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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FIRST PERSONA, MIGUNA'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND THE INTERPRETATION OF KENYA'S RECENT HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Peeling Back the Mask and *Kidneys for the King* are autobiographies. They are autodiegetic – the narrator is also the hero of the autobiographies. Miguna Miguna has applied the autobiographical first persona as a narratological strategy. The autobiographical first persona has an import on historiography. Autodiegesis has strengths and weaknesses. This impacts the portrayal of the historical process. This impact is elucidated using Miguna Miguna's *Peeling Back the Mask* and *Kidneys for the King*. On the one hand, the autobiographical first persona provides unique, personalised and believable insights into events that other points of views may not achieve; on the other hand, given that the autobiography is an exercise in reconstruction, there is always the danger of the narrator being biased. This is in an attempt to reconstruct his person positively. This article focuses on how Miguna's autodiegesis buttresses and erodes a credible portrayal of Kenya's recent history.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of the autobiography – the I – always invites suspicion. Given that history is a societal enterprise, many a commentator contends that the preoccupation of the form with the personal colours the narrative to a level that obtaining the historical threshold of credibility may be impossible. Leading the chorus of doubt against the autobiographical form as a credible vehicle for history in Kenya is William Ochieng who, in "Autobiography in Kenyan History", asks:

What makes an individual assume that the story of his life would be of interest to others? Is there a doubt, or problem, in his past which he must explain? Is he simply digging a niche of permanence in history? Is he a megalomaniac? Or is he truly concerned that he is a great man and therefore worthy of emulation? (80)

Redemption of a past self riddled with imperfection as the selfish motive of the autobiographer is repeated by Rockwell Gray, who in "Autobiography Now", states that the autobiography is "a personal history which saves one from shame, isolation, alienation and reduction to anonymity" (50).

Paul de Man, in "Autobiography as Defacement" problematises the subject of the subject of autobiography. He argues that one cannot tell who the 'I' in an autobiography is because "the subject in an autobiography is defined less by its history (i.e., its author's past) than by its status as a linguistic referent or trope" (921). Life as portrayed in an autobiography is produced and determined by the technical demands of self portraiture. As such the referential qualities that the text is supposed to have are too highly mediated by the demands of self portraiture to be reflective in any simple way of life outside of or prior to the life produced in and by the text embodying it (de Man 924). Thus, eventually, both meaning and the subject in an autobiographical work are generated rhetorically and tropologically, rather than historically. In this paper, we wish to disabuse Ochieng et al. of perceptions that the autobiographical 'I' has no merit at all for interpreters of the historical process. That it has weaknesses is a given but it is not bereft of strengths.

The Autobiographical First Persona as an Interpretative Tool for Kenya's Recent History

However protean the 'I' may be, there is a confluence point between the narrator and the author. This confluence ensures that there is congruence between the subject of the narrative and the narrator which relationship, really, is the basis of an

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autobiography. It is to further this argument that Jerome Bruner, in "Self-Making and World-Making", notes that in an autobiography:

A narrator in, the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, who happens to share the same name. He must by convention bring that protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness. (69).

James L. Peacock and Dorothy C. Holland observe, in "The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process" that there is "a somewhat unified self as an anchor of the narration" (368). We have commenced the analysis of the implications of the first person point of view for the interpretation of Kenya's historical process by analysing a passage from *Peeling Back the Mask*:

Admittedly, there were lots of challenges in Kenya as I prepared for my return home. There was ethnic exclusivism, xenophobia, discrimination and marginalisation of certain groups of people. There was flagrant nepotism and cronyism. Integrity, competence, education, training, experience and skills, which should be the basic criteria for employment and upward mobility, didn't matter as much as ethnic, racial and class affiliations. Caucasians, Asians, and the Kikuyu and Kalenjin elites – generally – were regarded to rank higher than other groups, in that order. The first and second categories derive their privileged status to colonial policies, while the elites of the third and fourth groups draw theirs from neo-colonial tribalism and abuse of power. In fact, growing up (and even up to this moment), I have never met an unemployed or homeless Kenyan Caucasian or Asian. Whether at Kenya's airports, hotels, restaurants or at social and political functions, those belonging to these two groups are always served first and more politely than their African counterparts. It's one despicable colonial and neocolonial legacy I have never accepted, and which is what I felt the burning desire to help change (xvii)

In the quote, the narrator introduces social stratification. He does not say that it has happened of a sudden but rather that the current state of affairs has not only been gradual but is traceable to the colonial days. His providing the background to racial and tribal differentiation, especially from the first person point of view, provides depth to the understanding of the sticking problem of tribalism. The reverent attitude that the African displays towards the Caucasian issues from the inhumane manner in which the colonialist handled his association with the colonised. The imprint of servitude that the colonialist left in the psyche of the colonised has not faded away. Subservience for the African is more of a reflex than a considered response to the presence of another human being. The disdain with which the black Africans treat their own was engendered within the colonial construct. The feeling of contempt towards their own kind springs from a shared

experience of helplessness at the hands of the heavy handed colonialist. That there exists no unemployed or homeless Kenyan Caucasian cements how political environments have shaped social and economic power. The fact that the web of associations is voiced through the first person grants the autobiography what Sandefur calls "narrative identity" (1). The first person voicing of these historical realities provides an eyewitness account that cannot be trashed as heresy. The voice brings this historical process right before us. The narrative becomes credible as a consequence.

Gerard Genette, in his influential work, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, distinguishes the focaliser from the narrator (98). The focaliser is the one who sees and/or experiences the events while the narrator is the one who tells them. In autobiography, the focaliser is also the teller. The type of focalisation Miguna employs in the autobiographies is termed *focalisation interne* (internal focalisation). This type, Monika Fludernik explains in *Introduction to Narratology*, "The perspective of one character dominates on the diegetic level" (102). The first person bridges the gap between the focaliser and the narrator thus provides immediacy and emphasis to the presentation of these vices that pervade Kenya's history. The autobiographical first persona thus adds credibility to Miguna's autobiography.

This narrative technique gives the autobiographies the wholeness that would miss in, say, a third person narrating presence. In the third person point of view, there is zero focalisation. The observations are generated from multiple characters. The narrator in the third person loses ownership of point of view. In the autobiographical first persona, varying points of view are minimised. That of the narrator/protagonist is granted prominence. A synchrony as regards narration obtains. The work is structured in a unitary manner. The cumulative consequence of choosing the first person is achievement of authority. This is central to the believability of a historical interpretation. The employment of the autobiographical first persona gives the autobiography narrative immediacy and vigour. Joanne S. Frye points out in *Living Stories, Telling Lives: Woman and the Novel in Contemporary Experience* that the third person is restrictive because "[t]he 'she' can easily lull us into complacent and conventional expectations; the 'I' keeps us conscious of the possibility and change" (quoted in Sandefur 65). The immediacy ensures there is "fluidity in form and by extension in the characterization" in the work (Sandefur 7). The characterisation of the narrator is consistent. Autobiography is centred on a metaphor. Rockwell Gray, in "Autobiography Now", calls it "the overarching metaphor" (45); Jerome Bruner in "Self-Making and World-Making" "the organizing metaphor" (69) and makes Jerome H. Buckley, observe that "the autobiographer ... frequently resorts to a central myth or metaphor as a means of organizing the details of his experience" ("Reviews" 82). The organising metaphor defines how the narrator/protagonist juggles all the elements that go into the narrative. The narrative is consistent because it has a unitary objective to actualise.

However unwieldy a work of autobiography may be, the narrative returns to the metaphor upon which it is constructed.

The overriding metaphor in Miguna's autobiographies is challenge to the retrogressive status quo. This aspiration can best be realised by the use of a first person narrator who shares the author's ideologies. The narrator in *Peeling Back the Mask* and *Kidneys for the King* shares Miguna's ideologies. This singularity of purpose makes the reader believe what narrator/protagonist communicates because the views of the narrator do not shift. In "Narrative Technique: Who's Telling the Story?" the critic calls the first person narrator the authoring presence to underline the proximity between the author and the narrator (2). A narrator is a "fabricated presence telling the story" ("Narrative Technique" 1). The fabricated self is an imaginative creation that may be stretched to embrace elements that the author believes will build his narrative. Even then, the elasticity of the embrace should be tempered by reality more so because the authoring presence is not only the narrator of the events but also the experiencing self of the events. The author has to be alive to what he is realistically capable and/or incapable of granting agency to. Whereas Miguna has exploited the proximity between author and narrator to make his narrative "full of the confessional tone, authenticity and honesty" ("Autobiography: Nature, Elements and History" 11), there are points when he goes dangerously overboard – confusing the author for the narrator.

By failing to demarcate the boundaries as to what his narrating protagonist can probably accomplish, Miguna hopelessly erodes the confessional tone as well as honesty expected of autobiography and, thus, the credibility authenticity of his narrative is compromised. His narrator/protagonist comes out as vainglorious, opinionated and eerily superhuman. Consider his assertion: "It's one despicable colonial and neocolonial legacy I have never accepted, and which is what I felt the burning desire to help change" (*Peeling Back the Mask* xviii). The narrator loathes tribalism and its appendages racism and nepotism. He expresses the hate by using the adjective 'despicable'. However, it is grossly swellheaded for him to imagine that he will be able to rid the country of these vices alone. The reality is that he has no magic wand to wield and undo the perils caused by tribalism. The narrator ends up belittling the communal mechanisms through which liberation has been achieved in this country – from the Mau Mau to the quest for multi-party democracy by the second liberation movements. Moreover, his 'burning desire' sounds quite vacuous. His agenda is wrongly premised. It lacks substance. The image created is that of a whirlwind that comes, causes havoc and quickly dissipates into nothingness. Many might get singed. True, liberation requires the daring of committed revolutionaries; nevertheless, actual change has been the product of united approaches and not the fantasies of an individual with a convoluted ego. He traps himself in the exaggeration of his self worth. This harms his interpretation of Kenya's historical process because change has been realised through united approaches to challenges rather than individual efforts.

At this point, let us bring in the second quote from *Peeling Back the Mask*:

Let me make one confession: although I wasn't involved in this high-stakes electoral fraud (I wasn't

even in Kenya then), I have always known about it – and I never reported it to the 'authorities.' From an ODM perspective, the 'authorities' were historically perpetrators of fraud. And the 'authorities' were our opponents. I was between a rock and a hard place, but I could still have blown the whistle, by publishing an op-ed or delivering a surreptitious letter to Raila's opponents. For that, I apologise profusely to ODM members, specifically, and to Kenyans in general. I'm a human being with human frailties like any other person. I mistakenly believed that Raila acquiring power so that he could transform Kenya was more important than the electoral infractions he had committed to get the ODM nominations (174 – 5).

The first person is indulgent in tone. The use of the word 'admittedly' at the beginning of the first quote gives an aura of informality. It appears as if the narrator is divulging something deep within his psyche. The narrator is accepting that he is not perfect. The confessional tone is more overt in the quote above. The quote is introduced by "Let me make one confession". The confessional tone that can only be managed by the first person narrative makes the narrative plausible because the narrator tries as much as possible to be honest. It has to be borne in mind that the river called autobiography sprung from such sources as *The Confessions of St. Augustine* and Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. It is not by accident but by design that the titles read 'Confessions'. In the former, the narrator is reflecting on his life prior to his conversion to Christianity and is admitting that it was a period of great transgression against his creator. He is ready to do recompense and he will do so by being brutally honest with God. He will hold nothing back for it is only through full disclosure that he believes he is guaranteed complete forgiveness. It is honesty that will absolve him.

Rousseau wanted to open up and answer some of the misconceptions his countrymen had about him. For instance, according to Jerome H. Buckley in "Reviews", Rousseau was viewed as a misanthrope (4). His *Confessions* was a reflective exercise intended to fix this misleading perception. Miguna has monumental benchmarks as he approaches his autobiographies. He has to pick from his predecessors the best practices that would give the voice of his narrator/protagonist authenticity. One of these should be the confessional tone. The word 'admittedly' should prepare the reader not only for a discussion of the narrator's successes but equally and more importantly his failings. Based on the syntax of the sentence where the word is used, and the foregrounding of the word 'admittedly' (it introduces the sentence), it does appear that the narrator wants to go the whole hog as regards revealing his life's interactions. Rousseau, too, attempted to attain authenticity through the tenor of his text as regards syntax and phraseology. His text's failure to live up to this vow of honesty should be understood as unintended slips. Though there has been a change in audience (from God to fellow human beings), Gray maintains that the autobiography has not lost its confessional attribute: "We believe the mode of secular confession and self scrutiny to be the sign of authenticity" (35). The divulgence of the workings of an autobiographical narrator's inner soul imbues the narrative with credibility

which is important for interpreting discourses for historical relevance.

Miguna promises a confession in the second quote. However, his syntax gravely impinges on his honesty: he says he wants to make a confession yet he incorporates the word ‘although’ in the same sentence. He wants to accept culpability for some of the mess that the ODM was involved in but still feels he shouldn’t. It is a paradoxical state of affairs. He betrays the purpose for which the autobiography is written. He loses the disclosure that St. Augustine and Rousseau achieved. Even then, Miguna is in good company. Proponents of New Historicism, as well, argue prejudice is attendant to mediation. The rewriting is usually done in a manner that reshapes the autobiographers’ personalities positively. In this instance, Miguna’s narrator structures this sentence in a way that minimises his culpability but maximises that of others with whom he disagrees and has set out to malign.

First, Miguna uses understatement while reflecting his involvement in activities of the ODM. The narrator says he wasn’t involved in the high stakes electoral fraud – the nomination of Raila Odinga as the flag bearer for the ODM on September 1, 2007. The parenthetical ‘I wasn’t even in Kenya then’ is meant to distance him further from blame. It becomes puzzling then that he says: “I have always known about it”. From the syntactic structure he may have known about the fraud only superficially thus does lack the authority to confidently speak on it. He admits, without realising it, that he was as peripheral a player in the activities of the ODM as every other party supporter. This greatly erodes the punch in his voice and the credibility of his story. If he had portrayed himself as an insider and admits being aware of and party to the malignant illnesses that imperilled the ODM, his narrative would have borne some heft. Instead, his narrative has all the imprints of heresy. When he says ‘I have always known’ but cannot provide the sources of his knowledge, the sentence sounds pedestrian and factually vacuous.

Miguna’s narrator has been a master at applying irony. He has consistently presented Raila Odinga as an individual who is viewed as a crusader for democratic principles by default. To him Raila, in actual fact, is a duplicitous clown. However, in the second quote (though we doubt whether he realises it) the narrator becomes the subject of his own irony. He, while anxious to dismiss the ODM house as an endemically corrupt entity, shows that he himself is deceptive. He wants the reader to believe his story yet he does not provide enough evidence upon which his story can be grounded. He wants to be viewed as an insider to the ODM’s duplicities so that he be believed but at the same time says he was not in the thick of things, so to speak. His narrator becomes scatter-brained and the narrative translates into a sketchy, poorly thought out tabloid piece. This string of sentences also equally gnaws at Miguna’s narrative: “From an ODM perspective, the ‘authorities’ were historically perpetrators of fraud. And the ‘authorities’ were our opponents. I was between a rock and a hard place, but I could still have blown the whistle, by publishing an op-ed or delivering a surreptitious letter to Raila’s opponents”. Miguna’s narrator was, erstwhile, the epitome of daring. Yet, here, a different narrator emerges. He has been portrayed as

spineless; he is unable to face the so called ‘authorities’. At one point he had dared even the executive. At Kilaguni Serena Lodge retreat, at his insistence, the former PM was allocated a room as spacious as that of the president. It does not add up that now he cannot stand up to these ‘authorities’ that he attaches no faces to. Though the quotation of ‘authorities’ may indicate the surreptitious dealings of the merchants of impunity – thus the potential danger in trying to subvert their heinous undertakings – it sounds apologetic and weak of Miguna’s narrator to cringe at the danger they harbour. We must remember, Miguna’s narrator’s vow on coming back to Kenya. He had said he was coming back to “*continue the struggle we had joined in the 1980s for true democracy in Kenya*, to pursue my own political ambitions and to seek justice for my late friend [Crispin Odhiambo Mbai]” (*Peeling Back the Mask* xiv; italics mine).

If this cowardly approach was the manner in which Miguna and his narrator were going to approach the three issues he was coming to confront, then true democracy in Kenya would never be achieved and Mbai’s spirit would remain out there in the wild wailing for a long time, waiting for a more decisive actor to take the requisite steps so that it may be satisfied and rest finally. This leaves us with the lingering feeling that Miguna’s narrator might have come back to the country basically to pursue his political dreams. However, again, this selfish objective came a cropper perhaps because of his scapegoating of other people. Rather than tackle his political nemesis such as Outa head on, Miguna’s narrator takes residence in hardly practical ideological posturing. No wonder he loses in the Nyando constituency ODM nominations (*Peeling Back the Mask* 187).

Even in the campaigns for Nyando Constituency parliamentary seat, Miguna presents himself as the good guy; all his opponents are bad:

So fierce, corrosive, virulent and personal were the rivalries that Outa and Nyamunga’s supporters had fought numerous times, guns had been drawn and two innocent youths had lost their lives. These two could never meet peacefully unless I was around. In fact, I was the only candidate who campaigned in Nyando without armed goons. I was also the only one who didn’t bear a firearm. Twice, Gogo and Outa had separately and individually held joint rallies with me. My youths and security freely mingled with those of my opponents’. So, it was natural that they would appoint me their spokesperson (*Peeling Back the Mask* 187).

The narrator presents himself as peaceable. He is the one that tempers the ‘fierce, corrosive, virulent and personal’ rivalries among his competitors. He saves no epithet when berating his opponents. The cumulative effect of the adjectives is that the narrator’s opponents are querulous and so simple minded that they cannot see that they are destroying the very Nyando that they hope to represent. The narrator/protagonist wants disgust to be felt when he says the lives of two ‘innocent’ youth had been lost. He juxtaposes the innocence of the youth with the fatal drawing of guns done by his opponents. He apportions

blame on Outa and Nyamunga. The narrator is the voice of reason: "These two (Nyamunga and Outa) could never meet peacefully unless I was around". He is even able to hold peaceful joint rallies with his opponents (Gogo and Outa).

The narrator's choice of words in the above extract is quite revealing of his desire to reconstruct himself as a pleasant person. Whereas he calls his opponents' supporters 'goons', he refers to his own as 'youths and security' who are so peace-loving that they 'freely mingled with those of my opponents'. *Word Web*, an internet based dictionary, defines a goon as an awkward stupid person or an aggressive and violent young criminal. In either sense, the word goon evokes unpleasant images. Had he simply called his opponents criminals, the distaste towards them would have been lessened. The narrator's choice of goon, then, reinforces the violence he wishes to associate with his opponents and thereby elicit abhorrence toward their supporters. Nevertheless, what perhaps one might worry about is how young people inhabiting the same locality could be so different in behaviour. Reference to one group as 'youth and security' invites two pleasant emotions: sympathy and admiration. The youth are young and as yet do not have the economic wherewithal. They are financially unstable. They are presented a poor lot merely looking for a means to a livelihood. Sympathy is exhorted towards their endeavours to eke a living. Miguna's narrator implies that the youth ought to be supported. They should be admired because, selflessly, they are providing safety for an ideologue, Miguna's narrator, who is going to liberate the people from political bonds of violence. They are involved in a just cause.

Having followed the narrator's thesis thus far, it is hardly surprising that he ends the quote with appointment as the spokesman of the Nyando Constituency aspirants' caucus. He is the one who drafts the letter to Orange House expressing their dissatisfaction with the flawed nomination process in Nyando. Miguna's narrator is presented as more informed, diplomatic, urbane and technologically savvy. He does not forget to point out that "I was the only candidate in Nyando who carried a laptop and had proven writing skills" (187). One wonders per whose standards and where the narrator's writing skills were honed and proven and whether anybody had cared to investigate the level of written proficiencies among the other candidates. If the narrator believed that prolific op-eds were the yardstick upon which proficiency was based, then it was an impartial parameter indeed. It was subjectively based on perhaps the narrator's loudness, his closeness to Raila or, may be, his verbal recklessness. Closeness to Raila and the media allow him make far reaching judgments and apportion himself a vantage position from which to interpret history. Nevertheless, we dare say that his variables are to a large extent suspect and selfish. Interpretation of historical process requires a bit more of universal baselines. These are lacking in the narrator's thus eat into the genuineness not only of his narrative but also of that of the voice of the narrating presence.

Miguna's narrator finds violence abhorrent but he calls himself a revolutionary. In *Peeling Back the Mask* alone the term revolutionary is used 15 times. Miguna's narrator characterises revolutionaries as of two types: the true ones and the fake ones.

In the first group he places Che Guevara (66), Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Fidel Castro, Karl Marx, Muamar Gaddhafi (69), Friedrich Engels (71), Vladimir Lenin, Edwardo Mondlane and Nelson Mandela (85). In the second category, he places Ngugi (119) and Raila (346). That Miguna's narrator places Ngugi in both categories is confusing. He had just celebrated Ngugi as one of those whom, because of their revolutionary writings, was exiled by Jomo Kenyatta (56). Later, when Miguna's narrator is in Canada and they organise a conference to promote Pan-Africanism and Ngugi demands his honorarium, Miguna's narrator turns around and regards him as hypocritical: "That was another valuable lesson learnt: people espousing revolutionary rhetoric won't necessarily practice what they preach" (119). Ngugi's contribution in freeing the country from autocratic governance is well documented. For instance, G. Odera Outa, in "The Dramaturgy of Power and Politics in Post-colonial Kenya: A Comparative Re-reading of 'Forms' in Texts by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Francis Imbuga", says:

It will be recalled that it was this latter play (*Mother Sing for Me*) that formed a core part of Ngugi's famous Kamirithu, "people based theatre" which propounded his problems with the successive governments of Kenya, leading to the outlawing of, and actually razing to the ground, of the Kamirithu Educational and Cultural Centre where this whole project was based... (349).

This is a historical fact. When Miguna's chooses to snap away Ngugi's revolutionary character because of a little disagreement between the two of them, the narrator does a lot of injustice not just to Ngugi as a Kenyan statesman but also to Kenyan history. He picks on a small point of weakness in his interaction with Ngugi, hues it with exaggeration and imagines that it will blot out the achievements Ngugi has under his belt. We argue that this is rather petty of Miguna's narrator. He attempts a contrast between the supposed apparent Ngugi and the real one. However, the contrast works to negate his argument that Ngugi is a charlatan. The narrator contradicts himself. Only a few pages earlier, he had nothing but encomium for Ngugi. He even quotes Ngugi as the drive for writing *Peeling Back the Mask*: "As Ngugi wa Thiong'o says in his *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya*: "silence before the crimes of the neo-colonial regime in Kenya is collusion with social evil" (*Peeling Back the Mask* xxi). The contrast falls far too short of capturing Ngugi as a fraud. This negatively impacts on the veracity of the claims Miguna's narrator makes in his narratives. As we have shown with Ngugi, the narrator's claims that Raila is a political fraud can equally be rebutted.

Let us now go back to the question of violence as concomitant to revolutions. The narrator reviles violence. He has presented people that employ violence as barbarous. The reality of the matter is that revolutionaries vouch for necessary violence. They construe violence as liberating, at times. In his now famous submission, "History Will Absolve Me", Fidel Castro, he of Cuba, argues that aggression only begets aggression. The only difference is whether the aggressor is noble in his aggressiveness or not. He insists that an aggression that is for

the common good is justified. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, equally justifies violence more so its use by the proletariat to free themselves of the yoke of the bourgeoisie. He says that the cure to colonialism which induced all kinds of complexes in both the colonised and the coloniser was pure violence (65). Miguna's narrator dotes on the fact that Fanon's work made it into the reading list during his university days. That he remembers these titles reflects his admiration for their authors. It becomes ironic that he does not subscribe to these writers' belief that violence can be liberating. The narrator's bandying around of names of revolutionaries is thus only that – bandying. He is not a revolutionary – perhaps a wannabe. He throws about these names to appear as if he belongs in the same league.

Miguna's narrator applies allusion. He alludes to great revolutionaries. Allusion is meant to achieve parallelism. A parallel should be drawn between the character or event, in real life, alluded to and another event or character in a text. Miguna's narrator attempts to draw a parallel between revolutionaries such as Frantz Fanon, Eduardo Mondlane and Nelson Mandela and himself. However, it is our argument that the realisation of his character in these autobiographies does not measure up to these icons. He lacks the mettle to come any close to these historical players. He does not have the resolve to take challenging assignments to their logical conclusions especially where decisive actions are desired. His presentation is more of a lament than anything constructive. He dithers when he ought to have taken contrary stance against his own party, the ODM or the so called 'authorities'. He waits until he is kicked out then begins to lambast his erstwhile comrades. William Ochieng could have had autobiographers such as Miguna in mind when he says in "Autobiography in Kenyan History" that: "most people who write their autobiographies tend to be those who fear that they have failed, or have not performed up to public expectation and therefore must explain their records" (81). He adds that, in Kenya, "the autobiographies of Bildad Kaggia, Oginga Odinga and James Beattah all have a grudge against one man: Jomo Kenyatta. The three autobiographies claim that they were more radical, or that they had better vision for Kenya, than Kenyatta." (81)

What we have done in the last few paragraphs is not really to lampoon Miguna's narrator as a narrating/authoring presence. It has more to do with the limitations of the first person narrative voice. Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, says "the choice of the first person is sometimes unduly limiting; if the 'I' has inadequate access to necessary information, the author may be led to improbabilities" (150). We believe that lack of adequate information is not one of the afflictions Miguna suffers. Rather, his weakness may be with how he mis(manages) the information at his disposal. The consequence is that his narrative is greatly imperiled. From the foregoing analysis, one would almost conclude that Miguna's narrative, on account of the autobiographical first persona, is incorrigibly tainted with subjectivism so much so that it has lost all elements of impartiality. The narrator, however, attempts to balance the sometimes self-extolling claims with those that intimate that he is only being intimate. There are times that even he feels that he has gone too far in his self-glorification. In such instances, he appears to look around, feel embarrassed

and seems to inject statements into his otherwise subjective narratives. His motive becomes to help blunt out, to some extent, the presentation of his person as perfect. He also hopes to cut down the tone of arrogance that pervades his narrative. In the second excerpt he says: "... I apologise profusely to ODM members, specifically, and to Kenyans in general. I'm a human being with human frailties like any other person". The apology injects sincerity into the narrative. The qualification of 'apologise' with 'profusely', cements the honesty in his voice. He explains that, being human, he is susceptible to making mistakes and should not be judged too harshly on account of having made a few. His honesty in this instance grants his story credibility.

From *Peeling Back the Mask*, the image of the narrator/protagonist is of someone who has a condescending attitude towards other people. For instance, Miguna's narrator/protagonist uses the word 'clueless' a record six times with regard to his opponents (191, 202, 221, 267, 292, and 512). He applies other equally demeaning terms such as "dour" with reference to the same opponents. It is ironic that he should now claim to be "a human being with human frailties". The other people that he lampoons are equally human. It is hypocritical of Miguna's narrator/protagonist not to be able to let pass other people's inequities yet expect his own weaknesses to be stomached. This irony, though he is unaware of it, is directed at his own self. Miguna's narrator appears not to be in charge of his narrative. He is unable to tightly secure a consistent self image.

On the whole, the narrating presence appears to have been too strong for the authoring self to control. This is dangerous because an autobiography operates best when autodiegesis is properly managed. The wantonness of Miguna's narrator/protagonist creates incongruence between the focaliser and the narrator. This significantly gnaws at the unity of the narrative and compromises the veracity of the claims the narrator makes. To check this, the author of "Autobiography: Nature, elements and History" recommends that the autobiographer should be neutral:

... the author has to maintain a kind of balance between his own self praise and narration of other persons, events and places. There is every chance for an autobiographer to sound egoistic. Obviously, all the activities of man are centred around his 'I' but an autobiographer has to express himself through the little 'I'. He should be very neutral about the positive as well as negative side of his temperament. (13).

In Miguna's autobiographies, the narrator/protagonist is so domineering that the voice of the 'real' Miguna is almost snuffed out. The narrator/protagonist comes out as overanxious to smoothen out any rough edges in his earlier life so much so that the character he creates is almost superhuman. The narrator has outdone himself. The character he has created is uncannily perfect. Though Miguna had set out to present an imaginative character, he succeeds in manufacturing an imaginary one. His character does not walk our Earth. He finds everything in the earth revolting.

Miguna must have realised that the texture of voice he chose in *Peeling Back the Mask* was too bitter, self-glorifying and egotistic as to tell a balanced story. He attempts to make amends for this in *Kidneys for the King*. In the latter text, the narrator's tone has shifted, even if minimally, to being conciliatory in some sections. He invests in many a paragraph explaining his unsavoury actions and reactions he exhibited both in *Peeling Back the Mask* and at the book's launch. His tenor speaks of someone who is now sober, indulgent and has the time to enunciate what happened. This patience indicates that he has reflected on several issues. His voice evidences this. The voice we now come across, though still shrill and reactionary in most parts, sounds a little bit bereft of emotion and tantrum. It sounds more human and appears anxious to share with his audience the deepest of his feelings. He candidly explains his emotions in a manner that the reader would find it difficult not to feel a tinge of sympathy for the narrator/protagonist:

But I recovered quickly, steeled myself, thinking quietly about how badly I wanted the event to succeed and thinking that I would spoil everything if I cried. There were powerful, overwhelming emotions rocking my body uncontrollably. These were emotions of all those days of struggle and suffering and sacrifices. The years of sojourn from Kenya to Tanzania to Swaziland to Canada then back to Kenya; years when nothing mattered except my unflinching focus to succeed and to shame the repressive forces that had conspired to undermine my life's purpose (*Kidneys for the King* 11).

The narrator/protagonist, in this instance, is an emotional wreck. His past – the tribulations, the frustrations and a history of gargantuan torment - have found convergence in the spatial temporal construct of the launch. The past pervades the moment and buffets the narrator mercilessly. The past, being constitutive of the narrator/protagonist's psyche, influences his logic. In a torrent, the words fall; the audience is astounded or enthralled depending on which side of the divide (detractor or enthusiast) they fall. The narrator has lost jurisdiction over his words. The image is one of helplessness: "there were powerful, overwhelming emotions rocking my body uncontrollably". The conjunctive construction "struggle and suffering and sacrifices" demonstrates that the pain is long drawn. The alliterative patterning "struggle and suffering and sacrifices", cements the anguish. The /s/ connotes pain. His brother, whose eyes are "welling up", only exacerbates the narrator's trauma (11).

Such vivid description could only obtain from a first person point of view since the focaliser and the narrator have synergised to weigh in on the narrative. A reader of this paragraph feels as if he was there with the narrator at that launch. He shares the narrator's apprehension, anxieties as well as triumph. The description is so realistic. A credible interpretation to a large extent depends on the skills applied to obtain realia. Miguna's narrator/protagonist puts vivid description and imagery to effective use, in this instance, to hue the narrative with realia.

Miguna's narrator/protagonist at that launch is, tone-wise, a stark contrast to the one narrating the incidents in *Kidneys for the King*. He laments:

I sat in the back and slumped sideways, closed my eyes and began the painful task of reflection and introspection. I instantly realised the enormity of my utterances. I knew I shouldn't have gone that far. Challenging Raila Odinga, Caroli Omondi, and Mohamed Isahakia was all right. But clearly, I shouldn't have have stated that that I could take "all these leaders to The Hague". To start with, I couldn't. I wasn't an ICC investigator or prosecutor. I didn't have an investigative, prosecutorial, or judicial mandate over The Hague. I wasn't privy to the nitty-gritty of the evidence the ICC prosecutor had gathered with respect to the Kenyan situation. (19)

The "Come baby, come" statement was an unintended outburst and a grave tactical error. It was said in the heat of the moment. The incident presented to the public the wrong persona – that who is recklessly thoughtless and vain. In *Kidneys for the King*, the narrator is petulant.

The narrator employs a variety of strategies to exhort faith from the reader. First, he indulges in full disclosure. This he achieves through vivid description. He captures every utterance, feeling and movement to the minutest detail. For instance, he does not pick the book; he grabs it from the lectern. He has been involved in violence which, though, he has previously condemned. He is rueful. The narrator quotes the exact words he used. This is intentional. The flash back provides the requisite background needed for one seeking to apologise. His electing to use direct speech provides immediacy and ultimately sincerity to his recompense.

Manipulation of temporal and spatial variables is a skill that astute autobiographers employ so as to reap fruitful literary and interpretative returns. Autobiographies, being reflective exercises, the distance between the narrating self and the experiencing self definitely must impact on the accuracy and authenticity of the reflection. The real self or event, as Sodhi Meena observes in *Indian English Writing – The Autobiographical Mode*, is replaced "by a new self made object, a cultural artifact - the book at hand, the autobiographical self" (33). Rockwell equally notes that "a writer is made by writing, the person created by the text, rather than vice versa" (44). Sandefur observes that in narratives such as those in which the narrator is an adult while the focaliser is a child "an adult narrator imposes his or her present interpretations and judgments on past experiences, the narrative goal is to determine the significance of previous experiences for the adult rather than to portray accurately earlier events or even the earlier self" (5). So conscious is Miguna's narrator/protagonist aware of the distance between the two selves that he commences *Peeling Back the Mask* with:

I stood in front of the bathroom mirror and examined myself carefully. The man that stared back at me wasn't the same person who had arrived in Toronto as a frightened young political refugee from Africa

almost 20 years earlier, on June 25, 1988. Of course, I remained the same ideologically. My core principles and mores remained intact. But I had grown older, worldlier and hopefully wiser. I had also become more socially and economically well-grounded. I was now a father and a husband, with all those roles' attendant social responsibilities and expectations. Most obviously of all, physically I wasn't the same penniless lanky fellow that I had been in 1988. (xi)

Miguna attempts to side-step the challenge of elapse of time by embracing avant-garde trends in writing the autobiography. Rockwell, in "Autobiography Now", notes that currently autobiographies do not use a singular persona, apply confessional tone nor employ linearity and chronology of events. Neither are they reflections/reconstructions written when one is in the autumn of his life (44). Miguna's autobiographies "are drawn toward "unorthodox" forms of autobiography which stress the fragment, the overarching metaphor, the leitmotif, the epiphanic moment, or the select period of life (such as childhood)" (45). Miguna's autobiographies are structured in a manner that the narrator/protagonist is not overly concerned about his life. They are focused on an 'epiphanic moment' – the time when Raila was the Prime Minister and Miguna Miguna his advisor on Coalition matters. The moment is epiphanic because it is the point when it was revealed to Miguna that the Raila was a fraud. Though there is nothing religiously revelatory about the revelation, the author/narrator's supposed enlightenment is akin to that which earlier autobiographers such as St. Augustine may have experienced.

Miguna's autobiographies are so structured as to zero in on his epiphanic moment. He compresses periods of his life that are non-essential and stretches those that are essential. This is done through the amount of acreage he grants the periods. In *Peeling Back the Mask*, Miguna's childhood is contained in Book One: Beginnings. Chapter One, Magina, that covers approximately 37 pages, is all that he accords 20 years of his life (1964 – 1984). The introductory pages, entitled 'Declaration', almost equal a quarter of the pages he allocates his childhood. It runs from page xi – xxiii (13 pages). Even then, most of it what he says there lays the foundation for his discrediting of his object – Raila Odinga. Book Two: Exile, covers his exiles in Tanzania and Canada. The 22 years of exile (2 in Tanzania, 20 in Canada) are cumulatively given 66 pages. The six books that follow (Book Three: Return; Book Four: In the Trenches; Book Five: Standing Tall in the Corridors of Power; Book Six: Circling Wolves; Book Seven: Against the Currents and Book Eight: Peeling Back the Mask), covering 329 pages, capture the narrator/protagonist's exposure and struggle to overturn the intrinsic corruptness of Raila Odinga's personal and official *modus operandi*. If the Epilogue, Acknowledgements and Appendices, which vouch for the claims he has made in the autobiography are added, the number of pages granted Miguna's epiphanic moment rises to 440. Yet the duration involved here is only 5 years.

The same pattern of allocating the epiphanic moment more scope is duplicated in *Kidneys for the King*. The text begins with a Pronunciamento (9 pages) which, really, is the declaration. He allocates the Introduction 25 pages. The

author/narrator connects *Kidneys for the King* to *Peeling Back the Mask* right from the Pronunciamento. He poses: "Why a sequel to *Peeling Back the Mask: a Quest for Justice in Kenya?*" (*Kidneys for the King* 1). We expect intertextuality. This expectation is met. After the "Pronunciamento" and the "Introduction", Miguna's narrator/protagonist goes straight into pages disparaging the wanting status of politics and the questionable character of key players either in political or other critical institutions in Kenya. The next six chapters (Between a Shark and A Crocodile; The Fat Cats are Still in Charge; Of "Mad Men" and Fascism; Kidneys for the King; Transformation, Not Reforms and Rayila, the "Nettle Sting") provide a detailed account of the narrator/protagonist's displeasure. Each chapter is metaphorically titled. For example, "Between a Shark and a Crocodile" is reflective not only the narrator/protagonist's struggle against steep odds but also the dilemmas he has had to confront. These chapters make up 332 of the texts 367 pages. The period that the narrator gives 332 pages is only one year long.

This compression and stretching of certain periods really works well to grant the autobiographies authenticity. Miguna wrote *Peeling Back the Mask* immediately after he fell out with Raila Odinga. The happenings at the Office of the Prime Minister were still fresh in his mind. Contemporaneousness is a key element of an autobiography. The autobiography is influenced by the writer's "race, milieu and the moment" ("Autobiography: Nature, Elements and History" 14). The moment is quite significant. Its credible capturing greatly impacts on the credibility of the narrative.

The further into the past the event the author wishes to recollect, the more challenging the recollection. Miguna's texts could be thought to be less encumbered by the challenges of temporality because the span between the time of occurrence of the events and the time of their mediation is substantially short. There is immediacy about the mediation such that the reader's perception is that Miguna writes while in the midst of the experiences while in the midst of interpreting them. As Jennifer Jensen Wallach says in "Building a Bridge Of Words: The Literary Autobiography as Historical Source Material" the autobiographers' propensity to "misremember" is highly diminished (450). The autobiographies' believability is enhanced as a result. Because the focalising self in the autobiographies is aware of his weaknesses as a narrating self in light of the passage of time and the human propensity to misremember, the narrating self rushes over the incidents that happened much earlier. He knows that in concocting a book that Miguna boisterously refers to as "a 601 page tome" (*Kidneys for the King* 3), the length must measure up to its billing. Thus he makes up for the compressed sections by stretching others where he is certain of the claims he makes. The narrator cannot trust his memory with respect to the earlier years but he can the most immediate or present ones. In fact, his confidence in reflecting the latter is boosted by the fact that they are contemporary occurrences and the sources of his claims are available in both official and non-official channels (the appendices in *Peeling Back the Mask* is 25 pages long). Thus, whereas it is acknowledged that autobiographies chiefly employ flashbacks, a flashback about an event that only recently happened (as with Miguna's launch of his first book)

is likely to be more accurate. Similarly, when Miguna's narrator/protagonist attempts to employ vivid description, he is more certain to do justice to a recent event than one that occurred years before.

Techniques that actualise the manipulation of time are employed ubiquitously in autobiography. "An autobiography is beyond the limits of time-span ... readers relish [her] flash backs and flash forwards methods of narration..." ("Autobiography: Nature, Elements and History" 11). In short, the manipulation of space and time by an autobiography grants the stylistic devices authenticity which authenticity spills over and influences the credibility of the narrative the autobiographer tells. Doing historicity while applying literary technique makes the author of "Autobiography: Nature, Elements and History" conclude that "autobiographer has to perform a twin role of a historian as well as a litterateur" (11).

Miguna has scored handsomely in executing both roles if not anywhere else, in the present quote, at least. Finally, the weaknesses of the autobiographical 'I' in interpreting the historical process can be overcome by the introduction of alternative voices in the narrative. Joyce Nyairo, in "The Half-truths Biographers Tell", says "one can introduce other voices, additional points of view to complete the subject's recollections" (39). Miguna attempts to liberate the texts from mono narration by the employment of dialogue. He interrupts the narrative discourse with dialogic interludes so as to capture the differing opinions, synthesises the dialogues and attempts to convince the reader as to why his opinion on the issue is the one that ought to be accepted. The dialogue has to be managed well for it to achieve the desired effect of communicating diverse opinions. Nyairo has observed that Yusuf Kinga'ala's *The Autobiography of Geoffrey W. Griffin: Kenya's Champion Beggar* "suffers from anaemic dialogue" (n.p.). Such dialogues are poorly crafted and barely meet purposes of dialogues. This is true of some of Miguna's dialogues.

To begin with, some dialogues are uncharacteristically too long. We believe that dialogues ought to be infused in the narrative when it is absolutely necessitated by circumstance. It must come at a point when the narrator requires it to make a point that cannot be made through narrative discourse. The dialogue is appropriate when reliving, not just any event, but an event that provides a turning point to the narrative. The characters ought to own the dialogue for it to have any impact. Some dialogues in which Miguna is a participant suffer invasion from the narrator/protagonist; the product is a suffocation of the other participants' voices. Others are simply choreographed to meet the narrator's narratival designs. A good example of the latter case is the dialogue between Miguna and Dick Abuor Okumu (*Peeling Back the Mask* 543-549). The dialogue is simply meant to glorify Miguna. Okumu's first words are panegyric chants:

"Ruath! We value you. You are our light with which we see. You are a descendant of Lwanda Magere. I know you are our bull that scares others from our herd. I'm aware that you are sharp and know how to fight with your mind, pen and if need be, physically. But we are also aware that it is the brave rhinoceros

whose hide is used to make shields. Please don't use cooking oil on a wild cat." (543).

The encomium is basically directed at the person of Miguna's narrator/protagonist. Okumu might have said these words but that Miguna elects to reproduce them here, is meant to build his persona as an indefatigable fighter. The images constructed around the narrator/protagonist further the fighter perception – our light, with which we see, our bull that scares others from our herd. Throughout the dialogue, the narrator/protagonist literally marshals Okumu on what they should talk about. He gently coaxes Okumu into thinking as he (Miguna) desires him to. Moreover, the authorial interludes are only meant to buttress the narrator/protagonist's prejudices against Raila.

The dialogues that Miguna uses amplify Monika Fludernik's observation that the dialogues as represented in texts are far from accurate because:

Recordings of genuine spoken exchanges show that written representations of these have been stylized or 'purified'. Spoken exchanges in novels are grammatically and syntactically correct; they are more concise than real-life conversations since numerous repetitions, rephrasings, fillers and many other features of spoken conversation have been eliminated (*An Introduction to Narratology* 65). The dialogues that we imagine should introduce other points of view are not true – they are (re)constructions. They have been shaped to fit into the narrator's design of things. The styles that we find in the dialogues may not have been used by the actual interlocutor but are the consequence of the narrator/protagonist's shaping of the conversation. The conversations have been taken through a sieving process overseen by the narrating presence such that only parts of the conversation that would meet his motives find reflection in the text. Portraiture of the historical process suffers under the yoke of autodiegesis.

Conclusion

The narrator/protagonist has used the autobiographical first persona quite effectively to relive episodes. However, there are times when the literary strategy compromises the telling of the narrative in a balanced way. Thus, the autobiographical first persona promotes as well as imperils the interpretation of Kenya's recent history as evidenced in Miguna's *Peeling Back the Mask* and *Kidneys for the King*.

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