by suppressing the names and stories of those who fought, the novel's naming of its protagonist as the collective inheritance of that resistance refuses the erasure and insists on the continuity of cultural memory across generations. Spivak's (1988) attention to the ways marginalised communities use their own cultural idioms to articulate resistance and survival is directly relevant. The name is itself an act of subaltern cultural assertion, recovering a suppressed history and transmitting it to the present.

In *Dust*, the deployment of oral cultural practices functions primarily to recover suppressed histories and restore the intergenerational cultural bonds that political violence has severed. The novel is saturated with stories, stories told by the living about the dead, stories inherited across generations, stories that the postcolonial state has sought to silence, and the act of recovering and transmitting these stories is presented as both a personal imperative and a cultural responsibility. When Akai-ma transmits the family's stories to Ajany, the act is

described in terms that capture the oral cultural understanding of stories as living, portable, and transmissible objects, as evident in the statement: 'She had given Ajany stories to carry' (Owuor, 2014, p. 276). The image of stories as objects to be physically carried encodes the Luo cultural understanding of oral tradition as an embodied practice, something that is held in the body, passed from hand to hand, and kept alive through active transmission rather than passive archiving.

The naming practice in *Dust* similarly functions as a form of oral reclamation. The characters' names, Akai-ma, Odidi, and Ajany, are drawn from Luo traditions that carry within them the weight of family history, cultural belonging, and ancestral connection. The recovery of these names and the stories they encode is part of the novel's broader project of cultural restoration, by insisting on the specificity and depth of Luo naming traditions. Owuor challenges the colonial devaluation of African linguistic and cultural heritage and asserts, in the spirit of what Bhabha (1994) terms the creation of spaces of cultural agency, that these traditions possess their own authority and beauty that no colonial or neocolonial imposition can permanently erase.

Ajany's practice of painting constitutes a further form of oral-cultural continuity in *Dust*. Like the storyteller, the painter transforms the raw material of communal experience into a form that can be witnessed, shared, and survived. Her art is presented not as an individual creative act but as a cultural practice rooted in the need to give form to what has been suffered and to transmit that form to others. This understanding of artistic practice as a form of cultural memory, continuous with oral tradition in its commitment to communal witness, confirms Ashcroft et al., (2002), argument that postcolonial cultural practices serve as counter-discursive strategies that challenge colonial representations and restore

collective memory. Owuor positions Ajany's painting like Ngugi's oral narrative structures, as a form of cultural knowledge that colonial epistemology has no framework to contain or dismiss.

The similarity between the two novels in their deployment of oral cultural practices lies in their shared understanding that the recovery and transmission of communal cultural knowledge, through proverbs, naming, storytelling, and artistic creation. This is simultaneously an act of resistance against colonial and neocolonial erasure and an act of cultural healing that restores the continuity of identity upon which genuine peace must be founded. This shared understanding is most clearly illuminated by the fourth tenet of postcolonial theory operative in this study, that is, the counter-narratives and the rejection of colonial metanarratives, which affirms local, oral, and subjugated knowledge against the Eurocentric frameworks that colonial power imposed as the only legitimate forms of cultural expression and historical truth.

Both *Matigari* and *Dust* construct their counter-narratives not only through what they say but through how they say it. The oral structural conventions of *Matigari* and the embodied, transmitted storytelling of *Dust* are themselves formal enactments of the counter-discursive postcolonial commitment to recovering and validating indigenous ways of knowing, remembering, and transmitting cultural identity across generations. The second tenet, which is, the subalternity and the politics of voice, is equally operative here. Both novels insist, in the spirit of Spivak's (1988), argues that, the cultural idioms through which marginalised communities articulate their experience are not merely aesthetic choices but political assertions of the right to speak, to be heard, and to define one's own reality on one's own cultural terms. Simatei (2020), argues that this kind of epistemic reclamation;

the restoration of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural authority through literary form, is among the most significant contributions that African postcolonial literature makes to the broader project of decolonisation, and both novels confirm this argument with particular force.

The novels further confirm Darko's (2000) observation that African postcolonial literature reclaims oral traditions and ritual forms to assert cultural autonomy. Consequently, both novels extend this reclamation into the specific context of post-conflict recovery and restorative peace, demonstrating that the recovery of communal cultural knowledge is not a preliminary step toward healing but is itself the substance of it. The living cultural practice through which communities restore what colonial and neocolonial violence has taken and reconstitute themselves as communities capable of imagining and inhabiting a more just and peaceful future.

4.3.3 Language as Cultural Reclamation and Epistemic Restoration

Language as a form of cultural reclamation and epistemic restoration is another theoretically resonant similarity between *Matigari* and *Dust* in their deployment of mechanisms for restorative peace. The two novels are deeply shaped by the postcolonial understanding that language is not merely a medium of communication but, as Ngugi (1986), argues, the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history, and the colonial suppression of African languages therefore constituted a profound form of cultural violence that severed colonised peoples from their worldviews, knowledge systems, and communal memories. The novels respond to this violence by deploying language as an act of postcolonial restoration, asserting the validity and vitality of indigenous linguistic and

cultural forms against the epistemic authority conferred by colonialism on European languages.

In *Matigari*, this deployment operates most visibly and radically through the novel's original composition in Gikuyu. As Simatei (2020) explains, Ngugi's linguistic decolonisation was not merely a symbolic gesture but a radical reorientation of the very medium through which African stories are told. A rejection of the epistemic violence embedded in colonial languages and a reclamation of the right to define African realities in African languages. Ngugi (1986) describes this decision in *Decolonising the Mind* as a response to the colonial 'cultural bomb,' the systematic devaluation of African languages as instruments of serious thought and cultural expression, and as an assertion that Gikuyu, with its oral traditions, its proverbial wisdom, its naming practices, and its entire cosmological framework, is fully adequate as a medium for literary and political engagement with the crises of the postcolonial present.

Within the translated text, the retention of Gikuyu words, names, and formulations performs an ongoing act of linguistic resistance. It rejects the erasure of the original language and insists that the reader encounter the Gikuyu cultural world on its own terms rather than in a form rendered culturally neutral for international consumption. (Pengfei 2025), has argued that translation practices in African literature either challenge or perpetuate epistemic violence, and the decision to retain Gikuyu formulations in Wangui wa Goro's translation, rather than rendering them into equivalent English, represents a deliberate choice to preserve the postcolonial cultural authority of the original linguistic form. The Praise-Singer's invocations, the proverbs, and Matigari's own name all carry within them a Gikuyu worldview that cannot be fully translated without remainder, and

that remainder is itself a form of cultural resistance, a presence that the colonial language cannot fully absorb or neutralise.

In *Dust*, the linguistic dimension of cultural reclamation operates through a different but complementary strategy. Owuor writes in English but refuses to write in the transparent, culturally neutral, internationally accessible English of the global literary marketplace. Instead, her prose is dense, allusive, rhythmically complex, and saturated with the cadences, associative logics, and the sensory textures of Kenyan oral and cultural experience. The prose itself enacts what Bhabha (1994) captures as hybridity, not as a compromise between coloniser and colonised cultural forms but as the creation of a new cultural space in which the indigenous cultural inheritance transforms and asserts itself within and against the inherited colonial medium. When Owuor renders the Kenyan landscape in the specific vocabulary of Luo and broader East African sensory experience, 'the colours of Kenya, ochre, gold, rust, sienna, the various hues of human skin' (Owuor, 2014, p. 7), she is performing a linguistic act of cultural reclamation. She refuses the colonial representation of Africa as a generic, undifferentiated backdrop and insists on the specificity, beauty, and irreducibility of a particular cultural and physical world.

The Luo naming traditions deployed throughout *Dust* constitute a further dimension of this linguistic reclamation. In Luo cultural tradition, as in Gikuyu cultural tradition, names carry the weight of ancestral memory, communal belonging, and spiritual connection. They are not arbitrary labels but acts of cultural transmission that link the individual to the community across time. The novel's insistence on the specificity and depth of these names, refusing to translate or explain them away for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with Luo culture, parallels Ngugi's retention of Gikuyu formulations in *Matigari*. Both acts assert

that the indigenous naming tradition possesses its own authority and that the text's primary cultural allegiance is to that tradition rather than to the expectations of a Western or globally homogenised readership. This linguistic stance confirms Spivak's (1988) argument that the recovery of the cultural idioms through which marginalised communities articulate their experience is an essential dimension of postcolonial resistance, and that intellectual and literary attention to these idioms constitutes a form of counter-hegemonic practice.

The similarity between the two novels in their deployment of language as cultural reclamation is ultimately a similarity of postcolonial conviction. Both Ngugi and Owuor understand language as the primary carrier of cultural identity and communal memory, and both understand the assertion of indigenous linguistic and cultural forms, whether through the radical choice to write in Gikuyu or through the hybrid transformation of English prose by Luo rhythms and cultural logics, as an act of postcolonial restoration that is inseparable from the broader project of restorative peace. Both novels confirm Fanon's (1961) argument regarding the necessity of returning to indigenous cultural sources as a revolutionary act, not as a nostalgic retreat from the present but as a recovery of the cultural foundations upon which a genuinely decolonised community, and a genuinely peaceful one, must be built.

4.3.4 The Convergence of Postcolonial Resistance and Restorative Peace: A Synthesis

The comparative analysis of both novels' deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language through a postcolonial theoretical lens reveals a profound convergence in their understanding of the relationship between cultural reclamation and restorative peace. Both

Matigari and *Dust* insist that genuine peace, peace that is more than mere absence of overt violence, cannot be built upon cultural erasure. The restoration of indigenous ritual practices, oral traditions, naming conventions, and linguistic forms is not peripheral to the project of post-conflict recovery but central to it. It is through these cultural practices that communities restore the dignity, continuity, and solidarity that colonial and neocolonial violence destroys.

This convergence is most clearly visible in both novels' shared treatment of cultural practice as an act of resistance and an act of healing. In *Matigari*, the deployment of Gikuyu oral traditions, proverbs, and naming practices resists the neocolonial devaluation of indigenous culture whilst also restoring the communal bonds and shared moral framework that make solidarity and collective action possible. In *Dust*, the deployment of Luo ritual, oral storytelling, and naming traditions resists the postcolonial state's erasure of inconvenient histories but at the same time restores the intergenerational cultural continuity and familial integrity that political violence has ruptured. In both cases, cultural reclamation and cultural healing are not sequential processes that first resist, and then heal, but simultaneous and mutually constitutive ones. The act of cultural reclamation is itself an act of healing, and the achievement of cultural healing is itself a form of resistance.

Kishan and Narayan (2024) have observed that as both writers draw on indigenous cultural resources, they do so in generationally distinct ways. For Ngugi, cultural reclamation prioritises political mobilisation. For Owuor, cultural practice is primarily a technology of healing. This study's analysis affirms this observation and also insists on the deeper unity that underlies the generational difference. Both writers are engaged in the same fundamental postcolonial project of restoring the cultural foundations of a community that

colonialism and its effects have sought to undermine, and the difference between political mobilisation and cultural healing is ultimately a difference of emphasis within a shared commitment to the recovery of what colonial and neocolonial realities have taken. Together, the analysis of *Matigari* and *Dust* constitutes a comprehensive postcolonial literary account of how cultural practices, ritual, and language function as irreplaceable resources for constructing restorative peace in post-conflict African communities, a peace that is, in the fullest sense, a cultural achievement as much as a political one.

4.4 Summary

This chapter discusses and presents the findings of the comparative analysis of *Matigari* and *Dust* in the light of the study's three research objectives. With respect to the first objective, the analysis shows that resistance is imagined differently across the two novels. *Matigari* constructs resistance as collective revolutionary confrontation with neocolonial material structures, while *Dust* constructs it as the memory-based reconstruction of suppressed histories and intergenerational trauma. This is a contrast that this study reads as reflecting the different historical conditions in which each writer works, rather than as evidence of a general sequence that Kenyan literature as a whole has followed. With respect to the second objective, the analysis shows that the two novels' ideological frameworks differ substantially. *Matigari's* revolutionary materialism, grounded in class analysis and collective political action, contrasts with *Dust's* intersectional, memory-focused, and trauma-informed ideology, which retains anti-colonial critique while treating direct revolutionary confrontation as no longer available to it. In respect to the third objective, the analysis has established that both novels deploy cultural practices, ritual, and language as complementary mechanisms for restorative peace, and that in both cases this deployment

functions simultaneously as resistance and as healing. This similarity holds despite the two novels' generational and ideological differences.

These findings are best understood as what a close comparative reading of these two novels can support, rather than as a claim about the evolution of Kenyan protest and peace literature. Within that scope, the comparison suggests that Ngugi's and Owuor's respective novels preserve a shared commitment to justice and cultural dignity while adapting their narrative strategies and ideological frameworks to different conditions. *Matigari* to the immediate betrayals of the independence era, *Dust* to the more diffuse and intimate violence of the postcolonial state in the twenty-first century. Whether this pattern extends beyond these two texts to Kenyan literature as a whole is a question this study's scope does not allow it to answer, and is left for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings arising from the comparative generational analysis of Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and Owuor's *Dust* (2014). It draws conclusions that address the study's three research objectives and offers recommendations grounded in the study's findings. The chapter also identifies areas requiring further scholarly investigation.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study explores the evolution of resistance narratives across the two novels, examines the ideological differences in the representation of resistance between the two literary generations, and establishes the similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language as mechanisms for fostering restorative peace, as guided throughout by postcolonial theory, particularly Ngugi's (1986) framework of linguistic decolonisation and Spivak's (1988) subaltern concept. The study has undertaken a qualitative comparative generational literary analysis that treats both texts not as isolated works but as contributions to a continuous and evolving Kenyan literary tradition of protest and peace.

5.1.1 The Evolution of Resistance Narratives in the Two Novels

The first research objective sought to explore how resistance narratives evolve across the two novels in their respective historical and generational contexts. The study found that resistance narratives undergo a decisive and coherent transformation from *Matigari* (1987)

to *Dust* (2014), moving from collective revolutionary confrontation with neocolonial material structures toward a mode of resistance organised around the recovery of suppressed histories, the reconstruction of fragmented identities, and the healing of intergenerational trauma.

In *Matigari* (1987), Ngugi constructs resistance as a form of direct, collective political confrontation. The protagonist, Matigari ma Njiruungi, whose very name signifies 'the patriots who survived the bullets,' embodies the unfinished project of anti-colonial liberation and mobilises the dispossessed around a shared demand for justice. The novel deploys allegory, proverbial speech, oral narrative conventions, and the revolutionary figure of the returning fighter to frame resistance as a popular, class-based struggle against the neocolonial appropriation of land and labour. The act of writing the novel originally in Gikuyu is itself identified as a form of resistance, an enactment of the linguistic decolonisation that Ngugi (1986) emphatically opines in *Decolonising the Mind*, and this dimension of resistance precedes and permeates the novel's narrative content. The novel's ending, in which the young Muriuki takes up the buried weapons of the fallen patriots, projects a future of continued political confrontation and affirms the intergenerational transmission of the revolutionary mandate.

In *Dust* (2014), Owuor's narrative situates resistance in a fundamentally different historical and political landscape. The aftermath of Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election violence, a crisis generated not by a foreign colonial power but by the postcolonial state's deliberate manipulation of ethnic identities, and one that claimed over a thousand lives and displaced hundreds of thousands. In this context, the direct revolutionary confrontation imagined in

Matigari (1987) gives way to the painstaking labour of memory reconstruction. The novel's organising act of resistance includes Ajany Oganda's effort to recover her brother, Odidi's history after his killing by state security forces, to restore to him a name, a story, and a dignity that the state has tried to erase. Resistance in *Dust* is internalised, embodied, and culturally mediated. It operates through the refusal of amnesia, the recovery of silenced histories, the restoration of ritual dignity to the dead, and the reconstruction of familial and communal bonds severed by political violence.

This study finds that despite these significant differences, both novels share a continuous commitment to the recognition that the Kenyan postcolonial state has betrayed the promises of independence and that this betrayal demands both literary witness and narrative resistance. The evolution from *Matigari*'s (1987) confrontational mode to *Dust*'s (2014) reconstructive mode reflects not a depoliticisation of Kenyan literature but a strategic adaptation to changing political conditions. This confirms Simatei's (2020) argument that contemporary Kenyan writers have shifted toward more nuanced engagements with memory and trauma in response to the consolidation of neocolonial power and the emergence of new forms of state violence that operate through erasure and amnesia rather than overt repression.

5.1.2 Ideological Differences in Resistance Between the Two Generations

The second research objective sought to examine the ideological differences that characterise the representations of resistance between the two literary generations. This study found that the ideological gap between *Matigari* (1987), and *Dust* (2014), is substantial and ultimately encompasses important areas of shared commitment.

The ideology of resistance in *Matigari* (1987) is grounded in revolutionary materialism, a mode of political analysis, shaped by Ngugi's engagement with Marxist thought and by Leys' (1975) foundational study of neocolonialism in Kenya. This materialism identifies the ownership and exploitation of land, labour, and the means of production as the primary sources of oppression, and it envisages liberation through collective political action. The novel's class analysis is uncompromising. Its villains are defined by their position as owners of stolen land and labour. Its heroes are the dispossessed who recognise their collective power; and its ideological conclusion, reached after demonstrating the futility of pursuing justice through the court, the church, and the parliament, is that transformation must come from organised popular resistance. The revolutionary ideology of *Matigari* (1987) encompasses both a critique of false consciousness (the internalisation of colonial ideology by the oppressed themselves) and a vision of collective awakening through which the masses recognise and act upon their shared political interests.

The ideology of resistance in *Dust* (2014) reflects the broader ideological transformation that Njovane (2023), Kishan and Narayan (2024), and Okech (2023) identify in contemporary Kenyan and African literature. This involves a movement away from class-based revolutionary nationalism toward intersectional, memory-focused, and trauma-informed frameworks that retain anti-colonial critique whilst abandoning revolutionary optimism in favour of what the study terms 'critical hope.' Owuor's novel is sceptical of grand revolutionary narratives not because it is indifferent to injustice but because the specific conditions of post-2007 Kenya, in which state violence operates through ethnic manipulation, political assassination, and the production of national amnesia, do not lend themselves to the singular revolutionary confrontation imagined in *Matigari* (1987). The

ideological response of *Dust* (2014) to these conditions is the insistence on the political significance of bearing witness, recovering memory, and restoring human dignity even when structural political transformation is not immediately achievable.

This study also finds that the two novels differ significantly in their treatment of gender and intersectionality. *Matigari*'s resistance ideology is primarily class-based, and whilst the character of Guthera introduces gendered dimensions of oppression, these remain subordinate to the novel's overriding class analysis. *Dust* (2014), by contrast, foregrounds the intersecting dimensions of gender, ethnicity, and displacement as constitutive of the oppression it resists. Akai-ma's experience as a woman from a pastoralist community, Ajany's experience as a diasporic Kenyan woman navigating multiple cultural belongings, and Odidi's experience as a young man from a targeted ethnic group, together constitute an intersectional resistance narrative that moves well beyond the class-based framework of *Matigari* (1987).

Despite these differences, this study found that both novels share a foundational commitment to the dignity and agency of the dispossessed, a suspicion of official history and official truth, and an insistence that the suffering of the marginalised is produced by specific structures of power that can and must be challenged. This shared commitment to counter-hegemonic truth-telling unites the two novels across their generational and ideological distance and confirms what Seddon and Zeilig (2005) argue regarding the remarkable continuity of the fundamental impulse of African resistance across the shifting targets of successive generations.

5.1.3 Similarities in the Deployment of Cultural Practices, Ritual, and Language for Restorative Peace

The third research objective of this study is to establish the similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language as mechanisms for restorative peace. This study found that this is the dimension in which the two novels exhibit the most profound convergence across their generational and ideological differences, and that this convergence reflects a shared postcolonial conviction: that the cultural devaluation imposed by colonial and neocolonial power can be undone only through the deliberate recovery of indigenous ritual, oral tradition, and language, and that this recovery is itself the substance of restorative peace rather than merely a precondition for it.

With respect to ritual, both novels depict indigenous ritual practice as what Fanon (1961) terms a revolutionary act of reclamation, a means of restoring to individuals and communities the dignity that colonial and neocolonial violence has stripped from them. In *Matigari* (1987), the ritual burial and recovery of weapons at the novel's opening and closing frames the entire narrative within an indigenous Gikuyu cultural logic of transition between conflict and peace, where the desire for justice precedes and motivates resistance, and the restoration of communal solidarity through shared struggle is rendered legible only within this ritual framework. In *Dust* (2014), ritual operates with even greater centrality. The entire narrative is organised around the recovery and proper burial of Odidi's body and history, and the Luo mourning rites that accompany this recovery constitute. Spivak (1988), terms a refusal of the epistemic violence by which the state renders subaltern death and grief inaudible. Both novels affirm the postcolonial argument that indigenous community-based ritual, burial rites, purification practices, and communal mourning

constitute a sophisticated and self-sufficient cultural system for processing collective trauma, one that requires no validation from external or imported frameworks.

With respect to cultural practices, both novels deploy oral storytelling, communal gathering, and naming as instruments of resistance and mechanisms of cultural restoration. In *Matigari* (1987), the oral narrative structure of the novel itself, with its direct addresses to the reader, its call-and-response conventions, and its deployment of Gikuyu proverbs and communal wisdom, restores the reader's sense of belonging to a collective cultural inheritance that colonial and neocolonial power sought to fracture. In *Dust* (2014), oral storytelling functions primarily as a mechanism for recovering suppressed histories and restoring intergenerational bonds. The stories that Akai-ma transmits to Ajany are presented as objects to be carried, portable, embodied, and transmissible, and their transmission constitutes an act of cultural reclamation that refuses the state's amnesia and insists on the continuity of memory as the foundation of communal identity. Both novels confirm Ashcroft et al.'s (2002) argument that postcolonial literatures deploy oral narrative structures and communal cultural forms to write back against imperial discourse, recovering forms of emotional, symbolic, and communal expression that institutional and state-sanctioned accounts of the past routinely suppress.

With respect to language, both novels deploy language as a form of cultural reclamation directly informed by Ngugi's (1986) framework of linguistic decolonisation. In *Matigari* (1987), the original composition in Gikuyu and the retention of Gikuyu formulations, naming conventions, and proverbial speech in translation assert the validity and vitality of an indigenous African language as a medium of literary and political thought, and in doing so perform what Simatei (2020) identifies as the restoration of indigenous knowledge

systems as a foundation of cultural authority. In *Dust* (2014), Owuor's deployment of Luo naming traditions, the rhythms and cadences of Kenyan oral expression, and the sensory specificity of Kenyan landscape and cultural life, perform a complementary act of linguistic and cultural reclamation, restoring dignity to communities and knowledge systems that the colonial education system and the postcolonial state have sought to render invisible. This study thus confirms Kishan and Narayan's (2024) observation that Ngugi and Owuor deploy indigenous cultural resources in generationally distinct ways. For Ngugi, language reclamation is primarily a political weapon. For Owuor, it is primarily a technology of healing, and both functions remain dimensions of the same broader postcolonial project highlighting the recovery of epistemic and cultural authority that colonialism sought permanently to displace.

5.2 Conclusions

This study addresses three interconnected objectives that include the evolution of resistance narratives, the ideological differences in resistance between generations, and the similarities in the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language for restorative peace, through a comparative generational analysis of *Matigari*, and *Dust.* The findings support the following conclusions.

Firstly, the study concludes that Kenyan protest literature has undergone a significant but coherent evolution across the generations represented by Ngugi (1987) and Owuor (2014). This evolution is not a retreat from political commitment but a strategic adaptation to changed conditions. The transformation from *Matigari's* collective revolutionary confrontation to *Dust's* memory-based reconstruction reflects the shift from the

neocolonial exploitation and authoritarian repression of the 1980s to the post-election ethnic violence and state amnesia of the 2000s. This confirms that Kenyan writers have responded to the changing forms of state violence with correspondingly evolved narrative strategies. The evolution of resistance narratives in Kenyan literature is thus not linear or cumulative in a simple sense, but dialectical, whereby each generation of writers inherits and transforms the strategies of the preceding generation in response to the specific political conditions it confronts.

Secondly, the study concludes that the ideological differences between the two generations are real and significant, but that they are best understood as complementary rather than contradictory. *Matigari's* revolutionary materialism and *Dust's* intersectional, memory-focused, and trauma-informed ideology are responses to different historical conditions, and each captures dimensions of the Kenyan postcolonial experience that the other does not fully address. Taken together, they constitute a richer and more comprehensive account of the multiple forms of oppression – economic, cultural, gendered, ethnic, and epistemic – that Kenyan society has produced across the postcolonial decades than either novel could provide alone. The ideological evolution from *Matigari* (1987) to *Dust* (2014) also confirms that African literary resistance is a living and dynamic tradition, capable of incorporating new analytical frameworks, including intersectional feminism, trauma theory, and subaltern studies, without abandoning its foundational commitment to justice and human dignity.

Thirdly, and the most significant for the study's contribution to African literary scholarship, is that both novels share a profound and sustaining commitment to cultural practices, ritual, and language as mechanisms for restorative peace. This commitment

unites them across their generational and ideological differences, and that constitutes a distinctively Kenyan literary ontology of peace. Both novels understand peace not as the mere absence of violence but as the restoration of dignity, memory, communal solidarity, and cultural continuity achieved through indigenous cultural practice rather than through imported institutional process, and they insist that this restoration is enacted through the daily, embodied, culturally embedded practices of mourning, storytelling, naming, and linguistic affirmation which sustain community across time and violence. This shared ontology of peace, rooted in indigenous African cultural traditions and expressed through sophisticated literary form, constitutes the most important and most underappreciated contribution of both novels to the project of post-conflict social reconstruction.

The study further concludes that postcolonial theory, anchored in Ngugi's (1986) framework of linguistic decolonisation and Spivak's (1988) account of the subaltern, has proved sufficient and productive as a single analytical lens capable of holding together the political, cultural, and epistemic dimensions of both novels. Its attention to language, culture, and epistemic power has allowed the study to read ritual, oral tradition, and linguistic reclamation not as supplementary cultural detail but as the very substance of resistance and restoration, while its grounding in the material history of land dispossession, political betrayal, and ethnic marginalisation has kept the analysis tethered to the lived conditions both novels depict. This single framework has enabled the study to honour both the political urgency and the cultural richness of *Matigari* and *Dust* as works of literary art and acts of social imagination, without recourse to external theoretical vocabularies.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced:

5.3.1 Promotion of African Literature as a Resource for Cultural and Epistemic Restoration

The findings of this study demonstrate that African literary texts are not merely artistic achievements but active resources for cultural and epistemic restoration, repositories of cultural memory, ritual practice, and indigenous knowledge that contribute to the imaginative conditions required for genuine post-conflict recovery. It is therefore recommended that governments, cultural ministries, and civil society organisations in Kenya and across the African continent recognise and support literature as a formal dimension of post-conflict cultural policy. Specifically, post-conflict recovery programmes, including those addressing the aftermath of Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election violence, should integrate literary and cultural practices alongside institutional mechanisms such as truth commissions and judicial processes. They should recognise that the emotional, symbolic, and communal dimensions of healing that Owuor (2014) and Ngugi (1987) illuminate cannot be addressed through institutional channels alone. Andrews and McGuire (2025) state that writers and artists occupy a generative role in post-conflict societies by creating the imaginative conditions through which communities envision coexistence and renewal, and this study's findings strongly support this argument.

5.3.2 Integration of Indigenous Epistemologies into Postcolonial and Literary Scholarship

The study finds that both *Matigari* (1987) and *Dust* (2014) draw on indigenous African epistemologies of restoration, embedded in oral tradition, communal memory, ritual practice, and relational ethics, that remain systematically marginalised within dominant Western theoretical frameworks. It is therefore recommended that literary and postcolonial scholars, together with cultural practitioners and policy-makers, actively engage with indigenous African knowledge systems as legitimate and theoretically generative resources in their own right, rather than as illustrative local colour within frameworks developed elsewhere. This engagement should move beyond the tokenistic inclusion of 'local practices' within essentially imported analytical structures. It should instead, as Jackson (2015) and Spring (2021) remark, treat indigenous epistemologies as foundational to the conceptual vocabulary through which African cultural restoration is understood. Literary texts such as *Matigari* (1987) and *Dust* (2014) represent an important and underutilised resource for this project, as they give nuanced and culturally grounded expression to indigenous understandings of healing and communal restoration that imported theoretical frameworks often struggle to articulate.

5.3.3 Curriculum Development and Educational Policy

This study's findings have direct implications for literature education at secondary and tertiary levels in Kenya and across East Africa. It is recommended that curriculum designers and educational policymakers include both *Matigari* (1987) and *Dust* (2014) in national literature curricula, not only as examples of literary excellence but as texts that engage students with the history of political violence, the ethics of memory and truth-

telling, and the cultural dimensions of reconciliation in Kenyan society. The comparative generational approach adopted in this study offers a pedagogical model that can help students understand how resistance narratives evolve, how ideological frameworks transform across historical moments, and how culture, ritual, and language function as resources for community healing. Educators should be supported with professional development resources that enable them to facilitate these discussions with appropriate sensitivity to the traumatic histories that both novels address.

Furthermore, given this study's findings regarding the centrality of linguistic decolonisation to both novels' peacebuilding projects, it is recommended that educational institutions in Kenya affirm and invest in the teaching of Kenyan indigenous languages alongside English and Swahili. Ngugi's (1986) argument that language is 'the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history' has direct educational implications. The devaluation of indigenous languages in the school curriculum represents a form of epistemic violence that undermines the very cultural foundations upon which genuine reconciliation and peace must be built.

5.3.4 Encouragement of Intersectional and Generationally Diverse African Literary Scholarship

This study finds that the comparative generational analysis of African literary texts, treating writers from different historical moments as contributors to a continuous and evolving tradition rather than as isolated individual voices, yields significant new insights that single-authorship or single-text studies cannot produce. It is therefore recommended that African literary scholars and academic institutions actively encourage and resource

comparative generational research that traces the evolution of resistance, ideology, and cultural restoration across the African literary tradition. In particular, this study recommends that future scholarship give sustained attention to the intersectional dimensions of African protest and peace literature, including the gendered, ethnic, and diasporic perspectives that *Dust* brings into focus, which remain under-theorised within a field still shaped by the predominantly class-based frameworks of the first postcolonial generation.

Academic journals, university research programmes, and postgraduate supervision in African literary studies should prioritise scholarship that brings postcolonial theory into closer dialogue with trauma studies and feminist criticism, building on the methodological approach developed in this study to produce richer and more comprehensive accounts of how African literature addresses the overlapping crises of political violence, cultural erasure, and the long aftermath of colonial dispossession.

5.3.5 Support for African Authors Writing Across the Intersections of Protest and Peace

The findings of this study affirm that African writers who work at the intersection of political resistance and cultural peacebuilding, as both Ngugi (1987) and Owuor (2014) do, make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to public life that extends well beyond the literary field. It is therefore recommended that literary prizes, publishing houses, arts councils, and cultural foundations in Kenya and across the continent actively support the production and distribution of African literary works that engage seriously with the histories of political violence, the ethics of memory and truth-telling, and the cultural

dimensions of reconciliation. The relative commercial marginalisation of such works, in comparison with genre fiction or novels written primarily for international audiences, represents a structural disincentive to the kind of socially engaged literary production that this study has demonstrated to be of profound public value. Public investment in literary culture, including library provision, translation funding, and the support of small and independent publishers, is therefore a peacebuilding investment as well as a cultural one.

5.4 Areas for Further Study

This study, whilst comprehensive within its defined scope, is necessarily limited by its focus on two primary texts, three research objectives, and a single theoretical framework. Thus, the following areas are identified as requiring further scholarly investigation.

5.4.1 Extending the Comparative Generational Framework to Other East African Postcolonial Literary Traditions

This study establishes a comparative generational framework for analysing the evolution of resistance narratives, ideological shifts, and the deployment of cultural practices, ritual, and language within Kenyan literature specifically. Further research should extend this framework to other East African postcolonial literary traditions, including those of Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, examining how writers from different historical generations have similarly adapted their postcolonial resistance strategies in response to the changing forms that neocolonial power takes across different national contexts. Such comparative work would test whether the pattern of evolution identified in this study, from collective revolutionary confrontation toward memory-based reconstruction and cultural reclamation, is specific to the Kenyan literary tradition or reflects a broader regional postcolonial literary

dynamic. Extending the postcolonial theoretical framework applied here, particularly the tenets of subalternity, counter-narrative, and linguistic decolonisation, to other East African literary pairings would contribute to a more comprehensive account of how the postcolonial literary imagination has evolved across the region and would help establish comparative generational criticism as a recognised methodological tradition within East African literary studies.

5.4.2 Gender, Subalternity, and Cultural Reclamation in Contemporary African Women's Writing

This study's analysis of *Dust* has identified the gendered dimensions of Owuor's postcolonial narrative, particularly Akai-ma's experience as a doubly silenced woman from a marginalised pastoralist community and Ajany's navigation of diasporic cultural belonging, as among the most significant innovations of the contemporary generation relative to Ngugi's (1987), generation. Spivak's (1988) tenet of subalternity and the politics of voice, as applied in this study, has proved particularly productive for reading these gendered dimensions of postcolonial silencing and recovery. Further research is needed, one which applies this tenet more systematically and across a broader range of contemporary African women writers, examining how gender shapes the specific forms of subaltern silencing that postcolonial women's narratives resist and the specific cultural practices through which those narratives perform the recovery of marginalised voices. Such research would contribute to the development of a distinctively African feminist postcolonial literary criticism, one that reads texts like *Dust* not primarily as successors to the Ngugi's tradition but as independent contributors to an African women's literary

politics of memory, cultural healing, and postcolonial resistance grounded in the specific intersections of gender, ethnicity, and colonial legacy.

5.4.3 African-Language Literary Texts and the Full Extent of Linguistic Decolonisation

This study has identified Ngugi's (1987) composition of *Matigari* in Gikuyu as a foundational act of linguistic decolonisation which aligns with the first tenet of postcolonial theory as operative in this study, and as a primary mechanism through which the novel performs the cultural and epistemic restoration that it thematises. However, because the study has relied primarily on Wangui wa Goro's English translation, the full extent of the Gikuyu original's linguistic, formal, and cultural dimensions could not be analysed with the depth and precision they deserve. Further research engaging directly with *Matigari* in Gikuyu, and more broadly with African-language literary texts in their original languages, including works in Yoruba, Zulu, Amharic, and Swahili, is urgently needed. Such research would examine how the specific oral formulae, tonal patterns, proverbial structures, and naming conventions of these languages function as postcolonial mechanisms of cultural reclamation in their own right, beyond what any translation can fully capture. As Pengfei (2025) has argued, the decision to translate or retain indigenous linguistic forms is itself a postcolonial political act, and research that engages directly with African-language originals would significantly deepen the field's understanding of how linguistic decolonisation, as theorised by Ngugi (1986), operates at the level of literary form rather than only at the level of thematic content.

5.4.4 Postcolonial Counter-Narratives and the Deconstruction of Colonial Binaries in African Digital and Multimodal Cultural Production

This study has examined the deployment of counter-narratives and the deconstruction of colonial binaries, which entail the third and fourth tenets of postcolonial theory as applied here, through the medium of written literary fiction. However, the postcolonial counter-discursive impulse that both *Matigari* and *Dust* embody is increasingly finding expression in digital, multimodal, and popular cultural forms across the African continent, including social media activism, digital storytelling, film, music, and performance art. Chipiro (2023) demonstrates how Nigeria's #EndSARS movement deployed digital platforms and cultural expression as forms of resistance rooted in older traditions of narrative protest, and Okech (2023) traces how Kenyan feminist activists have extended postcolonial resistance strategies into digital and multimedia spaces. Further research that applies the postcolonial theoretical framework developed in this study, particularly the tenets of subalternity, counter-narrative, and cultural and linguistic decolonisation, to these emerging digital and multimodal forms is needed to examine how contemporary African cultural producers are adapting the postcolonial literary traditions represented by *Matigari* and *Dust* to new platforms, audiences, and political conditions; as well as what new forms of postcolonial resistance and cultural reclamation these adaptations are making possible.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This study has undertaken a formidable comparative generational analysis of Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and Owuor's *Dust* (2014), guided by the framework of postcolonial theory, and organised around three interconnected research objectives. The findings reveal

a Kenyan literary tradition that is concurrently continuous and evolving; continuous in its commitment to justice, human dignity, and the refusal of state-sponsored amnesia, and evolving in its narrative strategies, ideological frameworks, and modes of imagining the relationship between resistance and peace. The two novels, read in sustained comparative dialogue across their generational distance and ideological differences, illuminate not only the literary development of protest and peace writing in Kenya but also the broader questions of how resistance narratives transform across historical moments, how ideological frameworks adapt to changing political conditions, and how cultural practices, ritual, oral storytelling, naming, and language function as irreplaceable mechanisms for the kind of restorative, justice-grounded peace that both novels envision and both writers have devoted their creative lives to imagining.

In the end, what unites *Matigari* and *Dust* across all their differences is a shared conviction that literature matters, that stories told truthfully and with full cultural integrity, constitute acts of resistance, of witness, and of peace. This is a conviction that this study affirms, and one that the continuing vitality of Kenyan and African literary culture compellingly sustains.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: CUEA Introductory Letter

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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28/05/26

To whom it may concern

RE: JOY MAKINGU REG NO: 1064760

It is our pleasure to inform you that Joy Makingu is a student in our Department of Languages, Literature and Communication, undertaking a Master of Arts in Literature. She defended her proposal entitled: THE EVOLUTION OF KENYAN RESISTANCE NARRATIVES: A COMPARATIVE GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S 'MATIGARI' AND OWUOR'S 'DUST'. She is due to collect data, and therefore we request that she be accorded the necessary assistance.

Yours faithfully

Dr. Rose Mavisi

HoD Languages, Literature and Communication

Catholic University of Eastern Africa

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