

School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

**'I am the Mau: short stories for young people' AND the role of
fiction in raising human rights awareness with an African
perspective**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature::

Date:24/07/2020.....

Abstract

My research question asks, 'How can human rights awareness be integrated into fiction for Kenyan secondary schools?' I respond to this question with a creative work and an exegesis. The creative work, 'I am the Mau', is a collection of 10 short stories aimed at young people and intended to raise awareness about human rights issues. The stories interrogate the complexity around human rights. For example, they reveal the indivisibility of human rights from other rights – because, in order for a person to realise full development, economic, social and cultural rights have to be realised as well – and they interrogate what rights mean in diverse contexts.

The exegesis is framed by the interdisciplinary perspectives of human rights, human rights education and comparative literature. It has three areas of focus: it examines African understandings of human rights against universalist ideas; discusses the relationship between rights and fiction in which they both imagine the human subject as an idealistic self; and analyses five short stories by African writers as examples of both how fiction works to raise awareness of human rights issues and the narrative strategies employed in doing so. Informed by these three areas of focus, I argue that human rights awareness can be integrated into fiction for Kenyan secondary schools by invoking a sense of a common humanity so as to stimulate empathy; by breaking down complex and abstract issues in order to shape an understanding of human rights; and by promoting reflexive engagement and critical thinking among readers. I further conclude that, beyond representing rights in local contexts, fiction complicates and exposes contradictions in African understandings of rights, particularly in instances where group rights and individual rights come into conflict. 'I am the Mau' provides a location for the mediation of such complex issues.

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EXEGESIS

Introduction

I stood staring at my hands. I looked hard, searching for answers – purpose even. I must have done so tens of times. It was the end of 2007, Kenya had just had an election, and the results were disputed – violently. But it was not the details of post-election violence (PEV) in Kenya that stayed with me, as much as the feelings of helplessness intertwined with fear. There was a moment when my sister remarked, ‘Did I bring my kids from America only to be killed at home?’ And another moment, when my mother and sister were stopped on the way to the airport by what they described as ‘hundreds of armed young men’ checking to see what tribe they belonged to – and the sheer relief that flooded them that, in that section of town, they were on the ‘right’ side. We had seen images of violence on television but only from what seemed like distant places to us. But as pockets of the country began to unravel, more so instigated by members of my own community, the distance closed and horror was at our door. On television, many of those interviewed spoke in my mother tongue. They were my people. In some way, I bore responsibility for what we were witnessing. That is what I see when I look in my hands, and this thesis found its inception in one such moment. But in my hands, too, were years of experience in the classroom, with young people both in Kenya and Australia and a passion for human rights. Hence, my research question was birthed: ‘How can human rights awareness be integrated into fiction for Kenyan secondary schools?’

The PEV caused the deaths of 1,200 people and internally displaced another 400,000 (Njogu, 2009, p. 2). But Materu (2015) and Njogu (2009) claim that the PEV was not the result of that specific 2007 election. Instead, they attribute it to a combination of ethnic differences and a political class exploiting them, and to ethno-political alliances and a lack of accountability for those known to have encouraged violence in the past. Other underlying causes included discrimination, poverty, disenfranchisement and historical land injustices (Njogu, 2009). The tension abated after President Kibaki and Raila Odinga, the opposition leader, agreed to govern in coalition. This was

arbitrated by other African leaders, who were led by Kofi Annan. One of the key commitments of the new coalition government was the adoption of what is now generally known as the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. Included in the new constitution was Kenya's Bill of Rights, designed to 'guarantee fundamental freedoms and rights for every individual' (Kenya Constitution).

Against this background of change, and in the midst of writing this thesis, several terrorist attacks happened in the east Africa region. *The Daily Nation* reported an increased number of terror attacks on malls, public spaces, public transport, homes and a university. These acts affected people's access to essential rights, such as the right to life, to liberty and economic freedom, and to social and cultural rights. The counter terrorism measures taken by the Kenyan government have also had implications on human rights, such as the right to non-discrimination, and the right to freedom from unfair and inhumane treatment or torture (including the principle of *non-refoulement*, especially with regard to Somali refugees now resident in Kenya). These violations made me rethink the human rights issues I initially sought to address in this thesis, which were general in nature. I decided to include terrorism and related rights violations in the fiction I was creating for secondary school age students, because both became a topical issue for them.

East African countries, especially Kenya, have experienced increased terrorist attacks in the last five years. These increased attacks are a direct consequence of the Kenya Defence Force going into Somalia, which prompted several threats from al-Shabaab, a Somali al-Qaeda-linked militant group (Odhiambo, et al. 2012). The deadliest attacks happened at Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, on September 21, 2013, and at Mpeketoni on June 15 and 17, 2014. Mpeketoni is a town in Mombasa, and a total of 130 people were killed there over the two days. Another attack happened at Garissa University on April 2, 2015 which killed 148 students. Whilst al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attacks, the president of Kenya stated that the Mombasa attack was committed by his political rivals. In both instances, however, it was clear these violent acts were committed by east African youth, a demographic that has been actively targeted for recruitment by Al-Shabaab. The state response to these acts of terror raised concerns about

human rights, because some governments took advantage of anti-terrorism laws, for political gain, by going after minority groups such as refugees and asylum seekers (Lumina, 2008, p. 125). In Kenya, for instance, Human Rights Watch has expressed concern over a series of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and the mistreatment of suspects while in detention (HRW, 2014). It is also important to note that the terrorist attacks in Kenya took place alongside other violent ethnic clashes, such as the Baragoi and Tana River massacres of 2012, which do not necessarily fall under the umbrella of 'terrorist' attacks, but have contributed to destabilisation in some regions of the country.

Terrorism, as a concept, is contested as a political term rather than as a legal one (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p. 581). Saul describes it as a 'contested terrain of innumerable political and moral opinion', which has made it difficult to arrive at an international definition in a 'diverse community of states' (2015, p. 19). Mainstream understandings of terrorism often reduce terrorist acts to just those done under the pretence of fundamental Islam, when, in fact, there are other forms of terrorism which are critical to acknowledge. These include taking hostages, attacks by non-state actors in peacetime or the actions of white nationalists. In Factsheet 32, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) states that terrorism is 'commonly understood to refer to acts of violence that target civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological aims' (2006, p. 5). It is this broader definition that I employ when writing my terrorism-related short stories.

Recent studies show that a section of Kenyan youth is vulnerable to the message of *jihad*. Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchen define *jihad* as a global philosophy of fighting to protect the *ummah* (global Muslim community) from the western-led 'war on Islam' (2014, p. 525). It is not my intention, here, to conflate *jihad* with terrorism, but the al-Shabaab group that claimed responsibility for the attacks at Westgate and Mpeketoni invoked *jihad* for their actions. I also use the term because the studies I cite are specific to the east African region, and the respondents, specifically in the Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchen study, refer to themselves as *jihadists* in the context of the terrorist attacks. Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchen's 2014 study, sets out to

determine the factors that made some people in different geographical locations, specifically Kenya and Somali, more receptive to jihadist ideology, while the message did not resonate with others (p. 525). A United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study reveals that recruits were lured into violent extremism for financial reasons, as well as other issues such as the perception of existential threats and a fear of cultural domination and oppression. Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchen determine that young Kenyan Muslims were a fertile recruitment ground because of poverty and the role of ideology and ideologues within their society (p. 524). In other words, young people joined al-Shabaab to align themselves with the message of jihad. The study also reveals that some young people were kidnapped and forced into al-Shabaab (p. 524). Young people are more vulnerable to radicalisation and to joining a terrorist group because they are active and more susceptible to influences (Botha, 2014, p. 909), especially before they turn 20. Of the 141 people associated with al-Shabaab and its members who were interviewed by Botha, five said they joined between the ages of 10 and 14, 17 between the ages of 15 and 19, and 35 between the ages of 20 and 24 (2014, p. 896,). Botha's research also reveals that 38% of respondents were introduced into the organisation by friends, and that 54% of that number later went on to recruit other friends (p. 900). Botha contrasts this with the 6% of respondents who say they joined the organisation because of family, which demonstrates that friends or peers had the most influence on young people in their political socialisation (p. 899).

These statistics are instructive to me, as I craft my fiction to target these specific groups of young people. If we can have positive discussions and allow young people to examine the lure of radicalisation, Botha's statistics show that the influence of those conversations could potentially extend beyond the classroom, making fiction a tool in promoting the human rights that relate to terrorism. Botha (2014) and Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchens (2014) suggest that a desire on the part of young people to be a part of something lofty, something larger than themselves, is evident – such as the cases of those who joined a terrorist organisation for monetary reasons but stayed on for the sake of protecting the *ummah*.

My research question was a result of the desire to contribute to the 'new' Kenya, with its new constitution – albeit a Kenya still battling with the scars of PEV and the effects of acts of terror. My research rests on the provision of article 42 of the Conventions of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states that 'State Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.' I also draw more generally from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and specifically and contextually from the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). With regards to the issue of terrorism, I make the argument that schools have the potential to educate in human rights and for human rights by providing students with the knowledge and tools necessary to challenge or reject messages or ideas, such as the narrative of jihad, which threaten the fundamental human rights of others.

My creative work has, as its target audience, high school students. They are chosen with the understanding and hope that human rights values can be incorporated into the attitudes and behaviours of young people, at a time when their character is being established (Frantzi, 2004, p. 7). It is also essential that young people be given a chance to learn about international human rights instruments, such as the UDHR, which 'affirms their right to not only education but to education in human rights because rights are considered to be both an ethical claim and in many respects, legal entitlements' (Osler & Zhu 2011, p. 223).

The official starting age for formal schooling in Kenya is six years old, but there is no strict adherence to this. A student's education could be interrupted by repeating a grade or by other social and financial reasons, hence a disparity in the ages of secondary school students: some students could be over 18 and some will be younger. For this reason, I will be drawing from children's literature and discussing children's rights, even though some sections of my target audience are not technically children. For the most part, I will refer to my target audience as young people. I have chosen to use the short story form as it allows for multiple voices and perspectives, which is ideal in exploring a variety of human rights themes. The short story can be read intensely in a single sitting, which also suits my young target audience.

My research has revealed a significant amount of human rights literature from South Africa, but very little from eastern Africa, the region that is the focus of my thesis.

Before providing an overview of my thesis structure, I will specify four definitions of the key terminologies I will be using: human rights, human rights awareness, human rights literature, fiction and short story.

I start this thesis with two working definitions of *human rights*: one, as the 'essential moral value in our being human' (Mcbeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p. 36) and two, as 'strong ethical claims which have universal application', and which have international recognition via treaties such as the UDHR (Osler & Zhu, 2011, p. 223). Human rights belong to everyone regardless of one's background and are said to be 'inalienable [cannot be taken away], interdependent [related to each other] and indivisible [of equal importance]' (OHCHR, n.d.). Human rights are based on the assumption that individuals have personal freedoms that states are obligated to protect. Both these definitions work for me because they arise from the ideas of human dignity and universality, terms which are contested and terms whose relevance I seek to interrogate in my thesis. These terms are therefore core to my discussion on what human rights are from African perspectives.

Human rights awareness as a term is hewn from the dimensions provided by human rights education. This encompasses three elements: 'the acquisition of knowledge and skills; the development of human rights values, attitudes and behaviour; and the call for social action in the defence and promotion of human rights' (UNHRC). In other words, 'human rights awareness' means to increase and promote understanding of the ideals of human rights, so as to encourage a change in behaviour. I have chosen to use this definition because it suggests that raising awareness happens through education, a distinction from Human Rights Education (HRE), the subject that is taught in schools or universities. The latter is a term I avoid consciously because it is a much wider field and beyond the limits of this thesis. I elaborate on this distinction further in chapter three, when I discuss human rights awareness in the school context.

Kimberley Nance defines *human rights literature* as those 'texts in any genre, whether documentary or fictional, that confront readers with a gap

between the actual conditions of a person or group and the conditions that would enable that person or group to exercise fully the rights and freedoms enumerated in the United Nations' (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (2010, p. 171). I will be drawing from fictional texts in my analysis and I will also use the terms *literature* and *literary works* interchangeably when discussing works of fiction.

Macquarie Dictionary uses the word *fiction* to refer to 'the class of literature comprising imaginative narratives written in prose form' (para.1). Bernard Harrison proposes that fiction- literary fiction- works by 'deploying words against a background of imagined circumstances in such a way as to allow us to focus on the roots in social practice, with all of its inherent ambiguities and stresses, of the meanings through which we are accustomed to represent our world and ourselves'(2014, p.2). Fiction is communication that both author and reader accept as make believe (Curry, 1985, p. 387). My work is grounded in these understandings of fiction.

Attempting to define the short story is problematic. Critics such as Tucan suggest that doing so, excludes certain understandings and 'reduces the short story to a limited number of possibilities' (2014, p. 1). Reid argues that the short story does not bear any features that set it apart from other fictions and citing one, such as the as the short story's ability to capture 'a moment of awareness', is not necessary to the genre (1977, p. 29). Other critics rely on the reader for its definition. For Ferguson, the differences between the short story and the "novel" is perceived through impressionism-- that is, as a function of content-- and not genre (1982). This means that the work is read differently when it is viewed as a complete story or an excerpt of a larger story. Similarly, Schuelter suggests that the short story differs from the novel in terms of genre because of 'convention and reader expectation rather than some inherent structural characteristic' (2012, p. 141). Other attempts at definition of the short story takes into consideration the length of the story but critics such as Reid, argue that the short story cannot, as a genre, be defined arithmetically but rather that short stories are whatever an author wishes to nominate or allows to be nominated as such (1977, p. 9). In acknowledging that the 'African short story' as a term is difficult to define, Habila notes that it 'must never be confused with the folktale' which he

describes as episodic and didactic (2011, p.xii). He relies on Congolese writer Emmanuel Dongala's approximation, that the short story's 'relationship to the expansive novel is that of poetry to prose; it is solely the creation of its individual author, written for experienced short story readers, rather than any written reduction from orature" (p. xii). Like many critics, Habila highlights what the short story is *not* rather than what a short story is or does. I will endeavour to write mainstream fiction, specifically the short story form, with a wide range of captivating conditions and emotions all common to my secondary school target audience.

This exegesis is organised into five sections: an introduction and four chapters. Chapter one reviews theoretical African perspectives with a focus on the universalist versus cultural relativist debate in relation to human rights. It also explores African social consciousness, and explores the practice of *ubuntu* as central to an understanding of human rights. Having an understanding of the different perspectives of human rights informed, and shaped, my research in writing stories within an African context with an African audience in mind.

Chapter two examines the relationship between human rights and literary discourses as harmonious, because of the way fiction and human rights conceptualise the human subject. I argue that fiction promotes human rights awareness by bridging universal concepts to particular contexts, inspiring a sense of a common humanity, contributing to a culture of human rights and by breaking down complexities and generating discussions. The second half of chapter two focuses on the audience. I examine the reader's role in the meaning making process, as well as how rights might be framed for a school context as informed by human rights education. The chapter also identifies some strategies of persuasion, and I conclude with a discussion on the limitations and risks of fiction as a pedagogical tool.

Chapter three advances my research question by offering examples and lessons from a close reading of five African short stories. These stories illustrate the arguments raised in chapter two and, in their analysis, I detail the narrative strategies the writers used to render their representation of human rights practices through fiction. Chapter four is a reflection on my

journey, and brings to the fore the ways in which my creative work was informed by the theories and strategies learned from the preceding chapters. In chapter four I also highlight the lessons learned and challenges encountered in the writing process.

This thesis provides two different responses to the question ‘How can human rights awareness be integrated into fiction for Kenyan secondary schools?’ First, in an exegesis which is grounded in the intersection of human rights theory, human rights literature and literary reading, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of what rights are and how they are understood in an African context. I also explore the close relationship between fiction and human rights, and how fiction is instrumental in raising awareness about rights. Second, in a collection of ten short stories which embody and complicate human rights issues and understandings, I seek to dramatise human rights within the lived experience and in the local contexts of my target audience, so as to promote empathy and self-reflection among readers. My stories are set against a background of ongoing constitutional change and political and social instability. This thesis has been a personal journey for me, and I have brought to it my background as a Kenyan, a schoolteacher and a parent.

Chapter One: African Perspectives and Understandings of Human Rights

There are several perspectives and understandings, terms I use interchangeably, of what human rights are in an African context; these perspectives and understandings fit into two broad and overlapping categories. First, I present the debate surrounding the notions of rights as universal or culturally relative, and the possibility of there being a culturally mediated universalism. Second, I explore African social consciousness as central to the conceptualisation of rights, and present the concept of *ubuntu* as a traditional practice which demonstrates rights and duties as reciprocal and core to the understanding of human rights. The definitions and understandings indicate that scholars generally diverge in areas of emphasis, such as dignity, integrity and freedom, in seeking to define or explain how human rights are understood and played out in everyday contexts.

It is important to my research question to begin this chapter by exploring the competing definitions of human rights in an African context for two reasons: first, I need to appreciate what rights are and how they are realised and protected, as well as how they link back to concepts of the individual and the group and its concomitant duties. Second, they allow me to be more deliberate in creating stories that interrogate the deeper complexities of what rights could or should mean in African contexts. They will also aid my appreciation and analysis of selected African short fiction.

A key regional human rights instrument designed to promote and protect human rights in Africa is The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), (henceforth referred to as the African Charter or the Charter). The Charter was drafted in 1981 after inter-governmental, non-government, religious and media groups urged the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to address human rights abuses in the continent which had been overlooked during the struggle against colonialism and apartheid (ACHPR). The African Charter has been ratified by 53 members of the African Union and is an important instrument for the advancement and the preservation of human rights in Africa (ACHPR). During the signing of the Charter, Leopold Senghor who was president at the time, prefaced the occasion by saying:

[A]s Africans, we shall neither copy, nor strive for originality, for the sake of originality. We must show imagination and effectiveness. We could get inspiration from our beautiful and positive traditions. Therefore, you must keep constantly in mind our values of civilization and the real needs of Africa. (Udombana, 2000, p. 60)

The Charter, although derived from the UDHR as a regional instrument, was designed to reflect the values and needs of Africa, including the notion of communitarianism.

The UDHR has its roots in western understandings of human rights as entitlements – something one has through virtue of being human. The idea of rights can be traced to the philosophers of the Enlightenment period. John Locke, for example, wrote that ‘all Men are naturally in ... a state of *Perfect Freedom* to order their Actions and dispose of their Possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the Will of any other Man’ (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p. 43, emphasis in original). Locke advanced the idea of natural law – an assumption that the inherent good in humans was a basis for a just society – which was a significant contribution to the idea of human rights as universal (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p. 38). Michael Freeman describes western liberalism as ‘egalitarian individualism’, because it is based on the idea that the ‘human individual is the most fundamental moral unit’ and that all humans are ‘morally equal’ (1995, p. 25). According to Freeman, this suggests that western understandings of rights are built on the values of liberty, equality and individualism (25). McBeth, Nolan and Rice argue that the most notable influence natural rights had over western political thinking, and subsequently the UDHR, was the ‘recognition of individual liberties in relation to the state’ (2011, p. 53). In sum, from natural law came natural rights, which influenced the drafting of the UDHR (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p. 43). The UDHR, although not legally binding, provides a definitive expression of human rights and a standard for global human rights ideals (Joseph & McBeth, 2010, p. 2). The UDHR, together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) make up the what is commonly recognised as the International Bill of Rights.

Regional instruments such as the African Charter were drafted to reinforce the International Bill of Rights in the promotion and protection of human rights. Of relevance to this thesis are two points that the Charter contributes to the discussion on what rights are: the tension between individual and group or collective rights, and the idea of the duties of the individual as a member of their community. The Charter provides for 'peoples' rights', which refers to rights that belong to a people in their collective or as a distinct identity. As Jones puts it, a group right is 'a right that a group holds as a group and only as a group' (2018, p. 33). Group rights include rights such as the right to cultural preservation and 'self-determination, political sovereignty over their natural resources and development' (Mutua, 2002, p. 192). These rights are also known as 'group rights' or 'collective rights', terms that are generally used interchangeably. I will do the same. In contrast to group rights, individual rights refer to the fundamental freedoms or liberties held by and belonging to an individual. An individual claims these rights against a state (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, pp. 37-53).

The Charter 'incorporates socio-economic rights and civil and political rights in a manner that emphasises indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness' (Chirwa, 2008, p. 323). This sets it apart from other regional treaties, such as those of Europe and the Americas, due to its recognition that the 'satisfaction of economic, social and cultural rights is a guarantee for the enjoyment of civil and political rights' (ACHPR). The Charter recognises group rights and considers individual rights, such as the rights to be equal, to exist, and to economic, social and cultural development, as rights 'that are not only possessed by individuals but by "peoples" in their collectivity' (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p. 305). The emphasis of the African Charter on the right to development as unique to Africa is an example of a right that is considered both an individual and a group right. It is framed as such: 'The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and

enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised' (ACHPR).

The African Charter also specifies individual responsibilities. In the Preamble, the Charter states that 'the enjoyment of rights and freedoms also implies the performance of duties on the part of everyone'. It outlines the following tenets:

to preserve the harmonious development of the family and *to work* for the cohesion and respect of the family; *to respect* his parents at all times, *to maintain* them in case of need; *to serve* his national community by placing his physical and intellectual abilities to its service; *to preserve and strengthen* positive African cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue, and consultation, and, in general, *to contribute* to the promotion of the moral well-being of the society. (Emphasis added)

The above tenets place emphasis on the duties of the individual to both his (*sic*) family and cultural group. Mutua, a Kenyan scholar, sees in the Charter an attempt to 'reinforce the relevant values of commitment, solidarity, respect and responsibility', and notes that the Charter differs from other international instruments in its broad inclusion of the competing conceptions of individual rights, kinship, community and government (2002, p. 6). Cobbah and Hamalengwa argue that, within kinship, a family member has certain social roles, which they describe as essentially rights that are enjoyed and owed to each individual (1987, p. 321). Wingo suggests that the Charter be treated as dynamic, because the framers of the Charter were 'creating a set of positive rights that reflected their own conception of human rights', and therefore the Charter ought to reflect the people's needs and understandings of human rights (2009, p. 126). The Charter gives emphasis to the individual as the bearer of both rights and duties, and its articulation of an individual's duties can be understood as an acknowledgement of the tension between cultural relativism and the universalism of human rights (Sloth-Nielsen &

Mezmur, 2008, p. 35). This discussion is at the core of the universal vs cultural relativity of human rights debate, which I will discuss next.

Human rights as universal or culturally relative

The debate surrounding the universality of human rights and the cultural relativity of the concept seems inevitable in human rights discourses; it has been around since the signing of the UDHR in 1948. A common argument made by universalists is that human rights are, by definition, a given. They come by virtue of being human, and are, thus, universal. Proponents of human rights as universal believe that the 'same legal enforcement mechanisms of human rights exist everywhere' (Le, 2016, p. 203) and that because they are based on human dignity by virtue of being human, they must be universal. This approach acknowledges the 'definition of human rights as based on the universal dignity of all human beings by virtue of their humanity' (Le, 2016, p. 203). Le also argues that, because dignity for all is the bedrock for human rights claims, the tension between cultural relativist and universalist perspectives on human rights can be constructive in recognising people to be of equal worth, deserving of respect and therefore the tension must be allowed to thrive. Musa and Domatob concede, that although human rights may have their philosophical basis in the west, their ideals are just as valid and relevant in Africa (2011, p. 9).

Cultural relativists, on the other hand, favour a definition and diversity in interpretation of human rights based on one's cultural background. They argue that there are various ways to understand and violate human rights (Le, 2016, p. 203). For instance, some in non-western societies may find that their religious freedoms clash with the west's idea of the rights of the individual; in other instances, the right to own private property may be in conflict with communities who hold traditional forms of ownership. Those communities are likely to see human rights as a western cultural imposition. Cobbah and Hamalengwa posit that 'African societies function within a communal structure where a person's dignity and honour flow from her transcendental role as a cultural being' (1987, p. 321). They believe that emphasis should be placed on whether or not human dignity is found in a society's cultural values (p. 321). Similarly, Woldeyes argues that

'understanding rights is about understanding difference' (2017, p. 24). For him, rights need to be understood with respect to different cultures and religions, as no one knowledge is superior to another. He cautions against understandings that are dismissive of non-western perspectives.

The debate on rights as universal or culturally relative finds a third position in scholars such as Nagengast (1998), Donnelly (2007) and Merry (2006), who seek common ground in the debate between the universal and the cultural relativist positions. Nagengast attempts to resolve the tension by calling for a 'culturally mediated universalism' (1998, p. 7). She argues that it is not the concept that is contentious, but the content, and that human rights are both individual and collective. She calls for a dialogue on universal values that promotes integrity for all, and she also draws attention to the definition and dynamism of culture, which she claims are key considerations in overall political, social and economic human rights contexts (p. 363). Merry, in acknowledging that culture as an idea is elusive, claims that in international human rights discussions, 'culture' refers to non-western traditions and is also imagined as a 'national essence or identity' (as cited in McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011, p.72). This reliance on an 'essentialised model of culture' is a basis for claims to sovereignty and ethnonationalism, and thus a means of resistance to human rights for some states (p. 72). Donnelly advocates for a 'relative universality' which gives room for 'important (second order) claims of relativism' (2007, p. 282). For him, rights are about people, individually or collectively, freely choosing to pursue what gives their lives meaning in a manner that reflects 'a vision of human flourishing'. He thinks of rights as a 'political conception of justice', backed by 'overlapping consensus' about what rights might mean to all culturally, as long as 'they operate largely within the constraints at the level of concepts established by functional, international legal, and overlapping consensus universality' (p. 303). Together, Nagenast, Merry and Donnelly attempt to reconcile the universalism and the relativism of human rights debates by drawing attention to how rights are actually realised in the lives of people in different contexts, rather than in how rights are understood at the level of principle.

Generally these middle-ground positions hold the view that human dignity is universal, and that all humans share fundamental aspirations; they

advocate for a view that goes beyond the particular to find the universal in lived experience. Sen argues that these aspirations are best realised by 'using basic universalist principles in general, while taking note of ... the relevance of local circumstances and regional conditions in appropriately contingent, or parametric, specifications of the exact demands of human rights' (2004, p. 202). McBeth, Nolan and Rice state that universalism and relativism find harmony in the understanding that, while 'human rights operate at the level of principle and context, particular realisation will depend on local conditions' (2011, p. 75). Douzinas argues that the universal is found in the particular, in that 'when a state adopts universal human rights law, it interprets it according to local legal procedures and moral principles, making the universal subordinate to the particular' (2002, p. 459). For instance, most human beings want the same basic rights – a life of dignity and one free from torture – and these do not depend on one's cultural background. There is a 'universality of the human spirit', as Higgins puts it (1994, p. 96). So, while the understandings of what human rights are continue to be contested within lived experience, contestation will also arise with regard to which cultural practices are considered contrary to human rights. Below, I will illustrate this with an example involving the cultural expectations of widows in certain parts of western Kenya.

A common concern among defenders of human rights occurs in instances where the defence of cultural relativism can be harmful to some vulnerable groups within a community. Udombana notes that, while the Charter requires that individuals 'promote positive African values', without specifying what those values are, it allows room for an interpretation that the Charter 'favours African rights to the extent that they do not collide with universal principles' (2004, p. 3). Fagana and Fridlund state that the rights to culture are encouraged specifically for those in whom culture and identity are interwoven, and they argue that, while culture needs to be respected as part of one's rights, not all aspects of culture, especially those that relate to women and children, uphold human rights (2016, p. 23). They also point out that 'human rights norms do not seek cultural hegemony or homogenisation but are in fact consistent with the advancement of cultural diversity' (p. 25). Murithi cites Africa as an example, where women's rights are often perceived

as contentious, and the need for cultural preservation has in some instances clashed with the need to protect human rights in general (2007, p.282). For instance, in parts of rural western Kenya, women's individual rights can be violated in favour of cultural practices. A woman who is widowed could be dispossessed or displaced where tradition does not allow women to own land; in some cases, a widow can continue to live on her husband's property as long as she accepts to be 'inherited' by one of his kinsmen. In such an instance, a woman's right to own property and the subsequent ability to earn a living through it – as well as the right to manage her own body – are in conflict with her culture.

Paragraph 18 of General Comment 21 of the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that 'no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope'. In Kenya, the bill of rights guarantees the right to property, but cultural and economic factors make it particularly difficult for some women to enjoy that right. While Nagengast supports a culturally mediated approach to universalism, she also states that 'if individuals ... are not free to choose whether they are in or out of the collectivity, not free to support or oppose its dictates, then the notion of group rights becomes vacuous' (1998, p. 9). For her, no one individual should come to harm because of belonging to a group, and so she argues in favour of redefining cultural practices with the understanding that culture is never static. I believe Nagengast's position speaks directly into the western Kenyan situation discussed above. Wife inheritance may have been a way to guarantee that widows continued to be looked after in the community, but the idea of community has changed significantly over the years: there is a lot more rural-to-urban movement and women want to be more independent in heading their own households. Currently there are legal channels that exist in Kenya which protect women from such cultural practices, but, until women are educated on what their rights are, it is hard for them to claim them. There are examples of women who have fought against wife inheritance and won, even though for some it has come at the expense of excommunication from their community. This is heartening for me, as it encourages me that educating for rights is indeed a channel towards claiming them.

In this thesis, I adopt a middle-ground approach to the rights debate. This is particularly evident in my creative work, where I imagine how rights could be realised in different contexts. My story 'Beading', for instance, illustrates the above argument by scholars such as Nagengast, Donnelly, Fargana and Fridlund, who argue that, while rights can be understood to be culturally relative, they must also uphold universally recognised human rights ideals. 'Beading', which illustrates a cultural practice by the Samburu, of Kenya, in which young girls are availed for the sexual gratification of their warriors, pits the right of a community to practice their culture – as a group right – against the need to protect the right of young girls to not be harmed (an individual right). Eze argues that the idea of the universality of human rights is only meaningful when applied to the bodies of those in oppressed situations – that is, if every *body* is treated with dignity and if the every body is valued as an end rather than a means (2016, p. 22). In 'Beading', it is in the valuing of bodies of young girls – or in the lack of – that human rights ideals can be contested as either universal or culturally relative.

African social consciousness

In addition to the debate on the universalism and relativism of human rights, a second key understanding of what human rights are in Africa requires that attention be given to African social consciousness as a specific and important aspect of cultural relativism. The African scholars who advocate for such thinking claim that the universalist and relativist perspectives on human rights are inadequate, in that they do not capture the communal spirit of social consciousness, solidarity and relational freedom that is inherent in the idea of human rights (Okere, 1984; Wingo, 2009; Mutua, 2002; Mbiti, 1969; Woldeyes, 2017). Ngugi, Mutua and Woldeyes argue for an acknowledgement of the precolonial African consciousness in order to find relevance for today. Ngugi, a prolific author, academic and political activist, states in a lecture delivered at the University of Oregon (UO) that African scholars need to 'connect themselves to that memory' of social consciousness made up of 'our bodies, our common places, local knowledge and our minds', without necessarily being held hostage to that memory as a 'starting point with which to begin engagement with the world' (UO, 2008,

1:11:44; 1:21). That memory is important to Ngugi, as he claims that the African memory has been subjugated to that of the coloniser (UO, 2008, 45:12). Mutua is wary of what he terms the 'mythical elevation of human rights corpus beyond politics and political ideology', as well as the use of human rights to advance or protect norms that are detrimental to the third world. He suggests that human rights from an African perspective should affirm that 'relationships, rights, and obligations flowed from social organisational structures which gave the community cohesion and viability' (2002, p. 14). Similarly, Woldeyes (2017) builds on the view of human rights as a western imposition by introducing the term 'apartheid of knowledges' – one in which human rights is a tool by which the west seeks to 'enlighten' others by terming 'non-western religious, philosophical and cultural knowledges as relativist, ethnocentric, repressive whilst maintaining their own as universal, democratic and egalitarian' (p. 68). Such discrimination is what he refers to as epistemic violence (p. 26). For Woldeyes, an understanding of rights should include religious and cultural knowledges, wherein is found 'new imaginings' of what it means to be human (p. 26).

Wingo considers human rights to be synonymous with a freedom which can only be found in community (2009, p. 125). Okere says that the 'African conception of man (*sic*) is not that of an isolated and abstract individual, but an integral member of a group animated by a spirit of solidarity' (Okere, 1984, p. 148). Wingo sees rights as an expression of freedom, an expression that is experienced through trying to survive difficult challenges not as an individual, but as a member of a group, so that in that survival one finds 'a episodic freedom of the individual'. He describes this freedom as 'relational freedom' (2009, p. 125), and argues that people's circumstances influence their idea or conception of freedom. Wingo also claims that in, the western world, circumstances are conducive to personal freedom, while in Africa the conditions require cooperation for survival – hence duties to each other are emphasised (p. 129). Relational freedom contrasts with the more western notion of 'personal freedom', which arises from the conception of rights as 'individualistic, utilitarian and of liberal posture' (Musa & Domatob, 2011, p. 9). Wingo recalls that the African Charter, written to reflect a particular view of what human rights are from an

African perspective, places onus on the individual to preserve, respect, serve and strengthen his community. He echoes Mbiti's adage of 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (2005, p.125). For Mbiti, a religious scholar, 'Community manifests itself with reference to blood and marital kinship, land, tribal affiliation, clan roots, ritual celebrations, rites of passage and death, and shared oppression and suffering' (Tarus & Lowery, 2017, p. 312).

Together, the ideas of memory, freedom and social structures point to the social consciousness of a people. Understanding these African perspectives are an important contribution to the understanding of human rights – or, as Wingo puts it, 'Human rights are historical phenomena, and philosophising about them cross-culturally calls for an open and magnanimous spirit' (2009, p. 102). I seek to imbue these ideas of memory and freedom and African social consciousness into my stories. The essence of African social consciousness is captured in traditional practices such as *ubuntu*, which is discussed below.

A key distinction in the understandings of human rights in Africa is the idea of the self versus the community, which, as discussed previously, is often articulated in human rights discourse as individual versus collective rights. Ubuntu is 'an ancient African code of ethics which emphasises the importance of hospitality, generosity and respect for all members of the community, and embraces the view that we all belong to one human family' (Murithi, 2007, p. 282). In attempting to define ubuntu, Desmond Tutu says the following:

When we want to give high praise to someone we say, 'Yu, u nobuntu'; 'Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu.' Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.' We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a person through other persons.' It is not, 'I think therefore I am.' It says rather: 'I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.' (Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, 2015, para.1)

In 'ubuntu', suggests Tutu, the individual finds expression in others and in his community, which is a distinction from the western notion of human rights, which places emphasis on the individual. In an ideal ubuntu, individuality is only an entity within others in a relationship based on reciprocity, so that claiming one's rights constrains one to dispense duties to others 'in the context of all living things' (Pavlish, Ateva & Ho, 2017, p.129). Michere Mugo, a Kenyan writer and activist, suggests that human rights be framed within ubuntu to resolve the tension between individual and collective rights, because communalism and collective growth are central to any conception or understanding of rights (2004, p. 8). She goes on to argue that, in the social dynamics of orature such as in the stories, songs and proverbs shared, the individual is incorporated into the community consciousness. This orature is crucial in 'instilling consciousness pertaining to human rights among the Gikuyu' (p. 8). In ubuntu, the rights of the individual are weighted against those of the group, an argument that is in the vein of cultural relativists such as Merry, Nagengast and Donnelly.

One of the key demonstrators of the reciprocity of rights, as understood within ubuntu, is found in the example of Wangare Maathai, a Kenyan Nobel laureate and an environmental political activist, who argued and demonstrated that human rights are about looking after each other. To that end, she led women in planting up to a million trees. Beginning in Kenya, she established what she termed a Green Belt Movement (GBM) that spread to other parts of Africa. Her approach to human rights included attributing the issues women have, of poverty and other challenging conditions, to their responsibility to the environment (which was ultimately about responsibility to each other).

The concept of ubuntu is undergirded by a call to duty to one another, a call that is expressed in the Preamble to the African Charter, which states that 'the enjoyment of rights and freedoms also implies the performance of duties on the part of everyone'. I have used ubuntu as an example of social consciousness but, by no means, do I suggest that it is the only traditional practice that reflects understandings of an African philosophy of rights. Ubuntu express the ideas of freedom and kinship in community. Here, I

invoke Wingo's explanation that the ideas of freedom and conceptions of human rights depend on what people see as pertinent to their enjoyment of freedom, and therefore in circumstances or societies such as the west which are conducive to personal freedoms, the focus is on the individual. But, in places where cooperation is key to survival, emphasis is placed on an individual's duty to the group (2009, p. 129). Mutua's words are apt in this summation: 'The concept of the group-centred individual in Africa delicately entwines rights and duties and harmonises the individual with the society' (2002, p. 65).

One way in which I explore and grapple with African understandings of human rights is through a demonstration of lived experience in my creative work. For this I draw especially from cultural relativists such as Nagengast and Donnelly, for whom the content of human rights is more significant than the concept; they argue for a consensus on the values that benefit everyone. For instance, same-sex relationships are not only frowned upon in Kenya, they are criminalised and often termed as un-African. I interrogate the notion of 'un-Africanness' in a short story I titled 'A Fire for Mother'. In it, I explore an obscure tradition from my community, in which childless women of a certain age and standing are allowed an 'elevated' position in the community, so that they can marry a younger woman to bear them children. In such instances, the woman would need to pay dowry as any prospective husband would; then she would choose a suitable man to help sire children for her. My story demonstrates that there are multiple ways of being in a marital relationship, and that same-sex relationships, albeit for the purposes of surrogacy such as this one, are not entirely un-African. Considering that such 'husband wives' enjoy a more privileged position in society, which includes sitting with men and subservience from women or their wives, 'A Fire for Mother' also invites a conversation on what human rights have to say about unequal gender statuses. The story challenges readers to consider the ideals of ubuntu – the idea that one is a person through others – and what that means in terms of inclusion, especially where there is gender disparity. 'A Fire for Mother' provides an opportunity, hopefully, for a robust discussion on whether rights are truly universal or culturally defined.

In this section on African perspectives on human rights, I have presented the African Charter as a significant instrument for the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa. I have also argued that the emphasis it places on reciprocity is central to the community in which individual rights may be found. I have highlighted the debate on the universality versus the cultural relativity of human rights, as well as the continuing tension this debate presents in the realisation of rights. I have also discussed African social consciousness, evidenced in practices such as ubuntu, as a significant aspect of cultural relativism. This discussion not only deepened my understanding of what rights could or should mean in different African contexts, it helped to shape and give nuance to my creative work, as I have suggested in the examples of 'Beading' and 'A Fire for Mother'.

Chapter Two: Human Rights and Fiction

When I set out to write this thesis, I wanted to find out how I might imagine human rights for today, as well as how to communicate human rights truths and values to secondary school students using fiction. This chapter aids that imagination. The chapter is organised into four sections: the relationship between rights and fiction; raising awareness through fiction; the reader's role in the meaning making process; and the risks and limitations of fiction. In the first half of the chapter, I examine the relationship between human rights and literary discourses and provide a brief background to that relationship. I also identify the human subject of literary works as an ideal human, one worthy of dignity, an ideal that brings rights and literary discourses together. Next, I explore how the ideas in human rights instruments translate from document to lived experience. My purpose is to argue that fiction is a vehicle by which human rights norms can be taught in a classroom, and so I explore four main ways in which fiction can raise awareness: by invoking our sense of being human; by using empathy as a powerful means into a reader's mind and heart; by breaking down complex ideas; and by instilling a culture of rights in readers as a long term strategy. I also examine the role of the reader in the meaning making process within a school context and with special emphasis on African educationists. I end this chapter with a discussion on the limitations and risks of using fiction for the purpose of raising awareness.

It is important to note early in this chapter that, in my research, I have drawn from literature that refers specifically to literary work. Therefore, the terms 'literature', 'literary', 'imaginative narratives' and 'stories' will refer to works of fiction. I will use these terms interchangeably. I have also expanded references to the novel to include all fiction, though my creative work is short fiction.

The relationship between fiction and human rights

Scholars working at the nexus of human rights and literary theories suggest that the discourse of human rights has often been linked with the development of the novel, because both focus on the idea of an ideal subject and how that subject is conceptualised (Hunt, 2007; Slaughter, 2007; Dawes,

2009; Potter & Stonebridge, 2014). Lynn Hunt, a foundational theorist in this field, proposes a theory, in her study of the American and French revolutions, that the rise of the novel inspired the rise of human rights concepts. She claims that the revolutions provided the backdrop which allowed the novel to open up pathways into people's hearts, thus giving rise to empathy and the ability to step into another's shoes. It was in the novel, the *bildungsroman*, that the individual – the idea of the ideal – began to be made manifest. Dawes argues that the novel is an aesthetic creation contingent on 'a certain conception of the human ... a conception that is likely also a prerequisite for the modern, liberal, equal, and universal human rights' (2009, p. 397). In citing historian Samuel Moyn, Potter and Stonebridge argue that when studied against each other, the history of writing and the advancement of rights reveal rights poised between utopianism and realism (2014, p. 3). They suggest that, through both rights and literature, the understanding and image of the human person was broadened and became more nuanced (p. 3). Hunt, Slaughter, Potter and Stonebridge seek to locate their arguments in the historical development of both the novel and human rights. Although my focus is on African fiction, this background is important in locating my research question within the conversation between human rights discourse and literary works, which the above-mentioned scholars trace to the rise of the novel.

Human rights and fiction are entwined in the way they both conceptualise the human subject. On the one hand, human rights place emphasis on 'the dignity and worth of the human person', as laid out in the preamble to the UDHR. This demonstrates that every human rights law is reliant on the notion of inherent human dignity. Dominant human rights discourses bring the human subject as rights bearer to the fore, and demand that the human is conceptualised in a certain way (Hunt, 2007; Slaughter, 2007; Anker, 2014). For instance, the right to life or right to work is fundamentally about one being worthy of respect and dignity, by virtue of being human. On the other hand, 'literary writing gives form and meaning to something poignant and abstract' – something Potter and Stonebridge label as the 'human person', or the self (2014, p. 3). Anker argues that, in fiction, subjects are imagined in a manner that achieves a new self, and that this is a

fundamental aspect of humanity (2014, p. 38). For Nayar, 'literary forms generate and resonate with ideas of the human in cultural, economic and political discourses' (2016, p. xii). So together, rights and fiction work to 'imagine, normalise and realise' the vision of the 'idealistic self' that is at the core of human rights (Slaughter, 2007, p. 4). Slaughter describes the relationship between fiction and human rights as 'two threads of the same discourse' because of their commitment to 'the free and full development of the human personality' (p. 4). For him, both the literary and human rights 'project an image of the human personality that ratifies the other's vision of the ideal relations between the individual and society' (2006, p. 1407). Similarly, Dawes argues that narratives shape how people understand how they came to be, because the self is at the core of storytelling and stories form the basis of human rights work (2009, p. 394). This suggests that fiction constructs the human in a way that has implications for human rights ideals. This is because human rights and literature can find expression in one another, as one helps to define the other.

The relationship between fiction and human rights is one in which fiction not only mirrors various power structures in society, but is also the basis for human rights discourse and practice (Coundouriotis & Goodlad, 2010; Slaughter, 2007; Dawes 2009). Coundouriotis and Goodlad suggest that scholars in the humanities can use human rights as a framework 'to consider the complex relations between art and power, culture and the state' (2010, p. 23). They cite contemporary debates such as those involving 'the global economy ... the environment, gay marriage, human trafficking, and cultural and religious nationalism' as issues that call for human rights contexts (p. 121). Human rights literary texts foreground the contexts and conditions under which subjects lose their subjectivity, their identity and dignity (Nayar 2016, p. 2). The literature in the field examines the fundamental concepts of human rights and literary discourses, as well as how both relate, or speak to or of, one another. This mutual relationship between human rights and literature has inspired a range of scholars to read for the ways in which texts talk about human rights, how texts contribute to the scholarship on human rights, and also for how human rights discourse talks about literary texts. In the words of Swanson and Moore, scholars in the

fields of human rights and literature read literary texts 'for the ways in which they represent and render the philosophies, laws and practices of human rights and also for the ways the texts contribute to the evolution of those philosophies, laws and practices' (2013, p. 2). The literature in the field suggests that the relationship between literature and human rights is one in which human rights drives the literature and the literature illuminates human rights (Coundouriotis & Goodlad, 2010; Slaughter, 2007; Bystrom, 2008; Dawes, 2007; Swanson & Moore 2013).

Here, I draw parallels with the African perspectives which I have previously discussed, on how the human is constructed as an individual embedded in relationship with others. In this sense, the group is constructed as the bearer of rights, and it is in their stories – the form in which they choose to narrate themselves – that Ngugi (2012) and Adichie (2010) argue that they [Africans] can conceive of the sense of self. There is a close connection between stories told and the way the self is created in relation to human rights. Ngugi says that, in narratives, there is 'a universality in which readers can see themselves and their world' (p. 16), and Adichie suggests that stories embody the spirit of a people (p. 96). And while Nayar states that 'to imagine the human is to imagine human rights', (2016, p. xii), Mugo explains that, in the African context, to imagine human rights one has to imagine the collective (2004, p. 7). In brief, fiction and rights share an intricate closeness arising from how both conceive of the ideal self, and fiction particularly reveals the conditions that either bolster or threaten the self and its various subjectivities, the details of which are elaborated next.

Another dimension in the relationship between human rights and fiction is the bridging of human rights principles, embodied in regional and universal declarations, to particular contexts. Galchinsky claims that after the UDHR proclamation, there was a change in emphasis from the state to the individual human person in international law (2010). He claims that human rights artists understand that a rights-respecting world does not arise out of the number of signed treaties, but arises once people everywhere can imagine it; then they are inspired to create, write, sing and perform that world into existence (p. 16). Todres and Higinbotham, in writing specifically about children's rights, claim that stories provide a base for human rights culture

because they locate and give meaning to legal institutions and prescriptions (2016, p. 4). This is particularly important for teaching about human rights, because stories are a simple and accessible form – especially for younger audiences, such as the one I intend to reach. Osakwe and Nwodo claim treaties such as the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC) can marginalise rather than serve the children for whom rights are drawn up, because of the complex form they take (2005, p. 205). For Stanton, it is crucial to read justice-themed literary texts and cultural stories against human rights philosophies and frameworks, in order to ‘open the foundations of shared rights norms to new interpretations’ (as cited in Swanson & Moore 2013, p. 3). These scholars suggest that fiction takes the abstract ideas of human rights, as constituted in documents and treaties, and brings them to the level of lived experience, so that they go from general to particular contexts.

If fiction is to be an effective vehicle for translating the universal concepts of human rights to particular contexts, then human rights must be presented in a manner that is relevant and acceptable to a people and, most crucially, mediated through local cultures (Huehls, 2012; Eze, 2016; Makoni, 2011; Mugo, 2004). Here I draw mostly from African scholars and educationists in the field, because I seek to connect ideas taken from international documents to local African contexts in ways that are effective for my purpose. Human rights may be framed as international legal discourses, but they are implemented locally and so, according to Makoni, they can only be ‘interpreted and mediated by cultural and linguistic factors and by individual proclivities’ (2011, p. 6). Eze argues that a people’s culture and values are crucial to the interpretation and application of human rights norms, if those norms are to form part of the national character (2016, p. 24). Deng and An-Naim propose that rights are more effective if human rights conversation and policies are reframed from the grassroots up (as cited in Twining, 2005, p. 230). Deng and An-Naim place emphasis on the concrete expression of human rights principles in recognisable forms and contexts, which suggests that rights have been endorsed by a people’s cultural practices (p. 230). Together, these scholars argue for a local and culturally specific interpretation of human rights that is not at odds with the obligations

encompassed in the international instruments of human rights. Stories present an opportunity for a discussion on what human rights might mean in a local context.

In my creative work, I draw more generally from treaties such as the UDHR, the African Charter and the CRC in order to make, and to quote article 42 of the CRC, 'the principles and provisions of the conventions be widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.' I take aspects of the treaties and turn them into fictional narratives so as to go from the universal to the particular, from the abstract to the concrete, in order to represent a more personal, intimate experience of human rights ideals or violations such as suffering. In other words, fiction helps to make sense of human rights, and rights provide material for fiction in various contexts and for different audiences. To quote Mullins, 'both literature and human rights call on the imagination to create alternative worlds, the former fictive and narrative in character; the latter aspiring to a more just, equitable, and peaceful world' (2008, p. 4). Through fiction, the relationship between human rights discourse and literary discourse is embodied, in a manner that foregrounds the subject of each as the ideal person worthy of human dignity. In imagining other worlds and other ways of being, one makes room for the aspirations of rights to develop.

The role of fiction in awareness raising

In this section, I discuss how fiction works to create awareness of any subject matter (although I have given priority to fiction about social justice). I derive from the literature three methods, which suggest that fiction works by: invoking our collective sense of being human so as to arouse empathy for suffering individuals; encouraging reflection and critical consciousness; and propagating a culture of rights and creating a forum for the discussion of complex subjects (Galchinsky, 2010; Chin & Rudelus, 2010; Gardner, 2006; Leavy, 2013; Clough, 2002). This section is particularly relevant to my creative work, because it is the most direct response to my research question about how fiction works in awareness raising. Not only does the research here give me the necessary background information to respond to my research question, it allows me to write purposefully so that I am always

looking for means to make my work more evocative. It also invites reflection and discussion, and, most importantly, helps me think about how to connect readers to my stories. In exploring the role of fiction in human rights education, Osler and Zhu's 2011 study reveals various purposes the creative work serves. This provides a summary of my intention for this section. Osler and Zhu state that, when used in human rights education, stories give learners the opportunity to:

address multiple and suppressed identities; examine historical and contemporary inequalities; stimulate empathy and solidarity among all humanity; and demonstrate the import of human rights as principles of living together at all scales from the local to the global in contexts of diversity and in various overlapping communities of fate. (p. 227)

Similarly, Mansfield identifies a four-fold summary of what he sees as the role of creative works in human rights, which he states as thus: *to remember* or to commemorate historical events the way modern national histories record human atrocities; *to reveal* unknown atrocities so as to invite intervention; *to remind* us of our common humanity and therefore elicit outrage over perceived injustice; and finally *to resolve* or encourage some sort of activism or general resolution so abuses are not repeated [emphasis added], (as cited in Swanson & Moore, 2013, p. 205). Each of these roles take on significance as I think through how fiction works in not just raising awareness about human rights, but in how fiction can encourage change in both individuals and society.

The first significant way in which creative works can be used to raise awareness about human rights is by drawing on a person's sense of a common humanity. This is encapsulated in a literature which speaks to the aspirations inherent within human rights. Fiction allows for the exploration of the human condition and experience, and provides a context for ideas and issues that affect humanity. In doing so, it provides a bridge between readers and others. The identification and empathy that readers experience when they read fiction which resonates with them and their struggles can have a

transformative effect (Nussbaum, 2009; Martin-Bowen, 1997; Bystrom, 2008; Green, 2004; Slaughter, 2010). Literary theorist and philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, contends that 'the great contribution literature has to make to the life of the citizen is its ability to wrest from our frequently obtuse and blunted imaginations an acknowledgment of those who are other than ourselves, both in concrete circumstances and even in thought and emotion' (2009, p. 156). Not only does fiction expose injustice to readers, it urges them to 'recognise not just their shared humanity but also the structural inequality that undermines that humanity' (Moynagh, 2011, p. 54). Fiction brings lived experience to readers by personalising abstract situations, and allowing them to step into the shoes of a character to see their world and their struggles and the reasons for those struggles. It works by 'combining concrete and abstract language [by] intertwining subjective and objective recollections of events, stories can reach not only readers' conscious minds, but their subconsciouses. They can reach them where they live' (Martin-Bowen, 1997, p. 106). This ability to empathise is a key element in education, and it forms the basis for my argument that fiction can indeed speak to the aspirations of human rights concepts by its vivid illustrations of societal problems. The potential of empathy emphasises the need to create stories in a way that allows readers to connect to fictional characters, and to care for them even if their circumstances are disparate. Empathy is an important first step in using fiction to promote human rights awareness.

Once empathy is established, fiction about human rights – especially stories which adopt realist forms – encourage reflection and critical consciousness in the reader, in order to increase the likelihood of action in the combat against injustice (Leavy, 2012; Clough, 2002; Nance, 2010; and Starratt, 2003). Leavy argues that social researchers, especially those in the field of social justice, harness fiction to make their work more evocative, and use various literary devices to carry the emotional capital necessary to get into the minds of the reader. This allows researchers to 'promote reflexive engagement and the emergence of critical consciousness' (2012, p. 254). Fiction allows readers to reflect on their own stories and experiences, so as to 'better understand their own values, identities and beliefs in relation to equity, social justice and democracy' (Oslo & Zhu 2011, p. 233). Starratt

describes that process as ‘moral reasoning’ which leads to a ‘moral conversation’ with others (2003, p. 211). Backed by anecdotal evidence and the findings of social psychological experiments and research, Nance suggests that reading about real or fictional accounts of social injustice, or witnessing it in person or via video, increases the chances of fighting against it (2010, p. 162). These claims boil down to the necessity of readers engaging thoughtfully with a work of fiction if they are to be inspired to act or change behaviour. Fiction lends itself to various interpretations and to the meaning making process, a topic I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Realist forms of fiction, in particular, encourage reflection and critical consciousness because of their ‘truth telling or “faithfulness” to the facts ... , the representation of social reality in its particulars ... and involving simplicity rather than ornateness, mirroring that of documentary history’ (Lamarque & Oslen, 1994, p.3). In other words, the intention of the work is to simulate real life and people. This kind of writing places emphasis on characters as individuals, who develop and change due to the circumstances they find themselves in. Harold argues that realistic forms of literature ‘offers us perspectival knowledge’ and ‘teaches us by educating our emotions—by immersing us in the psychological details of people’s lives and allowing us to experience their feelings and their thoughts vicariously’ (2007, p. 155). For the purposes of this thesis, I analyse short stories by African writers in Chapter 3 which can be described as realist. I do make exception for one story - ‘Hope’s Hunter’ - which has elements of fantasy but bears the same moral merits as the realistic ones, as it reveals how the main character develops through encountering the strange and the unexpected.

Building on empathy and self-reflection as a prerequisite, fiction can also work for the long term by instilling in readers a respect for human rights ideals, and thus build a culture of human rights (Galchinsky, 2010; Chin & Rudelius, 2010 and Gardner 2006). For Chin and Rudelius, fiction is a relational and/or instrumental tool which allows the Human Rights Education community to ‘focus on building a culture of human rights through empowering individuals and groups one story at a time’ (p. 265). They cite fiction as an example of an effective method for inspiring change of behaviour and attitudes because it gives readers opportunities for

empowerment and self-examination (p. 267). The potency of fiction, they argue, lies in its ability to bridge human rights themes and lived experiences, so as to promote understanding among people. Chin and Rudelius also argue that stories connect people in a way that 'transcends issues of race and ethnicity through uncovering basic themes that strengthen the common bonds of humanity, as well as changing prevalent systems of oppression that perpetuate racial injustice' (p. 267).

Similarly, Galchinsky (2010) suggests that, fictions of human rights go towards inspiring a 'habit of the heart', as they are couched in human rights rhetoric, so that if and when human rights violations arise, a human rights discourse is already in place to counter them (p.18). He suggests that human rights literature contributes to a human rights-oriented consciousness, which he defines as 'a mental culture, a set of habits of the heart, a sentimental education directed toward universal civility' which may lead to 'profound social good' (p. 18). He also contends that, because human rights literature is 'intrinsically bound up with wide-scale suffering', it becomes a 'socially embedded corpus' (18). For Galchinsky, Chin and Rudelius, and Gardner (2006), fiction is a long-term strategy in shaping behaviour and attitudes. It makes readers aware of the dignity of others and the necessity to accord them their rights as humans; it allows people to connect and develop an understanding of each other; and, most importantly, it contributes to human rights awareness. In exposing injustice and showing the results of oppression, through fiction one can make an argument for social change.

The final way in which fiction works in relation to awareness raising is that it helps to both break down complexities and to generate discussion among readers. It does so by revealing certain 'truths', so as to add depth to knowledge, by providing distance to hard or uncomfortable subjects, and by humanising situations to connect readers to others in different situations (Leavy, 2013; Abbott, 2007; Clough, 2002; Martin-Bowen, 1997). These ways work in combination and in a variety of ways, in order to explain complex issues.

Fiction breaks down complexities by revealing information about situations or an issue. It does this through opening up layers of meaning and nuance beyond what a factual rendering of the same information allows. This

opening up adds depth to the information one may already have about an issue. Abbott (2008) claims that the emotive and empathic language of fiction can reveal 'truths', because it can 'record with confidence and exactitude the inner thoughts of its characters', create worlds at will, and evoke feelings of approval or disapproval with regard to historical issues without violating its status as fiction (p. 153). For instance, fiction based on a war, such as Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), not only captures pertinent facts – in this case about the Biafran war and Nigeria in the 1960s – but also the conflict's horrors, struggles and anxieties. Abbott describes such truths gleaned from fictional accounts as 'the truth of *meaning* rather than *fact*' [emphasis in original] (p. 153). In human rights contexts, fiction can expand the capacity for dialogue for readers who are grappling with complex issues, because it 'exposes what facts conceal' (Leavy, 2009, p. 58). Or, as Clough puts it, fiction 'uncovers truths that cannot be otherwise told' (2002, p. 8).

In breaking down complexities, fiction humanises individuals so that readers can easily grasp and relate to characters and their circumstances. To illustrate this, I use the example of Martin-Bowen, who – when speaking about women's rights – borrows McKinley's terminology by suggesting that if a story is well crafted, 'it reveals a "universal truth" while it unfolds a probable, believable plot' (1997, p. 106). Martin-Bowen goes on to argue that a story's reality, such as that of the suffering of another human being, is what resonates with readers. For instance, in a story about surrogacy, the language of legal analysis would be 'riddled with terms dwelling at the summit of the "abstraction ladder," whilst the language of fiction [would] include both abstract and concrete words'. Martin-Bowen employs Professor Sandra Harding's example of the use of legal terms such as 'surrogate mother', instead of 'birth mother', to transform that mother 'into a mere participant in a business matter' (p. 27). This demonstrates that 'there are few ways to express within the language of law and legal reasoning the complex relationship between power, gender, and knowledge' (p. 26). Martin-Bowen asserts that fiction, with its capacity for verbal and sensual details, allows readers to have a deeper understanding of a situation. This helps them to link their own experiences to that of the story. As Todres and

Higinbotham explain, fiction humanises a situation, whereas legality makes that situation seem institutional (p. 7).

Fiction can break down complexities further by uncovering truths around uncomfortable or difficult topics. It does this by providing the opportunity for readers to reflect on issues, such as what constitutes justice, in stories that pit individuals against others or society or government; by addressing multiple subjectivities in stories that challenge or disrupt gender, race, sexuality or ability stereotypes; and by broaching sensitive issues that may be too personal or taboo to allow for an open discussion. For instance, fiction may allow readers into the experience of another, even if the experience written about is sensitive, or it is a cultural taboo to mention it outside of their cultural group.

My story 'Beading' explores the difficult subject of a community's practice of assigning young girls to their warriors for sex. Through a human rights lens, this would be termed as sexual slavery or bondage, although for the community which practices it, it would be seen as their right to practice their culture. 'Beading' illustrates the complexity of the interconnectedness of rights, by suggesting that in order to enjoy one set of rights, other rights need to be in place too. The story highlights the struggle for girls whose vulnerability arises from their being at the intersection of gender, age and being Samburu (a community largely isolated from the rest of the country in terms of infrastructure, health and education). For the young Kenyan audience I write for, this is an uncomfortable topic made possible through fiction, because fiction 'provides a certain distance by virtue of the events or characters being fictional' (Clough, 2002. p. 8). If readers grasp a situation through fiction, then they can more fully engage in discussions about it.

Clough suggests that, if stories are realistic and import ideas from real events, fiction is able to capture details, contexts and feelings, and the reasons why things happen, in a way that facts cannot. This makes it an effective way of 'speaking to the heart of social consciousness' (2002, p. 8). By capturing verisimilitude in order to reveal truths that add to the general knowledge of an issue or lend a human face or feeling to it, or by humanising situations and concepts and tackling difficult subjects, fiction is able to

'negotiate complex issues' and make its subject more comprehensible to a broader audience (Leavy, 2009, p. 264).

In summary, the efficacy of fiction in raising awareness about human rights lies in its ability to bridge the distance between readers and people in different situations, whether economic, political, cultural or experiential. Stories present an opportunity to unpack complex human experiences so that students can experience justice or injustice, equality or inequality and the human rights issues which arise. However, the work of imaginative literature which is designed to inspire change of attitudes and behaviour needs to happen over time. To use Fluck's summation, 'fiction is an important part of modernity that invites symbolic transfer processes' in which readers can draw on their own mental images and emotions to respond to another, 'and is a form of articulating imaginary elements that cannot otherwise be articulated' (2003, p. 22). In seeking to do likewise, that is to articulate complex human experiences and to promote empathy, reflexive engagement and critical thinking, the literature heightens my awareness on how to write for best effect. The onus is therefore on me to create stories that are complex and offer opportunities for deeper reflection. I expand on this with examples later, in chapter five. As a writer, I may provide the opportunity for learning to take place, but how and why readers respond to fiction is theorised in the next section.

The role of the reader in meaning making

This section, which is framed within the reader response theory which states that the reader is an active participant and meaning maker in the reading experience (Rosenblatt, 1994), examines various factors which determine how a text is read. In this section I discuss four main ideas about how readers make meaning of a text: transportation, as a means by which readers are connected to the story world; the believability of a story which influences reader identification; emotional response as an influence on reader experience; and the reader's background as significant to the meaning making process. Scholars working in the field of reading response argue that readers tend to align their attitudes to ideas expressed in the fiction that they read, and claim that readers' reception of texts is influenced

by a combination of the elements of identification and authenticity (Green & Brock, 2000; Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014; Appel & Richter, 2010). Readers are influenced in their response to texts by several factors which are elaborated below.

The role of the reader is significant to my research because my creative work is targeted towards raising awareness on a specific subject with the purpose of encouraging changes in the attitude or behaviour of readers. My stories are written in the hope that they are read by young people who will learn about human rights from them. Understanding that no two readers can have the same interpretation of a text causes me think more carefully about my intended audience. Ultimately, this section advances my research question because it suggests strategies for writing persuasively, in order to evoke certain responses from the reader to shape an understanding of human rights ideals.

Green and Brock's term 'transportation' describes the process of immersion in which readers are drawn into the world of stories they recognise as familiar and which have a sense of realism. They define transportation as a 'convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative' (2000, p. 701). In their research, Green and Brock discovered that readers who were 'transported' changed their attitudes more strongly toward the topics raised in the narrative than readers who were not transported. In a later study, Green and Brock found that transported readers were positively inclined to a sympathetic character, and, at the same time, that negative thoughts about story content were diminished (2002, p. 248). The transportation theory suggests that although attitudes towards characters may be 'an independent mechanism for belief changes, the emotional responses may also contribute to perceived realism' (Green 2004, p. 253). In other words, readers respond to characters they can connect to and to issues they identify as realistic. This opens them up to possible changes in attitude or behaviour.

Appel and Richter (2010), while conceding that there could be other ways readers are influenced – such as by the Elaboration Likelihood Model or the Heuristic Model, which propose that people are persuaded by analytical and critical processes – argue that people are most influenced by

stories that transport them into the world of the narrative (p. 103). For them, transportation is a 'holistic experiential state characterized by a close connection of the recipient to the story world and emotional components' (p. 104). They conclude that transportation makes belief change possible by diminishing the mental and intellectual activities that defy persuasion, effectively suspending disbelief so as to see and accept the narrative world as real, and thus harnessing favourable feelings of identification toward the story or characters (p. 104). It is only then, they argue, after the readers are emotionally invested in a story, that they can be transported into the world of the narrative, so that they can access the information that is woven into it. Similarly, Hoeken and Fiekers (2014) claim that a writer can influence a reader's response if the reader makes an emotional connection to a character.

Readers find personal relevance in the stories they perceive as authentic, realistic and truthful. This allows for a closeness to develop between reader and character, in what Liebers and Schramm describe as 'a parasocial relationship' (2017, p. 15). This relationship, they say, leads to 'ease of cognitive access', a necessity in achieving reading pleasure (p. 15). Liebers and Schramm echo Appel et al. (2002) who claim that, if readers find the story easy to understand, they experience pleasure which in turn opens up their cognitive dimensions. Because of this, a certain presence is created which serves to intensify the parasocial relationship, and everything felt is underscored by the personal relevance readers find in the narrative. For Bal and Veltkamp (2013), the key question to ask is if the text is believable. Unlike a non-fiction text, it is believability in fiction – that is, a story's ability to achieve verisimilitude and truthlikeness rather than consistency – that counts, and only the reader can assess believability (2013, p. 2). The fictional world has to sound believable or seem realistic to the reader if they are to be drawn into that world, and only then can their empathic skills be developed. Bal and Veltkamp argue that, if fiction simulates real life events, then readers can identify with characters in a story and can practice being empathic. For them, empathy has to do with the 'cognitive and intellectual ability to recognise the emotions of other persons and to emotionally respond to other persons' (p. 2). Thus, when readers empathise with a fictional situation, their reactions

are integrated into how they would respond to real life situations. This claim suggests a method for how readers' attitudes or behaviour can be influenced by fiction, in a process that begins with identification if readers deem the story world to be realistic and authentic. This will then make it possible for transportation to happen.

In the reader response case studies I read, several researchers carried out tests to determine the factors that prompted the most measurable emotional response to works of fiction. Green and Brock created a transportation scale to test the impact of stories on readers by checking to see if the more transported readers demonstrated 'story consistent beliefs on both story-specific and general dependent measures' (2000, p. 706). To do so, they outlined the components of transportation to include 'emotional reactions, mental imagery, and a loss of access to real-world information', so that the resulting transportation may be an instrument for 'narrative-based belief change' (p. 703). The test contributed to the conceptualisation of the transportation theory as an 'integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings, focused on story events' (Green & Donahue, 2009, p. 241). This means that, when a reader is immersed in the narrative world, they let go of real-world facts and may respond strongly to a situation even if they know it is fictional. The transported reader may wish an unhappy ending had not happened and even imagine a different outcome. Green and Brock suggest that a reader reemerges into the real world 'somewhat changed by the experience' which may be 'reflected in individuals' beliefs and attitudes' (2000, p. 702). Raymond Mar, a psychologist, claims that 'researchers have repeatedly found that reader attitudes change to become more congruent with the ideas expressed in a fiction narrative' (as cited in Gottschall, 2013, p. 150).

Another group of researchers in this field are Cupchik, Oatley and Vorderer (1998), who tested for the emotional response to excerpts from selected short stories by James Joyce. They explicitly instructed their subjects to either side with the protagonist or to be spectators in the stories, some of which had strong emotional themes and some of which were descriptively dense. The results of the study indicated that, although participants found the former group more intense and likeable, the latter was

harder to read but interesting as it was more informative. Readers judged emotional texts to be more complex and richer in meaning. This prompted them to like the stories more, or claim them to be more relevant or inspiring, and that in turn demonstrated how 'stimulating emotion can be when embedded in a complex structure' (p.375). Cupchik, Oatley and Vorderer were interested in how textual properties affected both the emotional and cognitive processes of readers. If readers identify with a character, then they argue that readers may see the character's world through their own lens. They claim that where there is a greater aesthetic distance to the character, readers may become 'spectators', and are therefore able to see their own response to the 'aesthetic episode' (p. 365). Cupchik, Oatley and Vorderer therefore suggest that by the dual approach of writing emotionally (mode for identification) and descriptively (sympathetic spectator), a 'writer could orient readers either outward to situated characters and events or inward to their own personal reactions' (p. 365). Like Green and Brock, they also found that a text's features and a reader's cognitive and emotional propensity remained a large influence on the emotional effects a reader experienced. Cupchik, Oatley and Vorderer draw the parallel that, if writing in the first person promotes identification and writing in the third person spectatorship, as is generally accepted, then writers will make that choice depending on what they want to achieve, and a writer who understands the influence of writing emotionally or descriptively on a reader will also have the option of varying aesthetic distance between fresh emotions (emotions felt in the moment) and memories (events that were historically or personally meaningful) (p. 364). It is not the intention of Cupchik, Oatley and Vorderer to have writers use their findings as a basis for their writing technique, but they do suggest that writers use the results of the research to judge their own writing, by taking on the role of the reader to see the psychological effect their words might have. For me, this is one more tool in judging how my audience might respond to my writing. I might ask myself if I am writing to elicit fresh emotions, or to stir up memories? Or, for what effect I am seeking: would I want my readers to connect to my story, or for them to look inwards? I do not believe I need to make a choice here, because I have argued through this paper that fiction needs to encourage both empathy and reflection in the reader. But Cupchik,

Oatley and Vorderer's argument is important in highlighting how a reader may respond to different styles of writing.

Several researchers consider the reader's background of considerable significance in the process of meaning making in fictional texts (Browne & Brooke, 2012; Sipe, 2008; Leavy, 2013; Abbott, 2008). Readers bring to the text their own pre-existing attitudes, assumptions and background knowledge, including what others say about a text, all of which may influence reader expectations and eventual readings. Browne and Brooke argue that a 'range of cultural positions' are factored into readers' meaning making, and that one's culture, race and ethnicity 'both enable and constrain response to literature and thus shape literary understanding' (Sipe, 2008, p. 14). If a text resonates as real or true to an audience then familiarity is created, which allows readers to draw on 'their own rich store of personal experiences' in their appreciation of texts (Green, 2004, p. 251). Fiction allows for a variety of meanings to develop because of the way readers bring their own unique perspectives to a text, in a process that involves weaving meanings, creating subtexts and offering more than one point of view (Leavy, 2013, p. 84).

As I seek to use fiction as a pedagogical tool, the implications of this research for my own writing are profound. I approach my writing with considerations such as: if readers will make whatever connections they do, then as a writer who seeks to raise awareness on human rights I need to evoke certain images and emotions that my readers will identify with and find authentic enough to be transported into the story world. I also need to be aware that just because a situation may seem authentic to me, it may not necessarily feel so for my target audience. This requires me to be a lot more considerate and purposeful about who I am writing for and why. If students bring to the reading their varied individual and cultural contexts, including biases, then the onus is on me to map the terrain with relevant clues, all the while understanding that fiction can be read in multiple ways by different audiences.

If it is inevitable for readers to find gaps in narratives, as Abbot (2007) claims, then those gaps can be designed into a storyline to evoke discussions and debate. For me, creating gaps includes developing dilemma-type stories which invite students to explore their own values and

assumptions, and thus create room for contemplation of issues and ideas. My fiction writing is guided by the understanding that reader transportation is necessary for empathetic literary training, and that a reader's cultural background is acutely influential in the reception of a story – especially for human rights themed stories, where one hopes to inspire social change. It is evident that, while my writing – and writing in general – is a significant factor in funnelling meaning, and in employing fiction for raising awareness about human rights and for general educational purposes, the reader has a role to play in how effective the fiction is. As a writer, I can adopt a writing style to guide the reader to a desired outcome. In brief, the above strategies – namely writing with the aim of connecting readers to the story world so transportation can happen; writing believably so as to influence reader identification with character and story; seeking an emotional response as an influence on reader experience; and acknowledging the reader's background as significant to the meaning making process – combine to develop my argument further that fiction is a crucial instrument in raising awareness about human rights.

Human rights in the school context

Building on the reader-focused approach detailed above, I now shift my focus to the school age readers who are the target audience for my human rights themed stories. Stories, of course, are only one way of communicating the ideals of human rights: they need to be supported by other pedagogical tools and approaches, so that students are exposed to multiple perspectives and ways of learning. So, in this section, alongside consideration of young adult fiction and what it means to write for young people, I also highlight the importance of human rights education (HRE) in a school context, then discuss three aims of a HRE curriculum which are relevant to my thesis. Although it is not the intention of this thesis to fully discuss pedagogic tools for HRE as a subject in its own right, because that is beyond the scope of this study, I draw from HRE principles as they are relevant to my exploration of how to raise awareness about human rights in the fiction I write for young people. In this section, I do not intend to suggest that there is one cohesive

HRE curriculum: like all other disciplines there are various ways in which it is conceived and understood.

It is also important to acknowledge the growing body of critical work by Children's Literature scholars about the intersection between human rights (and children's rights) and children's literature. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the legal definition of a child is 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (OHCHR, n.d, para.19). The terms 'child' and 'childhood' mean different things in different cultures and so children's rights and children's literature are contested fields. Saguisak and Pricket describe children's literature as 'institutions that attempt to "secure" children in a particular definition of childhood' and its emergence as a category, contribute to children's rights such as the rights to education, leisure and expression (2016, p.3).

The term young adult fiction (YA) seems, according to the literature, to be a fluid one, as its various definitions place emphasis on the different aspects of its attributes. Some definitions describe YA as fiction for people between the ages of 12 and 18 or 'those who are chronologically teenagers' (Belbin, 2011, p.142), while some say that YA [fiction] is fiction that 'unflinchingly engages with the problems of adolescents' (Hintz et al., 2013, 2). I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis that the secondary age for students in Kenya is not fixed, and therefore that my writing is directed at young people in schools (not necessarily people of a certain chronological age). I choose to refer to my target audience as young people rather than young adults because, even with the disagreement over its precise parameters, the latter term is defined as a genre by the book industry, and I want to avoid the limitations of that kind of definition. Instead, I adopt Belbin's suggestion that 'if it's narrated through a young adult consciousness – even if the narrator is sophisticated, or unreliable – then it's Young Adult [fiction]' (2011, p. 141). McCallum defines YA as fiction whose 'preoccupation with personal maturation ... is commonly articulated in conjunction with a perceived need for children to overcome solipsism and develop intersubjective concepts of personal identity within this world and in relation to others' (1999, p. 7). YA fiction depicts experiences from the perspective of

young people which guides them in making connections between the fiction they read and their own lived experiences. They are generally focalised through a young central character, emphasise character growth, and are associated with issues relevant to that central character, such as identity and conflict with parental or authority figures.

Writing for young people requires an appreciation of the reader response theory, discussed in the section above, that students will bring their own understanding to the reading of texts. This requires a writer to get into the mindset of a young person and see through their eyes, so a text can be created which offers the most in terms of student involvement, growth, diverse perspectives and critical thinking. In instances where students cannot relate to others culturally or experientially, then a text can be viewed as an opportunity for student readers to see how someone else experiences life. Alsup et al. argue that to promote real growth, 'the cognitive and emotive must be tapped in tandem. The reading of literature is a combination of direct experience and distanced analysis; a merging of emotional, personal response and socio-cultural criticism' (2011, p. 12). Students need to be engaged both cognitively and emotionally in the learning process.

Education in Kenya is, at the time of writing, undergoing reform. One of the pillars of this reform is values. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) states in the curriculum framework that it will 'adopt a values-based approach to education that will create learning opportunities within the formal, non-formal and informal curriculum dimensions to inculcate the desired values in all learners' (KICD, 2017, p. 14). The KICD goes on to state that 'the teaching and learning of values will also enable them to value diversity in all people, and to demonstrate respect, empathy and compassion for all people' (p.14). This is not to say that values are the same as rights, but I find, under the pillar of values, an opportunity to make a contribution with my human rights-based fiction. I believe the goals of a values-based curriculum overlap in interest and content with those of a human rights education.

To this end, I find relevance in Alsup's comment that 'in a time when global literacies and citizenship are becoming goals for educators, it seems appropriate to view reading literary texts as a pathway to cross-cultural

understanding and heightened awareness of the goals of social justice' (2010, p. 14). Ian Ward (1995) and Osler and Zhu (2011) argue for an education in human rights targeted at pre-university students, because, unlike school, the university is only accessible to a small section of the community. Ward states that fiction opens opportunities for many more students to 'engage in the jurisprudential debate ... [as they are] developing conceptions of social expectations and of one's rights and the rights of others in the community' (1995, p. 118). Osler and Zhu claim that schools provide the greatest accessibility for most people to get an education in human rights, which, in turn, increases the chances of those rights being secured (2011, p. 231). Article 2 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training places emphasis on education about, through and for human rights, to contribute to 'the promotion, protection and effective realisation of all human rights'. It defines HRE in the following way:

Human rights education and training comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights. (OHCHR)

In working towards the above, many HRE scholars argue for a comprehensive curriculum that is both inclusive in content and allows for student participation; a curriculum that respects diversity of ideas and the values of all people; that demonstrates deeper understanding of human rights principles; and that also encourages commitment to social justice and solidarity with those whose rights are denied (Osler & Starkey, 1996; Nussbaum, 2009; Offord & Ryan, 2012; Woldeyes, 2017). HRE is a long-term strategy for developing a rights-respecting individual. The OHCHR says that the aim of HRE is to create a human rights mindset and to encourage

tendencies beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge about human rights (2004). Reynolds and McLeod suggest that teaching and learning are more productive if human rights principles are embedded in the school curriculum, because HRE is aimed at the development of both the character and skills of individuals (Newell & Offord 2008 p. 41).

As stated, the aims of HRE are threefold. The first aim of HRE is to have a comprehensive syllabus, whose focus is on approach rather than content. The HRE curriculum places emphasis on student involvement, as well as on critical engagement with concepts, ideas and others. Learners participate by dialogue, as it is important to engage with human rights discourse on what rights mean and look like in different situations. Such contexts, Woldeyes suggests, include local, historical, cultural and political (2017, p. 13). He describes such learning through dialogue as a 'continuous adventure in becoming', because it is only in dialogue with others that one learns what it means to be human in different contexts (p. 55). Offord and Ryan argue for a curriculum that is 'both critically explored and critically experienced', one that is founded on 'experiential learning' in which 'the educator is a practitioner and the student an active, listening citizen' (2012, pp. 29-30). For them, rhetoric must be connected to reality, and student involvement is crucial for empathy and understanding to occur.

Another aim of HRE is to encourage empathy for, solidarity with, and responsibility to others, regardless of their physical locations (Nussbaum, 2008; Osler & Starkey 1996; Osler & Zhu, 2011; Woldeyes, 2017). These traits acknowledge that individuals have unique circumstances, and they allow for an applicability of ideas which depends on one's cultural context and values. In developing the idea of HRE as a commitment to social justice and solidarity, Nussbaum cites three principles underpinning it: 'The willingness to audit one's traditions, beliefs and assertions; being open to multiple perspectives and having a 'narrative imagination' which allows one to step into the shoes of others' (1997, pp. 9-11). Empathy calls for an impartial sensitivity to others in disparate circumstances.

Woldeyes refers to this solidarity with humanity as the 'pedagogy of empathy', which, he says:

results in reconstituting ourselves, recreating who we are as human beings, by looking at the world differently, by thinking and acting from the position of those who suffer – it involves changing our life's centre to a different level. Human rights education through empathy views life as a process of relatedness, seeks life to emerge by overcoming binaries and structures of power that attempt to define and confine it. (p. 51)

For Woldeyes, education happens with and through others and, in this sense, he invokes the spirit of ubuntu, in which humanity is wrapped in a complex web of invisible ties to each other. HRE presents empathy and an appreciation of diverse perspectives as the basis for a more just world in which humanity can co-exist in peace.

The final aim of an HRE syllabus is to encourage change in individuals by promoting a curriculum at whose core is a deep understanding and respect for human rights. This is because critical awareness of rights is the basis for claiming one's rights and for defending those of others (Osler & Starkey, 1996; Banks et al., 2013). In situating human rights literature in a wider political context, Osler and Starkey (1996) suggest that someone can only claim rights if they know about them, and that HRE provides a deep understanding of rights knowledge. Osler calls for a reflective approach if HRE is to be effective, and associated with social change, one in which both teachers and learners examine their role, if any, in sustaining inequity and injustice (2015). In instances where there has been conflict, such as the PEV of Kenya that spurred me on to start this research, the need for HRE is to foster co-existence and to focus on diversity and pluralism as a basis for understanding human rights. This approach allows students to examine 'multiple identities and seek to explore the commonalities among different groups, dispelling myths and stereotypes that can lead to violence, conflict, and rights abuses' (Bajaj, 2011, p. 501). For Osler, a deeper understanding of HRE is transformative because it is committed to building human rights and rejecting the structures that propagate injustice (2015). Banks et al. claim that HRE instils a profound knowledge of human rights concepts, which encourages commitment to social justice for all, and is particularly necessary

in multicultural contexts (as cited in Newell & Offord, 2013, p. 13). The deep discernment for human rights principles is fundamental to HRE.

One way in which HRE can deepen knowledge is by the use of stories which help to animate it. Osler and Zhu make the connection between using narratives to educate for human rights and Sen's theory of justice, a theory that seeks to advance social justice by calling attention to justice or injustice in lived experiences, rather than a focus on institutions and the idea of a 'just world' (2011, p. 224). Education may inspire students to act for justice and human rights. Through fiction, students have an opportunity to make sense of what the articles in the UDHR mean in their own contexts. Students could expand on ideas by suggesting other hypotheses and seeking possible solutions to the issues raised. Osler's insights suggest that, by using stories, teachers can 'contribute to the realisation of justice, peace and equality as they empower learners not only to articulate their own rights but also advocate for the rights of others' (2016, p. 4). Fiction here becomes a springboard to wider conversations.

In summary, fiction used in HRE provides an opportunity for students to engage with what human rights mean, with the understanding that an awareness of human rights will contribute to greater respect for the rights of others and empower them to claim or defend their own rights should the need arise. As such, the principles undergirding HRE, like the need to have a curriculum which is comprehensive, reflective, contextually relevant and student centred, are principles that need to guide my creative work. The scholars in the field of HRE suggest a holistic approach to education in human rights, one that respects the context of the student and encourages their reflection and participation. In general terms, HRE goals need to be cognitive, affective and action oriented. This involves creating opportunities for learners to examine their own beliefs and biases, to understand that there are multiple perspectives to every view and, most importantly, to draw empathy for the characters – especially those whose worlds are unknown to the reader. Such are the opportunities I seek in my creative work.

The limitations and risks of fiction

I have argued at length about the capacity for fiction to be a pedagogical instrument in teaching about human rights, one which works by stirring empathy for others in difficult situations and by encouraging reflection and critical consciousness so as to create an awareness and thus develop a culture of human rights. However, fiction has some associated limitations or risks when used as a tool for raising awareness about human rights. There is the risk that fiction's proclivity to different interpretations could be used for unethical purposes (Osler & Zhu, 2011; Fluck, 2003), or that a work could be narrow in perspective or inevitably privilege some rights over others (Mansfield, 2013). A story may also present essentialised versions of characters, and while it may inspire readers to respond to injustice, it may also render them as powerless. Fiction for HRE is also a long-term strategy, which means that it alone is inadequate for raising awareness about human rights. These limitations and risks are elaborated below.

Human rights themed fiction is subjective with regard to interpretation, the articulation of justice and in creating the perception that justice or injustice is stratified. This suggests that some rights or injustices are more important than others, depending on who is affected. Considered from a constructivist epistemological perspective, 'narratives are discursive constructions rather than factual statement' (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 216), which means that fiction lends itself to several interpretations. Bell describes fiction as 'inherently multilayered and ambiguous' (2002, p. 210) and, as such, it is subject to the perspectives of both narrator and reader. In other words, there is no neutral position. Fluck argues that fiction is subjective in its articulation of justice, in that the idea of justice is more visible to society when individuals are pitted against power or society and not against each other, or when injustice fits in with 'a current pattern of cultural recognition' such as racism and sexism, which already have a history of documented instances (2003, p. 28). This is problematic for him because the idea of justice then becomes individuated, and to take one person's side is to do injustice to another.

In earlier sections, when citing Nussbaum, I have argued that one of the main strengths of fiction is its ability to inspire empathy for others in

difficult situations and, ultimately, to lead to changed behaviour. Fluck finds fault with this claim, arguing that empathy can be biased, that readers can just as easily identify with a villain as they do a victim, and that writers could just as easily write persuasively in promotion of injustice against a group of people (2003, pp. 29-31). Data may be used to misrepresent a situation, for unethical purposes, or for propaganda. He suggests that readers employ self-discipline with regard to their emotional involvement in a fiction, so as to judge between trustworthy and untrustworthy emotions, and that they be judicious enough to discriminate 'true facts' (p. 30). Similarly, Prinz argues that bias limits fiction's quest for justice. He calls for an 'intellectual recognition of a common humanity', which rejects human suffering based on reason and moral judgement and not just empathy (2011, p. 229). Arguing elsewhere against similar claims, Nussbaum rejects a 'simple opposition between emotion and reason ... [that means] basing political judgment upon a force that is affective rather than cognitive, instinctual rather than concerned with judgment and thought ... because compassion is a certain sort of reasoning' (1996, p. 28). In agreeing with Nussbaum, Dudek suggests that when the affective is understood as cognitive, it eliminates the binary tension of the cognitive over emotion without diminishing either one (2011, p. 18). Fiction's subjectivity is here questioned in terms of what or who to give importance to or feel for. So, whilst Fluck and Prinz favour reason and logic over emotion in instances such as the suffering of others, Nussbaum and Dudek collapse the potential gap between reason and emotion by recognising both as deriving from some form of intuitive acknowledgment of others. To sum up, the subjectiveness of fiction limits empathy as a tool for awareness raising. This is because readers may be biased in their interpretation of fiction, and in who they choose to identify with (as Fluck and Prinz suggest). However, Nussbaum and Dudek suggest that empathy is an intellectual acknowledgment of others as well as being an affective one, an argument I find persuasive.

A second limitation is that fiction can be subjective in the way rights are represented. Mansfield (2013) contends that because one of the impulses of human rights literature is to 'resolve' human rights abuses, certain events are privileged over others, as with examples of the holocaust

over slavery and minority civil rights over asylum seekers' and refugees' rights (p. 204). Mansfield argues that the 'affective intensity of the stage of resolution risks certain kinds of moralistic disproportion and exploitable enthusiasm' (p. 204). For example, in Kenya, some of the rights that seem to draw the 'moralistic and exploitable enthusiasm' of politicians and community leaders such as clergy, are rights that relate to land ownership. In comparison, sexual rights such as reproductive, sexual orientation, and exploitation of children as brides draw scant attention. From my personal judgement, it seems that the fight for the former is encouraged and perhaps even considered honourable, while the latter are suppressed as belonging to the private sphere, or are considered women's issues, which also serves to relegate them to a lower status. Murithi claims that women's rights in Africa are considered controversial as they are perceived to be in conflict with the preservation of African identity, culture and morality (2013, p. 13). As a writer, I make a choice about whose stories to tell and what realities to represent. While I have made the effort to portray a variety of human rights issues and to draw attention to those which affect different groups of people in Kenya, the choices I made with regards to contexts, the settings of stories and characters risk marginalising some voices and perspectives.

In fiction, there is the risk of presenting an essentialised version of individuals, and readers do not always recognise some characters or situations even if they are drawn or set within a familiar situation. Camicia and Bayon (2012) and Osler (2015) argue that, although students may come from different physical locations, their specific positioning and various facets of their identity will determine if their voices are heard or not. Osler argues that an education in human rights must be a humanising experience, one that accepts and challenges the disproportionate power that may exist in the school and in the wider society where the education takes place. At the same time it should also reflect the recognition of equal dignity that is at the core of human rights (2015, p. 263). My story 'Beading', for instance, is based on the Pokot traditional practice of 'giving' (for want of a better word, as it is not a betrothal) young girls to their *moran* (warriors), who may have sex with them even if they have no intention of marrying them. Read in western Kenya, the story can be meaningful, but read in central or eastern Kenya, the Pokot may

seem an essentialised group whose practice is of little relevance to other cultures in the country. However, if expanded on effectively, 'Beading' could be a springboard for students or readers in the east to identify cultural practices from their own groups which are harmful to young girls.

One of the challenges of using fiction as an instrument for human rights is the varying responses from readers: some may feel overwhelmed and turn away, others could experience voyeuristic pleasure, while many more may empathise but feel powerless to act (Nance, 2010, p. 164). Nance invokes Lerner's (1998) explanation of readers' 'cognitive defenses', which include reactions such as downplaying the suffering, putting the blame on the sufferer for making unwise choices, expecting someone else to help, and, in some cases, just being left feeling grateful they do not share the same suffering and instead remaining passive. Coundouriotis and Goodlad warn that focusing on positive action may alienate readers who are dissatisfied with inaction, causing them 'to lose confidence in political agency or even cease to believe that injustice exists,' (2010, p. 124). Against such a claim, Howard Gardner argues that persuasion is effective when directed at 'potential resistance', rather than 'positive action' becoming significant (2006, p. 145). In other words, rather than fiction which suggests what action a reader can or should take, a writer needs to address possible questions which may arise in order for their work to be effective.

For me to write persuasively, as suggested above by Gardner and Coundouriotis and Goodlad, I have to pre-empt my audience's expectations and ask questions such as, how do I write for the student who may read my story 'Beading' and think, 'Thank God I am not a Pokot girl'? Or for one who might read my story 'Kembo is Home', about a teen who has to find a way to look after both himself and his mother, who has an intellectual disability, and presumes 'That is what the church/government/NGOs are for'? Or the story 'Not One of Us', about the plight of asylum seekers when their needs are conflated with the fear of terrorism, and which might make a reader think, futilely, 'What can I do, there is only one of me?' I do not believe I need to have all the answers, but I need to be aware of potential points of resistance so that I can address them, where possible, in ways that are subtle, entertaining and hopefully effective.

Fiction as a pedagogical tool is a long-term strategy that may require action on the part of the reader. Elaine Scarry, in discussing the difficulty of imagining others, says that there are severe limits to imaginative accomplishment, but if one must judge it, then the test would not be in 'the pleasurable feeling of the cosmopolitan largesse but in the concrete willingness to change constitutions and laws' (as cited in Nussbaum & Cohen 2002, p. 105). McClennen and Slaughter argue that, 'the imaginative and social work' of literature and culture is 'done over time and space ... through the *forms* of stories that enable forms of thought, forms of commitment, forms of being, and forms of justice' (2009, p. 11. Emphasis in original). One way of using fiction as a long-term strategy for raising human rights awareness is in the example of writers who twine their literary work with their own personal lives, especially when writing about issues which are considered taboo or controversial. Ncube (2014) cites the example of two openly gay Moroccan writers who present fictionalised accounts of their experiences, using characters that are in no way 'provocative, outlandish, or confrontational', to a country that is generally intolerant of open discussions about minority sexuality (p. 483). In doing so, the writers demonstrate that they have a 'social and moral duty to articulate the anxieties of individuals with non-normative sexualities who have to struggle against religious and cultural practices in order to justify, not just their (homo)sexuality, but their very existences' (p. 483). So, while fiction allows writers to express themselves and their experiences of injustice, it also presents readers with opportunities for empathy and personal growth, and sometimes even the opportunity to act. It is a long-term strategy because raising awareness requires time and space for fiction to speak to the social consciousness of readers.

Despite all the limitations associated with using fiction as a teaching tool for human rights, I believe that the advantages of HRE outweigh its challenges. For me, every reading moment is a teaching moment, and hopefully with new understandings and connections to people from distant places and contexts a universal culture of human rights can continue to develop, as a sense of rights is continually imbued into, not just the fiction, but the everyday lives of readers. The implication for me as a writer is to evoke meaning by creating authentic contexts and scenarios, while

remaining cognisant of readers as meaning makers. As argued in the previous sections, fiction provides an opportunity to connect readers to the story world, so that they can experience and examine various issues. As a writer, my goal is to promote a response and a reasoned judgement, in order to inspire change which is for good.

This chapter began with an in-depth discussion of the connections between literary discourse and the discourse and practice of human rights, by drawing attention to their shared imagination of the 'free and full development of the human personality' (UDHR), a human who is worthy of dignity. Next, I made the argument that fiction is the means by which the universal becomes particular, by the providing of concrete scenarios for how rights can be realised in different contexts. I also discussed the ways in which fiction aids in awareness raising by means of empathy and reflection, which are foundational to the development of a culture of rights, and suggest that fiction helps to break down complex subjects and issues. I then turned my attention to my potential audience, the reader who has a role to play in the meaning making process. Guided by the reader response theory, I argued that readers are most responsive to fiction that they identify with and connect to – fiction which allows them to be transported into the story world. After that I then drew on the principles of HRE, the syllabus of which needs be comprehensive, reflexive, contextually relevant and student centred, in order to explore how rights awareness could be raised in school contexts. I finished with an acknowledgement of the limitations of fiction, which include bias interpretation, unethical use of data and variegated response to a work of fiction.

This chapter addresses my research question in that it helps to frame my arguments regarding the theoretical perspectives of human rights and literary discourses. It also provides a direct response to my question, as it outlines ways and strategies in which fiction works to raise awareness about human rights. The role of the reader is significant to my research because it draws attention to my potential audience as meaning makers, as well as to the factors which influence their reception of texts. The final section on the risks and limitations inherent in fiction is helpful to my question as it guides

me, particularly in my creative work, to anticipate potential questions or points of resistance from readers, so that I, as a writer, can be better prepared to address risks adequately. These different sections combine to explain how human rights awareness can be integrated into fiction for young people. In the next chapter, I turn to works of fiction by African writers for both an illustration of the arguments made so far about the role of fiction in raising awareness about human rights, and the strategies employed in doing so.

Chapter Three: The role of fiction – five African short stories

This chapter offers a close reading of five short stories written by African writers. Three of the stories are from east African writers and two are from west African writers. I did not set out to find stories that represent the continent or each article in the international human rights instruments. Rather, because human rights are said to be indivisible, I have, in my creative work and the texts chosen for analysis, deliberately chosen issues which overlap the broad classifications of civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights. They are classified as such because civil and political rights are guaranteed under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as are economic, social and cultural rights in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). I was also interested in stories that I felt would resonate with my target audience, and with myself as an African and a writer. My choice of stories and discussion revolves, to a significant extent, around two considerations: if the stories reflect a rights discourse as discussed in the literature review section of this thesis, and if they offer useful narrative strategies in relation to the issues raised in the first three chapters of this thesis. The five short stories, in the order in which they are discussed, are: 'The Last Trip' by Sefi Atta (2007), 'Root Gold' by Shalini Gidoomal (2007), 'Jambula Tree' by Monica Arac de Nyeko (2008), 'Hope's Hunter' by Mohamed Yunus Rafiq (2014) and 'Olikoye' by Chimamanda Adichie (2015).

In discussing fiction's role in raising awareness, I draw from general claims regarding fiction rather than those that are specific to short stories. I am guided by theorists such as Ferguson, who claim that although short stories may be defined in terms of unity, techniques of plot compression, character development, subject, tone and "lyricism", 'there is no single characteristic or cluster of characteristics that the critics agree absolutely distinguishes the short story from other fictions' (1982. p.13). That being said, it is also prudent to note that short stories by virtue of its brevity, offer a slice of reality and therefore 'rely on implication, suggestion, and in-depth understanding' (Tucan, 2014, p.6) as well as 'stylistic economy and the foregrounding of style' (Ferguson, 1994, p.15).

My intention is to illustrate the arguments raised in the last three chapters regarding the role of fiction in raising awareness about human rights, including a focus on the following: fiction which explores the human condition by articulating experiences and issues with the aim of promoting empathy and reflection among readers; fiction which particularises abstract subjects such as ubuntu, which is crucial to the understanding of human rights from an African perspective; fiction which explores and addresses multiple and suppressed identities as difficult and taboo subjects in an African context; fiction which has the potential to create moments of transportation, and which suggests transformation as an implicit form of influence in a reader's response to a story; finally, I aim to raise some examples of the limitations of fiction in influencing behaviour. I explore these claims alongside examples of narrative strategies used by the above authors in writing stories that I consider to be entertaining, captivating and effective.

'The Last Trip' and the human condition

A key aspect of fiction which raises awareness on human rights issues is an ability to capture the human experience so as to reveal the human condition. This reminds readers of their common humanity, especially in the face of injustice. For illustration of this, I use 'The Last Trip' by Seffi Atta, a Nigerian novelist and playwright whose literary awards include the 2006 Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa and the 2009 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Seffi Atta). She was also a juror for the 2010 Neustadt International Prize for Literature (Seffi Atta). I chose this story because it shows the author's ability to create a sympathetic character in a situation which is ethically unsettling for the reader. Additionally, I will also explore the use of the present tense to detail the particulars of everyday life and capture verisimilitude. This helps to reveal the human condition and experience, so as to attract empathy for the main character and her situation.

'The Last Trip' is a literal journey, set aboard a Lagos-to-London flight. It is a story about a woman who is involved in the drug trade. She is unnamed, goes by the alias 'Simbiyat Adisa', and has a falsified age and documents. She is the mother of a teenage boy with an intellectual disability.

The story details the experiences of a parent in difficult circumstances, who receives very little help from her family and community. She is aware of her wrongdoing, but she is fierce about doing the right thing for her son by trying to raise him to be independent. The protagonist provides a sympathetic perspective which affirms the use of drug smuggling as a regrettable but legitimate means of making an income for those handling inequitable situations. Atta reveals the strength of her character by giving readers access to Simbiyat's interiority, in order to show feelings and thought process. This is persuasive because readers see the true individual; they see her vulnerability too, and her resolve against difficult circumstances. In establishing such a strong and sympathetic character, a bridge is built between the reader and the character. In such a situation, identifying with the main character is key to understanding the human condition. Fluck says that 'if a novel is skilfully crafted, we may even find ourselves on the side of a killer ... as fiction can articulate aspects of individual experience that are erased by broad social classification' (2003, p. 27). In 'The Last Trip', readers are encouraged to identify with the central character and to share in her thoughts and her justification for what she does, despite it being an ethically unsettling situation. Simbiyat admits she is no angel and refers to Kazeem, her handler, and those above him in the business, as 'cheats out of common sense rather than a sense of moral superiority' (p. 23). Simbiyat also admits to herself that the need for her to make the frequent trips just so she can look after her son is 'living with the habit after all' (p. 30). The nature of the storyline makes it difficult to sympathise with the protagonist because she goes against common understandings of appropriate behaviour.

'The Last Trip' is a dilemma-type story which presents a challenge to its readers. It is an invitation for readers to do some soul searching in defence of Simbiyat, as they grapple over good versus evil. Kieran Dolin argues that fiction provides the domain 'for alternative voices to be heard, for hypothetical situations to be explored, and for settled questions of society to be reopened' (2003, p. 207). 'The Last Trip' is an example of 'an imaginative space' especially suited for classroom use, as its moral dilemmas can be re-enacted by young readers so that they can 'wrestle with complexity' and 'balance the competing tensions of moral choices' (Bearne, 2000, p. 197).

'The Last Trip' invites readers to consider if they would side with the central character, ponder alternatives that would be available to them in similar situations, and think about what connections they could make to the larger context outside of the story. Such considerations aid in the exploration of the human condition, as readers are encouraged to step into the shoes of someone in a difficult situation.

Fiction can also unpack, and examine the reasons for, the structural inequality which is part of the human experience. In 'The Last Trip', Atta creates a resonant character through whom the structural inequality inherent in issues of race, gender and able-bodiedness becomes evident. Atta represents her protagonist as strong and having agency, while showing the institutional processes which have a tangible impact on who she is. Simbiyat is both a victim and a perpetrator, and has a lot stacked against her as a woman, mother and as an African away from home. When she goes to London she travels as a racially coded body. This invites excessive policing at airports, and impacts on her earning capacity despite the risks involved. There is a lack of understanding in the community about intellectual disability, and her son is considered aberrant. Her son's father does not acknowledge him, and says that the child cannot be his: 'I told you to let the nurses smother him' (p. 24). In fact, every time Simbiyat is placed in the presence of a male, there seems to be an attempt by the men in her life to use and subdue her. But she fights back. She is not intimidated by Kazeem, her drug handler, despite knowing that in the past he hired killers to get rid of difficult couriers or those who double-crossed him. She stands up to him in order to remind him that the body he wishes to use was worth the price she quoted per trip. She stands up to the men who have used her, her child's father, Kazeem and the customs officials. Simbiyat is depicted as strong, unapologetic and prepared to harness her body for her independence. She admits that, if Kazeem had not come along, she would have considered prostitution. Simbiyat invites sympathy as one propelled by circumstance into wrongdoing. Speaking in an equally problematic but very different context, of child soldiers, Maureen Moynagh says that:

In extending our sympathy, we readers lay claim to our common humanity belied by the very structures that produce these narratives ... which lay bare the inequalities and call for a difficult solidarity in the face of them, one that can recognise at once a common humanity and the structural inequality that threatens it. (2011, p. 54)

Similarly, in 'The Last Trip', Atta not only gives us insight into some of the ways in which individuals are marginalised, she also lays bare the circumstances that allow abuse to thrive.

A key component of fiction which raises awareness about social justice issues is the ability to stimulate empathy in the reader for those in difficult circumstances. Personally, I found 'The Last Trip' to be a compelling read. I wanted to explore why the main character came across as sympathetic, because I felt connected to her and her story on a deep and personal level. Atta writes in the present tense, which allows the reader to experience the events as they happen to the narrator and, in the process, this creates and holds suspense. The present tense establishes such a closeness to the text that the story reads like one written in the first person. The narrative is focalised through Simbiyat and as a reader the present tense has you wondering whether you are hearing or seeing her thoughts. 'She is sweating again, under her arms ... She panics when she does not see hers [luggage]. She will not make this journey again, she tells herself. She should not and cannot. Her nerves will not survive another trip' (p. 32). The reader is allowed access into Simbiyat's interiority by way of an ongoing internal monologue. For example, as she is reflecting on the risks that her job demands, the tone becomes tense as readers are invited to witness Simbiyat's fears about the dangers of drug smuggling: the possible prison term, deportations and beheadings, and the increased risk of death when balloons burst inside them (p. 29). She recalls how Kazeem was angry that she had asked for more money, and assures herself that, 'granted, none of them were flying angels, but given their work hazards, five thousand is not too much to ask for' (p. 29). By this technique, Atta invites the reader to be a witness to the thoughts and deeds of the main character in a way that is

much more immediate. This enhances emotional engagement, perhaps urging us to see the person and not just her deeds. The reader fully understands Simbiyat's justification for what she is doing: that she has explored all her options and that this cannot be a selfish act because her internal strife and the reasons for her choices are visible.

By using the present tense, Atta is also able to heighten suspense, in order to hold the attention of the reader. Given the seriousness of Simbiyat's actions, and that information is relayed to the reader at the same time it is revealed to the protagonist, readers are able to hold their breath as Simbiyat holds hers; they can almost hear her heart beating when she goes through customs. The increased emotional engagement is necessary for empathy to occur, which in turn puts the reader in a position to understand the human condition and Simbiyat's experiences. The subjects raised in 'The Last Trip' resonate with ideas about human rights, such as the injustices and inequality surrounding race, gender and disability, making fiction an effective way to explore human experience.

Ultimately, 'The Last Trip' is more than just a story about a woman trafficking illegal drugs. It is a story which exposes institutionalised inequality based on gender, race and disability. Simbiyat makes very difficult choices under tough circumstances, and Atta makes it difficult to judge Simbiyat harshly because her readers have lived through what her protagonist has, even if it was just for a moment. What makes Simbiyat appealing is that she represents ordinary women in challenging circumstances, and, with her story told in present tense, her fears appear to be much more immediate to the reader. The story is also an example of how to use narrative strategies, such as characterisation and tense, to craft a story which explores the human condition while exposing inequality and the reasons for it. 'The Last Trip' is an illustration of how an author might use one person's experience to make links to societal issues that threaten equality or the ability to enjoy one's rights.

'Root Gold': From the universal to the particular

Fiction is a means by which universal truths and abstract concepts can be expressed in particular contexts. One such concept is the claim that the

fundamental distinction between African and Western perspectives on human rights is that of the collective versus the individual claim to human rights. Underlying the collective or group rights discourse is the place of ubuntu, earlier defined as an African code of oneness, a deeply spiritual connection among humanity summed up in Mbiti's 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (1970, p. 141). In exploring this concept, I refer to 'Root Gold', a story by Shalini Gidoomal, a Kenyan writer and journalist. Her story is published in the 7th Annual collection of the Caine Prize for African Writing, in a series titled *Jungfrau and Other Short Stories (2007)*. 'Root Gold' is a story of the exploitation and oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful. It is set in the context of political and historical events, at the core of which is conflict over communal land. I argue that 'Root Gold' is an example of human rights fiction from an African perspective because it requires a focus on, and understanding of, ubuntu. I discuss how Gidoomal's use of narrative techniques, such as parallel storytelling, contrasts and juxtaposition, draws on notions of ubuntu, and the realisation of individual rights through the group as duty to each other in the spirit of reciprocity. 'Root Gold' also explores the complexities which become evident in the pursuit of group rights in a culturally specific context.

Ubuntu is a relational concept that seeks the common good for all, by placing emphasis on qualities such as compassion, community and a willingness to share. It is not a concept that easily finds definition, but, in 'Root Gold', aspects of it are made manifest. Gidoomal narrates two parallel stories which set up contrasts between two central characters; the story opens to two scenes engulfed in dust: scene one shows a businessman, Kungwu, inspecting a massive house he has just completed building in a 'posh' suburb of Nairobi, only to have the stairs pull away from the wall, killing his business partner instantly and leaving him trapped under huge pieces of oak and *mvuli* wood. That beginning is juxtaposed with a second scene, showing Ameru and his wife Sana, in an empty hut full of dust, built on dry parched. The story oscillates between Kungwu and Ameru, both of whom lie trapped, Kungwu in the collapsed building and Ameru in desolation, and with only a series of flashbacks to fill readers in on their backstories. Gidoomal uses the desires of each man to reveal who they are: Kungwu is the

insatiable greedy powerful individual who corruptly acquires Karura Forest in order to build an upmarket shopping complex and apartments for Nairobi's elite. He is pitted against the hardworking everyday man Ameru, whose livelihood depends on Karura Forest and who is subsequently reduced to a life of poverty when the forest is privatised. Kungwu wants the forest to enrich himself and build a name for himself; Ameru, on the other hand, wants to preserve it so the many who depend on the forest can continue to live. Ameru encapsulates the spirit of sharing, a recognition that he needs to seek a common good. Through their contrasting desires the spirit of communitarianism and sharing, which is the basis for ubuntu, is illustrated.

Another notion of ubuntu is that the individual is embedded within the community, and therefore his or her rights are only realised in the fulfillment of those of the community. In ubuntu, one's rights are bound to one's duty to others in a spirit of reciprocity. In 'Root Gold', even though Gidoomal speaks through each individual at a time, Ameru is the face of the rights bearer. The fiction makes it possible to frame the issues Ameru and his wife face in the language of rights; it shows the contrast between the individual and the state, with the latter representing the dominant way of thinking, due to its power. This is expressed in Ameru, who, fuelled by the threat to what he calls his forest home, goes from village to village on his bike, inciting all to come out and protest. Many people heed the call and come in large numbers to block Uhuru Highway, only to be met by riot police, the army and tanks – a sight that looked 'like a lumbering elephant about to squash a flea' (p. 127). The image captures the contrast of the powerless versus the powerful, who are an extension of the Kenyan government, in order to reflect a class strata that, if it is inherent in the community, can have fatal results. The story demonstrates an inequality that, Gidoomal suggests, sets up a power dynamic which guarantees abuse; Ameru's fight against abuse and for his own right to access community land can only be realised in fighting for the group to achieve theirs. Ubuntu is generally only defined in relation to others or in interactions, and Ameru shares in the affirming human relationships of ubuntu.

Ubuntu demands reciprocity as part of a community's duty to each other in the understanding of human rights. Ameru's fight to save Karura

Forest demonstrates his understanding of his duty, not just to his fellow human beings but also to future generations. He is militant about protecting his forest home, which he recognises as his to share with others, both present and future. In saying ‘a soldier’s job is to protect their territory from invasion’, and warning that ‘Kungwu is creeping in, cutting our soldiers, to take our land for himself. We must fight. We must stop him’ (p. 126), Ameru is willing to exchange his strength and life – if need be – for his community to get back Karura Forest.

The difference between Kungwu and Ameru is best summed in how they think about the forest: Kungwu describes his mansion, made of 180-year-old mahogany, as the ‘fruits of his forest’ (p. 122). Ameru calls the entire Karura Forest ‘his forest home’ (p. 126). In this way, Gidoomal represents Kungwu as rapacious by evoking the image of fruit which is plucked and consumed, while Ameru’s use of the phrase ‘forest home’ evokes feelings of serenity, belonging and sharing. Ameru gives and takes and is in a reciprocal relationship with others and the environment. When he goes into the forest to find wood to burn, he only collects twigs, broken stems and small shards of splintered tree trunks’ (p.122). When the forest is threatened, he risks his life in organising a protest march to protect it. Kungwu, on the other hand, only takes and destroys. He bribes government officials in order to acquire ‘the five-square-mile radius of Karura Forest’, which he fences off from the community (p. 123). He does not exhibit awareness of anyone beyond himself, and his greed makes him vulnerable to being conned by his business partner to invest in *ogombo*, a ‘medicinal’ root which promises him great financial returns. They called it root gold. Kungwu had cleared the forest to plant *ogombo* and to build his mansion, only to be brought to his end, by the collapsing wooden stairs. This greed leads to his punishment and robs him of ubuntu, because he chose to only take and not reciprocate.

‘Root Gold’ animates the reciprocity which is prerequisite to having and enjoying ubuntu. It also asks a different question, that, if ubuntu is about the interdependence of humans, how does one treat another who is not deserving of ubuntu but is still a person? That is, a human nevertheless, which potential for ubuntu? And, in Ameru denouncing Kungwu, does he fail to show or demonstrate ubuntu, or does ubuntu only matter to those who are

like-minded? Such are the questions that can be explored in 'Root Gold', in an attempt to understand reciprocity as an essential quality of ubuntu.

Besides explaining notions of ubuntu, 'Root Gold' also reveals and expresses the complexities that surround land ownership, distribution and redistribution which continue to be contentious in Kenya. In 'Root Gold', Gidoomal acknowledges the potential for conflict when a culture shifts towards individual ownership and capitalism from something more communal, leaving groups such as pastoralists in difficult situations. For instance, in Kenya the expanding activities of landowners, ranchers, conservationists and the extractive industries have had an impact on the people of Laikipia, who, having lost access to their land for grazing and their water, have consequently lost their livelihood and the means to practice their culture (New African, 2017). The government intervention has been by way of militarisation against the pastoralists. 'Root Gold' offers a context for such a situation in a form that allows readers to explore some of the complexities that are inherent when modern systems of land ownership clash with traditional ones. As a strategy, Gidoomal does not just tell two parallel stories, but she also parallels her fictional world with the reality in Kenya. The theme is a topical one, and she includes leaflets and newspaper clippings to allow her to step out of her fictional world in order to draw real data from real life events. For instance, in one of the flashbacks, she has Kungwu ripping off leaflets that were put up to protect the Karura Forest. The leaflets read:

If you imagine the history of the world as one month you have been here for about a minute ... you ate 30 per cent of all your natural resources at your disposal. Don't add us to your statistic.
SAVE KARURA FOREST FROM DESTRUCTION. (p. 122)

These leaflets are reminiscent of those written by Kenyan Nobel laureate Wangare Maathai, during her fight against the Kenyan Government in the '90s, in order to protect the environment as a means to protecting all other rights. Maathai cited conflict over resources as the reason for wars, and, in order for a person to enjoy their rights, the responsibility was on them to protect the environment and its natural resources (GBM). Gidoomal's

fiction here serves to particularise a universal principle of human rights: that while rights are generally considered indivisible, there are power relations in society which impact one's enjoyment of rights. Pavlish, Ateva and Ho state that, in ubuntu, 'individual claims to rights instantly acknowledge concomitant obligations to observe similar treatment toward others in the context of all living things' (2017, p. 129). Gidoomal demonstrates that, while individuals have a right to private property, it is against the spirit of ubuntu to do so at the expense of communal ownership. The contradictions of 'Root Gold' also show that Ameru enjoys what Douzinas describes as a 'partial operation of rights' (2002, p. 323): Ameru may be entitled to work for a living and even to the right to assemble, but, having no financial power, his mission is hijacked and labelled as criminal while Kungwu can afford the media access that allows him to bury his wrong doing:

The day after [the demonstrations], the paper carried an inside page three snap of Ameru's head, swollen to twice its size. Next to it, an editorial seethed about the donation of public land to private individuals. As Tesai fielded calls from journalists, politicians and businessmen, Kungwu opened his safe, heaped little sacks of notes into different piles and listed their respective destinations. Ministry of Lands, News Editor, City Council, Nema. Reaching for his briefcase, he ordered Tesai to mobilise the bulldozers, quick. (p. 128)

One other strategy employed by Gidoomal, in 'Root Gold', is her manipulation of structure at the end of the story. Readers may expect or hope that good will ultimately triumph over evil, and 'Root Gold' ends with destruction for Kungwu on account of his greed: his body is trapped by the 'cadavers of the forest' (p. 130), the same forest he had sought to destroy, an ending that will be satisfying for many readers. However, the last image of Ameru, who represents good, is one bereft of hope:

His back on the cracked dirt ... the decimated landscape around him, the vacuum caused by the vanished woodland, the

claustrophobic panic that rose inside him as each tree fell. Staring into the night, he let his lips widen into a smile (p. 129).

Is Ameru's smile one of resignation or of promise? Readers can only guess if he dies or lives. Perhaps the smile is to suggest that the battle for the environment is still going on, and that the battle against corruption continues? That when good characters and heroes rise, their successes may not necessarily be in the way a reader might expect? The disrupted expectations or assumptions of the ending create ambiguity, and an ambiguous ending is one that invites further reflection. 'Root Gold' provides a discussion point of what it means to have ubuntu.

I found the story of 'Root Gold' appealing, as land ownership in Kenya continues to be problematic, especially where large chunks of land are owned communally. While individuals may be entitled to private ownership, Le warns that the sale of communal land to individuals may destroy existing cultural norms and even provoke conflicts among people (2016, p. 3), a situation that is captured in 'Root Gold'. Gidoomal has taken a very complex subject and presented it simply, with an underlying message about building community. She is able to narrate two parallel stories via flashback and contrasts: of Ameru who embodies ubuntu, and of Kungwu, the antithesis of the spirit of ubuntu. She does this to call attention to historical and contemporary injustice on land related issues in Kenya.

'Jambula Tree' and identity

Fiction is effective for raising awareness about human rights because of its ability to break down complex and contentious rights issues. In this section, I argue that fiction can address multiple and suppressed identities by revealing or disrupting stereotypes of dominant ways of thinking about patriarchy and sexuality. I also explore the conditions that allow one's identity to be diminished. To do so, I use Arac de Nyeko's story 'Jambula Tree', a lesbian story. This kind of story is difficult to tell in an African context, as same-sex attraction is generally considered abhorrent and taboo; in Uganda, where 'Jambula Tree' is set, same sex relationships are illegal.

'Jambula Tree' went on to inspire a movie called *Rafiki*, which was produced and directed by Wanuri Kahiu, a Kenyan. When released, in 2018, the film was immediately banned by the Kenyan Film Classification Board because of its 'homosexual theme and clear intent to promote lesbianism in Kenya contrary to the law' (Daily Nation). The ban was temporarily lifted by the high court to allow *Rafiki* to be entered into the running for the 2019 Oscars' Foreign Language Film category. This is an example of the context writers in east Africa, and most of the continent, contend with when writing about homosexuality. African attitudes toward same-sex attraction also pose a challenge for me in trying to introduce the language of rights to, or frame homosexuality as, a rights issue.

Against such a background, Arac de Nyeko's writing takes on a form of advocacy by offering a contemplative reflection on a contentious social reality. 'Jambula Tree' is written in an epistolary form, from Anyango to Sanyu, two girls who were forced to be separated when their sexuality was outed by a gossipy neighbour. Sanyu, whose family is wealthy, sends her away to school in London; Anyango stays in Uganda and goes on to become a nurse. 'Jambula Tree' is a letter from Anyango to Sanyu. Both central characters are teenagers, which makes this a story that could appeal to the type of young audience my writing targets.

Fiction can play a key role in the promotion of human rights awareness by addressing multiple and suppressed identities. Here I recall Potter and Stonebridge's words in speaking about writing and rights, that 'literary writing gives form and meaning to something poignant and abstract'; they name this poignant abstraction as the 'human person', or 'the self' (2014, p. 3). In 'Jambula Tree', the story represents individuals whose identities and ideas of self are suppressed because they are in conflict with those of their community. The story world of 'Jambula Tree' is one that is governed by a strict, heteronormative cultural code of conduct – one in which same-sex desire is suppressed by secrecy and shame. It is consistent with this need for secrecy that the author chooses to use the private form of a personal letter to represent the lives of Anyango and Sanyu, who must live in partial occlusion. In the story, homosexuality is suppressed, and often talked about in hushed tones: the story depicts shame as a haunting phenomenon

whose weight is increased by constant repetition of the word 'shame'. The shame itself is personified by Anyango, as she writes to Sanyu: 'After all these years, I still imagine shame trailing after me tagged onto the hem of my skirt' (p. 10). Other, similar, words – such as 'uncovered', 'exposed', 'naked', and 'immoral' – are interspersed in the story as the protagonists grapple with what their community perceives as deviant sexuality. This suppression of the characters' love life interferes with their ability to live as free and full citizens of their community. It introduces the conflict between human rights and societal attitudes, and, in Uganda where 'Jambula Tree' is set, a more consequential conflict with the law. By using fiction, de Nyeko can explore 'the possibilities of freedom that political systems are often blind to' (Potter and Stonebridge, 2014, p. 2).

Additionally, in exploring identity, 'Jambula Tree' challenges the perception of sexual subversion, both as a threat within patriarchy and for impact on women's subjectivities. In doing this, de Nyeko uses contrasts and juxtaposition to introduce the tension that exists at the intersection of gender and sexual orientation. 'Jambula Tree' draws out the identity of its central character, Anyango, beyond her sexuality, by describing who she is in the company of other female members of her community. In the story, Anyango is surrounded by females who occupy very gender specific positions, such as carers, mothers or wives. The women make up the majority of the inhabitants of Nakawa Estate. In a very personal way, Anyango's letter invites the reader to witness the daily minutiae of community life, along with the values and attitudes which show the inequalities that are part of Ugandan society's cultural makeup. The constant address of Sanyu in the epistolary – and the reader – as 'you' encourages the reader to step into Anyango's shoes and be part of the overcrowding at the estate and the endless chatter among women, as they 'wait for their husbands to bring home a kilo of offal ...' (p. 9), the 'women laughing at each other for wearing the cheapest sandals on sale by hawkers' (p. 10). The reader is also able to feel the presence of Mama Atim, a gossipy neighbour and the villain of the story, who leads the hostility against Anyango and Sanyu. The rest of the women in the neighbourhood are largely depicted as lacking power to make decisions about their lives, and as dependent on the men in their community.

Against the inferior position that women occupy, de Nyeko disrupts the celebration of heterosexuality by drawing attention to the life of abuse and repression women suffer under patriarchy. She juxtaposes the image of Anyango and Sanyu holding hands and skipping, almost childlike in nature, against the harshness and brutality that women experience under men in heterosexual relationships. As well, father figures become increasingly absent as women rise to take positions at the head of their households – for instance, Anyango’s father takes a much younger second wife and abandons Anyango and her mother. The father figures in the story are also depicted as failures in their traditional role of provider: Sanyu’s father sexually violates his daughter ‘with touches that Sanyu could not tell her mother about’ (p.9). De Nyeko seems to question the community’s perception of what deviant behaviour entails, as she juxtaposes the sweet innocent relationship between the girls with the failed, abusive, heterosexual relationships between men and their wives and families.

The use of contrasts and juxtaposition in ‘Jambula Tree’ underscores the inequality of the sexes in Uganda, by positioning women as less important than men. ‘Jambula Tree’ is an example of how to explore different identities and explain different injustices in writing, as well as an illustration of the complexity of attempting to realise human rights which are perceived to clash with cultural norms pertaining to gender and sexuality.

Another way in which fiction explores identity is by depicting central characters in search of authenticity, and who demonstrate growth in the process. Anyango and Sanyu – raised in patriarchy, and both a depiction of how restrictive life at Nakawa Estate is for women – sought to remove themselves from the expectation of domesticity, with the aim of becoming independent. (Anyango expressed a desire to be a nurse, and Sanyu an engineer.) As Anyango says to Sanyu, ‘We vowed we would not be like them, you said it yourself, we could be anything,’ (p. 10). But their ambition broke the rules: ‘It did not occur to either of us, to you or me, that these were boundaries we should not cross nor should think of crossing’ (p. 18).

The two girls’ rejection of an established way of life – and sexual identity – upended their families, was transgressive and crossed boundaries. But there were some positives too: Anyango’s mother’s change of heart is

most powerful, even if stated quite mildly. She is depicted as becoming more progressive as her views evolve, and eventually she becomes more supportive of her daughter. She manages to overcome the shame and accepts Anyango as she is. 'My mother has gotten over that night. [When the girls were caught together]. It took a while, but she did' (p. 9). Alongside this, Anyango also seems empowered by the act of writing down her feelings and thoughts. In her letters, she is able to grow and nurture her own identity against a background of hostility; she is able to overcome stigma and isolation in order to assert herself against her world. She reveals, in the letter, that she has chosen not to be held back by the expectations of others, that she is more confident and secure in who she is, and that she would like Sanyu's mother to feel the same. Anyango suggests to Sanyu that her mother 'should start to hold her head high and scatter dust at the women who laugh after her when she passes by their houses' (p. 9). De Nyeko uses character growth to advocate for individuals who are gay. She is not out to effect change in an instant, but she demonstrates that change can happen over time and that it all begins with acceptance.

Besides exploring the complexity around identity, fiction can also navigate the tension which exists when you try to frame homosexuality in the language of rights even though it is largely considered a cultural, moral or religious issue. De Nyeko initiates this discussion by placing 'Jambula Tree' in a setting that is culturally relevant to her audience. Nakawa Estate is a depiction of a contemporary life in urban Uganda. It is a communal setting, where everybody knows everybody and people are free to enjoy their culture – until, of course, that culture is disrupted by the introduction of a love that unsettles its inhabitants. De Nyeko's point, however, is that nothing needs to be disrupted just because two girls happen to love each other. In a way, she sets out to prove that love is love, and that there is nothing foreign about it. This is shown in the faith of Anyango, who is a Christian in conflict. She writes:

Sanyu, I went for confession the next day, right after Mass. I made the sign of the cross and smelt the fresh burning incense in St Jude's church. I had this sense of floating on air, confused, weak,

and exhausted. I told the priest, 'Forgive me Father for I have sinned. It has been two months since my last confession.' And there in my head, two plus two *Jambula's* equals four *Jambulas*. (p.18)

The use of *jambulas* here is code for breasts. In Uganda, the bill against homosexuality was sponsored by a religious organisation, and by including religious details in the story, de Nyeko inserts herself into the larger conversation and debate around homosexuality in the country. In this way, the story teases out the tension between what is morally right from both a cultural and religious perspective: prayers do not change who Anyango is, despite her 'good intentions'. The tension in the story mirrors that in Uganda by asking whether or not homosexuality is a rights issue; if it is, de Nyeko suggests, then asserting that it is so is a culturally relative issue.

Another way de Nyeko navigates around her difficult subject is by creating distance between the reader and the issue. She employs metaphor, such as the trope of the forbidden fruit, to relieve some of the discomfort around the topic. The story's title gets its name from the jambula tree, also known as the java plum. This is commonly grown in Uganda. Stimpson claims that lesbian stories which 'seek metaphors for their characters' passion are resorting to "excessive coding", a complicit tactic through which the writer makes "an implicit, perhaps unconscious pact with her culture" (1981, p. 367). She explains that such 'standard tropes carry the implicit burden of dissolving the taint of "unnatural" actions through the cleansing power of natural language' (p. 371). De Nyeko confronts the taboo issue of female same-sex desire in an African context, but is careful to encode sexuality in metaphor and symbolism by using expressions such as 'your *jambulas* and mine' (p. 18). This encoding domesticates Anyango and Sanyu's relationship. Although the use of metaphor can be example for how to write about taboo topics, for me there is probably the unintended suggestion that de Nyeko's audience is not ready for these kinds of stories. The use of metaphor can contribute to the perception that homosexuality is un-African. It is also worth noting the paratextual information that 'Jambula Tree' won the Caine Prize for African Writing, a prize considered by many as

a western prize. But given the context of homosexuality being both illegal and a taboo topic, de Nyeko's writing, to use Potter's words, 'signals an act incompatible with submission to power' (2014, p. 11). De Nyeko's writing is an act of defiance.

In summing up, 'Jambula Tree', opens up pathways for exploration into one's sense of identity and the factors that may suppress it, particularly in a society which is intolerant of minority sexuality. Whether or not to include stories about same-sex relationships in my creative work was a major consideration for me, because I want my stories to be considered for classroom use in Kenyan schools. Homosexuality is not just a difficult topic to address in Kenya: similarly to Uganda, it is criminalised. This complicates the background to my creative work. 'Jambula Tree' is one example of how to use a combination of form and content to make a work 'safe' and accessible to an audience, as well as how to discuss a range of identities and subvert related assumptions about identity. Fiction becomes the ground on which the negotiation of complex issues such as multiple and suppressed identities can be addressed.

'Hope's Hunter' and reader transportation

Scholars working in the field of reader response theory argue that readers are more open to ideas in the stories they find authentic and are able to identify with, because such stories have the power to draw readers into their worlds. An example of a story I found compelling and into whose world I found myself drawn is 'Hope's Hunter' (2014), by Mohamed Yunus Rafiq. The story is published in a collection of short stories titled *Africa 39*. Rafiq is a Tanzanian author and documentary film maker whose interest includes globalisation and youth affairs (*Africa39*). 'Hope's Hunter' is the story of a hunter's journey into a forest, in order to find the 'elixir that will ward off the impending calamity' of drought (Rafiq, p. 271).

In this section, I use 'Hope's Hunter' to explore the ideas of reader transportation into the story world, from the perspective of reader response theory. Transportation, as discussed in an earlier section, is 'an implicit form of influence' and it happens most when readers connect to the characters or story, find relevance or authenticity in the story and when ideas that are in

the story are congruent with the attitudes of the reader (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, 2004; Appel & Richter, 2010). In this section, I discuss three conditions which encourage reader transportation: emotional engagement; identification with a central character; and when reader attitudes are in congruence with that of the text. I discuss these alongside Rafiq's use of figurative language, such as lyrical prose, imagery and allegory, to create vivid and sensory descriptions. This is a strategy used by writers to engage the reader's cognition and emotion, which Green and Donahue suggest is 'a melding that is prerequisite for reader transportation to happen,' (2009, p. 241).

The first way in which transportation happens is by emotional engagement, which Rafiq's style, evident of poetic influence, evokes in readers. He says, in an interview by *Africa39*, that his writing is 'influenced with poetry and thus heavily bent on lyricism and abstract ideas' (Africa39, n.d. para. 17). Lyrical prose invites reader appreciation on the level of meaning and for the sheer beauty of the language (Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2006). 'Hope's Hunter' is densely descriptive but it is also emotive and pleasurable. It is the story of a hunter who must leave home to find answers in the face of an impending natural calamity. Rafiq's lyrical style is evident in the way he creates moments of great emotional intensity and presents a rich array of imagery, both of which serve to propel the hunter on his quest.

He leaves behind him the fire that has tied his family together more securely than the most ingenious knot. He leaves behind too the pleasant smell of the *mtarakwa* tree that hugs the walls of his homestead. He leaves behind the tobacco-coloured mountains that caress the low pregnant clouds that never deliver ... He leaves behind the eyes of his children staring at his departing and diminishing form, eyes as blank as dead stars ... In his departure, the traveller also leaves behind some painful, yet sorrowful nods of approval; nods reminiscent of the lizards' resignation to the inevitable setting of the sun. The traveller tips

down his throat the bitter herb that is the agony of departure as he stands at the mouth of the forest. (p. 271)

In the above quote, the repeated phrases do not just amplify the hunter's pain and sacrifice. They also create a rhythm which combines with the contrasting imagery of nature as both strong and weakened, such as 'stillness of the mountain' against 'the cracked earth' and 'clouds that never deliver' (p. 271). This creates a lyrical tone. These images of nature are recurrent in the story; they are intriguing, and likely to keep readers emotionally engaged so as to facilitate transportation into the story world.

Another example of the use of imagery for emotional engagement is Rafiq's use of archetypal imagery. In 'Hope's Hunter', the journey ends when the hunter finds the 'great python' with its 'mouth open and a stream of water gushes from it like a mighty waterfall' (p. 274). The python represents a river, which is an archetypal image for life and vitality. 'Hope's Hunter' has recurring patterns of the basic elements of life, all embodied in the imagery of water, fire, earth and animals woven into the story. For instance, there are descriptions such as 'this is the land: once teeming with galloping and prancing antelope, now a desert of fine dust'; 'low pregnant clouds that never deliver'; 'warm embrace of the fire from roasting meat ... leaves behind the fire that has tied his family together ...' (p. 270). These archetypal images, of the basic elements which the hunter harnesses for his quest, can be read symbolically to represent 'hope and renewal versus darkness and despair, water as rebirth or initiation, forest as danger and the unknown and fire as life' (Beach et al., 2006, p.149). They reflect the hunter's journey as being both a physical and a spiritual one, a journey that readers are invited to make with him. The use of archetypal imagery, as 'one of the components of transportation', helps to hold the attention of readers and thus creates the opportunity for them to be transported into the heart of the story (Green & Brock, 2000, p.703).

A second way in which reader transportation can happen is when readers identify with a central character. If the character is seen as a role model, they may inspire a change of behaviour or attitude in readers. In

'Hope's Hunter', the central character is depicted as a strong, determined and selfless person who is placed in opposition to evil, the natural calamity threatening the lives of his people and family. He leaves his family and home on a quest to fight off the impending drought on behalf of his community, and 'he leaves behind him the fire that has tied his family together more securely than the most ingenious knot' (p. 270). After travelling for 'many moons' the hunter still has the humility to wonder whether he has earned the 'honour required of him to help his people' (p. 270). On the journey, he is fatigued and his body bears the 'assaults of the elements'. But he remains resolute. Fatigue, loneliness and despair set in for him and 'he sees himself as a star spun off from its ancestral grouping and left alone in the vastness of the sky' (p. 271). While the hunter is depicted as strong, he is also shown to be humble and sensitive to the suffering of others. This makes him a hero and a sympathetic character who readers may be drawn to. According to Green and Brock (2000), if a sympathetic character holds certain views, readers may be persuaded to want to hold similar views, especially if the character is one they admire. In the case of the hunter, going on a dangerous journey in service to others is his duty, 'for it is the glory of man to be on the move always' (p. 271). Transported readers are more receptive or easily persuaded to accept world views that are similar to that of a character like the hunter.

The central character of a story can be further developed in the description of the setting. In 'Hope's Hunter', the setting is described in present tense and in striking and intense detail; it comes alive as the hunter journeys across the plains and into the forest. The setting becomes an extension of the protagonist's quest, to defy the 'severity of the impending drought' (p. 270):

A baobab stands formidable here; roots firmly sunk into the earth. The hunter is dwarfed by the great tree, whose branches lift like the strong arms into the sky. The hunter feels the presence of the uncountable prayers of the wise that have been offered here. He only wishes he could hear them. His eyes are glued to the robust trunk of the tree and his mind records the shifting scripting and

pictograms presented by armies of ants and other insects enacting before his eyes the daily struggle of their lives. (p. 271)

The strong physicality of the environment, created through specific sensory detail, becomes a reflection of the strength and resolve of the hunter. The scenes are focalised through the hunter, so that the reader sees and hears and feels what the hunter is seeing, hearing and feeling. When readers are able to share in a character's plight like this, it leads to what Liebers and Schamms call 'ease of cognitive access', which in turn enhances reading pleasure (2017, p. 15). This pleasure, they argue, is experienced if readers find the story easy to understand – this increases cognitive awareness. If readers are more open and more cognitively aware, then they are more open to lessons suggested by the text. The powerful description of the hunter, encourages reader transportation especially if readers identify with him.

The third and final way in which reader transportation happens is a result of readers' attitudes aligning with those expressed in a text – this especially so if readers recognise a story as familiar (Green & Brock, 2000). In 'Hope's Hunter', one can argue that its Swahili speaking audience, which is mostly east African readers, would identify not just with the situation in the story, but also the form of storytelling-as-allegory. 'Hope's Hunter' can be read as an allegory of a community under threat of annihilation, because of a few of its greedy members. According to Green (2004), when fiction sounds real, then familiarity is created. This allows readers to draw on their personal experiences in the interpretation of texts. What is familiar about 'Hope's Hunter' for east African and Swahili readers is the form in which the story is told: it is a quest fable. That the story points toward corrupt and greedy leaders who have destroyed the environment or society through their selfishness is also a familiar theme and trope in east African fiction.

As mentioned, in the story, the python is an analogy for a river. The python's drying is the reason why the people are facing a drought. The responsibility for its drying is placed on the 'big bellied' and 'rapacious frogs', who 'turn upon another and begin a gory blood churning spectacle of tearing and ripping each other' (p. 276), and are a picture of a self-destructive community. As an east African reader, I give the story this interpretation –

and the idea resonates for me – because I recognise greed and corruption as an ongoing battle for east African communities. In this way, ‘Hope’s Hunter’ can be read as an indictment of greed and over-consumption in society. If readers condemn the action of their leaders in the same way the story condemns the frogs for bringing the drought, then the values of readers can be said to be congruent with the values of those of the text. This congruence, or ‘story consistent belief’, happens when readers are transported into the story world. Mar argues that researchers have repeatedly found that ‘reader attitudes change to become more congruent with the ideas expressed in a fiction narrative’ (as cited in Gottschall, 2013, p.150). However, in recalling Sipe’s (2008) claim that a reader’s cultural background influences how one reads a text, this familiarity and congruence of ideas and values are also dependent on the reader as the meaning maker.

‘Hope’s Hunter’ is a story rich in figurative language which helps to extend the journey of the hunter into a larger one. Burroway suggests that the use of figurative language in literature ‘retains its force, slightly or twisting the reader’s perspective to offer a new or unusual view of the familiar’ (2007, p. 25). This strategy is evident in ‘Hope’s Hunter’, and it allows for different interpretations of the story. In the story, the extensive use of figurative language, such as lyrical prose, imagery, allegory and vivid descriptions, combine to increase emotional engagement for the reader; encourage empathetic feelings toward the characters in the story world and the real world they represent; and explore how congruent the values espoused by the text are with those of the readers. This is in a bid to immerse readers into the story using the process of transportation, which, as pointed out earlier, is the implicit power of fiction to influence behaviour or attitude, or to inspire change. This story is an example of how to write with familiar ideas and in a familiar form, as transportation is encouraged when readers find relevance with a story, see it as authentic and real, and can connect both to the story and its characters.

‘Olikoye’ and the limit of fiction

The final story I will analyse is ‘Olikoye’, written by Chimamanda Adichie.

This story, published by *Matter – Medium*, was commissioned by the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation. 'Olikoye' is story of a woman in labour, explaining to the midwife why she had chosen to name her child after a famous person. It was written to teach about the importance of vaccinating children against preventable diseases. 'Olikoye' is a story that requires the audience to make up their minds and act, whether to get vaccinations for their children and families or to take a stand against it altogether. For such a story to work, a big consideration must be its audience. Adichie's writing is directed at an audience concerned with the fact that the World Health Organisation (WHO) puts child deaths in Nigeria at about one in eight for children under five (WHO). The deaths are largely from measles, tetanus, diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria, most of which are linked to malnutrition. It is estimated that about one million children die each year in Africa (WHO).

Alongside all its positive uses, Osler and Zhu caution that fiction can be misused for unethical purposes (2011). This is because 'truths' relayed in fiction can enter the general consciousness and have an impact on the general views and attitudes of people. Data or information drawn from life experiences can be misused to create a falsehood or to spread propaganda. Adichie's story stands the risk of being considered propagandist by those who reject the practice of vaccination, or even by those who are opposed to commissioned writing. Katy Waldman, a critic for *Slate* magazine, labelled the story 'propaganda', and claimed that Adichie was pushing an agenda which oversimplifies complex issues. In Waldman's words, 'Agendas have a way of eliding complexities and flattening interactions' (2015, para. 5). 'Olikoye' advocates for vaccinations, and, in Nigeria where the story is set, there is a significant percentage of children who are not vaccinated for reasons such as 'a lack of trust in the vaccine or the provider, people not perceiving a need for or not valuing the vaccine, poor access, lack of knowledge, rumours, religious beliefs, illiteracy, and other social and political factors' (Oku et al., 2016, p. 2). Given this background, 'Olikoye' can be seen as contentious.

One strategy Adichie employs in writing 'Olikoye', in order to communicate a message she perceives as urgent, is by telling the story of a real-life Dr Olikoye in the style of African oral tradition – a tradition that allows societies to pass on important information or values, or to tell stories of great

people through generations. In 'Olikoye', the story is a conveyor of wisdom and knowledge. Earlier in this thesis, I mentioned Deng and An-Naim's claim, that teaching human rights principles is most effective if a people perceive them to be sanctioned by their own culture and institutions (Twining, 2005, p. 230). Adichie seems to be aware of such effectiveness because, in 'Olikoye', the narrator passes on a treasured story that has been told to her by her father, in a storytelling session. The protagonist, who is an unnamed young woman in labour, recalls the tale of Dr Olikoye, 'The best health minister Nigeria had ever had' (Adichie, 2015, para. 32). Although the story is fiction, Dr Olikoye the character is named after the real Dr Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, who was a prominent health minister in Nigeria and considered a 'leading figure in global health ... and his efforts in fighting the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic were heroic' (Olukoya & Ferguson, 2003, para. 8). This manner of storytelling – retelling – is likely to resonate with the intended audience because of its links to the oral tradition. 'Olikoye' is also pithy, and lends itself to readings at meetings or gatherings. Stories of great men and women told in this manner would be persuasive because of their familiar nature: it is not the narrator's story, it is a story she has been told is passing on.

Another problem associated with using fiction for raising awareness is the risk of constructing an essentialised version of individuals. The danger here is the production of stereotypes, such as that of the 'diseased African' which 'Olikoye' may be seen to do. This is because the story is narrated against a background of children dying due to disease, poverty and a lack of knowledge regarding health care and services. Against such a claim, Brenda Cooper argues that:

The recognition of social and economic disparities ... is not in contradiction with the acknowledgement of porousness, perplexity and collusion. The everyday worlds that the writers [referring to African female writers] examine are indeed particular to their circumstances; we should know that they are not spokespeople of the worlds and circumstances of the majority of the people from the countries they are from; but we should examine their lives and struggles, within the particular angle from

which they write, with respect and interest, for they deliver powerful insights into struggles and dilemma, politics and transformation that are a part of the structures of globalisation and the mobility that comes with it. (2013, p. 22)

Adichie's writing of 'Olikoye' is based on research about the general state of health and health care in Nigeria. It therefore becomes important that the story be told realistically and accurately, as a strategy to counter essentialism. Capturing verisimilitude, suggests de Freitas, is what imbues the work with authenticity (as cited in Leavy, 2013, p. 80). With this accuracy, 'Olikoye' can then be seen as an accurate depiction of a situation rather than a stereotype.

The narrator in 'Olikoye' says, 'My father's first child was a girl ... But she died at the age of four months. The second, a boy, was not yet four months old before he died' (para. 13)' Not only does the narrator recall deaths in her family, but she captures the ensuing despair of those trying to make sense of them: 'Some people from my father's family said my mother was a witch, eating her children, trading their innocent hearts in exchange for her own long life' (para. 13). The details ring as true for me, as I know from personal experience that blaming 'witches', and by extension woman, was often an 'acceptable' explanation for unexplained deaths. The turn to some form of deity for answers, in the story, is a realistic portrayal too: 'The Christians prayed in church. The Muslims prayed at the mosque. The old people performed sacrifices. Still, babies died, and their tiny still bodies were wrapped in cloth and buried, and it seemed senseless that they had even been born at all' (para. 13). The despair is contrasted against the quiet confidence of the narrator, who herself is in labour, because she is aware that her child can be immunised against preventable diseases.

Writing on the role of African fiction in educating on albinism, Baker and Lund argue that, if fictional texts are to be used for advocacy, then the 'accuracy of their representation becomes as significant as the fictional space they open up for the exploration of questions that cannot easily be explored elsewhere' (2017, p. 282). In the stories they analyse, Baker and Lund suggest that the African fiction used for advocacy, 'provide objectively

informed representations of the experiences of living with albinism, and the characters and situations they represent are plausible' (p. 282). Likewise, 'Olikoye' states explicitly how children can be immunised and gives direction to families about where to go for family planning. Another tactic for increased verisimilitude – and increased plausibility – is to write in the first person. For Adichie, this has the advantage of coming across as personal witness, which increases believability as her young narrator retells the story of her family's tragedy. The first-person narrator and limited narrative focus give the reader direct access to the protagonist's hope, as well extra assurance and earnestness as she recalls the story. This combines with lines written specifically to answer some pragmatic questions about immunisations. For example: 'I am alive today because of Dr Olikoye' bears witness to how effective the immunisations are; 'It took mere moments ...' (para. 22) answers the question of how immunisation works; 'It is free,' (para. 22) explains how accessible vaccines were. 'Olikoye' mimics personal testimony, which adds to its persuasiveness, and, by writing authentically and sensitively about people and situations, the potential to portray essentialised versions of people is limited.

Another key limitation of fiction in raising awareness for action is the claim that some readers may feel powerless to act against gross injustice, while others may feel overwhelmed by emotion and even cease to believe that justice exists. Howard Gardner suggests that writers should attempt to address 'potential resistance' from their target audience, so as to increase the persuasiveness of their work (2006, p. 145). 'Olikoye' is an example of writing that attempts to address 'potential resistance' by way of a didactic approach. In this instance, I use didactic to mean 'intended to convey instruction and information as well as pleasure and entertainment' without consideration to possible negative connotations in tone or manner that may suggest that the approach is manipulative, controlling or restrictive (Merriam-Webster, n.d). The didacticism in 'Olikoye' makes it a story of explicit advocacy. The text provides instructions on how to avoid the unnecessary deaths of children by getting them immunised against preventable diseases. The lesson of the story is instructional, and provides background on the deaths of children and the despair of parents who sought help from churches,

mosques and traditional religious institutions, before presenting vaccination as an alternative for the intended audience. An example of didacticism is when the narrator recalls her father's words about Dr Olikoye: 'He walked among the villagers listening to them, he taught women to mix sugar and salt and clean water to give their children who had diarrhoea and he told them about washing their hands with soap and he told them the Universal Primary Health Care Centers would be open in a month' (para. 18). For the specific audience, this style of writing can be seen as effective, as information is prioritised over reading for pleasure. Given its life and death context, this seems appropriate – certainly there is a need for this information to be disseminated urgently. And this form of writing, according to Dawes, becomes a form of action which entails humanitarianism (2007, p. 218). 'Olikoye' is a story that celebrates improved access to healthcare while paying tribute to those behind it. This is the kind of fiction that Dawes claims can participate in the work of human rights by expressing something true. It teaches people about what is already available and, in the process, finds a way and a language to insist on basic human rights for all.

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to explore how the various example stories illustrate the claims of fiction as an effective tool for raising awareness about human rights. I have looked at the theories around how fiction works and used the selected stories as exemplars of the claims in action. The points I have raised regarding the texts I discussed do not represent a full analysis of how fiction can or should work – there are myriad other ways these texts could be interpreted. I have been particularly interested in how the various authors use specific narrative strategies to either represent the individual or communities as bearers of rights, or use those strategies to draw out or complement the inequalities that are a violation of human rights. In 'The Last Trip', I explored how Atta uses character development as a means to explore the human condition, so as to generate empathy for an individual and a situation. In 'Root Gold', I explored how Gidoomal uses fiction to bridge the abstract to the concrete, in order to explain abstract ideas such as ubuntu and the complex conflict between individual and communal land ownership. De Nyeko's 'Jambula Tree' offers an exploration of identity by way of the first person point of view, which is

appropriate in a personal letter writing style. 'Hope's Hunter', by Rafiq, is about the use of figurative language in order to enhance the relationship between the reader and text in a way that transports readers into the story world. Finally, in attempting to explain some of the possible limitations of fiction, I turned to 'Olikoye', and Adichie's use of the didactic to advocate directly for the use of vaccines. These texts serve as examples, both in content and style, of fiction as a location for the discussion of social and political issues that have implications for human rights awareness in Africa.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In this exegesis, I have endeavoured to answer the question, 'How can human rights awareness be integrated into fiction for Kenyan secondary schools?' In seeking to find out how fiction facilitates learning experiences, such as critical thinking and consciousness raising so as to contribute to an increased awareness of human rights, my research took me to the nexus of human rights theory, human rights literature and literary reading. The thesis as a whole comprises a collection of ten short stories titled 'I am the Mau' and an exegesis, both written as a response to the research question.

In the short stories, I answer the research question by embedding human rights injustices into fictional scenarios, so that, when read together, the stories interrogate what human rights might mean and look like in diverse and complex Kenyan contexts. The stories also illustrate the interconnectedness and indivisibility of human rights, by suggesting that for anyone to realise their 'free and full development of the human personality' (UDHR), other rights, such as economic, social and cultural rights, have to be realised as well. To make the stories relevant and familiar to my young target audience, I created stories that revolve around young people and their experiences. It is my hope that these stories will add knowledge and deepen understanding about human rights concepts and practices in Kenyan classrooms.

In this exegesis, I provide a response to the research question by discussing the different understandings of rights from African perspectives; examining the relationship between human rights discourses and literary work; and by analysing five African short stories and their narrative strategies for the ways in which they demonstrate arguments about fiction as an important tool for raising awareness about human rights. Together, both the fiction and the exegesis contribute to scholarship at the intersection of human rights literature and literary studies with emphasis on African perspectives and contexts.

My fiction is targeted at an African audience, so it was important to get some perspectives on African understandings of human rights. One important aspect of this conversation is the debate surrounding human rights

as either universal or culturally relative: this is a key distinction between African and western perspectives on human rights. Universalists contend that rights are universal because they are inherent: they are simply the result of one being human. Cultural relativists prefer a diverse understanding and interpretation of rights, based on one's cultural background. An alternate perspective provides for African social consciousness as central to the understanding of rights, in which traditional practices, such as ubuntu, matter to the understanding of human rights. I also discuss the African Charter as an international instrument drafted to promote human rights and address any abuse of them. The Charter recognises the tension between individual rights and group rights, and suggests that the enjoyment of rights and freedoms implies the performance of duties by the individual to the group.

Drawing from human rights and literary studies theories, I argue that human rights and fiction share a twin relationship, in that rights conceptualises the 'ideal human' as one worthy of dignity and fiction materialises that ideal. I also argue that fiction works by appealing to our sense of a common humanity so as to stimulate empathy. It does this by breaking down complex and abstract issues, and by generating discussion to promote reflexive engagement and critical thinking, with a view to instilling a respect for human rights. This can only be a long-term strategy.

In discussing the role of the reader in the reception of fiction, I rely on the reader response theory which sees the reader as an active participant and meaning maker in the reading process. I draw from the work of Green and Brock (2000), on transportation theory, which proposes that readers are more transported into a story they recognise as familiar. Green and Brock also recognise that transported readers are both more positively inclined to a sympathetic character and more likely to change attitudes towards topics raised in narrative which is transportive. This was particularly useful for me with regard to understanding the importance of writing to evoke certain reactions from my potential audience, with a view to promoting awareness about human rights in them.

This thesis has been developed through an iterative writing process, in which both creative and academic writing have provided opportunities for critical reflection. It has been a journey of direction and redirection too, as

both approaches informed each other. There were times when I was working on my exegesis and discovered some new way or new thing to say creatively, and, similarly, while working on my creative work, I discovered something about the way I write or about myself – such as my reluctance to address certain issues. In this process I was guided, validated and challenged by the arguments of several of the scholars discussed earlier, in chapters two and three, who argue that stories need to be authentic in depicting the diverse social experience of readers. This is to help fiction inspire, humanise and empower, as well as to encourage understanding and empathy.

One of the difficulties I face in writing stories is the choice of what rights to illuminate and emphasise. Because human rights violations are necessarily difficult subjects in themselves, I find myself either unwilling to explore a subject truthfully because I feel limited by issues that could perpetuate negative stereotypes of a continent already burdened by them, or because I am unsure about subjects that could be problematic for my target audience. This is an audience for whom issues as varied as female genital mutilation, cyber bullying, resisting the lure of violent extremists in the name of jihad, or the need and right to basic necessities of health and education are just as relevant. Writing 'I am the Mau', and this exegesis, has been a journey of exploration.

My creative process was enriched by Patricia Leavy's work in the field of fiction-based research. She argues that fiction is a 'site to negotiate complex social and political issues' (2013, p. 29), and that its goal is to portray the complexity of lived experience or illuminate human experience; promote empathy and self-reflection; and to disrupt dominant ideologies or stereotypes (p. 38). I also drew from the examples of African fiction discussed in chapter four. In 'I am the Mau', I tried to 'give form to something abstract and poignant', Potter and Stonebridge's reference to the human person, by crystallising human rights issues and by creating the faces of those persons whose rights must be defended (2014, p.2). I set out to raise awareness about human rights in my fiction and so I created situations and characters around human rights issues or violations. For instance, in writing the title story of the creative work, 'I am the Mau' – a story which explores the

contradiction of a government seeking to protect a forest as a national resource only to create conservation refugees in the process – ‘Root Gold’ offered an example of how to use flashbacks to pace a story and sustain suspense. Thus, ‘I am the Mau’ (another nod to the work of Maathai), interrogates the tension between one’s right to a clean environment and to practise one’s own culture, and another’s to make a living.

Another issue that arose in the writing of this thesis was terrorism, which became increasingly relevant to my target audience. I sought to address the human rights issues and abuse caused by both state and non-state actors. Additionally, I sought to create an opportunity, in ‘Westgate: A Four-Part Story’, for discussions around issues such as the reasons for radicalisation towards terrorism. For this, I drew strategically from the work of several authors discussed in chapter three, both on creating evocative stories and in building descriptions using concrete details which allow readers to see into characters’ minds, situations and contexts. This last was with the intention of challenging readers to reflect on the lives of others and to ponder moral dilemmas.

In acknowledging the diversity of experiences in my target audience, I tried to disrupt stereotypes around issues of statelessness and namelessness as part of an effective human rights education. I suggest, in the story ‘One Last Breakfast’, that one does not have to be poor and powerless to be stateless, and that having wealth impacts on how one experiences statelessness. In writing this story, I was guided by Leavy’s focus on realistic dialogue to create characters that are authentic and who participate in believable relationships. Atta’s story ‘The Last Trip’ exemplified the strong characterisation of a sympathetic narrator involved in an illicit drug trade, and aimed to do the same for a high-ranking powerful official who loses her citizenship because of falling out of favour with a president.

I wrote several other stories in a similar manner, always cognisant that the stories were only representative of some rights, and that I could not address every human right meaningfully in one project. I wrote the first drafts of the fiction by letting ideas flow freely, almost unchecked, and I embraced the difficulties that came with that. It was only after I had done my analysis of the African texts that I purposefully redrafted the stories to include the

lessons I had gleaned. Between writing creatively and exegetically and allowing each mode to speak to the other, my critical thinking, reflection and imagination were greatly enhanced.

When I set out to imagine what human rights would look like in different contexts, I also imagined how I wanted my stories to be used. I envisaged a classroom environment in which the stories were shared and pondered on, and in which students were encouraged to share their own stories too. Beyond this collection and thesis, I would want to add teacher and student notes which include discussion-type questions aligned with the learning objectives and outcomes of a human rights education¹. The aim for these notes would be to create an opportunity for students to discuss issues directly, such as those that are relevant or topical, or rights they perceive as either being abused or denied in their immediate contexts. While working, I also imagined a situation where students were open to multiple perspectives, including challenging why I – or any other writer – may shape stories a certain way. In this environment, I would encourage students to seek commonality with those far away from them, both physically and in what they have experienced. The questions would be designed to encourage contemplation and critical consciousness.

This work was birthed in a moment of helplessness, after, in 2007, I watched a gross violation of human rights following an election dispute in my own backyard. In that helpless moment, wondering what to do and what my place was as a teacher, I found a desire to speak to high school students about human rights. I eventually found my voice as a writer, which became one way of perhaps making an ongoing contribution towards a culture which, I hope, will one day respect the rights of all persons. And now, when I stare at my hands, I find 'I am the Mau'. I know it is not enough, but it is a start.

¹ This additional work is unfortunately beyond the scope of this PhD, but offers future opportunities for research and practice.

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CREATIVE WORK

I am the Mau: short stories for young people

Kembo is Home

'Mwenda! Chokora! Kicha!'

The taunting was relentless. Kembo felt himself pushed to the ground. Two of the biggest boys in the school towered over him. More boys stood around in a circle laughing and yelling at him.

Kembo kept his eyes on the ground. He could taste something salty in his mouth, and he knew it was blood: he had become familiar with the taste of it. He had lost count of the many times his jaw had connected with the fists of Juma and Jim. This time the pain in his jaw was bearable, although he was more worried about losing some teeth.

Instinct told him not to look up. His eyes fixed on the gravel he was lying on. He hoped that if he did not say a word, if he did not move, the boys would all eventually get bored and go away.

'Get up, you chicken!'

'Stand up and fight for yourself!'

Kembo still did not look up. And eventually he was proven right. Getting no response from him, the crowd of bullies left to find some other more exciting prey. Kembo spat out the blood which had collected in his mouth, blew his nose with his right hand, and wiped his fingers on the ground. Then he raised himself up, patted himself down, and noted with dismay that his only good pair of trousers had ripped down the front to reveal what was left of the threads that once held together as underwear. Clutching his shirt where he had lost a couple of buttons, and picking up his bag, he dragged himself home. The pain in his heart was far greater than any bunch of bullies could ever inflict on him. He fought back tears. Big boys don't cry, he reminded himself. But then, Kembo was not an ordinary boy.

'Mama,' he called as he limped through the door.

'Mama,' he called again.

It was what ordinary boys did, they called out to their mothers when they got home. But Kembo was not expecting any answer. He carefully placed the plastic bag, which contained the only two exercise books he owned, in the corner of the room. They had been given to him by Mrs

Omollo, his English teacher. He used them for every single subject. He had trained himself to write in small writing and on every available space so his books would last the entire term.

His eyes swept around the tiny room he shared with his mother. She was seated on the mattress on the floor in the corner, running her fingers up and down the wall. She was muttering to herself as usual, but Kembo noticed that the *matutas* on her head were neatly done. Winnie, from the salon two doors away, must have had some spare time, as she did Mama's hair whenever she could. He liked it when Mama's hair was done. It made her look like a mother.

Kembo walked over to her and straightened her skirt. Then he used the edge of her *lesso* to wipe the drool off the corner of her mouth. He took her by the hands and said to her 'Kembo is home.'

'Kembo is home. Kembo is home,' she repeated to herself.

Mama's eyes were still pinned to the wall even though Kembo held her face toward him. He waited patiently for her eye movements to focus on him, even though when they did it was for just a fleeting moment before turning back to the wall. She would then smile before her attention waned. He buried his face in her hands for a moment. Mama's hands were soft. Clean and soft. Too soft. How different life would have been, had she the ashy grey and calloused hands of the many women who broke stones all day in the quarry!

'How was your day?' he asked her, again not expecting a response. His mother continued running her fingers up and down the cement wall.

'Kembo is home,' she was saying.

'School was fine,' he lied to her. 'Everybody is so nice and so helpful.' He swallowed hard. He wasn't sure how much she understood, but he did not want to say anything that might upset her.

'The *githeri* is ready and we should eat soon,' he said, not waiting for a reply. 'Sorry, today we will eat it cold.'

He set about dishing the *githeri* he had cooked a few days ago into two plates. He noticed his mother was fidgeting and so he promptly stopped what he was doing and went and took her hand.

He helped her stand up and led her out to the courtyard towards the toilets.

'Come on Mama,' he encouraged.

Mama Njoki was fanning her *jiko*, and, when she saw them, she quickly came over and took Mama's hand. The neighbours knew Kembo by name and they had taken it upon themselves to keep an eye on both him and his mother.

'Let me help her, okay?'

Kembo gratefully accepted Mama Njoki's help. He had been attending to his mother as long as he could remember. He never considered it strange to take his mother to the toilet or the bathroom. He was familiar with his mother's nakedness.

'*Asante sana*,' he murmured his thanks.

Kembo bent to pick up an empty *blueband* sachet. The stones he had swept to the corner were back on the pavement, obviously left there by the children who were playing seven stones. He was slightly irritated by them, although a part of him envied the kids their ability to play late into the evening. The courtyard was relatively clean. He swept it every morning before he left for school. Mzee Ishmael, the landlord, had agreed to have him clean all the shared spaces, including the bathrooms and toilets, in exchange for the single room he shared with his mother.

There were eight houses that opened onto the courtyard. They all looked alike. The window frames and doors still bore evidence of the light blue paint that must have brightened them up once, but sadly no more. The cement on the walkway had cracks and holes through which weeds consistently pushed. To the right, across from his room, a large *mabati* was held in place by a post to serve as a gate. There was a total of six children in this block, although behind them was another block that seemed to have many.

Evenings were abuzz with activity. He could hear children yelling and playing from the next block. Someone was cooking *chapati* and he envied the family that would be enjoying them that evening. He watched as one of his neighbours pushed himself through the gate, bowed low with a sack of potatoes on his back, in readiness for market day later in the week.

Kembo walked back to the house. When Mama Njoki arrived with his mother, she informed him that Mama Jimi had been looking for him a little

earlier. He liked Mama Jimi. He knew she needed help around the house, and usually he worked for her on the weekend, cleaning or weeding the garden. She paid him about 200 shillings, which was generous. Many times, she would also pack him some food or some old clothes for both him and his mother.

‘*Asante* Mama Njoki, thank you very much,’ he said quietly. ‘I will try to see her soon.’

‘Take care of Mama,’ she said. ‘Remember, call me if you need anything.’

‘Thank you once again,’ he responded, as he straightened Mama’s blanket.

‘Sit Mama Kembo,’ Mama Njoki said as she settled his mother on the blanket before she left.

‘Here is food, Mama,’ he put the *githeri* in front of his mother. ‘I need to go see Mama Jimi before it gets dark. I won’t be long and Mama Njoki is just outside the door,’ he reassured her.

What did Mama Jimi want? This was a Wednesday and she never had him do anything during the week. She insisted that he focus on his homework instead.

Mama Jimi lived about ten minutes away. He tried to jog but the pain in his shin bothered him. That was where he had been kicked earlier by one of the boys. He winced as he walked. He barely acknowledged the people who walked past him: his mind was on school and on the two more years he had left.

But he enjoyed learning. He particularly liked Mrs Omollo, as she was very patient with him and did not yell at him when he did not have a book. He loved the way she always said, ‘Give it a try, nothing is easy the first time’. But he understood that if he did not find money, his secondary education would be over by the end of the year.

He arrived at Mama Jimi’s house in a lot of pain, and the door opened just as he raised his hand to knock on it. Kembo almost keeled over at the sight of the person who opened the door.

‘I ... I’m ...’ his voice trailed off.

‘What do you want? Have you come for some more?’ thundered Jim, the bully from school.

‘I’m so ... sorry ...’ Kembo closed his eyes and braced himself for the blow that he expected would follow.

‘Is that Kembo at the door?’ Mama Jimi called from inside.

‘Eh ... eh ... are ... are you Kembo?’ Jimi seemed just as taken aback as Kembo was. He turned and yelled, ‘You mean this is the Kembo with the mad mother?’

‘Eish!’ His mother’s voice was sharp as she nudged her son out of the way. She lowered her voice to speak to her son but Kembo could hear her.

‘We don’t say that. She has an illness of the brain. Some sort of intellectual disability, they call it.’

Jim swallowed and kept his head down.

‘Come in Kembo,’ He heard her say. ‘This is my son, Jim. He goes to the same school as you. You probably have not met him. You see, he is in fourth form.’

She paused and looked a little puzzled at the two boys, who could not hide that they recognised each other.

‘Come in, come in,’ she urged.

Kembo had never met Jim at home before. Mama Jimi always said her son was away at football training, trying to be the next Samuel Eto’o. Out of the corner of his eye, Kembo caught sight of Jim beckoning his mother to go into the next room. They closed the door behind them.

Kembo looked around wondering whether he should start cleaning, like he did on Saturdays, or wait for instructions from Mama Jimi. To think she was Jim’s mother! And that Jim was in the next room! The thought made Kembo aware of the pain in his shin and he shuddered. No wonder Jim kicked really hard: must be all that football training. He looked around for something to lean on. He tried to lean on the sofa but straightened up right away. He took a step back and rested against the wall instead. His mind was racing, Jimi was Jim from school! He tried to keep his breathing even. He wiped his hands on his shorts and hoped Mama Jimi would not see fear in him. How could he explain it?

When the door opened, he took a quick step towards Mama Jimi.

'Yes, Mama Jimi?' He asked, clasping his hands and filled with an acute awareness of who the Jimi in Mama Jimi was.

'I've got guests tomorrow,' Mama Jimi said. 'I need to have these floors scrubbed thoroughly. You know where everything is, don't you?'

'Yes, Mama Jimi,' he replied.

Kembo picked up the red bucket from behind the kitchen cupboard. He half-filled it with water and sprinkled a little soap on the sitting room floor. He went back to the kitchen for the old towel with which to dry off the water once he had finished scrubbing.

Kembo crouched on the floor with a brush in his hands, glad that he had something to keep them from trembling. How could someone as lovely and kind as Mama Jimi have a son like Jim? Kembo scrubbed harder than usual, and he was busy working when two familiar feet stood in front of him. The same boots that had kicked him right in the ribs a few hours earlier. Instinctively, he covered his head with his hands and shut his eyes tight. He held his breath.

'Here, I brought you another towel,' said Jim, and dropped it on Kembo's head.

Kembo did not respond. He waited a little longer before opening his eyes. And no, it did not come. Not a kick nor a blow. He shook the towel off his head. Jim's feet were about to walk away when he heard Mama Jimi come into the room.

'Brush for you, Jim,' she said.

'But I don't want to do this. Why do I have to clean?' Jim asked.

'We have just spoken about this. It would be nice for you to start doing more around the house. Get on with it.'

'Isn't that what you are paying him to do? This is so unfair!' Jim's voice was little high, which surprised Kembo.

'Your choice, you can either help out now or miss football on Saturday.'

Kembo kept his head down during the entire exchange. Slowly, he relaxed his grip on the scrubbing brush. It made his heart a little glad that someone could make Jim do something he did not want to do.

'I am not scrubbing! I will only dry,' and with that Jim grabbed the towel he had dropped on Kembo moments ago and got to work in the corner.

Mama Jimi watched them for a while, and, with a small smile at Kembo, she left the sitting room.

They worked in silence. Kembo scrubbing. Jim drying. When Jim ran his towel over parts that Kembo had not scrubbed, Kembo said nothing. He went over the spot

'What are you doing?' Jim sounded a little angry.

'Your mother wants every spot scrubbed,' Kembo said simply.

'So why didn't you tell me you hadn't scrubbed that end?'

Kembo did not answer but shrugged his shoulders instead, to loosen his muscles a little.

'Huh, you really need to learn to speak up. You have a voice, use it.' Jim sounded a little irritated.

'That bit is done,' Kembo said, and turned away to begin working backwards from the door towards the centre of the room. He took his time cleaning the grout lines on the tile floor. Then he shuffled backwards, only to bump into Jim, who went tumbling into the bucket of water and onto the floor.

'*Shenzi!*' Jim swore out loud.

'Sorry, sorry, I am so sorry,' Kembo said, over and over, while reaching for Jim's arm to help him up.

'I can get myself up,' snapped Jim.

'I am really sorry, I really didn't mean to ... I didn't see you. Sorry, sorry ...'

'How many sorrys are those?' Jim raised himself up to a sitting position. 'Is that a record for you?'

Kembo was confused. Jim had not raised his voice. Had not called him names. He had an odd look on his face. Kembo quickly looked away, unsure what to expect.

'Bravo Kembo, you finally knocked me down! We are now even.'

Was that a touch of a smile at the corner of Jim's mouth? Kembo was really confused. He did not respond.

'Here, help me up now,' Jim asked, his arm outstretched.

Kembo took it but he didn't have to do much as Jim pushed himself onto his feet. Jim towered over him with a quizzical look in his eyes.

'You are only little, aren't you?' Jim finally said.

I am the same one you squash daily, Kembo thought, but he did not dare say that out loud.

'Let's finish up here,' Jim said and picked up his towel. There was something new about the way Jim spoke to him. The usual venom wasn't there. They worked on in silence until the work was done. When Mama Jim walked in later, if she noticed anything unusual about the two, she never said a thing.

'Thank you so much Kembo. My back doesn't allow me to clean floors and so I am extra grateful to you. Thank you again.'

Kembo thanked her too, with a slight bow and with his hands pressed together.

'I will pay you on the weekend, Kembo, I hope that is okay with you,' she added. 'But here, take this home to your mother,' Mama Jim put a plastic bag in Kembo's hand.

'You better hurry up now, I know you must have homework.'

Kembo thanked her once again and turned to walk home.

'Kembo,' Jim's voice called out to him.

'What, no *kicha* or *chokora* this time!' he wondered to himself. Just his name. It sounded strange hearing his name uttered by Jim. He was accustomed to the name calling but never the sound of his own name.

Kembo stopped and waited, unsure what to expect. Jim ran up to him.

'About school ...,' he hesitated, 'it will never happen again. No one will touch you. I'll make sure of that.'

'Okay.' Kembo was still not sure how to respond, so he kept it simple.

'Goodbye,' Jim said, 'and *maze*. I'm sorry.' He said this softly, sounding rather embarrassed. 'I don't know why I do it. Maybe it is because I can, I just can.'

'Okay,' Kembo said again, and this time he managed a weak smile.

He turned and started walking home, his step lighter and the pain in his shin bearable. As he walked away, he glanced into the bag to see what Mama Jimi had packed for him. It was a *lesso* and a blanket. Mother would

love it, he thought, as he reached in to feel the blanket. He also touched something wrapped in plastic. He quickly drew it out and what he saw made him stop. Kembo stared at a pair of new black and red striped underwear. New undies! He knew they were for him even though Mama Jimi had not mentioned it. With shaking hands, he peeled off the wrapping and then brought them to his nose. He drank in the newness of them. As he inhaled a second time, he couldn't help tearing up. Sometimes it is okay for boys to cry, he told himself, as he quickened his pace home.

This story explores the right to: feel safe; be treated fairly; not be harmed physically, emotionally and mentally; food and shelter; and to education. These rights fall under the following articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 25: (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

One Last Breakfast

They say when problems come, they bring along all their relatives – a saying that was to bother Zuri for a very long time afterwards. But for now, the breakfast table was laid out in abundance. Mother's favourite white-patterned tablecloth was draped over the table, and the usual toast and jam and margarine were at the centre. The kettle of tea was to the left. Plain mini pancakes sat invitingly in front of Zuri. She looked up at her mother, who was silent before a bowl of her favourite millet *uji*. Zuri did not need to be told that the baked sweet potato and green mango slices were intended for Father, and, laid out before Yared, was a plate of four rhubarb muffins, each with a sprinkling of brown sugar, his favourite. The children were excited as they sat down, as the table of favourites had set the tone for the day. Yared reached out for a muffin, only to be stopped by Mother.

'No. I mean, just wait. We need to em ... eh give thanks. I mean, let's take a moment.'

Father's eyes were already closed, which surprised Zuri. Mother only ever prayed when they had guests around, and, even then, it was only with the religious kind. 'Zuri, Yared,' Father said his eyes still closed, 'How about one of you give thanks, right?'

Zuri had her eyes and mouth sealed tightly, knowing that her brother would have no choice but to pray. She heard him recite, 'For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful, amen.'

'Amen,' everyone murmured. Except for Zuri, who said 'Amina' a fraction later and a little louder. They ate in silence for a while. Were they celebrating something? Zuri wondered as she set upon her pancakes. The question could wait.

'Children ...' began Father. He hesitated. Then he opened his mouth again, changed his mind and was quiet. Then he said, 'Um, we ... you know what, enjoy your breakfast.'

Zuri reached out for a muffin, only to have her hand slapped away by her brother's territorial hands.

'I think it is clear, *these* are mine!' Yared dropped the muffin he was holding to protect the other three with both hands.

'Mother,' Zuri cried.

Mother ignored her and blew on a spoonful of hot porridge. But, instead of putting it in her mouth, she brought it back down to the bowl.

'Mother! Yared won't share!' Zuri's voice was a little louder.

'I shared a womb with you Zuri, and I am sharing nothing else,' said Yared.

'Quit that old argument. Trade for one of my pancakes, then?'

'Two, but only for half of my muffin.' The glint in his eye showed that he believed he was the superior haggler.

Zuri dropped a couple of pancakes on his plate and quickly snatched a whole muffin while simultaneously raising her feet, a learned reaction from one too many bruised shins. Yared was either slow that morning or the muffins weren't as great as they looked. Father was chewing his potato loudly, and the consequent irritation from Mother wasn't forthcoming. Zuri was not sure why that disappointed her a little. She tapped her brother with her left foot, then tilted her head slightly to get Yared to look at their mother. He did so and shrugged.

'So, what is this about?' he said to no one in particular. 'Father, what is going on?' he insisted, when he got no answer.

'Yes,' added Zuri, 'is anyone going to tell us what is happening?'

'Enjoy your breakfast,' Father said and reached for another piece of potato.

'Are we even going to school today?' Zuri asked. It was only then that she noticed Mother had not bothered to undo the nightly *matutas* that kept her hair disciplined while she slept. Her lower lip was dry and ashy too, and twitched constantly.

Yared raised his head and began to nod to what Zuri assumed was music in his head. Then he sung out a line of his own version of 'O happy day, O happy day!'

Zuri rolled her eyes at her brother and turned to Mother, 'Why do we have our favourite foods?' she asked.

'Cook made breakfast,' was all Mother said.

'Is someone dying?' Zuri continued, dreading each answer.

'You always assume the worst,' Yared said.

'Do I? If you weren't so busy gobbling food you would notice that no one is talking,' Zuri said.

'These muffins demand to be masticated with grace!' Yared held up a tiny bit of left-over muffin between his thumb and index finger, and then brought it up close for inspection. 'Hmmm!'

'Masticate that!' Zuri raised her voice and slammed one of her mini pancakes onto his plate.

'Yared!' Mother said, but not with her usual yelling voice.

'But I didn't do anything!' protested Yared. 'You always take Zuri's side.'

Zuri leaned in closer to her brother and lowered her voice a little, 'See what I mean, Yared? She didn't even look up.'

Father dropped his half-eaten sweet potato back on the tray. Then he pushed his plate away so his hands could rest on the edge of the table, and both his middle fingers began the tap tap which signalled silence. Usually Zuri would tense up, secretly hoping it was her brother in trouble again. This time Zuri knew it was different. She looked up expectantly and so did her twin. Father reached out to his left to touch Mother's hand, but she recoiled slightly. His hand went back to position for the next lot of tap tap tap.

'First of all, no one died, so lose the looks,' he tried to smile. But the twins knew it was a dishonest smile, as, still, their mother did not look up. She blew some more on her porridge. Just then Cook walked in with a tray of something, but Father waved him away.

'It's been good here, hasn't it?' Father asked, looking around the room.

Zuri nodded, noting that this was by far the best home they had ever lived in. She had loved that, when they moved to Limuru, she was finally able to have a bedroom to herself. Most of all she loved that she did not have to lie to friends at school about why they could not come over to visit. She couldn't have them knowing that she shared a room with her twin, a boy twin.

'Oh no, are we moving again?' Yared's question was a plea.

'But we only just got here, Dad, you can't do this to me again,' Zuri said. 'We haven't even had one Christmas here! We all love it here.'

Especially you, Dad Remember you said this was the most perfect room you had ever been in?’

Everyone loved the dining room, especially Father, as he could point to the tea bushes that started just outside their compound and spread like an unending wavy rug of greenery into the distance. Father would remark about how incredible it was to enjoy a cup of tea whilst surrounded by tea.

‘Kids, at 14 you are old enough to understand that the nature of Mother’s job requires that we move, and move often.’

‘Yeah, that foreign attached thing you keep telling us about,’ said Yared.

‘You would think a word like attached meant you were actually attached to something,’ added Zuri.

Mother finally spoke up: ‘It is pronounced a-ta-shae, foreign attaché.’ Her voice was a little croaky that morning. ‘That is going to change now,’ she added. ‘This,’ she said, pointing around the room with the spoon which still had porridge in it, ‘This is ... this will ...’

‘What your mother is trying to say ...’ Father began to explain.

‘Do not speak for me, Wes,’ Mother snapped at Father.

‘And do not talk to me like that or call me that.’ Father’s voice was controlled.

Zuri looked from one parent to the other and didn’t like what she saw. So, they *were* still fighting from the night before!

‘Daddy, you have never really told us why you don’t like your name.’ Zuri found Yared’s foot under the table and then mouthed to him, ‘Come on.’

‘Yes, baba, we would like to know.’

‘That is a story for another day,’ replied Father.

‘But you always say that,’ Zuri argued back.

‘Kids, this is not really the time for that.’ Yared seemed to accept Father’s explanation and went back to his muffins, but Zuri, sensing and dreading that another row between her parents was about to erupt, chose to stay on topic.

‘Is there ever going to be a time for it? Mum, you heard Dad promise us that last time, didn’t you?’ Zuri turned to her mother, who, with just a look, got Dad talking.

Father downed a glass of water and then cleared his throat, and the children knew immediately that what was to follow was a formal speech. The kind he only gave when Mother was present.

‘At 14,’ he began, ‘maybe you two are old enough to hear this. When I was your age, when I was 14 ...’ Father paused for a moment to acknowledge Mother for the mug of *masala* tea she had placed in front of him, before bringing it up to his nose to inhale loudly. ‘How incredible is it that we get to enjoy the tea grown on these highlands that surround us? One word, Yared’ he said, encouraging Yared to lean forward and smell it.

‘Astringent,’ Yared announced, proudly to his sister, confident that she couldn’t top that. She scowled back at him and said ‘spicy’ when her turn came.

Father sucked in the aroma of the tea again and said, ‘Simply perfect. The tea bushes for miles around us – perfect.’ Getting no reaction, he continued ‘Oh, where was I? Oh yes, my name, the name “Wes”, er ... I wasn’t always called that. You have heard the expression “given name”?’

‘Oh yes, that means your first name,’ Zuri chirped up.

‘In my case, I literally gave myself a name. I can’t tell you how many times I have apologised to myself when I introduce myself with it. “Wes” is my post-1994 name.’ Father cupped his mug of tea with both hands. ‘I have spoken often to you about 1994, haven’t I?’

Sensing rather than hearing the seriousness of the occasion, the twins nodded. Not even Zuri could voice a response.

Father uttered something in Kinyarwanda, before adding ‘Drowning in a sea of forgetfulness.’ After a small pause he declared more forcefully, ‘Children, I am the son of a Tutsi.’

There weren’t many things Zuri envied her brother for, but watching him sit up at the mention of 1994, eager to devour the story with the same fervour he did action movies and war tales, Zuri knew this was one of them. Only Yared would see the genocide as another episode in a *Horrible Histories* show! Since the day Mrs Onyura had walked into class and written down three numbers – 1994 - 800,000 - 100 – that date had come alive. It had proceeded to climb onto her shoulders, from where it spread its tentacles around her neck. Hearing about the genocide from Mrs Onyura had filled her

with an urgency that no one could know she and Yared shared Rwandese blood. In class she had looked across the room to her twin, willing him to read her mind and say nothing, because Yared rarely passed up an opportunity to volunteer information that he thought was relevant to a lesson. *Please don't say we are Rwandese, please don't say we are Rwandese*, she sent her silent prayer via twin telepathy. It worked! It really worked! Maybe he too was weighted by their ancestry?

But now Father was speaking, and they were not in a history class anymore. Zuri felt a slight shiver go through her, she inhaled a small breath and clutched the edge of her seat. Father had spoken often about the genocide as something that happened in his country, but this was about him, and about them.

'I am the son of a Tutsi. You know what that means?'

Yared nodded slightly, although he looked confused. Zuri held on, praying that she wouldn't hear what she feared were going to be the next words out of his mouth.

'Was Babu a ...' Zuri did not want to name it.

'No! No, no, he wasn't. Your grandfather was a good man. But he had a brother, the one by his second mother. He was the one involved in the ... killings.'

'He was more than involved. He was one of the chiefs,' Mother said flatly.

'Viv, can I tell this – *please!*' Father said, with the quiet emphasis on 'please' which usually shut Mum up in any argument. 'My half-uncle carried our family name, and, after the war, the name was easily one of the most hated in the country. And so, like many sons of the Tutsi, I adopted a new name. "Wes" was random enough. I was not looking for anything meaningful.'

Father poured himself another cup of tea but did not drink it. Everyone waited for him to continue.

'I also gave myself a new story, and eventually a local Burundian girl.'

He gave a slight smile in Mother's direction, but her focus remained on her *uji*, and her hand snatched away before he could reach for it, as he often did when he referred to her as his Burundian girl.

'I became Burundian. I never mentioned being Rwandese to anyone after that. And that brings us back to what I ... um ... what we need to speak to you two about today.'

Zuri picked her fork and stabbed at a piece of pancake.

'I'll let your mother ...' Father's voice trailed off as he brought the cup to his lips. His eyes settled on Mother.

'President Nziza has made changes for some diplomatic missions. Ours is one of them, and I won't be working for the Burundi embassy anymore.' Mother said this without much emotion and then waited for the confused silence to abate.

'So, we don't have to move then?' Zuri finally dared to hope.

'No Zuri, not in the way you think. Right now, it is not clear what we are meant to do. There is some complication.'

'As long as we do not have to find new friends, I am cool with that,' Yared said.

'You don't have to go to school today,' Mother announced, and was pushing her bowl away when Father spoke up.

'No Viv, the whole truth. I do not think ...'

'I think that is enough for now.'

'No, I warned you against him, now look what has happened. We have to tell them now.'

Father's voice rose as Yared's eyes dipped. He generally quietened down when he thought their parents were going to fight, but not Zuri. She always planted herself in the heat of every argument. She enjoyed the way her parents banded together when punishments needed to be handed down to either herself or her brother. Right now, she needed to feel that they were together.

'Who are we talking about?' Zuri asked.

'We can do this together, or I can tell them without you.'

'Kids,' Mother looked at Yared and then to Zuri. 'Remember Mr Moddy Mbare?'

'Uncle Bare!' Zuri spoke up brightly.

'He isn't your uncle. Is that clear?'

Father's voice was that of a man exhausted with patience. He held up his hand and waited for both his kids to indicate they agreed. Yared's head, though still bowed, nodded slightly. Father's face muscles looked larger.

'The president says Mbare has been plotting against him,' Mother's voice remained flat.

Zuri glanced at Yared to see if that made any sense to him, but she couldn't read him.

'How, what do you mean?' Yared asked, barely audible.

'Uncle B ... er Mr Mbare was involved in a coup against the president,' Mother's voice wasn't raised nor did it sound angry. This confused Zuri. It all seemed important, but what did Uncle Bare have to do with them that morning?

'Involved?' barked Father. 'He led the bloody coup!'

'Bloody is not a word we use in this house,' Zuri echoed her father's words without thinking.

'What I mean is that it was bloody, really bloody. People lost lives. And now we are about to lose ours.'

The children gasped.

'No. Not "our lives". I mean our livelihood.'

'What ... why us? Mother, were you involved too?' When Yared said this Zuri knew her brother was scared. The less he wanted to know something, the lower his voice got.

'No! No. President Nziza has a list of people accused of ... no, I mean of those he considers to be Mbare's supporters.'

'Mummy?' Zuri was getting really scared.

'Yes, I am afraid I am on that list. He is my friend. That is all.'

Questions stumbled out of Yared, 'Is that ... er ... what does ...?'

'That mean?' Mother finished the question for Yared. 'It means that our Burundian citizenship has been revoked.'

'And ...' both Yared and Zuri asked.

'It means we do not have a nationality.'

'Is that possible? Can he do that, just take away your nationality?' Yared asked.

Mother shrugged. 'Apparently he can. It has happened before, Idi Amin did it to Asians in Uganda in the '70s.'

'But we could stay here in Kenya, couldn't we?'

'Not if we do not have the right papers.'

'But does father also lose his citizenship?'

'Anyone on the list and their entire families. That also includes you two.'

'Meaning what?' Yared asked.

'It means you lose your passport. You cannot go anywhere,' Zuri said, trying to explain. 'Does it also mean we cannot stay? Are we now going to be like those Kakuma refugees you see on TV, are we ...?'

Yared had to raise his voice above his sister's, 'But dad still has his Rwandese passport, right?'

Father did not respond immediately. Mother had gone back to blowing on her *uji* even though it was no longer steaming. Zuri knew there had to be a lot more going on. She looked at her father again, searching for a clue, but found nothing. Zuri and Yared found each other's eyes. Perhaps it was a twin thing, but as the children looked around, surrounded by their favourite food, panic began to set in for both of them at the sight of Father, who seemed smaller in the moment. His shoulders were a little stooped, probably from the 'weight of three decades of flight', Zuri thought – a phrase she had heard used before between her parents. Just the night before, Zuri had heard Mother scream about being tired of hearing it. She mouthed to Yared to say something even though she knew he wouldn't do it, especially if she was the one telling him to.

Finally, Zuri asked, 'Daddy, is this what you were fighting about last night?'

'What?' Her father's voice was sharp.

'She heard you and Mama last night,' Yared blurted out, a little unusual for him. 'She was in your bathroom using Mum's makeup,' he added quickly.

Zuri did not correct him, as she imagined she would be in less trouble for using makeup than for using the phone Mother had confiscated from her

earlier in the day. Father's eyes were harsh on Zuri, making her want to shrink into her chair until she was no longer visible.

'You might as well tell them,' Mother's voice interjected.

Zuri held her breath, willing Mother to tell her off – anything but this mood she was in today. Father's fingers began tapping on the table again, then he shuffled his chair back a little, opened his mouth, and shut it without a word escaping. The same thing happened again. Zuri had never seen Father this undecided about what to say. Imagining herself alone in a sea of homeless people, perhaps in Kakuma or on the streets of Nairobi, Zuri gripped her hands – each was holding the other captive, trying to control the panic that was rising in her. She didn't want to hear what Father had to say but she knew she had to. She focused her gaze on his mouth, and, as each word left his lips, she imagined herself back at Kasarani House, sitting in the front row, watching fascinated as a magician pulled an endless string of handkerchiefs out of his mouth.

'My own father bequeathed me a debt to society I have never been able to repay,' Father began. 'And now I am about to do the same to you, my Yared and Zuri.'

The children sat transfixed as Father's voice and words took on a strangeness they hadn't heard before. Yared and Zuri looked at each other, and then to Mother, bewildered. What father was saying made no sense. When Father spoke, he always intended to be heard and he got really angry if it seemed anyone was ignoring him. This time he didn't sound as though he really cared: it was as if he was talking to himself. What did his past have to do with their being stripped of citizenship? And why now? Zuri's mind was racing, and it was only by stopped by the startled crockery, which rocked when Mother brought her fist down onto the table.

'Rwanda *is* an option,' she said between clenched teeth. 'Things are so much better there now. It is an amazing place but you refuse to even consider it. God, you are so stubborn!' Mother's voice was rising. 'Wes, Rwanda has to be an option. Your past be damned! Damn you!'

'Let's not forget that you, you and your friends have damned us!' His pointing finger was now directed at Mother.

Tears began to well up in Zuri. Father saw them and immediately his voice dropped.

'Listen to me *tata*, you too Yared. I will admit to you both, I have lived a life of fear. Not for me, but for what could happen to you. My family in Rwanda is associated with evil doers, and, who knows, someone might want to take revenge someday. You see,' at this point Father paused to make sure both kids were following him. Then he reached for their hands, '*Tata*, Yared, the past I was running away from, um ... er ... is here. How can I put it? It is a shadow. It creeps. It fills and wraps around everything I do, and, you know, my God you know, that it is only a matter of time catches before it catches up.'

Glad that Father was holding onto her tingling hand, but her voice still breathy, Zuri turned to Mother for sense, 'Mum, homeless, are we homeless now?'

'Stateless,' Mother clarified simply.

'Homeless! Stateless! What is the difference?' Zuri broke off, and also broke off from Father's grasp to bury her face in her hands, only to have them pulled away. She was in Mother's arms.

Yared suddenly spoke up, 'Can someone please explain what "stateless" means?'

'It means that you do not have a legal bond with any nationality or any state. It means you have no identification papers and no travel documents.'

Zuri could hear Mother's voice above her head explaining to Yared.

'So, a refugee then?'

'Not necessarily, Yared. Being stateless can make you a refugee, although many refugees have a nationality. Being stateless means you are not a member of any country. So, for now, we are stateless. We are not Burundians anymore.'

Not Burundians anymore! Zuri rolled the thought over in her mind, trying to make sense of what it meant. Did being Burundian have a feeling? What would it feel like to not be one? They had been Burundians in Kenya and in Tanzania and the Congo. There was also the six months they spent in Uganda. She had been Burundian the whole time they moved. The only difference had been the size of the house they moved to, and that they had

picked up a lot of Swahili whilst in Tanzania and could now confidently speak it. Changing schools and making friends were the hardest things she had had to do.

‘How long have you known about our being stateless? Have you been lying to us?’ Yared’s voice broke into her thoughts.

‘Yared, watch your language!’ Father was harsh.

Yared raised his hands in mock surrender, ‘Alright then.’

‘We were only notified about our situation yesterday morning. We have not had a lot of time to think things through,’ Mother answered.

‘I don’t want to leave here. I want to stay here. I want things to stay the way they are,’ Zuri’s voice rose and cracked at the same time.

‘Zuri, enough!’ Her mother snapped at her.

Zuri’s eyes widened as they did when she was startled. It was the loudest mother had spoken at the table that morning. When their eyes met, Zuri saw something in her mother that was not anger. Of that she was sure. But she decided to ask anyway.

‘Mum, are you angry with me?’

‘No child, sorry. It is this situation. It should not have happened.’ Her eyes fixed on Father, whose gaze turned heavenward as a small click escaped his teeth.

The twins exchanged a panicked look but, Mother caught the clandestine exchange. She tried to smile at them. ‘Don’t get me wrong. It is a very serious problem we have, but we are a little fortunate. We do have friends and we do have ties in this country. That should make it easier for all of us. Could be worse, but in our case it is not.’

The twins looked at each other, wondering if they dared to hope. Parents always downplayed serious situations.

‘First, we will apply for a nationality. For now, a Kenyan nationality seems the best option. We have been here for a few years now.’ And then, almost inaudibly, Mother added, ‘That should count for something.’

Mother paused for a little while longer and took several more sips of her tea.

‘It won’t be easy but it is something, an opening. I do have a lawyer friend and he will know how to advise us.’

The longer Mother spoke, the more she sounded like herself. She seemed to know what to do. A little gladness began to creep into Zuri.

‘How long will before all this is sorted out?’ Yared asked.

‘Hard to say if and when that will happen,’ Father replied. ‘But meanwhile we will try to keep things going normally for you two – maybe even keep you at the same school. But if that is not possible, promise me one thing kids.’

‘Yes?’ The twins sat up sensing the urgency behind the question.

‘Stay open to the possibility of a different experience, whatever that is.’ Father took his time finding the eyes of Yared then Zuri. ‘As long as we are together, we will be fine.’

‘What if ...’

‘Not going to happen,’ Mother cut her off in a quiet voice that Zuri found reassuring.

There was quiet for a while. Zuri reached for another pancake, then stopped herself. Would this be the last time she enjoyed a plateful of pancakes? Would Cook come with them if they had to go and live in Kakuma? Surely not. She had seen refugee families on TV, huddled around small tents or queuing for their daily ration of maize and beans. Maize she was okay with, but beans – urgh! Maybe she could trade with Yared, his maize for her beans? She looked up to see him helping himself to Dad’s potato. He didn’t even ask! How could she go back to sharing a room with him? No, a tent! Would Yared want to bring all his soccer balls with him, would they even be allowed to take anything with them? Her books? What if all four of them had to share one small tent? Would they, could they? Being with both Mum and Dad so close together did not seem so bad. But what if several families had to share the same small space? She shuddered. Zuri reached across to pick a slice of mango off Father’s plate, but her hand brushed past the *uji* jug and it tipped over. ‘*Woi!*’ Nobody moved. Not even mother jumped up to get a cloth from the kitchen. All eyes settled on the thick *uji*. It then began to spread its dark redness ever so slowly over the patterned white cloth before becoming immobilised as well.

Article 15: (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Vote Bahati x2

Aririririri ... Arie wee murenik ...

Jenga was nodding his head to the music when he became aware that the excitement had kicked up. There were more claps and ululations; DJ Kenda had the microphone and had danced his way to the centre of the room. Almost everyone was on their feet and writhing to the beat. A dancer was chanting as she led Bahati onto the dance floor to join DJ Kenda. Soon they were joined by a dozen women, who danced passed the duo as they formed a circle, tapping them on the shoulder as they did so.

Men, be men!

Men who are respectful, men who are lithe, men who are solid and brave in the soul.

DJ Kenda's voice filled the room. Bahati and DJ Kenda were face to face, both their arms out and puffed up in a mock aggressive spur like two roosters ready to do battle. Laughter and clapping rang out from the crowd, followed by more stomping of the feet, as they waited to see who would blink first. Inevitably, it was DJ Kenda. He had the microphone and had to keep up the singing. The crowd was on its feet, screaming Bahati's name. They were here to celebrate him. He was the new Member of Parliament for Keiyo. Jenga wanted to be proud of his brother, but he couldn't find it in him to be so. Then, someone sidled up to him. He sensed rather than saw her. Something jumped in him.

'Are these the *murenik*?' A familiar voice asked.

'Yes, Sally. These are the men,' Jenga replied. It was best to make his answer simple and hopefully keep emotion out of his voice. He knew Sally was mocking his brother and possibly him too. He was both irritated and pleased that she was there.

Next in the 'cockpit' to face off against his brother was the man they referred to, simply, as T9. He seemed rather awkward in the traditional garb he had chosen to wear, and when Jenga saw him he remembered how small he was. He watched T9 close the gap with exaggerated high steps to take on Bahati. Today, Bahati seemed to stand taller. Victory could do that to a man, but somehow, he still could not dwarf T9, who only came up to his chest. T9's

steps were larger and quicker, and his feet were more limber. He even sang louder. When Sally excused herself to go speak to someone else, Jenga sat down and leaned back a little in his chair and narrowed his eyes for a moment, as he listened to the crowd echo responses to DJ Kenda's questions. Victory, they agreed, was theirs. But victory really only belonged to his brother, Jenga thought, and he most definitely did not share in it. The people would soon understand, when they realised Bahati was not the selfless individual he claimed to be.

'Who accepts this fate? Who accepts this victory?'

The women challenged in song a response to DJ Kenda's assertions. Jenga's head nodded to the beat, but his being rejected what DJ Kenda claimed.

'Who accepts this song? Who accepts this celebration?'

Jenga watched his brother Bahati enjoy the dance in acceptance of the great day. Bahati's smile was particularly broad – it pervaded the rest of his body, making him seem more lither as he swayed his hips, moving forward and backwards, with fists clenched in power, to the call of the drummer. Bahati beckoned to Jenga a few times to join him on the dance floor, but each time Jenga declined.

'Men be men!'

Still dancing, Bahati came up to Jenga, beating his chest and challenging Jenga onto the dance floor. Jenga shook his head.

'If you don't dance at my party, I won't be able to dance at yours. Come on, let's have some fun.'

'Huh! You think this is what I want?'

'Everybody wants this,' Bahati said, looking around with a proud grin on his face.

'Even if I did, I would do it differently. I wouldn't be lying and intimidating voters.'

'Little bro, you need to get over yourself,' Bahati closed in, to within an inch of Jenga's face. 'We Bahatis are the same. Keep up the sullen looks and you will scare away supporters. From what I see, you have no problem enjoying the lifestyle that comes with being a Bahati.'

Jenga turned to walk away but Bahati grabbed his arm.

'I am pointing the way to the stars for you, and all you can see is the tip of my finger! Get real, Bro!' And with that Bahati danced away, no doubt to find worshippers to make him feel great again.

Jenga stood there a little shaken. Bahati's success was just going to fuel the arrogance and entitlement that had defined him as long as Jenga could remember. His mind went back to the afternoon when he had just turned ten. That was only six years ago. He had accompanied his brother to the licensing centre to fill in the paper work for a driver's licence.

'Your ID please,' the person behind the desk had asked.

'What ID?' Bahati questioned.

'You need to prove you are 18 in order to apply for one.'

'But I don't have one yet.'

'Sorry, I cannot help you then, young man,' retorted the person behind the desk, before looking over Bahati and inviting the next person in the queue to come through.

Bahati, shrugging his shoulders, nudged Jenga as they made their way to the back of the next line marked 'Identity Cards'. Judging by the length of the line, Jenga supposed they would be waiting for another hour. But as they settled themselves for the long wait, another official walked over to them and escorted them out rather roughly.

'There is another way,' the official said, his tone a little softer than his manner was.

'What, how?'

'TKK?'

'Huh?'

'*Toa Kitu Kidogo*'

Jenga was puzzled. What did having to dish out something small mean, and what was that something? His brother seemed to understand. This time it was Bahati leading the official aside as they spoke in hushed tones. Jenga watched them disappear around the corner of the office. Ten minutes later, on their way home, Bahati was flashing a driver's license in Jenga's face.

'This can't be real.' Jenga reached for the card and examined it closely. It looked no different from the regular ones.

'You can get what you want if you are willing to speak a different language. Learn from me bro. Let me point you the way to the stars.'

Bahati had sounded very grown up that day. Jenga looked at the man that his brother had become and a wry smile escaped him. His brother had learnt a whole new language that got him whatever he wanted. 'Money talks,' Bahati often said, and boy could their mother's money talk! Jenga wondered why, if Bahati really believed that money spoke, his fists had to do some of the talking as well. He had a whole team of supporters who also spoke the same languages. Both money and fist had brought him to this day, the day after the elections.

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'Keiyo County has a new boss!'

Some politician Jenga had no interest in was making a speech.

'Keiyo county has a new boss,' Sally's voice mimicked the speaker.

Jenga flashed Sally a look of irritation, but she countered it with a smile that unnerved him completely. It was not that he disagreed with her (and even when he did, going toe to toe with her often exhilarated him). But he always did his best to contain his excitement. Right now, she was the only thing that made this afternoon of celebration remotely special. Her proximity did things to him he did not want to name.

'Yes indeed,' he managed to say calmly.

'Question, does Bahati know how to be a boss, or will Mama still be in charge?'

God, she was annoying! But she was there. That was all that mattered. He looked at her and tried to shrug off the question, but her eyes challenged him to respond. What could he say? That Bahati had made the leap from most popular in school to Member of Parliament on the wings of the family name? He bore that name too, but for now it was his brother who was MP. Bahati was the new boss. Thanks to Mother, who was the bigger boss. He looked around at the orange and green décor which reflected her party colours. There were a host of elves weaving through the revellers with trays of samosas and a variety of barbecued animals on skewers. With Mother, everything went according to plan. When someone who couldn't hold

his drink crashed into a server with a tray of wild rice destined for the buffet table, all Mother did was look in that direction and people were scampering and the floor was clean in moments. Now that is what you call a boss! If Bahati thought he could command like that, he was in for a shock. All he had ever commanded was a band of agreeable comrades who were loyal to his mother, and now he was about to lead an entire county! Knowing his brother as he did, that was not going to stop Bahati. His brother loved titles and adoration, and he loved being called Boss.

Jenga had heard a young voice call out to his brother, just two days ago, 'Boss, can you spare a shilling?' But Jenga had not looked at the speaker, and instead had brushed him aside. One couldn't walk five minutes in that part of town without some child begging for money or food. The campaign had led them to the west end that day, and Jenga had tagged along to watch some of the other members of the team. Bahati stopped to talk to a little boy who was begging for coins, before dropping a handful from a height above the boy's head and onto the pavement. The sound of coins hitting the ground was enough to attract a lot more boys to the spot.

'Settle down please,' T9, the head of their team, took charge of the commotion.

Jenga watched in fascination as T9 formed a circle with his index finger and thumb, then brought them to his open mouth for a full-powered whistle. As usual it never failed. The small crowd of kids scrambling for change were soon swallowed up by a bigger crowd made up mostly of young men.

'How many of you have your IDs?' T9 asked, when he was finally satisfied with the size of the crowd.

Jenga was confused. What did he need IDs for?

This was supposed to be an ordinary campaign day, a meet and greet to encourage people to go out and cast a vote the next day. As was typical of Keiyo, once a crowd gathered, it doubled every two minutes thereafter.

'If you have an ID, I got a job for you,' T9 was explaining. 'You must first show them to my helpers, these ones dressed in orange shirts.' He paused to point out three of the team members. 'They will collect them.'

Almost immediately, there was a mini stampede. But the bouncers-for-hire insisted on seeing the IDs.

'What job does he have to offer?' Jenga asked one of the team members, as they ushered those with IDs to the side.

'You'll see,' was the reply.

Jenga shrugged and walked a few feet away from the main group. He needed a bit more air and was rather uncomfortable with the pushing and shoving among the young men. He noticed a few girls in there, equally as determined to get to the main leader.

'Do you have yours?' A young man who had just donned a T-shirt with Bahati's image on was asking him.

'My what?' he wondered.

'Your ID. If you show them one, you get 200 shillings.'

'Really! Are you going to vote for Bahati?'

'No way!' his voice lowered, sounding conspiratorial. 'This is Lelmet zone, no one here is voting for Bahati. We will collect a T-shirt and 200 shillings. We will feast on Bahati but our vote, our vote is for Lelmet.'

'So why do you do it?'

'When else can we eat the rich?' The young man retorted.

Jenga watched with renewed interest – he must warn his brother not to waste his resources here. As they were walking away, he thought to tell T9 about what he had learned.

'I am afraid this morning has been a complete waste.'

T9 winked at him and did not seem moved by his revelation.

Jenga was bothered by his attitude. 'Do you not care because it is my brother's money and not yours?'

'As a matter of fact, it was a very productive day.'

'How so?'

'Kondo?' T9 called to one of the team.

'Yes?' Kondo said as he caught up.

'Show this young man how it is done!' T9 said, placing his hand heavily over Jenga's shoulders.

Kondo opened his bag and revealed what looked like hundreds of identity cards. 'We got more in the car.'

'But ... I don't get it.'

'Without an ID, Lelmet gets zero votes. They won't be able to vote for the opposition.'

Jenga walked on, trying not to be impressed.

'But won't they need their IDs later on?' He turned to ask T9.

'Of course. After the elections, we will bring them back. We could drop them at the chief's office or some other place.'

'Will they all get their IDs back? What if some go missing?'

'Nothing is going to happen to the IDs. But if one does, too bad! They already got some money anyway.'

'Isn't that a little cruel?'

T9 stretched up to draw Jenga close. The strength in T9 forced him to stoop.

'One day, this may also be you running for some office. You are a Bahati. Have you learnt nothing from your family? There is more than one way to win a vote. If you cannot get them to cast one for you, you simply take away their ability to cast one at all.'

That was on the eve of the elections.

*

'Men be men!

You must leave the compound so the children can eat!

Don't graze around the home like a woman!

Jenga looked around to see how Sally would react to the mention of women, but she wasn't there. She must have danced off.

The singing got louder, the dancing more vigorous. DJ Kenda issued challenge after challenge to a crowd that gleefully echoed a response. When the drumming rose to a peak, T9 had Bahati hoisted onto the shoulders of two of their team members. The motion was swift, the beat unbroken. More ululations followed and Bahati's grin spread to its widest. T9's torso swayed to the music but his arms remained extended like a choir conductor. His eyes never left the men carrying their boss and they too kept their eyes on T9. That kind of focus was admirable, Jenga admitted to himself, refusing to think about what kind of a price his brother had paid for it. The men held their

focus until T9 whistled a series of brief high-pitched musical sounds, and then they swayed all the way down to their knees, so Bahati could climb off their shoulders. T9's next lot of whistling pealed in jubilation above the singing and drumming.

That whistling took Jenga back to the first time he met T9, in one of Bahati's team leaders' briefing sessions. It was Jenga's first one, and it came when he was home from boarding school for the December holidays. T9 had walked into the sitting room whistling *daima mi ni Mkenya mwaninchi mzalendo*, a patriotic song that soon had everyone humming along; it set an inspirational tone for the session. That day, T9 had headed straight for Bahati's briefcase, one that nobody, not even Jenga, his own brother, was allowed to touch. T9 had picked it up and laid it on his lap and there it had remained for the duration of the meeting. *Fedha House* is what they called the briefcase. 'The money house indeed,' thought Jenga, what a cute name. The briefcase was always full of cash and almost always attached to T9.

'Today, we plough thorough Iten, Keiyo and Singore districts,' Bahati addressed the six-member team of leaders. 'Yep, we get up for days like this. It is going to be a tough day. Today we go into enemy territory.'

Nobody else spoke as Bahati laid out the plans. Jenga was a little excited to be included in Bahati's business. He looked around the room at the leaders. They seemed to be around the same age as his brother, which meant they were in their twenties. Jenga had been surrounded by politicians and campaigns all of his life, but this was the first time he had been included in any plans. He was excited about what duties Bahati was going to give him and so, when his brother beckoned him, he had jumped to his feet.

'Little bro, today I want you to stick to T9. He will tell you what to do.'

'Today we separate the men from the boys,' T9 said, looking into his eyes. 'What are you?'

'Of course, I am a man.' Jenga was a little ticked that T9 would think otherwise.

'*Mundu ku mundu!* Man to man all day.' T9 said to everyone.

Their first stop was Singore, aka Lelmet's Stronghold, aka Enemy Territory. Jenga had never been there before. He looked on, enjoying the

promise of adventure that lay ahead. It had to be good, the campaigners were urging themselves on and reassuring each other of support.

'It is the chest or the chest, just do it!' T9 reiterated as he stuck out his chest and struck it with his right fist clenched and his left arm raised to display the treasury chest. He also turned to Jenga with a quick 'you are my man today'. That comment was accompanied by something that was almost a smile.

'Our battalion will be at the market,' T9 told the crew, 'so let's make a move.'

The market was always full of idlers, regardless of what day of the week it was. T9 led the group of four young campaigners through it, and was about four stalls in before he stopped and spoke on a microphone. This was enough to draw a crowd in. T9 spoke while Bahati stood behind him.

'Ours is brief. It is to let you know that Bahati is it on Monday. You are all familiar with Mother Bahati as the mother of the county. She served us well. And who better to take over from her than one who sat by her side all these years and understands how to look after the county? Your choice at the next elections will be to stand with Mother Bahati, which means you must stand with Bahati her son. A name so powerful, he was named it twice. He will bring prosperity because he understands what your needs are. Lelmet may tell you that he has the experience, but we know his type. He says he will bring prosperity when he cannot afford to build you a pit latrine. His many years of learning have never earned him success and now you want to trust him?' T9 challenged the crowd.

Jenga listened to the stump speech. It was simple and even he had heard it many times before. It praised their mother, tied her success to his brother and ended with the demonisation of Lelmet and the opposition.

'Vote Bahati x 2! Now T-shirts for all'

The team members, visible in their orange shirts, were positioned strategically around the market. They held out the party T-shirts like matadors to a bull as the crowd charged in.

'If you do not vote Bahati, we will be back to collect what is ours,' claimed one of the other men on their team.

Jenga was a little startled. Were they allowed to say that? He had not heard his brother give such instructions.

'Our battalion does not take kindly to being made fun of by anyone,' another team member was saying, in lowered tones through clenched teeth, to another stranger.

A woman who dropped the T-shirt she had been scrambling for seconds earlier suddenly walked away. Curious, Jenga looked up to see her retreating into the crowd. He also noticed that T9 had followed her, and was speaking with his face close to hers, while his right hand held her fist. As usual, the briefcase never left his arm. He wondered what T9 was saying, as the woman was obviously unimpressed. She shook herself off and walked away to her stall of cabbages, which was piled high and neat.

Jenga was about to turn away when he noticed about four boys descend on the cabbages and start to throw or kick them around as though they were footballs. But the woman said nothing. She did not try to stop them. Why doesn't she fight back? The woman kept her arms protectively around her front. That is when he noticed the baby strapped to her with a *lesso*.

'Hah! What are you going to do?' One of their men was taunting the cabbage seller. 'Tell the police?'

'This is our county and Keiyo has its owners,' said another supporter.

'Best to remember that elections have consequences, we shall be back!'

The taunting was fierce. Jenga stood still and only later realised that he had let things unfold as though he was watching it on TV. He had neither opened his mouth nor attempted to help the cabbage seller. These were his brother's men and he knew some of them by name. He turned away, shoulders slumped. He had a few things he wanted to say to his brother. He squinted out into the crowds and down the stalls, hoping to see where Bahati was. There were more Lelmet portraits hung around that market than he had seen in other campaign grounds where Bahati's image was dominant. But his brother was a much more powerful candidate and the battalion did not hesitate to remind the people of that.

'The bull shall not be overcome by a mosquito,' one of their team yelled out.

'Like you have never tried to go to sleep with a mosquito buzzing in your ear,' defended a rather brave boy.

'Know your enemy my brother, before more rice is lavished at your funeral than you ever saw in your entire miserable life!'

Jenga tried to say something but nothing left his mouth. The frightened eyes of the woman with the baby had him in a grip. T9 had come from behind him and tried to nudge him to get his feet moving, but his feet seemed to have forgotten how to.

'Bahati Junior, listen,' one of his brother's men was saying to him, 'these people understand the game and they are probably putting up a fight to try and get more out of our treasure chest.'

'That's why you must use your chest to show them who is boss,' another added.

Jenga remained in shock, wondering if the so called Bahati Battalion went to a special school to learn to say these strange things.

'But isn't Bahati in the lead anyway? Is this necessary?' He finally found his voice.

'He is, but we have to make sure that he stays that way. We cannot let a mosquito edge us at the finishing line. T9 lowered his voice so only Jenga could hear him, 'I prefer not to part with any money, if my fist can do the job.'

That was only a couple of days before the election.

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Jenga knew the celebrations were going to go on all afternoon and into the night. He wanted to leave, but Mother would forbid it. *We must show a united front!* Typical, and how convenient for her. She only ever thought of unity when it had to do with her precious Bahati, the one she named after both Father and Grandfather, Bahati Bahati. Who names a child with the same two names? Jenga fumbled with his phone, and began to make his way out for some fresh air, when he bumped into someone, and knocked a stick to the ground. He reached out quickly to steady the person and noticed it was one of the *wazee*. Gee! Was he still alive? He must have been 150 years old!

'I am so sorry,' he said, picking up the stick and placing it gently in the man's hands.

The *mzee* smiled at him and shuffled away. Jenga watched the gangly figure wearing a blue *Vote LeImet* t-shirt make his way to one of the side tables. There were rows of them that lined the sides of each wall. By nine o'clock tonight, the place was going to be transformed into a disco club for the younger crowd.

'I see it is not beyond you Bahatis to knock off the opposition,' Sally had sidled up to Jenga now.

'Hey,' he said, trying not to sound awkward.

His eyes were drawn to her mouth and the lips touched by fresh dark-maroon lipstick. She was smiling just enough to reveal the gap in her front teeth. His fingers itched to trace the outline of her beautiful face. He had known Sally for a very long time. Their families had been friends for as long as he could remember, but this fluttering in his stomach whenever she was close to him was a new experience.

'Hi,' she said flatly.

'Are you enjoying yourself? DJ Kenda is truly something, isn't he?'

'So, you got him to perform here. Congratulations, if that is what you want.' She replied rather abruptly.

'Thanks, but is there a problem?'

'Is this satisfying for you?'

'Sorry, I don't follow.'

Jenga knew she could be brutal when she chose to. He liked her abrupt nature. She was outspoken and did not hesitate to criticise any of their friends.

'Okay, let's talk,' Jenga said as he led her away to a spot furthest away from the loudspeakers.

'So, what Bahati wants, Bahati gets!' She stated this without attempting to conceal her contempt.

Jenga did not disagree. His brother had been quite successful in just about everything he had put his hand to.

'My brother is a smart man, Sally.'

'He must wear his brains on his fists then.'

‘What are you talking about Sally?’

He feigned ignorance. He wasn’t sure which incident she was referring to and he did not want to volunteer unnecessary information. Sally was sixteen, just like him, but she often made him feel like a little boy. It was most infuriating. She wore her hair short and twisted into tight locks, so refreshingly different from the long weaves worn by her friends. Sally’s father was the Police Commissioner of Keiyo County. Jenga often saw him at his brother’s campaigns, but Sally rarely accompanied him, and so he had been particularly thrilled she was there on the night when both their families met for dinner at the Eldoret Club. They had both been seated in the dining area beside the swimming pool.

‘Here’s to the MP of our great county,’ Sally’s father had toasted.

‘Not yet,’ Bahati had replied.

‘Like they say, confess it and you will possess it,’ Sally’s father had encouraged. ‘There is no doubt in my mind that you will win this thing. It is our turn.’

‘Yes, our turn to eat indeed!’ Sally had retorted.

‘Sally!’ her father had been quick to admonish her.

‘But it is true. All you people want to do is get power so you can eat!’

‘You will respect your elders,’ Sally’s mother had reminded her quietly, as she kept her gaze on her plate of chicken and chips.

‘*Bwana* Commissioner, ready for tomorrow?’ Bahati asked Sally’s dad.

‘Yes, there is talk of rain and so we will need to use the Land Rovers. They are the only ones that can conquer those hills and the off-roads.

‘Thanks. That would be fantastic.’

‘I will have them all fuelled and ready for you. I will put it down as OB,’ he said, as he winked at Bahati.

‘Official Business, my foot!’ Sally scoffed. ‘You people are all the same.’

‘Sally,’ Jenga said, a little startled by the genuine look of disgust on Sally’s face. ‘No, no, Sally, I don’t ...,’ he began, but a look from his mother silenced him. He had wanted to say, ‘*I am not like my brother, I am not like them.*’ But instead he had bit his lip and nodded to what his brother was saying. Bahati was echoing their mother’s words about there being only one

way to power, and, once there, one could actually do some real good. 'A little wrong now will allow you to do a lot more right later on.'

'So what if we lose a few kids to malaria? Or children of teachers eat every other day? By all means let's get Bahati x2 elected.' Sally did not flinch despite the daggers heading in her direction from her parents.

Jenga envied Sally for the way she spoke her mind. He couldn't remember the last time he had been able to do that. She had strong sense of right and wrong and never hesitated to voice it. His had slowly been eroded though, and whenever he became aware of wrongdoing, there was no more indignation left in him. Somewhere along the way, Jenga had accepted that wrong things will happen from time to time, and so he had sat there and pretended it was normal to use government resources to pay for the election of Bahati Bahati. With Sally at the same table, he couldn't help but feel a lot smaller.

That was the week before the elections.

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'Tell me Jenga, does Bahati always get his way?' Sally was still waiting for an answer.

The music was picking up again. Jenga mouthed that they needed to step outside. He led the way to the side doors by squeezing through the dancing bodies, keeping his hand raised for the congratulatory high fives and only pausing briefly to pick up two soda cans.

Outside, it wasn't the bite of the October sun that got him, but the purple of the jacaranda trees in full bloom.

'Isn't that beautiful!' Sally remarked as she caught her breath, loud enough for Jenga to hear.

'Absolutely,' Jenga agreed.

His eyes were on her and he was a little relieved that she had moved the conversation away from his brother. He took a tiny step back so he could watch her more fully without catching her eye directly. Large Jacaranda trees lined the driveway leading to the club house, their darker faded leaves on the ground an invitation for the barefooted. The family had rented out the large room for Bahati's election victory party, and so confident were they of his

election that the room had been decorated two days in advance. The Bahatis never lost. His mother had served two full terms and now it was his brother's turn.

He turned to look at Sally, whose gaze and gentle smile still rested somewhere atop the riot of colour that was the jacaranda. How did she find peace with a dad whose job as Police Commissioner required that he remain neutral in politics but was unashamedly biased with his support for the Bahatis? At least she got to voice her disapproval, even if, when she did it, Jenga felt slighted too. Were her disapproving words and looks only a façade? They both knew they had benefitted greatly by their families' proximity to power. But they were only sixteen, how much responsibility could they possibly bear for their families' actions? His brother had won but he wasn't holding out to see if anything good or meaningful came the way of the Keiyo people. It was what it was and he could do nothing about it.

But he could do something about the opportunity standing right by his side, even if Sally exuded a confidence which unsettled him. He steadied himself and inched closer to her so that the hairs on his arm brushed against her. There was a shine to her skin that invited him to touch, but courage failed him. She was close enough for him to smell her and he liked it. He wanted to tell Sally how beautiful she looked on that day and every day. He took a deep breath.

'Sally, I ...' he began, and then stopped, surprised by the shakiness of his own voice. He popped open his can of soda and took a huge swig.

'Yes?'

'Sally, it is not true about my family.'

'Uh huh?' Sally's eyes narrowed just a little.

'That what we want, we always get,' Jenga said.

Shenzi! He swore at himself. He was the one who was now talking about the Bahatis in politics, a topic Sally had shown disdain for. *I am not my brother*, he wanted to tell her. He opened his mouth to defend himself, but instead a cola-infused burp rode out of him thunderously. It came in three waves, each louder and longer than the last. Horrified, he turned to excuse himself, only to find Sally's grimaced face. It took a moment for him to realise

that Sally was trying to contain a laugh. He let out a sigh and she raised her hand to high five him.

'Best one yet! Never heard one quite like that.'

'I guess I just won at something. I am a Bahati after all,' giving himself a thumbs up.

This time, when the laughter came, it was mutual. Perhaps she had not really sought him to ask if his brother always got his way. Jenga found that comforting. He could feel the knot he had carried in his stomach through the campaign week begin to unravel, only to be replaced by a different kind of knot that he knew had everything to do with the girl standing next to him.

It was at least another five years until the next elections. Hope bloomed inside of him.

This story explores the right to democracy. From the UDHR:

Article 21: (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

JM on Excursion

'Let this day be kind to you, Jane-May,' her grandfather had said in his customary goodbye when he dropped her off at school that morning.

'JM,' she corrected, irritated at her *kuga*.

He was the only one who called her by her full name. Everyone else called her JM, which she liked and insisted on. She stood on the sidewalk and watched the Land Cruiser drive away. Many more cars stopped as students hopped out and waved their goodbyes. JM was fascinated by cars and she loved to count the 4WDs and she kept a mental tally of them. She would wait at the driveway till the bell went before she dashed to form class.

On this day, JM was feeling a little jittery. When the bell went, instead of turning away to walk to class, she crossed the road and ran to catch the city-bound bus. She was barely in when the bus began to move and she could feel herself shoved forward by the bus conductor who was trying to fit in twice the number of passengers than the bus was intended for. JM positioned her schoolbag just in front of her and held on to the top rail for support.

'Stop pushing!' she said to no one in particular, rather enjoying the energy the bus exuded. As they got closer to the city, she became hopeful that she would find a seat, maybe even one in the back so she would have a full view of the commuters. She closed her eyes to enjoy the yelling and the conversations and the smells around her.

'You still owe me change, what do you think, I can't count!'

'You have taken me too far, idiot!' someone was yelling at the driver.

'Sorry, the bus had a puncture. So sorry I will be late,' another was lying over the phone, probably to her boss.

Living in Elgon Range with very few neighbours in between, JM had grown up feeling isolated. The Sigilas lived on a huge property on the edge of Lake Victoria, where the setting sun danced off the face of lake and bathed the entire front of their home. It was the quietness of home that made her long for the raucousness of city buses and the city markets. First period must have started by now, she thought reaching into her bag to grab her *Apple* watch. She had kept it hidden because Mother did not let her take it to

school. She had bought it in Dubai on one of her mother's overseas work-related trips. But sitting in the *matatu* got her skin tingling. She was excited at the prospect of doing something her *kuga* would kill her for. But she could handle him – her mother not so much. She skipped school every so often and spent the day at the movies or window shopping.

When the bus stopped in front of Equity Bank on Koin Street, she hopped out. She did not have specific plans for the day. Today, all she wanted to do was drift from shop to shop. She had her mother's just-in-case-of-emergency credit card, and she was sure a midday thirst for Fanta pineapple would constitute an emergency. Looking in through windows at jewellery and shoes, JM strolled leisurely through the mall. She thought of going to the movies but decided to save that for after lunch, and instead she stepped into the computer shop to check out the latest gadgets. As she walked into the shop, past the security guard at the door, he whistled at her softly under his breath with a glint in his eye.

'*Salale!*' He remarked, '*niaje msupa!*'

JM was about to tell him what to do with his compliments when she caught herself and decided that could wait. *A grown man thinks he can treat me like this! Doesn't he care about my school uniform?* Although her blazer was slung over her left shoulder to hide the school logo, she was confident he knew that the brown, white and black uniform belonged to Kerio Vale School. She had to be quick. She waited till she saw a few people walking in and the security guard ogling one of them, then she swiped something off the shelf and casually brought her blazer down, so that it hung over her left arm to conceal her prize. She held her head high and was out the front door as quickly as she could.

Out on the pavement, it didn't require much effort to lose herself in the crowd. JM was smiling to herself, her excitement intensifying at the thought of getting away with it. She looked to see just what exactly she had gotten away with and YOINK! The silver item was out of her hands. JM barely had time to yell at the disappearing figure of a child. *Oh well*, she thought, *he must have been one of those kids who had made Koin Street home*. JM shrugged and was beginning to get the irony of it, only to walk into a big burly man.

'Hey, watch it,' she yelled at the man, who was already reaching around her. In a moment, she had been spun around, her right arm trapped behind her. 'Let go of me!' She screamed again in pain. But her captor was looking beyond her to someone else.

'Let go of my hand I said, you, you ... security?' Her voice wobbled as she noticed the dark suit with fluorescent letters which spelled 'Total Security'.

'Is this her?' The big burly security man who had her in a tight grip was asking.

'What are you talking about, let go of my hand!' She hissed at him.

'Definitely her, this one of Kerio Vale School.' It was the ogling security guy.

'Hmm. Even kids of Kerio steal? With all that money you pay in fees, couldn't your daddy buy you a camera?'

JM flashed an irritated look at him. *Maybe you are my daddy! Or that one over there, she thought, I will never know.* She turned back to the big one who was causing her pain. So, it was a camera she had taken! JM was almost amused, trying to focus on the present.

'No, I didn't take anything. You are mistaken.'

'A beautiful girl like you! That I cannot forget,' the ogling one continued, with a twinkle in the eye, perhaps satisfied that he had caught her because she did not respond to him earlier.

'Let's move it,' said the burly one, and with one hand on her right shoulder, he pushed her ahead of him, her feet barely touching the ground.

'Where are you taking me?' She struggled, alarmed at being manhandled.

'Back to the shop.'

'But I don't have anything on me?'

'Like that would matter,' chimed the ogling one.

'But seriously, search me. I haven't taken anything.'

Once in the shop, JM found herself led into a backroom. The burly one pushed her in without another word and locked the door behind him on his way out.

'You can't lock me up forever!' she screamed. 'You don't know who I am.'

The veiled threat must have worked as the burly one opened the door and popped his head around it.

'Your name?'

'Why should I tell you?'

'Then we will have to get your principal to come identify you. Next time, try not robbing us in your school uniform,' he snorted and he was gone.

And with that the door clicked. JM ran to the door and knocked hard. 'It's Jane-May Sigila. Please call my grandfather,' and, with more urgency added, 'Please!'

But this time, there was no response, nobody came back. She waited a little longer, hoping to hear footsteps. She looked around the room and for the first time noticed that it was larger than it looked. Brown boxes were piled up high to the roof. She stood at the door and looked across the room to see how far the boxes stretched, only to be startled by the sight of two children huddled in a corner. She stared at them wordlessly for a while and received the same treatment. She thought they both looked younger than her but not by much. *They too must have been caught shoplifting. I wonder what they took.* JM scanned the room for somewhere to sit before picking out one of the many boxes that had been strewn around. She took the one that was at the opposite end from the other kids. There was only one small window and they had taken a position by it.

The kids, who stared back at her at first, dismissed her almost immediately. They began to talk to each other in whispers, until, soon, they were chatting comfortably together. First, they were amused about a boy in their neighbourhood, then they moved onto something that happened on the streets. Eventually they noticed that JM was listening in on them, so they began to whisper again whilst stealing glances at her as though they were sizing her up.

JM wondered whether to say hello but eventually decided against it. One child was barefoot, and JM's eyes settled on the cracks in his feet. *Maybe I can fit a 10-cent coin in there, she thought. Maybe I will call him 10 Cent?* The soles of his feet looked a little like an off-colour yolk, like they had

been scrubbed hard and cleaned, and this only accentuated the dark cracks in them. They reminded her of the underbelly of the copper-coloured lizards which basked on her bedroom window sill. A slight smile touched the corners of her mouth at the thought, and as it did, she lifted her eyes to look at the kids, who whispered something to each other.

‘What’s your problem?’ She snapped at them.

They laughed straight at her.

‘Listen to her, trying to be boss yet she is just a thief,’ the bigger one of the two said.

‘I am not a thief!’ JM snapped back.

‘So, what are you doing in here then?’ This time 10 Cent spoke.

‘Mind your own.’ She stood abruptly and moved back to the door.

‘No one will come,’ offered 10 Cent.

‘I didn’t ask you.’

‘Unless they need a box of something for the shop,’ 10 Cent explained, dismissing JM’s rudeness. ‘They come in about three times before lunch. It is only a store room.’

‘How do you know? How long have you been here?’

JM clutched her bag to contain the panic that was creeping into her. She couldn’t possibly get locked up in a backroom for long. Her mother would know she had skipped school. Her *kuga* too, maybe they had called him already? *Oh God, I hope they have called him.*

‘How long,’ she asked again, ‘how long have you been here?’

‘Since yesterday,’ 10 Cent spoke.

‘Me,’ the other one was speaking, ‘since this morning. Not long before you arrived. I have been here before, in fact more than once. They keep you here till the end of the day when they lock up. Sometimes overnight.’

‘Without food?’ JM was worried.

Both 10 Cent and the bigger boy, who JM decided to think of as Other One, laughed.

‘What, you eat every day?’ 10 Cent went on, ‘This one here calls it the good jail.’

‘Don’t your parents get worried?’

The boys didn't respond immediately. 'They keep us here till the end of the day as there is no one to call,' said 10 Cent.

'Where are they, your parents?'

'First of all,' Other One volunteered, 'we don't have the same parents. And we don't know where they are.'

'How can you not know where they are?' JM asked. She moved slightly towards them, and, feeling awkward towering above them, she sat down opposite.

'Nice shoes. And jacket. And clothes.' 10 Cent continued to list as he checked JM from toe to head. 'Even good hair – washed and combed. No wonder you know where your parents are.'

'But still a thief like me,' Other One said, with a grin that JM wanted to knock off his face.

'I said I am not a thief. I took something. But it was only for fun. I am not like you.' JM stood up abruptly, her arms crossed. She moved back to the furthest corner of the room. The other two continued talking to themselves, saying gossipy things about JM with lowered voices, but she was able to hear them say 'Thinks she is better than us.'

I am better than you! JM uttered under her breath. *How dare you judge me!* She did not want to say it out loud as she was still unsure about them. JM wandered around and pretended to be studying the boxes with more interest than she had. The room looked like a mini warehouse with stock piled up to the roof. There was no ceiling, just the wooden beams that held up the corrugated iron sheets. She moved closer to the boxes and even closer to see the writing on them. Slowly, with her fingers tracing the words, she began to read the boxes, first to herself and then out loud.

'Von HKBT50JS/VSKT50 MNK Traditional Kettle 5.0L Cordless – Stainless ... KES 3,700

'Von VSTC05 MSX Blender, 1.5L Glass Jar, 500W – Black. Product Features ...'

'Kitchen appliances?' she wondered aloud to herself. 'Isn't this a camera shop?'

She was still absorbed in this activity when the door opened noisily.

'You, you of the Vale Kerio,' a deep voice shouted.

'Kerio Vale,' JM corrected.

It was the burly security guy from earlier on. JM looked at the other two kids, and was about to stick her tongue out at the older one as she made her way towards the door, when she was stopped.

'No, no, no! Just need to know your name.'

'My grandfather not here?' JM asked, mournful.

'Who said anything about your grandfather? We are calling your school.'

'It's Jane-May Sigila,' she said simply.

She was no closer to going home than when she first arrived. She paced the room a few more times. Then she read the boxes again for a little while, before making her way back to sit next to the other kids. She did not really want to talk to them but right now they were more interesting than reading instructions on kitchen appliances.

'You heard my name. I am JM. What is yours,' she began by looking at 10 Cent.

'I am Jose and this is Duma. I don't think he will say much to you. We met in this room.'

JM shrugged, '10 Ce ... I mean Jose, did you say you have been locked up in this room since yesterday?'

'Uh huh.'

'No food?'

'Uh huh.'

'Toilet?' JM was a little afraid to ask.

'The big one with a bald head comes and takes us out after four hours. There are some toilets behind the building.'

JM fell silent at that. Was this a prison for real? She looked at Other One and reminded herself that his name was Duma. It was then that she noticed that his brown shirt was about two sizes too small and had only one button, just above his belly button. The whites of his eyes were a little yellow and when he spoke his mouth widened, making his eyes appear smaller. She was about to ask him what he had taken to end up in 'jail', but then she decided to wait till later, when she was more at ease with him. She turned to 10 Cent instead.

'Why are you in here?'

'I don't know.'

Oh, the liar, she thought, rolling her eyes. But out loud she asked, 'Did you just wander into this room then?'

'The big one dragged me in. I was looking in the bin, the one in front of the shop. Sometimes they have oranges or over-ripe mangoes or even bread that has been tossed out. You know what I found some other time?' His eyes widened, 'I found a *mahamri* the size of my two fists! And they were still warm too! Right at the top of the bin,' his voice rose, a little excited. 'You know the one with *masala* in them?'

Eww! JM was thinking. How does one get excited over dumpster *mahamri*? And in that moment 10-Cent-I-mean-Jose became Mahamri in JM's mind. She chuckled at her own ingenuity.

'Go on, did you chase the *mahamri* all the way into this store?' JM asked getting more intrigued by the boy in front of her.

'No. I fell into the bin. Someone running past pushed me and I fell *ngung ngung* into the bin.' Jose's eyes rounded at the explanation before he tossed the top half of his body onto his lap to show how he fell. He straightened himself up with a big smile on his face.

JM smiled back, amused. *Did that explain the smell that was on him?* Bin or not, that smell he wore must have been with him for at least a month. He looked small enough to fit into a Nakumatt bin.

'I was trying to get myself out of the bin when I felt myself lifted completely from it. It was the *seguriko*.'

Seguriko! He must be from Ukambani. 'And just like that, the security brought you here! You mean you really didn't do anything?'

'That is what I just said to you. He said something about being tired of thieving little hands. But I did not do anything. They say I stole a camera. The *seguriko* told the other *seguriko* who brought you in that he thought I was the thief. *Aki ya Mungu*, I did not take anything, I swear it!'

As he swore to God, he touched his finger to his tongue and brushed it across his neck like he was slicing his throat, before lifting it high.

'I swear,' he repeated.

So, he did swear the same way JM did! She believed him but did not tell him so. She was enthralled by his animated hands. They did not look like a child's hands. *Would those hands even know how to work a camera?*

The door opened noisily then, and the ogling security man stood in the doorway, blocking it.

'You and you,' he yelled, pointing at the boys. 'Toilet, now!'

The boys scrambled onto their feet and were at the door at once. As the door slammed behind them, JM was a little shaken by the fear she had seen in the boys. And, with them gone, the room seemed larger and darker. JM suddenly stood up, unsure why, and moved closer to the door and waited. Her eyes swept across the room. There were boxes stacked to the roof. *How did they do that? Ladder? Forklift! Were they securely stacked? What was that, a rat! What if they all came tumbling down on her? If a snake crawled in, would anyone see!* JM shuddered and then forced herself to shake the thoughts out of her head. Oh Mum! Please come and pick me up. She considered going back to read the labels on the boxes but her feet did not move. She looked down at them, her left foot was lined up almost perfectly with the crack in the cement floor. She brought the right foot across, placed it heel to toe, and began to measure the length of the crack until she came to point where it split four ways. *Just where was that ogling security person?* She was walking backwards following the crack when the door opened again and she turned around just to see her fellow inmates thrown in and land a few feet from her.

'Jesus!'

She wanted to yell something else at the security man, but he had slammed the door already and was gone. She could not believe how vicious he was. The older of the boys picked himself up immediately and went and sat quietly under the window, his head in his hands. JM looked from one to the other. Jose was rubbing the left side of his head. JM reached down to help him but stopped half way, unsure.

'What happened?' She asked.

'Duma tried to escape but ... but ...'

Sour luck? 'Can I help you up?' She asked out loud with some awkwardness.

Still clutching his head, he told her no with a slight shake.

'What happened to your head?' she asked again and sat opposite him on the cement.

'That stupid stupid *seguriko* banged our heads together,' he said, pointing to the door. 'First he slaps me, now this!' Jose wiped goo off his nose with a clenched fist. 'I haven't done anything.'

'God no!' JM's voice wavered and she looked at the door anxiously.

'Don't worry rich girl, he won't touch you!' Duma said from the back.

That was not comforting to JM at all. Duma had not said very much to her directly. She was about to say something to him when the door opened again.

'You of Vale Kerio – now!'

She did not need to go to the toilet but she was not going to say anything about it. She made her way towards the door. The ogling security man was ahead, almost blocking the door while holding it open for her. Her heart beat a little faster than she liked. She looked back at the boys, their heads still clutched in their hands, and she picked up her pace. As she squeezed past the bully at the door, she felt his hand brush down her backside slightly. She looked back at him in disgust and caught his snake-like eyes winking at her. She hurried down the corridor which opened into the shop and straight into someone she feared a thousand times more than him.

Mother! Her mother opened her arms and, as JM walked into them, her mother's hands brushed past her shoulders and settled on her ear lobes. JM closed her eyes tight as she waited for her mother's fingers to burrow into her flesh. This time, when the heat in her ears began to build and spread, she rode the wave of pain comforted by the fact that the hands which touched her were her mother's. When Mother finally let go, JM opened her watery eyes and kept her head down.

'Apologise at once to the shopkeeper,' Mother was curt.

'I am sorry,' JM obeyed.

'Very specifically.'

'I am sorry I took your camera,' JM said.

'Use the proper word,' Mother was snarling.

'I am sorry I *stole* your camera,' JM said, struggling to not feel so humiliated.

'Out,' her mother pointed, and JM walked ahead of her into the waiting car. She was about to get into the front seat when she hesitated and turned to go back into the shop.

'Mum please, please.'

Mother let JM past. She ran back into the shop and into the back room to emerge a few moments later, barefoot and without her blazer.

'Mum, I will explain later, I promise,' JM said, heading towards the car.

'Nuh ... nuh!' Mother held out her hand to stop her. 'You explain it right now!'

'I gave them to my friends in the back.'

'What, was this a school excursion to come rob a shop?'

'No, they are not from my school.'

'Well, we are going back to get your things,' Mother said, and began to lead the way back in.

'Jose and Duma are *chokoras*.' JM's voice was a little raised.

Mother spun around to stare at JM with a flash in her eye which did not make immediate sense to JM.

'Hm,' Mother finally said, shaking her head and made her way around to the driver's seat.

JM followed. She braced herself for what was to come but nothing did. Mum just sat at the wheel, her hands folded across her chest. JM had done silly things in the past and Mum would either explode in her face or pinch her ears, sometimes both. JM sat on her hands to stop them from shaking.

'Mum, say something,' JM said when she could not take anymore.

But nothing.

'Let me explain, don't be so mad. Please.'

'Actually, I am more disappointed than anything else. Is there anything I have not done for you, JM?'

This time it was JM who could not find a suitable response. This was not the time to be truthful about what Mother had not done for her. She simply shook her head.

'Mum, I just wanted to be out of school. I am not a thief.'

'Yet you managed to steal something!'

And with that she started the car and they were soon merging into traffic.

'Where are we going, Mum?' JM finally asked when it became clear they were not headed in the direction of her school.

'I don't know yet. I need to get back to work. I can't take you back to school now anyway, the day is almost over. Plus, we still have to sort out your school blazer.'

'I can take the bus home. I will be fine by myself.'

'Fine?' Mother sneered, 'You just stole a camera!'

JM flinched. Is that how Mother saw her now, as a thief? *But I am not really a thief, it was a thing of the moment.* Her chin trembled as she felt a lump form in her throat. But she could not find the words to defend herself to her mother. It hurt that Mother thought she was a thief. Granted she had taken the camera to spite that hideous ogling security man, but that was not who she was. She wished Mum would believe her. *Why did grownups simply not understand?*

'Mum, I swear ...' She began to touch her finger to her tongue and was immediately reminded of Jose doing the same. He really had not done anything and she had. Who knows how much longer he was going to stay locked up in that horrible store room? She turned to her mother only to be met by a stern look and the words died in her throat. Her eyes watered.

'Look here, honey,' her mother said with a small sigh, 'I am not saying you are a bad person. You just did a very bad thing.'

JM sniffed. 'I know.'

'You could be in far more serious trouble.'

'I know, Mum.' Her mind went to Jose and.

'You know what happens to thieves in this town? What a crowd can do to them? You could ...' Mum's voice faltered. 'JM, you scared me today. You have no idea the risk you exposed yourself to by stealing.'

JM nodded and shuddered.

'What would have happened if someone had yelled out thief?'

'Street justice. People attack you.'

‘And it wouldn’t matter if you were guilty or not. You do not get the innocent-till-proven-guilty treatment here. You would have zero defence. You would be declared guilty on the spot.’

‘Mum, I know. I know,’ and if she had not been shaking so much, she might have noticed that her mother was shaking too.

JM couldn’t get rid of the image of Jose and Duma rubbing their heads together. And that darned ogling security guy!

‘Mum, do you think ...’ she began, and then stopped as she was unsure how to ask.

‘Eh?’

‘The two boys I was with, the *chokoras*. Do you think you can get them out too?’ She blurted out before she lost her nerve.

Mother was still angry with her and she didn’t want to make things worse by asking for any favours. Mother was quiet for a long while after that.

‘First of all, try not to call them that. I, too, lived on the street before your grandfather found me.’

JM’s eyes rounded in disbelief.

‘I will tell you about that another day. Right now, I don’t really know about trying to get your friends out,’ she said. ‘My own daughter just stole from them, so I doubt they will want to listen to me.’

‘But they listened to you before. You could just try. You are a parent. They will listen to a parent.’

Her mother hesitated before taking the next right turn to begin their way back to the camera shop.

A little unsure, JM took her mother’s hand. ‘Thanks for doing this. Thanks for everything.’

Mother gave her a quizzical look.

‘At least you are now thinking of someone else.’ Mother smiled a small smile at her.

JM was relieved. She knew Mother was going to be angry for a very long time, but for now she was a little less angry. When they walked back into the shop, JM stuck close to her mother. As Mother spoke to the shopkeeper, she stood behind her to stay out of his glare and to give Jose and Duma a better chance of release.

Her attention was drawn to the shelves of computers, laptops and smartphones which were lit up in intense visual colours. There was a row of watch display cases right next to the cameras. *Cameras! Urgh!* She cringed. Just then her eyes found the ogling security guard but his attention was elsewhere. She followed his cold expression to find it fixed on Jose who was outside at the window pulling faces at him. Jose was wrapped in her blazer, which came down to just above his knees, so that when he raised his shoulders with clenched fists, he looked like he was wearing a cape. That brought a smile to JM's face and her mood lifted. When Jose caught sight of JM, his face changed, and he grinned broadly at her and then waved before running off.

Bye Mahamri, she thought to herself, and stood there staring at the spot for a while, till her mother's voice told her that the boys had been let go shortly after she had.

'I know,' she said, almost to her herself. Gladness filled her. 'I know'.

This story concerns the right to; be considered innocent till proven guilty; to have security of person; to economic, social and cultural rights. *From the UDHR:*

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 11: 1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

Article 26: (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

An Infusion of Masala Tea

Salinda's phone sent out a message notification. She picked it up and barely read it before she jumped to her feet.

'Out! Out! Joanne, out now. He is on his way!'

She grabbed the two wine glasses, ran into the kitchen, tipped out their contents in the sink before giving them a quick wash and wipe, and shoved them into the kitchen cabinet. She screamed instructions to Joanne.

'Quick, empty the bottle. No, take it with you. Into your bag NOW!'

Salinda swept Joanne out of the front door.

'Thanks for leaving. Thanks for doing it for me,' she said.

Joanne hesitated at the door and gave Salinda a hug. 'You know I am not scared of my brother. I can handle him.'

'He's my husband. It's different. Bye Jo.'

'You need to get out more. Locked up in this house all alone like you are, you are going to go ...' she whistled the last word whilst making a circling motion with her index finger around the right side of her head.

Salinda slammed the door and leaned back against it. She took in a few good deep breaths. With her hand against her chest, she waited for her heartrate to drop. She knew she had the best part of thirty minutes between when he left his office and when he arrived home. She sent a silent thank you to Nduta, the cleaner at the office.

Salinda had never paid any attention to his office staff – well, not until that November day. For five months, Katwa would call and say something like, 'Darling, how about some steak for lunch today?' And she would have to drop everything and get his lunch to him within the hour. Sometimes he would say, 'Darling surprise me, lunch at 10.30.'

'Can I at least pack your lunch for you?' she had asked. 'You could take it in the morning and heat it up whenever you want to.'

'But darling, I need to see you. You are my wife. A wife looks after her husband.'

And she had gladly done it. Now she shook her head at the naive girl who had read that as love. It wasn't until much later, when Nduta told her about the uneaten plates of food she had had to empty, that it dawned on

Salinda her husband's demands were a way of keeping her tethered to him. All his other requests to bring stuff to his office – the spare set of keys, clean shoes, a book or folder he had left behind and other random items – kept her yoked to him all day. She had just about enough rope to keep her moving but was never able to wander too far off.

Salinda had hoped that, with the birth of their son, she would be free to be a mother and that things would improve between them. As expected, her son would bear her husband's name. Katwa Tugen was due to be born early the next year. So, it was in high spirits that she had knocked and, without waiting to be invited in, entered her husband's office to bring the lamb's liver he had requested for lunch. But Katwa was in a meeting with two other men, and she heard the words 'Kayole', and before she knew it words had left her mouth to the effect of 'Surely you are not thinking of condemning Kayole estate!' She was met with a stunning silence. The two men with her husband immediately stood up and excused themselves in a hurry, leaving by a side door that led back into the street.

'Katwa, who was ... is that ...?' She had seen one of the faces before.

Suddenly she was off the ground, and she felt herself slammed against the door. The palm of her husband's left hand was pressed against her larynx, and his face was right on top of hers so that with each word he spoke his saliva hit her with a heat similar to the splattering and spitting of simmering tomatoes.

'If you ever ... ever... presume to tell me how to do my business or intrude in on my meetings ...' The heat of his breath raced up her nostrils as she gasped for breath. With her left hand pinned behind her, her right rose to grab the fingers that were strangling her, but all she managed to do was smack his hand helplessly.

'Woman, you dare to hit me?' he asked in a voice that was to be scorched into her being forever.

The last thing Salinda remembered was the searing pain in her belly, right where his knee made contact. She had woken up a long while later, to a husband who was gently stroking her hand. Her half-opened eyes followed his hands to his face and his sparkling smile and then to his eyes – cold and accusing. She blinked away quickly. Beside her was a table with a vase of

carnations on it – Katwa’s standard gift. She looked past them to find that there were three other beds in the same room. Next to the beds were intravenous stands and drips and monitors. As it slowly occurred to her that she was in a hospital bed, her eyes went back to her husband’s, wondering what had happened. He brought his face close to hers so their lips touched lightly. He paused briefly. Salinda stilled herself as she waited for his tongue to assault her mouth. But he moved his lips along her cheek to find her ear, into which he whispered, ‘Darling, you killed my son.’

And now he was on his way home. Salinda looked around to see if everything was as it should be. She was standing with her back against the front door. Her eyes swept the white marble tiled floor – spotless. To her left at the base of the stairs were two chairs and a glass table. Just above them was his portrait. He preferred paintings to photographs. In this painting, his features were a lot more defined. With his military haircut, there wasn’t a hair out of place nor any on his face. Salinda envied him his clear skin, which, against his teeth, presented the contrast of a white-eyed black bean. The artist had captured more of the man and less of the brute, but the eyes couldn’t be manipulated. His eyes made her cold, they looked even more predatory every time she looked at them. She turned away, only to catch the same eyes reflected in the giant mirror with the gold frame which was mounted on the wall to the right of the front door. Her nerves shot, Salinda walked past the mirror into the guest bedroom. She sat on the bed to recollect herself. Her fingers traced over the delicate embroidery of a flower, a sun and half a house, an incomplete scene that she had stitched onto the white bed spread. They never had guests, not the kind that stayed over anyway, and *he* never came into this room. She had taken up embroidery when she was pregnant, but, after that November, she feared that the dullness she carried in her might tempt her to drive a needle into her eye.

The sound of the panicked booted feet of the watchman running to the gate told her he had arrived. Salinda stood up slowly, and, with her right fist, struck her chest gently three times as she released three short sharp breaths. She then took a long deep breath, rolled her shoulders outwards, tilted her head until she was facing the ceiling and exhaled slowly. Then she

walked out of the room and presented herself just inside the door to kiss her husband.

'Ah, Mylinda.' He greeted her with a soft touch of his lips to hers and then to her cheek. Standing there with her eyes level with his tie, he permeated her nostrils and then her entire being with his choking presence. 'I love you,' he would always say, with the discipline and emotional control he had been unable to unlearn in civilian life. It was up to Salinda to make sense of the greeting. Today she heard, 'I own you.' He put his arm across her shoulders and led her to the table right below his portrait room. She hoped he could not smell the alcohol on her breath. She tried to control her body from recoiling from him, but without much luck. His hold on her tightened.

He pulled out the seat that faced the front door. As soon as he was settled, Salinda went through to the kitchen and came back with two cups and a flask of tea. She placed them gently on the table and took her place to his left.

'You have a good day?' he asked.

'Yes,' she replied, as she poured him the sweet milky tea which was heavily infused with *masala*, just as he expected it to be.

'Was Joanne here today?' He asked, needlessly.

They both knew he knew everything that happened around her.

'Yes, she was,' Salinda replied, and then asked dutifully, 'Was business good today?'

'Yeah. Everything went as planned, as expected,' was his response.

Of course, Salinda thought, everything always goes according to *your* plan. Irritated and fuelled by the wine from earlier on, she tried to make conversation by discussing his work.

'So, you condemned a few houses today then?'

Silence.

Then he turned to face her and lifted her chin with his right index finger until her eyes found his. He leaned in close, until his *masala* breath was covering her, and she fought back the rising panic.

His left hand stayed resting on the back of her chair. She remained contained by his powerful earthy smell, and her head and shoulders dropped. Both her hands reached down to support the growing knot in her stomach. As

much as she cringed from knowing that he condemned government houses unnecessarily, so that he could buy them cheap and profit from the resale, she never worried about money: it was important to both of them that they looked successful. And, when her mother came to her, desperate and on the verge of being evicted by the bank, Salinda had appealed to her husband's pride. He had bought them back the house, the very home she grew up in, which was almost lost thanks to an alcoholic, inconsiderate father who had re-mortgaged it and squandered the money on his pleasure. She knew there had been other buyers for the house, higher bidders even, but she had been confident that her husband could get the bank to sell only to him. Though, in this one calculated move of generosity, her husband had extended his power to include her own family and her childhood home. Salinda cursed her father for giving her Katwa more power over her.

'Do your parents still need a water tank?' His glare baleful, he dismissed her like she was an annoying child.

'Yes,' she was barely audible. 'Please.'

Salinda watched as he reached for his cup and then put it down without taking a sip. He still hadn't touched his tea. He always insisted on steaming hot tea but rarely tasted it until just before a skin formed on its surface.

'Remind me about the tank later in the week,' he said.

Salinda knew he did not need reminding, he never forgot anything. It was his way of reminding her of his place in her own family's life. 'A man is lessened by the inability to provide for his family,' he would say. And, as a skilled puppeteer, he also worked the strings attached to that provision to make sure she never left him.

'Now, pour yourself some tea, Mylinda,' he instructed. She obeyed.

Salinda sipped her tea slowly, careful to not show her disgust. She dreaded the taste of *masala*. How her pregnant body had craved it! Now the whiff of the spice filled her with the empty sadness of the past. She sat there trapped between her husband and her cup of steaming *masala* tea.

Salinda watched Katwa to take her mind off the *masala*. He caught her eye and winked at her over his cup. Startled, she shifted her gaze to his hands. Those were not hands that had ever held a *jembe*. They were office

hands. They were soft and they were wrapped around the mug snugly, in the way they occasionally did around her neck. Katwa was right-handed, but when he punched it was usually with his left.

‘I want a divorce.’

What! Had she actually said it? She had indeed! Out loud. A thousand times, she had imagined saying those four words, and a thousand times her mouth had clamped shut. Today, and for some reason that eluded her in the moment, when she’d imagined those words, they were out of her mouth – of their own free will – and into the open. The words sat between them.

‘*Moita nyu,*’ he mocked, piercing her with the use of her mother’s pet name for her. ‘Don’t be a fool. You know not to test the depths of the water with both feet, don’t you?’

He downed his cup and was out of the room. Salinda sat motionless and without a sense of the passage of time. Her mind registered nothing except the car starting in the distance, which gave her the tiniest sense of reprieve. She had always expected that she would die before she ever uttered those words, but the furious beating of her heart reminded her that she was still here. And then, slowly, the tingling began. A warmth flushed through her, beginning from the tips of her toes, through her body, and into the tips of her fingers. She fought off the lightness in her head with little success.

But then the realisation came – and it bugged her. It had nothing to do with the fear that she had finally given voice to the unsayable. There was something else, something in what he said.

Only a fool tests the depths of the water with both feet. The words jolted her into some familiar place. Her father’s own words! A phrase her father had often used. The words were mocking her. How often had Father said that? When he was upset with Mother, only a fool tests the depths with both feet. When Mother challenged him, he had slapped her and told her not to be a fool, and not to test the depth of his waters with both her feet.

When those words left Katwa’s mouth, their familiarity had hit her harder than his left fist ever could. Why had she not recognised it before? Sitting across from the empty chair with his portrait right above it, Katwa’s face morphed into her father’s. She was looking at her father – hearing him.

A painful breath escaped her lips. She grabbed her cup and took a gulp of tea which she barely tasted. The words of her aunts and her mother's friends rose from the recesses of her memory. When Father had hit her mother, the aunties said '*Vumilia*. Be stoic.' When they nursed her mother's bruises, they said 'He is the head of the family. It is only a little discipline.' When she wanted to report him, they asked, 'Do what? And bring shame to the family!' But whatever else they said, they always said *vumilia*. *Damn you!* She cursed them hard – all the generations of womenfolk who had made *vumilia* their mantra.

Her husband was her father and she had become her mother. She had become what she swore she would never be. Something began to build in her, starting in the pit of her stomach. It was a ball of something akin to fire. As every muscle in her began to clench, she shut her eyes so tightly that her ears popped. Her jaw clamped down, rage coursed through her veins. It burned in her, compelling her to do something.

She stood up suddenly and her chair went flying. Her eyes opened, to be met by his. She was staring at his portrait. She met the usual shudder with rage. In one swift motion, she grabbed a shoe off her foot and, fuelled by all the years of resentment, hurled it the portrait. The portrait shook but did not budge. His dead eyes stared back, mocking her. *Stubborn old ass!*

Salinda paced up and down the room. Her hands itched to throw something else but she did not. She let out a scream instead.

The goat is right, I am a fool. How could I have done this to myself for so long? Why did I not see it before? I must do something. She picked up her phone and dialled Joanne, but, not sure what she was going to say, she hung up. *I need to get out.* Getting away from Katwa was not going to be easy. She couldn't go back to her parents. She knew she could go to Joanne. But she was his sister. *No, she is my friend! Joanne is MY friend!*

Salinda and Joanne had met in their first year at university, as roommates. They soon developed a good friendship, but she did not meet Katwa until graduation day. She met him again at Joanne's graduation party that weekend, and that was when they really connected. He never left her side that evening. *That should have given me a clue,* she winced. His eyes, he had said, were only for her.

'Ugh!' She spat out loud at the eyes that stared back at her.

With one shoe on, Salinda continued to pace the room lopsided, wondering how she had ended up so abused after she vowed she would have a different life to her mother's. Her boss used to say, 'Look not where you fell but where you slipped.' Oh, her boss.

'Sal,' her boss had said. 'You are not fooling me. I know a battered woman when I see one. I have been right where you are now. Only you can decide when it is enough. Call it what it is Salinda, before you become a statistic.' Her boss had asked her to take time off to sort herself out.

She dialled Joanne's number again.

'Jo, come.'

A sudden fatigue came upon her. She slumped into Katwa's chair so she was directly opposite his portrait. She stared at it. He stared back. She kept her eyes pinned on his until she felt them lose their power over her. She felt a little victory. That was when the tears came. A little at first, until something in her broke and she cried. She cried for herself now and she cried for herself in the past. She cried for what she feared the future might be. She cried out of pity for herself, and then she cried because she had had enough.

Later, when Joanne let herself in, Salinda was still crying.

'Oh my God, what did my bastard brother do now?' Joanne quickly closed the gap between them.

When Salinda's sobbing finally reduced to a whimper, Joanne asked her again. 'What has he done this time? Did he hurt you?' She looked Salinda all over.

Salinda let out a big sigh and said, 'Actually quite the opposite. He opened my eyes, Jo.' Her voice dropped like she was speaking and having a realisation at the same time.

'Huh?' Joanne's eyes narrowed.

'It is enough! It is finally enough.'

Joanne waited for more explanation but none came. She seemed confused by the serene person sitting in her brother's chair. Then she sprang into action. 'I have waited so long for you to say it was enough. Look, we do not have to think of everything right away. Let's focus on getting you out of

here before he gets home.’ Joanne jumped to her feet. ‘Let’s pack you a bag. Come on.’

But Salinda remained seated. Joanne went straight to the storage space under the stairs and retrieved a suitcase, which she then placed open at Salinda’s feet.

‘Come on, hurry!’ Joanne said, and went straight to Salinda’s bedroom.

‘Need the yellow blouse? This jacket of course, you are always cold.’ Still no response from Salinda. Eventually Joanne dropped an assortment of clothes and underwear into the open suitcase.

But Salinda did not move to organise her clothes. She sat watching her friend move in and out of rooms until the case was full. Joanne brought out a second bag.

‘Anything you need that I might have forgotten?’ Joanne asked, as she zipped up the suitcase.

‘No,’ Salinda said simply.

‘Come on, Sal. Surely there must be something you really want which I have not packed. I will go look in the bathroom.’ Joanne turned, but Salinda stood up.

‘Don’t worry, Jo. I can always come back for it.’

Joanne spun around, stunned. ‘You want to come back here?’

‘I do not feel afraid anymore.’

The silence that fell between them was palpable. Each stared at the other. Joanne walked back and sat herself on the suitcase so that her face was just under her friend’s.

‘I was always afraid that I might make things worse,’ Salinda said. ‘Imagine that, me, make things worse!’ She chuckled.

Joanne leaned in slightly.

‘There is nothing more to make worse. I have lost a child here and may never have another.’ Salinda’s voice dropped a little as her arms cradled her tummy. ‘In a way I have also lost my own life.’

Joanne rested her hand on Salinda’s thigh with a small sigh.

‘Somehow I do not feel afraid anymore,’ Salinda continued. ‘That does not mean I want to wait till he gets here to find out if I am going to be reduced to pulp. I will be out before he gets back.’

‘Where is he now?’

Salinda shrugged. ‘He just left. I imagine to be with his drinking buddies. We have about four hours.’

‘Wine then?’ Joanne asked, rising and pushing the suitcase to the side.

‘I’ll get it.’ Salinda stood, finally kicking off her other shoe as she went to the kitchen. She was reaching for the glasses when she noticed a little tea was still left in the pot. *Ugh*. She took out a bottle of wine she had concealed behind bags of beans and maize. As she straightened up, her hand brushed against a plastic jar, sending it crashing to the ground. A whiff of *masala* rose to meet her. She held her nose to steady herself against the smell. It was hard to imagine that she once loved the smell and taste of it. She was the one who had introduced *masala* tea to Katwa. She remembered the first time he tasted it. It was the first time she had cooked for him.

‘Let me bring cows to your father, so you can come cook for me,’ he had said.

‘But you have already asked me that seventeen times,’ she had answered, ‘and I have said yes seventeen times.’

After that, he asked her to marry him every single time she made him a cup. That was years ago. Fighting back the memories which threatened to engulf her, she stepped over the spice and began to walk away. She had only taken a few steps when she turned to the stove instead. She warmed up the rest of the tea in the pot. It was enough to fill one cup.

Katwa had taken too many things from her. She was going to teach herself to drink *masala* tea once again. She wasn’t going to be defeated by a cup of it, anyway. She took a sip and held her breath. And she held the drop in her mouth until she wasn’t nauseous anymore.

Kenya has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Africa. It is estimated that between 41% to 47% of reported cases of violence are between intimate partners (Memia et al., 2018; Temmerman et al. 2019; UN Women).

This story explores the right to: life and safety; to not be tortured both physically and emotionally; and work. From the UDHR:

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 23. (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

Of Hair and Goats

My father grew up herding goats.

And so did all our fathers, Kim noted wryly. Not only did he herd goats, he herded sheep and cows and donkeys and camels. He herded them every single day of the year. Dad worked long hours and never ceased to remind Kim of the fact. 'You don't know the blood and sweat that has put that desk in front of you.' She tried to focus on her English assignment, in which she had to find and respond to a great speech. But her father's voice was never far off.

That's why I am here. And you are here because you know that yearning.

The yearning in her was overwhelming. The air outside looked crisp through the misty windows. Kim longed to be able to walk out into the chilly morning and perhaps even go as far as the shops, but she was not allowed out. She was home from school on a two-day suspension. Mrs Omollo, the principal, whose own hair was woven down to the waist, had decided that students could not wear their hair more than an inch long. Kim had said that the principal had no right to make such a unilateral decision, and she had said so right to her face. Mr Kago would be pleased she had used a word he had used in class – and she knew she had used it correctly too. That thought made her smile. She had expected her parents to support her cause, but instead she was grounded. No one was going to touch her hair though, not Mrs Omollo and definitely not some hairdresser who had no understanding of how she had slaved long and hard to grow her hair, which was now, when straightened, at least the length of her middle finger.

The soviet's shadow had swept across Eastern Europe. In the West, America, Britain and France took stock of their losses ...

'Kim, Auntie says I need to mop your room now,' Jeni, a relative who was helping the family, said from the door.

'You know you can just call her by name?' Kim said, rather amused that, in the two years Jeni had been with them, she had never heard her refer to Mum by name. Sometimes, when Jeni called her Mama Kim, she sounded quite reverent. Kim kept her eyes on the article she was reading as she stood

up. Out of the corner of her eye, she tried to keep up with Jeni, moving into the spaces that had just been cleaned. A while later, she looked up long enough to notice her footprints on the tiles, and that Jeni was going over the floor once again.

'Sorry,' she muttered, and she left the room to stand in the hallway. Her mother came out of her bedroom and asked if she had made her bed. Kim ignored her, pretending to be engrossed in her reading.

'Still not talking to me I see,' Mother said. 'Oh well, your choice'. Then she made her way to the kitchen, where she busied herself with the dishes.

From time to time, Kim caught sight of her mum as she came into view when putting the big pots in the corner cupboard. Mum had wrapped her head loosely with a sky-blue scarf, but her long wavy weave spread down beneath the knot on the nape of her neck. *How unfair.* Mum could wear her hair any way she was wanted. Why wasn't she as keen to protect Kim's right to choose her own hairdo? She wanted to yell at Mum, but she wasn't talking to her. Forty-eight hours more silence, she told herself.

Kim had not only refused to get her hair cut in school, she had refused to go to Mrs Omollo's office when she was summoned. She had stubbornly stuck to her seat in Mr Kago's English class when the principal had popped her head around the door and asked to see her. Obviously word had got to the principal that she had led a group of 'liberated' form fours who refused to be told how to wear their hair. This was the 21st century, Kim argued, and women had the right to choose that kind of thing. She had been a little nervous as she said it, but the whole class was looking at her, many in awe, and that had only spurred her on.

'You are not a woman. You are a young girl,' Mrs Omollo had reminded her. 'Young girls at St Matunda obey school rules.'

'The rules need to reflect the century in which we live,' Kim muttered under her breath, but because the class had gone quiet, her reply was heard clearly.

'Are you coming to my office or not?' Mrs Omollo lowered her voice, which unnerved Kim.

But Kim had remained seated. She sat in her chair for the next hour or so, till fourth period, when there was another knock on the door. This time, it

was her mother stepping into the classroom. She asked to be excused for her interruption and, without calling Kim's name, she simply pointed at her. Then, with the same finger, she pointed out the door. Kim half wished Dad had come to pick her up, she could at least try to explain her position to him. But she knew it wouldn't be beyond her mother to walk up to her, give her a smack across her face, and drag her by the offending weave out of the class. Her mother never backed down. Kim would rather have lost her hair than be the one everyone talked about as having been humiliated in class – and in front of Mr Kago too! She stood up promptly and made her way to the door. She barely heard what her mother was saying to Mr Kago, but she knew she had guaranteed Kim twice as much homework as anyone else.

'I won't even pretend to understand your reasoning, young lady,' her mother said as she marched her to the car. 'You dare to get yourself suspended because of hair! Don't you know if you fail in school, all you will be good for is sweeping up hair from the barber's floor?'

'Is this what you think a revolution is?' Her mother continued, without giving Kim a chance to respond. 'You are grounded for the entire time you are home. Don't think this is a midterm holiday. No friends, no phone calls, and definitely no TV!'

Kim shrunk further into her chair. She knew Mother's mind was made up. She was going to appeal to Dad though. He loved her hair and, surely, he would speak up in defence of it. But that wasn't to be.

Dad had walked into her room that evening, without so much as a knock, and very curtly said, 'Kimeu' – using her full name, which betrayed his rage despite his calm tone – 'you have gone too far. I am with your mother on this.' And with that, he was gone.

Kim tried to get back to her reading. She had 72 hours of being stuck in her room. That she could cope with, but come Sunday she would need to have her hair one inch long and combed back, as per the rules. Before then, she had an assignment to complete for Mr Kago's class. Mr Kago! That brought a smile to her face. Almost as soon as she found out that he was to be their English teacher, she had ditched the knee length socks for the ankle ones and taken her skirt in by an inch or two. A small mirror had found permanent residence in her desk, and it came out a few more times just

before English. It irritated her a little that a few of her classmates had had the same idea, and that they were probably preening themselves at the very moment she was working away, all alone, because she did not want to trim her hair. In form three, cropped hair had been bearable, but this year, this year they had Mr Kago!

People of the world, look at Berlin!

People would be looking at her too, thought Kim. Without her weave and with short hair, what would everyone think? How would they know that she was one of Beyoncé's single ladies, determined to do her own thing? She wished she could SMS her frustration to Stacy, but Mum was holding her phone ransom for the weekend. She read the line again.

People of the world, look at Berlin, where a wall came down, a continent came together and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands together.

The Son of our Soil was imploring the faraway lands. Kim ploughed through the article. She knew it would please Mr Kago immensely that someone had been paying attention, and she was determined to not only understand it, but to prepare the most thoughtful personal response to it. Mr Kago had to notice, he would look at her work and at her and look past her two-inch hair and see the beautiful brain that lay underneath. He was going to look at her. Instinctively her right hand flew to the back of her neck and her fingers found the hair that was sitting on her shoulders. She began to comb through it with her fingers, it felt almost natural to her. Perhaps this could become her fight, she mused.

If only her friends had stood with her on that day. Instead they had buckled at the first sign of trouble and had agreed to remove their weaves. She suspected that they would get two days of weeding the school garden when the rest of the school was at afternoon sport. She smiled, knowing how much her friends hated sports. They hated gardening but they hated sports more. She could imagine them muttering and lamenting the great punishment to the teacher on duty.

But for now, losing her hair was keeping her restless. She could do without the weave but could she really wear her hair that short? She knew eventually she would have to do it, but one more year of school and she

wouldn't have to abide by the stupid rules anyway. In that year, too – who knows – her hair may have grown some more. Grownups could be so annoying. Who was she more mad at, her mother or Mrs Omollo?

That is why the greatest danger of all is to allow new walls to divide us from one another. So history reminds us that walls can be torn down. But the task is never easy.

Kim sat right up. The Son of our Soil was making a lot of sense. She picked up a pen ready to write a response. Should she begin with her own story, her own walls? She jotted down a few words, one below the other. *Walls. History. Triumph.* Unsure how to proceed, she sat back for a moment to look at the three words she had written. Still nothing. She went over the words with an orange highlighter. Next, she drew circles around each word and then arrows from each word pointing to the right. She thought for a few minutes, but having nothing more to add she went back to her reading.

Her eyes soon glossed over the page, and she looked past the words as an image lifted from them to meet her. Kim took a deep breath as she leaned backwards. She closed her eyes to allow the image to grow, and then slowly released her breath, afraid she would blow it away, like it was a bubble or a 3D image from a magic eye. But just as gently as it had surfaced, it was gone. And that was when it came to her. Perhaps this was her solution? It was possible. Cheeky, but possible. Didn't the Son of the Soil say no new walls ought to divide them? But what about the old walls? Kim smiled to herself. Perhaps it would mean the last time she would ever smile, but she was determined to go through with this.

She grabbed a piece of paper and started writing out what she was going to need. Red clay, ochre, fat – cow or sheep? Not sure, perhaps it did not matter. How about the stench, she wondered – could she stand that? Perhaps Vaseline might do the job. She put a couple of question marks next to the word 'fat'. Maybe she would need to ask someone. Mum would know, but that would mean talking to her.

Kim was a little less angry by then, but she was going to keep her vow of silence against her mother. Maybe she could beat her last record of 28 hours? She had barely managed 24 hours against her father, but then he never goaded her like Mother did. Once Dad issued a punishment, he never

mentioned the subject for which she was in trouble until the sentence was served. Mother on the other hand, with fingers snapping at Kim's ears, would be like, 'This is not how a lady behaves, respect is everything and if you do not respect yourself, you will end up a zero! Blah blah blah.' A response would burst out of Kim, and then there would go her vow of silence. The only person she could talk to was Jeni. They were about the same age and she suspected Jeni understood how things worked. Kim had a few hours to get what she needed for her plan. She knew it was going to be time consuming, so she needed to act fast.

That evening, when her parents chatted over dinner, Kim brought the silent treatment to an end. It was not too difficult as she was no longer angry, but she needed Mother to believe that she still was. At the same time, she had to speak in order to get her plan to work.

'I'm sorry,' she struggled to say.

'Sorry?' Dad said, as Mum looked up a little surprised.

'She squeaks!' Mum observed, sounding a little triumphant. Father gave her the look and urged Kim on.

'I am sorry,' Kim said, this time her voice a little surer. She filled her mouth with a spoonful of beans and some green vegetable she did not recognise. She did not know how to proceed.

'Sorry for what dear?' Father asked.

'I am ready to get rid of the weave.'

'Just like that?' Mum said, looking at her quizzically.

Kim nodded.

'Good to hear that, Kimeu,' Dad said, with a quick pat on the back of her hand. She was still holding onto her spoon.

Kim kept her eyes down and avoided conversation for the rest of the meal. She paid little attention to her parents as they discussed the cost of fertilizers, and how it would delay the planting season. Kim was feeling conflicted: defying her mother was one thing, but her father, she wasn't sure how he was going to respond to her plan. She excused herself as soon as she was done.

Back in her room, she set her plan in motion. She was going to rise early and ask Dad for money to go into town to get her hair taken out, but she

was not going to mention what she intended to have done instead. Her thoughts were interrupted by a gentle knock on the door. Jeni came in to bring her some of her clothes, which she had folded neatly. Kim thought for a moment.

‘Jeni, do you know how to do Maasai or Samburu braids?’

‘The regular ones yes, but the *morana* ones, just a little,’ Jeni answered, with a look of confusion.

‘Oh, do you think you can do them for me?’

‘But they are only worn by men.’

‘I know, I am not Maasai, so why not?’

‘You will need some sisal. And where will you find the ochre?’

‘I intend to go to the market tomorrow and have a look.’

‘But they wouldn’t sell that at the market,’ countered Jeni.

‘Do you know where I might get some then?’

‘I could ask around, but it may take a few days. Not many people use ochre anymore.’

‘Do your best please. I really need it.’

Jeni arrived the next day, from the market, with a grey plastic bag which contained about two handfuls of ochre and some light-coloured sisal fibres.

‘Thank you so much, Jeni,’ said an impressed Kim.

‘Don’t thank me just yet. Let’s see if I can braid them right.’

And so, they got to work. First Kim insisted that Jeni shave the sides of her hair about an inch in, and about two inches at the back. She left the front hair a lot higher.

‘Do you want the lines to go to the back or to meet in the middle?’ Jeni asked.

‘Perhaps backwards, that way they can fall on my shoulders.’

‘You’ll need to help me do this if we are to finish before morning.’

Jeni was systematic in her instructions.

‘Take a few strands, this much,’ Jeni said as she pinched off some sisal strands.

Jeni then sat on the bed to show Kim how to do it. She took some sisal, about the thickness of her little finger, and held it in her left hand. She

dipped her right fingertips into a bowl of oil before patting them lightly on the red clay. She then palm-rolled the strand until the entire length was fully covered in ochre.

‘Hey, Kim, why would you want to do this? Isn’t this the style of a long time ago?’

‘I want to try something different,’ Kim said.

‘Really, this clay on your head? And how about your sheets?’

‘Oh, oh yes, I need to cover them as well at night, I hadn’t thought of that. I will put a scarf over my pillow.’

‘Won’t others laugh at you in school?’

‘Maybe, but who knows, maybe I can start something?’

‘*Aki* you Kim, you were created differently; that much I can say.’

Kim smiled but said nothing.

‘Okay, once the braid is done, hand it to me and I can corn-row it into your hair.’

Jeni used the first strand. She patted Kim’s hair, working from the front to the back. She sectioned the hair into eight sections. Jeni worked in silence for a while, parting each of the sections into two strands, and with the ochred extensions she proceeded to braid the hair; the two strands and hair piece making three for the plait. Very soon, Kim and Jeni were working in unison. Roll, oil, pat on clay, braid. Roll, oil, pat on clay, braid. In about two hours, the braid preparation was done, but Jeni still had more braiding to do. Kim stepped out to wash her hands and was back almost immediately.

‘Jeni, can we work at my desk so I can do some work as you braid?’

Kim was a little tired but she had to do some more of Mr Kago’s homework. He’s going to be pleased with me, she thought. He will notice that I did all my work!

Let us resolve that we will not leave our children a world where the oceans rise and famine spreads and terrible storms devastate our lands. This is the moment we give our children back their future.

Kim liked the sound of that, and for a moment she paused to reflect on what that future would be. It was her last year of high school, and as much as she was looking forward to being finished, a part of her wanted to spend more time in Mr Kago’s class. She liked his style. He never stuck to the

textbook like most of the other teachers. Instead, it seemed he turned every available text, written or visual, into a textbook. Kim loved that. She thought it kept the class fresh and exciting and many times she was able to quote some of the texts at dinner. This not only impressed father, it made her feel quite grown up too. Mr Kago was nice. So nice. When Jeni tapped her on the shoulder to let her know the braiding was done, Mr Kago's name was scribbled all over her page.

'Look Kim, it may not look exactly like the Samburu ones, but it is close. Now you almost look like a *moran*.'

'A girl *moran*, I hope.' They both chuckled. No one can fight me on my culture, can they? But she did not say that out loud. 'Thanks Jeni, I promise when I have some pocket money, I will give you some.'

'It is okay Kim. Just try not to stain your pillows, that doesn't come out easily and I would not be able to explain that to Mama. You must sleep with a head scarf too.'

'Not a problem.'

Kim found sleep with a naughty smile on her face. And now to break a few walls.

The first one happened the next morning, when she stepped out of her room as her mother was walking out, dressed and ready to leave. She walked to Kim, who had remained motionless just two steps out of her room. Kim looked down. Her mother lifted her chin using only her pointing finger.

'Hmm,' she said, as she turned Kim's head first one side and then to the next, and then leaned forward for a closer inspection.

'Your father will drop you at school.' Then she walked out the front door.

One down, two to go. Kim went to the kitchen and had a piece of toast and sweet tea as she waited for Dad's reaction. She heard him call out to her and so she grabbed her bag and met him outside.

'Morning Kimeu, ready to go?'

Kim nodded. He didn't appear to notice her hair at all! She sat back in the chair, her hands under her to keep them from shaking. He asked if her homework was done and she responded in the affirmative.

They drove up and parked on the grass off the gravel in front of the school administration building. Kim felt herself trembling. Was she ready to front up to class with her new hairdo? First, they had to report to the principal for the okay to get to class. Father waited patiently for her to grab her bag and he led the way into the building. The receptionist, who they only knew as Mary, looked up with a smile and said the principal was expecting them. She gave Kim the kind of smile that said she had indeed seen it all now. Father knocked twice before opening the door.

‘Come in Mr Ruka, please take a se ...’ Her voice trailed off as her eyes found Kim.

Still motioning to the seat to her right, Mrs Omollo sat back into her chair. Her eyes went back to Kim’s father for a moment before she straightened herself and resettled into her chair.

‘Mr Ruka, good to see you again.’

‘Same here.’

‘Sorry sir, I don’t understand.’

‘What’s not to understand Mrs Omollo?’

‘Kim was sent home to get her hair sorted and now this?’

‘Perhaps Kim would like to explain it to you, Mrs Omollo,’ her father said, and leaned back into his chair.

Kim almost wished her mother had been the one to take her to school. Her mother would have told her right off in front of the principal, she would have begged pardon of Mrs Omollo for her errant daughter who did not listen to her parents, and she would have expressed how displeased she was with Kim. That would have given Kim something to work with, a springboard to launch her defence. But no, her father sat in silence, also waiting for an explanation.

Kim tried to open her mouth to give the speech she had prepared.

‘It is my right to do this,’ was all she managed, unprepared for the shaking in her voice.

‘Your right to come to school covered in mud?’ Mrs Omollo asked, one brow raised.

‘Yes, no, my right to wear my hair according to our people’s way.’

'Kim,' Mrs Omollo said, as she rose from her seat and walked to stand behind Kim. 'I am fully aware of the Maasai culture. I am also aware that this is only worn by the Masai *moran* and you ...' She paused as she touched the top of Kim's head with one finger, then inspected it closely whilst rubbing it against her thumb, which left a powdery redness. 'You, my child, are neither a *moran* nor male.'

Kim began to defend herself, but once again she couldn't find her well-rehearsed defence.

Dad finally spoke up. 'Perhaps I can talk to you in private, Mrs Omollo?'

'Wait outside, Kim' Mrs Omollo said abruptly.

'Not Maasai. We are not Maasai, we are Rendille,' Kim said, defiantly, and was out the door when she realised the words had never left her lips.

'This may take a while, go on to class. I will come for you when I need you,' Mrs Omollo added, before she shut the door.

Kim stood for a while. Courage seemed to have left her again. She had been determined to show the principal that she had a right to practise her culture. She had fully intended to use Nafula Wekesa's baptism and confirmation case, which had caused a furore when the Irish priest insisted that she take on the name 'Concessa', after a Catholic saint. Nafula's parents had accused the Catholic Church of demonising African culture by rejecting Nafula's name. Kim had looked up the word 'precedent' to make sure she fully understood its meaning. She had wanted to make sure her case was fully heard.

Feeling a little inspired, Kim walked to class, knowing that maths would be on. Outside 4W, Kim knocked on the door and waited to be invited in. She took a deep breath and opened the door. The whole class, which had been quietly working, turned to look at her and instead of the smiles or smirks or even outright laughter, she was met with silence. Kim was taken aback. The almost lack of reaction stunned her. Perhaps it was not a cool move after all.

'Come in and sit down, Kimeu.'

Kim was surprised to see the Mr Bosire, the deputy principal taking maths class. Where was Mr Nengo? No wonder the class couldn't respond to

her hairdo – they were all terrified of the deputy. Worse still, like her father he insisted on calling her by her full name.

‘Did you discover your roots last night, Kimeu?’ Mr Bosire asked. Kim was not sure if it was a sarcastic remark and if she was expected to respond. ‘Page 68,’ he continued, turning away from her and saving her the trouble of finding a suitable response.

Kim walked to her seat, head bent to avoid making eye contact with anyone. Her grand entrance had fallen flat, her big speech was a non-event, and as she sat down she began to feel the weight of the braids and ochre and animal fat. Looking at her watch, she was relieved to see that Mr Kago was less than fifteen minutes away. Perhaps her chance would come then? She got straight to work on geometry.

When the door knocked once before it opened, Kim knew she was probably being summoned back to the office. Mrs Omollo was not finished with her. But the head that popped around the door was her father’s. Kim was on her feet before Mr Bosire said a word. He nodded in her direction.

‘Bring your bag,’ her father said. Not sure why, Kim did as he asked.

Once outside, Dad led her out towards the car park.

‘I thought we were going to see Mrs Omollo.’

‘Not necessary.’

‘So, have I been suspended again?’

‘No, not this time.’

‘So where are we going then?’

‘Kimeu, you have made your point.’ He stopped, and then brought his face close to hers. ‘I am taking you to the hair salon to get your braids taken out. You look ridiculous.’

Kim first opened her eyes wide, then narrowed them as she looked at her father.

‘You are beautiful, regardless of how you dress your hair.’

‘But Dad, how ... why didn’t you say so earlier? That you didn’t like the *moran* braids.’

‘Last night, your mother and I decided to see how you intended to handle this.’

‘Um ...’

'Jeni told your mother that you were braiding your hair.'

'And you didn't think to stop me!'

'Sweetheart, it is only hair. Don't make a bigger deal of it than it is.'

'But one-inch dad? It is a stupid rule!'

'Rules exist for a reason. In this case they do not want your hair to be a distraction from your studies.'

'But Dad, don't you see, how is looking after myself a distraction? What if I stopped showering to save time so I could focus on my studies?'

'Then you would be a stinky smart child, wouldn't you?' Father placed his arm over her shoulders and drew her close.

'Dad you are not taking me seriously. The rule is not fair. Jasminda does not have to cut hers because she is Indian. The Muslims are allowed to wear head scarves, so it does not matter if they cut their hair or not.'

'*Toto*, I hear you. And what's more, your mother gets you even more than you realise. It is why she let you braid your hair and come to school as you are today. It is also why she wanted me to bring you to school, as she felt it was time for fathers to have a say in our daughters' hair too.'

Kim was quiet for a brief moment. 'So, what did you say to Mrs Omollo?'

'I simply asked her the same questions you are asking now. She says the board was already looking into changing that rule – and not because of you. Don't get big headed.'

'Oh. So, I can wear it as I please?'

'Hell no! For now, you will obey the school rules. There are bigger issues for you to deal with.'

'Like the length of my skirt?'

'No!' Dad was emphatic. 'May I remind you that I grew up herding goats?'

'I know, I know. Like Obama Senior.'

'Yes Kimeu, you have that in common with the Son of our Soil. And a whole lot more.'

*'The road ahead will be long. But I come before you to say we are heirs to a struggle for freedom. We are a people of improbable hope.'**

*Barack Obama's address to the people of Berlin (2008).

Many public schools in Kenya require that girls keep their hair cropped short or completely shaved. It is one of the biggest causes of angst among female students. The general assumption, from what I know anecdotally and from my own school experience, is that hair is a distraction from studies. This is generally not considered a problem for girls who are Muslim, as they wear scarves, or for girls of non-African descent. I have not found studies that are specific to this as an issue, but from general public discussions and opinion pieces in the media the short hair policy for girls, which extends to many other African countries, is partly attributed to colonial legacy and the need to control the sexuality of girls.

This story concerns the right to: express oneself freely and to make choices about one's body; to not be discriminated against; and to an education. From the UDHR:

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

From the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR):

Article 6: Every individual shall have the right to liberty and to the security of his person.

Article 17: Every individual shall have the right to education.

Article 18: (3) The State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions.

Beading

'Do the red one now Mama'

'Out of my way child, why don't you go get me some water?'

'But will you do it? Red is my favourite. Maybe with a little bit of blue?'

'Go! I said go, now *ala!*'

Naisula ran into the house. She knew when Mama said *ala* she was not going to say another word, and she did not wait for her to reach for the *sosiot*. She grabbed the mug off the table, carefully removed the lid and reached into the pot for some water. The pot was full. She and her sisters had done the morning run to the river before they went to school, but Naisula had had to stay home. She was soon turning eleven, but Mum felt she was too young to walk the ten kilometres to school each day. She took the water to her mother, who was whispering with four other women she simply referred to as her *senges*.

'She is too young,' her mother was saying.

'Who is too young?' Naisula piped. 'Mama, that is four red beads. Now do more.'

Mama looked at her. She downed the water in less than the time it had taken for Naisula to walk from the hut to the tree. As she mumbled a thank you, she took Naisula by the hand and sat her between her outstretched legs, so that Naisula's back rested on her stomach.

'Here, let me show you.'

'Has to be red,' one of the women pointed out before asking. 'Is that allowed?'

Mama ignored the question and placed a little red bead in Naisula's left hand.

'Give me your other hand,' she said, placing a needle carved out of *sosiot* tree in Naisula's right hand. It was the colour of the soil and shone from the sheep oil that had been rubbed into it.

Naisula had seen the women beading countless times before, but she enjoyed listening to Mama explain how she was to do it.

'Hold this hand still and let the bead follow the needle.'

'Hold this hand still and let the bead follow the needle,' Naisula repeated, slowly, as she instructed her hands what to do.

'Well done,' Mama said. But it was not the same 'well done' as when Naisula completed all her chores. Perhaps Mama was tired, or thirsty again?

Naisula repeated the process again and again as she chose red after red after blue after red bead.

'You are strong and brave, that colour suits you,' one of the women said.

'You are my child, my baby,' Mama asserted, in a tone that Naisula had not heard before.

'Can I try the green of the bushes next Mama?' Mama did not reply immediately and Naisula kept on beading.

'What are we making mama?' Naisula asked.

Mama was hesitant.

'Is it a necklace?'

No response

'Is it a bracelet?'

Again, Mama was quiet. Naisula twisted around to look at her mother.

'You are not even eleven yet.'

Naisula was puzzled. Perhaps when she is eleven, she thought, she will know just by looking at the number of beads what it was they were making?

'These beads belong to Arap Terer,' said one of the *senges*.

'Remember, he is head of the clan. Don't you ever forget it.'

'It is an honour,' another of the women reminded Mama.

'You will be bold,' Mama whispered in Naisula's ear, 'just like the red beads in your hands.' Grabbing Naisula by her waist, her mother helped her onto her feet. 'Run along now. You can go play a little before you need to go with your brother to water the cows.'

'But I want to do this, I like beading.'

Naisula did not want to go. She had already fetched two pots of water that day and she wasn't keen on another hour's journey.

'You are old enough to do some hard work,' one of the women said.

'But baba said I wasn't old enough to walk to school.'

The women went back to beading. The sun was beginning its downward journey and so the shade was now behind them. They had not bothered to move with the shifting shadows, and the tree under which they sat was not big enough to provide adequate shade. They were seated facing a big basket full of beads. Some of the beads were huge, the size of two groundnuts still in their husks. Some were smaller than a grain of sand.

Naisula stood watching the women for a while. She was a little uneasy, not sure why Mama had not made certain she had left. Usually Mama did not like giving instructions more than once. But, today, she had let a few things slip. Naisula was a little hungry but she knew to wait until after the sun went down. The porridge she had had in the morning was no longer with her.

Unsure what to do, Naisula sat down with the women and proceeded to separate the beads, the big from the small, and then into their different colours. The women did not say much and Mama got quieter as the afternoon wore on. Naisula was glad that her work was appreciated, as the women seemed to work quickly when they did not have to spend time trying to find the right bead.

'Naisula, this bracelet is for you from Mzee Terer,' began one of the *senges*. It was Big Senge, the one who had been speaking the most.

'I will tell her myself,' said Mama sharply. A look passed between Mama and Big Senge before they both went back to their beading.

Mama still did not say anything after that.

'Arap Terer's son ...'

'Senge!' Mama silenced her again. 'Naisula,' Mama began again.

'Yes Mama?' Naisula looked up at her face.

'Go get me some more water.'

Naisula walked to the house wondering if Mama needed the entire Bogoria Lake to quench her thirst that day. Perhaps it was the sun? Was that why the *senges* had their arms around Mama, to shield her from too much sun?

*

Musa trudged on. He had been told the girl was ready. His mind went back to when he had received his first girl. She couldn't have been more than ten years old. He expected that she was going to be young, but he was not prepared for the child that met him. He had sneaked into the *singira*, fully aware that the family was expecting their daughter to have a visitor that night. But still he did not want to draw any unnecessary attention.

On that first night he had hesitated at the door, as he did tonight. He took in his surroundings. All was silent. By his calculations, the celebrations would be going on for another three hours. The three huts were quite visible in the dark. He had been to this home earlier in the day, with Arap Rongi, for the *koito*. The smallest hut, to the side with the door facing away, was the kitchen. Pots of beer had streamed steadily from there all afternoon. Right now, all was quiet there. He imagined that, after the ceremony, the entire kitchen floor would be covered in order to sleep all the girls and the women who had travelled for the occasion. Even in the dark, he could still make out the smoke coming out the side opposite the door. Cooking was going to go on through the next day too.

Musa took a deep breath. He knew he would find a terrified girl inside, but this wasn't the time to worry about that. He had to do what he had to do. This wasn't the time to be soft. This had been the way of his people for generations, and the young *moran* understood it only too well.

He pushed the door open to be confronted not by two frightened eyes, but four.

'Who are you?' he asked, a little irritated.

'Just brought something for my sister, I am leaving now,' said the other girl. There couldn't possibly have been more than a couple of years between them.

'I said, your name,' Musa said, still a little cross.

'Jelimo,' she said, barely audibly and with her eyes firmly on the ground. She turned slightly in her sister's direction and added, 'Your *moran* is here.'

Jelimo sidestepped Musa and made for the door. He reached out and grabbed her by the hand, she gasped and stopped suddenly. 'No! Stay right

here with your sister.' He looked at her closely, narrowed his eyes and stated rather than asked, 'You have already been beaded.'

Jelimo's bowed head gave him his answer.

'How long ago? This season?'

Slight shake of the head.

'Last season?'

Jelimo turned her bowed head away from him.

Musa looked around the room. It was lit by a little wick standing on a box to his right, and was bare save for the bed. He could tell the hut had recently been thatched: the air still held an earthy mixture of clay, *doum* nut leaves and recently cut dry grass. The younger girl had not said a word. As Musa watched her, she took a step back away from the light. He could make out the rows and rows of beads around her shoulders; they rose up her neck and rested under her chin. Both girls were beaded. The younger one kept fidgeting with hers, and shifting her necklace around while she rolled her shoulders. He took a step towards her with Jelimo's hand still in his. He paused for a moment before he reached around the younger girl's heavy necklace, for the bit that would unclasp the beads. He found it. With his other hand he reached for Jelimo's beads too and did the same. The girls both stood transfixed. Musa leaned in towards the beads, looking from one set to the other like he was counting each one. He studied the intricate patterns closely. He looked up from the beads to the girls, but they wouldn't look at him. And then, with a sudden deft move of his fingers, the girls were free of the beads.

Jelimo gasped and looked up at Musa. He held her gaze for a moment and, just as suddenly, he flung the beads against the mud wall. Hard. The girls heard the beads scatter in every direction. Jelimo dropped to her knees at once.

'My beads! My ... my *moran*'s beads. What am I going to do ... say? No! No!' Jelimo's hands swept across the floor around her, patting the beads at the same time. 'No, no, no!'

The younger girl seemed confused, and she stared back at Musa for a moment before copying her sister. But as she got on her knees, Musa yanked her back.

'The door, now!' He snapped. 'Now!'

He grabbed both girls as he made for the door. Jelimo had to steady herself, and her feet barely touched the beaded floor as she was half dragged out the door.

'I ... but ...' Jelimo's body seemed to go as limp as her words.

'You, Naisula right?' He spoke directly for the first time to the younger girl. 'What did your mother say to you?'

'Not to be afraid. To be bold.'

Musa expected that it would have been a lot more than that. 'Good. The time to not be afraid is now. Now be very quiet.'

Musa turned to Jelimo. 'I need you to help your sister. Keep her quiet. I am not ... um ... You must follow me!' With that he placed Naisula's hand in Jelimo's and started to walk.

Musa did not doubt that they would follow him. The beaded one would know that she *had* to obey her *morán*. She would understand that the *morán* was the choice of their parents. He did not expect her to scream or draw attention to them. She was already beaded, and beaded girls knew how to bite their tongues.

Musa led them along the route furthest away from the homes, towards the village centre. As they waded through the tall grass, he noticed that some celebrations were still going on in some of the households. If the wind had not been blowing away from them, they might have been able to catch a whiff of different meats roasting. This was the beading season. Lots of goats had been slaughtered for the occasion.

They had been walking for what seemed like half an hour when Musa suddenly led them away from the main path, through the small forested area towards the top end of the river. Because the path was no longer familiar, the girls slowed down and treaded more carefully. Jelimo reached out for her sister's hand. They were both trembling even though the night was warm.

The night got quieter and so did Musa. He had not snapped at them in a while. Now he also slowed down, so that he was never more than a step away from them.

'Where are we going?' Naisula whispered to Jelimo. Jelimo tightened her grip on her sister and shrugged her shoulders.

'I am scared,' Naisula said, her lower lip trembling like the rest of her. 'Mama said not to be scared of him but I am'.

Naisula's bravery gave way to whimpers, and soon she was weeping.

Musa stopped and turned to look at the girls. He bent to peer closely into their faces even though he knew they would look away. He opened his mouth to say something to them, changed his mind, and uttered 'just children' to himself instead.

'Keep moving!' he said, no longer whispering. But he slowed down a touch. The girls were a little breathless from keeping up with him. They had come onto a path where the ground was a little flatter and there were no thorns and twigs to worry about. But then the girls began to whisper to each other again, so he picked up the pace, and just as suddenly as they had come upon a road, they stopped.

'Wait here,' Musa said softly. 'You can sit down if you want to. It won't be long now'.

'What are we waiting for?' Naisula whispered to Jelimo.

'You do not need to whisper anymore. It is different from here on,' Musa said.

Soon after, a dim light began to approach them from a distance. As it got closer, the light split into two. Musa stepped onto the road, his hand stretched out. It was a van. It stopped right in front of them. The side door slid open.

'*Habari wanangu?*' It was a woman's voice.

The girls did not respond to the greeting. Their feet did not move.

'Here, I will take care of them,' said another woman's voice from the back. Jelimo and Naisula clung to each other tightly.

*

Three weeks later, the girls sat clinging to each other again. This time, it wasn't the darkness and the strangeness of the van that filled them with fear, but the familiarity of home. The *moran* crouched on the grass in a circle to their right, their hair braided long and reddened by ochre, the fierce redness only matched by their bright red and orange *shukas* wrapped tightly around their waists. The rest of the village sat in front of the huts all around them.

The elderly were under the trees and the women, with their necks full of intricately patterned beads of every colour, sat opposite the men.

Jelimo let her eyes drift across the homes accentuated by the parched red earth to Ololokwe, the mountain of God, where the sun rose. In the last weeks, she had sought the strong face of that mountain and knew home could not be far away. Her eyes drifted back to find her *moran* looking in her direction. She averted them, hoping he did not see her. Her breath quickened and so she hunched over, legs crossed, trying to stem the memories of when he would come to her. But the memories that were fading were those from before she was beaded two seasons ago. Where was that child? Oh, that she was back at the Safe Centre! At the centre, her story was common. She did not need to say much because all the girls shared her story; this had made her feel less burdened.

'I think father looks angry the most,' whispered Naisula.

'Uh?' Jelimo shook her head to focus on the present.

This was the first time they had seen their father in three weeks. Matron had told them not to go see their parents until she had spoken to them. Jelimo had missed her mother. But, being away, she had begun to ask why her mother, or anyone, would let her be beaded. Didn't she have a say in it at all? At the centre some girls accepted beading as their sacrifice, if it empowered their *moran* to do their job. It was the way of their people.

'I want to go to Mama,' Naisula tugged at Jelimo's arm.

'Not yet, we must obey the matron,' Jelimo stopped her. 'Quiet, the chief is speaking.' She squeezed her sister's hand and added, 'Now, keep your eyes down, you don't want to make them angrier.'

'I see Matron,' Naisula whispered.

'Where?'

'There, with all the women, at the back.'

Both girls brightened up, assured by her presence. Matron had looked after them at the boarding house where they had been living for the last three weeks. There were many more girls living there. Jelimo was still amazed at the number of double-decker beds in the large rooms they slept in. It made night time fun as the girls chatted late into the night. Matron would come in from time to time and threaten to take the mattress of anyone who continued

to speak. 'See how you like sleeping on springs!' But she never did. She would come in after the bell each morning to make sure they were all up and dressed for the day. She was the one who gave the girls their uniforms, and she also made sure they were washed every second day. She watched over them as they queued to get food. Jelimo loved the evenings when she would spend time just chatting with the girls.

'Jelimo, I like Matron but I want to see our mother,' Naisula said. 'I want to tell her I now go to school. Oh, and that I can see school from my bed. And that our school is called Salama Girls Safe Centre.'

Jelimo leaned in to whisper to Naisula, squeezing the hand that was firmly tucked under hers. 'You see those people, the old men – what would happen if they saw you running around when grownups are talking? We have to wait. Matron said to wait.'

'But I want to show Mother my new clothes. And to ...' but Jelimo's nails dug into Naisula to stop her. Naisula screwed up her face at her, mouthing 'let go.'

The *baraza* was in progress. It was generally held at about the same time every time, in the middle of the morning when the sun seemed at its hottest. Except for the clucking of chickens and babies crying, only the chief's voice could be heard. Jelimo looked at Naisula, whose attention was on the blue and white of her new school uniform, her finger following the checkered pattern. She had feared she was not going to cope well away from Mama, but she seemed to have been happy at school. Jelimo had been careful to give her extra attention so she wasn't too overwhelmed at the Safe Centre.

'*Mambo ya zamani ni ya zamani*. The past belongs in the past. Things are different now,' the chief was trying to explain amidst a small murmur. 'We have to follow the law. Things are no longer just about us, as the Samburu. No. We have been absorbed into a larger community and the law says what the law says.'

Jelimo tried to focus on what the chief was saying, but she was interrupted by Naisula holding out a dark brown smooth stone.

'Think we can play seven stones soon?' Naisula asked.

'Shh!'

'But no one is even looking at us. See, no one is talking to us. They are talking to themselves only.'

'This is about us, Naisula,' Jelimo explained. 'We won't have to say a thing, but we need to listen.'

'But I don't understand what he is saying.'

'He is saying beading is now against the law. A *moran* cannot give you beads and say you now belong to him.'

'You mean the kind of beads we wore the night we were taken to our new school?' Naisula whispered. 'Many of the girls at our dorm house say they ran away from their *moran*.'

Jelimo nodded and looked ahead. It had been hard to watch Naisula listen in on some of the stories the girls shared in the dorm room. Good thing Naisula was far too restless to sit still long enough to understand what beading was all about. Matron had told the older girls to be careful what they said around the younger girls.

Chief continued to address the *baraza*, his focus mostly on the elders and the *moran*.

'Children must go to school. We will now hear from Mama Leshornai.'

Both Naisula and Jelimo looked around wondering who that was. When Matron walked up to the centre of the circle and greeted everyone, the girls turned to each other a little amused.

'So that is her name!' Naisula giggled.

'Ooh, Matron Leshornai,' whispered Jelimo, straightening herself.

Matron's voice was just as strong as when she stood at the dormitory door, warning everyone that bedtime was in under seven minutes.

'Thank you for the opportunity to speak and to those who have spoken before me. There was, I know, a time when beading was necessary, when it was relevant and a big part of who we were. But can I say this, as a community we have come a long way. It is no longer just us, but we are part of a bigger community now. We must change to keep up with the rest of the country.'

How many times in the last weeks had they heard Matron say that they must 'change to keep up the rest of the country'? Naisula and Jelimo mouthed those words to each other.

The crowd did not seem to like what they heard. A small murmuring spread through the crowd and was loudest in the direction of the *moran*. Matron had said the same things the chief had said, but they seemed a little more displeased at her. She did not look bothered. She raised her voice a fraction.

‘These here,’ Matron said pointing to the women’s section, ‘these are your mothers and sisters and daughters. If you can look into their eyes, you will see suffering in many of them. They may not talk about it, but it is there. I have deep respect for our culture. Being Samburu is who I am. But beading is harming our girls.’

A low guttural humming rose from the *moran*, and they gently tossed their glistening spears up and down. As the humming died down, it was followed by three slow claps from a lone *moran* who was soon joined by three or four others.

‘Look,’ Naisula whispered to Jelimo, ‘It is Musa. He started the clapping.’

Matron’s voice held steady. ‘Let our children go to school. School does not take away from who we are but rather it builds our girls. You heard the chief introduce me as Matron Leshornai from the Safe Centre. I have received many girls who have run away from home and from beading. It is time to listen to our children and put an end to the aspects of our culture which no longer serve us. Let the children be kids, let them play *kalongo* or *banta* or whatever they choose.’

‘She is talking about us,’ Naisula beamed at her sister, rubbing the smooth stone between her fingers.

Jelimo nodded.

‘Jelimo, remember when we used to play *banta*? It has been a long time since you did it.’

‘Quiet!’ Jelimo snapped at Naisula, and then added, ‘Beaded girls do not play *banta*! Now shush!’ She sounded a little harsher than she intended to.

When the chief stood up to invite the next speaker, quiet returned. Jelimo felt her sister nudge her and point surreptitiously to the *moran* striding to the centre of the meeting. Jelimo looked up to see the *moran* whose

shadow hounded her every waking moment. She felt a cramp coming on in her gut. It was hard to look at him, so she hid her face in her hands. Mama had said girls needed to be proud of their *moran*. They were brave and their job was to protect the community. She had not felt an ounce of pride for him. All she had ever wanted to do since he gave her beads was run away.

‘I wonder which one of them is the one to protect me?’ Naisula’s whisper broke into her thoughts. ‘Will he know that I now go to school?’

Jelimo was horrified. She reached for Naisula and pulled her close, finding strength in the hope that, at the Safe Centre, Naisula would be safe from beading. That she would never know what it means to have a *moran*. Some of the girls at the centre had been there for about five years.

‘A lion does not turn around when a dog barks,’ Jelimo’s *moran* declared. ‘We did not create this culture – the beading. We inherited it and we will protect it.’

There was a loud cheer from the group of *moran*, many of whom raised their spears, which glittered in the noonday sun.

‘We will keep it the way it was given to us. Maybe the next wave of *moran* might want to change. They might want to follow a different law. Not us. Not this time. Our culture must be stronger than the law, your law.’ He directed the last bit to the chief.

Another *moran* stood up to argue that girls were a source of wealth to the community, and that taking them away to school was robbing the community. Beading strengthened the morals of a community, another said, although Jelimo did not understand how.

Another *moran* spoke up against beading. ‘We are no longer at war with our neighbours, the *moranhoo* does not have the purposes of the past. And therefore, we no longer need to bead young girls. Its time has passed.’

One of the big *Senges*, who always spoke at every gathering, ambled forward. The intermittent murmuring stopped at once.

‘We are putting our girls’ lives at risk. Especially those who become pregnant. We are destroying ourselves.’

There was a stunned silence. What side was she arguing on?

She fixed her gaze on the *moran*. ‘Young men, do not bring me your beads, I have already beaded all six of my daughters. Now I have run out of

girls to bead. I ran out of them at least forty years ago,' she said to nervous laughter. 'That was a different time.' Her gnarled fingers stayed pointed at them the whole time she addressed them.

Jelimo stretched out the numbness in her legs. She was surprised by the words coming out of Big Senge. She leaned forward.

'Then, I did not imagine it was possible to do anything different, but I did not like it. I bore the pain of doing it because it was what we did.' She then turned with effort to towards the elders, bending forward slightly to keep her balance. 'But, ultimately, we need to look to the elders who are the custodians of our culture. We are looking to you now. You can do it. You can end the suffering of our girls and the women.'

She got the loudest cheer from the women and was soon joined by a handful of *moran*.

As the afternoon wore on, the speeches got heated and drew cheers and jeers in equal measure. This was the crowd that formed Jelimo's clan and she was a part of it. That should have been comforting, but instead she felt a stab of betrayal by those who favoured beading. She longed for some water but did not dare move. She wanted to hear what happened.

The chief rose to speak again. 'The law is the law, but we do need to solve this as a community. We need to have our say in handling this aspect of our culture. We shall continue to have these discussions until we achieve what is best for the entire community.'

The chief went on to thank everybody for being there. He finished by instructing the women and children to leave the men to other matters of importance.

Jelimo gasped. Was this it? Why didn't someone say that the whole ordeal was now over? That beading would cease immediately.

'Come on, it is over,' Naisula said, already on her feet.

Jelimo remained slouched on the ground. Her little sister helped her up and was leading her to the girls' hut when they were stopped by Matron walking briskly towards them.

'Matron!' exclaimed Naisula, her face looking up in expectation.

'Matron, they did not agree to stop beading,' Jelimo's voice cracked.

'It is not over yet, girls.' Matron drew Jelimo close to herself with her left hand, and with the other she pointed to the groups of people sitting on the grass in groups. 'Look around, we have the women, the elders and the *moran*. Everyone is here to talk about beading. We have never had an open discussion about this with everyone present. That is good Jelimo, very very good. We are now able to talk about change.'

Jelimo only looked in the direction of the women. 'That means we cannot come home soon,' she said, her voice a little weak and her eyes wet.

'It not that easy, Jelimo. It is why we keep the school open all year, so girls like you have a place to call home.'

'But the chief says it is against the law. Why is that not enough?'

'The law works better if everyone gets behind it. Right now, we too also have a right to follow our culture and beading is part of our culture.'

Jelimo went quiet, ignoring Naisula who was tugging her arm to go play.

'Look here girls, do not despair. Remember Musa? He is a *moran* too. We have few of them like him helping to rescue girls from beading.' Matron waited until Jelimo raised her head. 'But right now, I need to talk to your parents, and you are both coming with me.'

'Will they listen?'

'We have to give it a go. I have been saying to you all at the boarding house, your parents have a lot of say in this.' Matron seemed sure.

Jelimo winced. 'But you do not know our father. He does not listen to anyone.'

'Not to worry. I can deal with grownups, even the scary ones,' she added, with a wink. Then Matron drew Jelimo close to her. 'You focus on your little Naisula and your life at the Safe Centre. The hard work of educating each family is just beginning. It is a tough road ahead. Let's go find your parents.'

Jelimo was a little alarmed.

'No, I won't leave you with them. We have to protect your relationship with them so when the time is right, you can be reconciled. Come on, girls.'

It was too late. Naisula had skipped away to join her friends. Jelimo made to go after her, but was stopped by the laughter and the giggling from

the girls chasing and tagging each other in a game of *banta*. Out of the corner of her eye, the shadows of the *moran* spears penetrated the air. The girls played on. Their tiny frames defiant against the layers and layers of red beads that threatened to crush them.

The Samburu is one of the 42 community groups in Kenya. Beading is the practice of assigning a girl to a male relative who is then allowed to have sex with her. These males are known as *moran*, meaning they are the warriors of their community. Beading is a silent practice among the Samburu and many Kenyans may not be aware of it. Although beading is unique to the Samburu, other communities in Kenya may also have other cultural practices that are particularly harmful to girls, such as child brides and female genital mutilation.

This story concerns the right to: not be discriminated against; not be held in sexual bondage; and not be subjected to harmful cultural practices. From the UDHR:

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude [sexual bondage]; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

From the ACHPR:

Article 18 (2) The State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions.

A Fire for Mother

Wanja and Lulu arrived at Jamila's home to find a hive of activity. There were people everywhere. Most of them were women with *shukas* and *lessos* wrapped around their waists and heads, sitting in small groups hard at work. Wanja had never been to a Kalenjin engagement before, so when her friend Jamila invited her over, she was filled with excitement. Looking around, the sight was familiar. Groups of women peeling potatoes, others carrots, some sorting the beans and a group picking the *kiyenji* vegetables off the stalks. They were all sitting on the grass. A few children were running around, getting in the way of everyone and getting told off at every turn.

'Oh, there you are. You must be Jamila's friends.'

Wanja turned around to greet the speaker. It was a woman wearing Jamila's smile.

'I will go get her for you. I am her sister,' she said. And she added, just before she turned to go inside, 'I'm glad you two could come. She needs her friends today.'

Jamila came out of the house and hugged her friends.

'Sorry we cannot go in. They are cutting meat and chicken in there – unless you want to look at all the blood?'

'Oh no no. I'd rather not see that,' replied Lulu.

'Look, we can sit on these steps at the side of the house to avoid those coming in and out.' She led them to the end of the veranda so that they faced the front gate. 'Again, thanks for coming.'

'Details Jam, details. So, who is getting married?' Lulu asked in a singsong voice. 'You asked us to come for the *koito* but didn't give us details.'

'My mother is getting married.'

No squeal accompanied the announcement. Wanja and Lulu looked at each other in confusion.

'Isn't she a bit too old to be getting married?' Lulu's question was out before Wanja's stern look could shut her up.

Jamila said nothing. Her friends did not know how to respond so they sat in silence, waiting for some indication on how to proceed. But none came. Jamila, seated between the two girls on the steps, lowered her head into her

hands. This allowed Lulu and Wanja to find each other's eyes in bewilderment. A little unsure, they put their arms around Jamila and waited. Wanja held on a little tighter. If anyone knew how hard it was to watch a parent re-marry, it was her.

Wanja looked around her. Someone, probably a neighbour, was letting themselves in through the barbed wire gate, carrying a bag of produce on his back. The home was framed by a curving kei apple hedge that Wanja immediately recognised. It combined with another that she did not know, which was flowery and thorny and of a lighter green. It was obvious, from how uniform and neat the hedge was, that it had recently been trimmed.

'She is taking a wife! A wife, can you believe that?' Jamila sounded upset.

'No, no we can't believe that,' said Lulu.

Wanja did not trust herself to say the right thing. Had she heard right?

'Sorry Jam, does that mean your mother is ...'

'No!'

Both Jamila and Lulu cut her off, with a little more venom from Lulu. Silence. And then some more silence. Wanja had to ask again.

'But if your mother isn't ... you know ... then why is she marrying a woman?'

Jamila's head was back in her hands again, and so Wanja looked to Lulu for some explanation. But she knew Lulu wouldn't say anything unless she was sure it was what Jamila would want to hear or say.

'Tell her, Lu,' Jamila sounded defeated. Her voice was barely above a whisper.

'It is part of our Nandi tradition,' began Lulu. 'Jamila's mother has earned the right to take a wife. She has ... em ... she's got the ... Gogo Rotich needs an heir.'

Lulu got up suddenly and went into the house, leaving Wanja even more confused. Wanja was unsure what to say to Jamila. Did this call for congratulations or commiserations? Her mouth was still open, and her head shaking of its own volition, when Lulu got back with a huge basket of fresh peas. She dropped it in front of them. Some spilled over onto the concrete steps.

'We are expected to shell these.'

This time Lulu sat herself on the grass so that the basket was between them. She then picked up a handful of peas, and had just pried open two pods, when she suddenly got up, stepped over both Jamila and Wanja, and went back into the house. She arrived back just as quickly this time, with an empty bowl which she placed right next to the basket, and then continued shelling peas.

Wanja watched her with a little impatience before asking, 'Well, is that it? What did you just say?'

'What did I just say?' Lulu asked feigning ignorance.

'That whole explanation, that doesn't make sense at all.'

'Like I said, it is a cultural thing. I don't expect you to understand.'

Wanja winced. These were her very best friends but sometimes when comments like that were made, she felt a little left out. She looked at Jamila, whose jaw appeared clenched, and who would occasionally tap her forehead with the base of her palm. Wanja reached her hand over Jamila's shoulder and looked at Lulu.

'Why would Mrs Rotich need an heir? She already has five children.' Wanja kept her voice soft and gentle.

'All daughters. No boys!' Lulu replied.

'My sisters and I do not count,' spat out Jamila, breaking a long silence.

'What? What year is this? You Kalenjins and your crazy traditions!' Wanja remarked without too much thought.

'As opposed to your Kikuyu modern ones,' Lulu added, air quoting on the word 'modern'. 'We have all seen Biyanvanga's ways.' Wanja felt a little attacked, but this was her friend. And Biyanvanga was a public figure and a public face who lived his private life so publicly. She let it pass, turned to Jamila and began to say 'When my parents' marriage broke up and my father remarried, I ...'

'No! Your father remarried. Mine is dead.' Jamila snapped back, shrugging Wanja's arm off.

'Sorry Jam, I know it's not the same situation, but all I wanted to say was, I feel ... eh ... it's difficult, I know.'

Wanja leaned over and grabbed a handful of peas. Jamila also joined in and, for a while, all that could be heard were the peas as they dropped into the aluminium bowl. The longer the silence, the bigger the pile of empty pods grew.

'By the way, just how many people are we supposed to feed?' asked Wanja.

Lulu chuckled. 'What, do you count people where you come from?'

'I guess not. But this is an engagement not a wedding.'

'Kalenjin *koitos* are just as big as the wedding. You'll see. The whole world will be here tomorrow.'

Lulu had taken it upon herself to explain everything to Wanja, but she would look to Jamila first. Lulu and Jamila's friendship went all the way back to primary school, but Wanja had only become friends with them in the last year.

They worked on in silence again. Wanja would look up from time to time to see how Jamila was doing. Lulu was mouthing stuff and chuckling nervously to fill the silence. She was the loud one of their group, the animated storyteller who was often fact checked by Jamila, a dynamic that still amused Wanja.

'So, your mother is definitely not ...' Wanja began.

'No!' She half expected the shocked chorus from both her friends.

'But she is marrying a woman, right?'

'Yes,' came the chorus.

'So, she can have a son?'

'Yes,' another chorus.

'Do I dare ask? How?'

'She will choose a suitable man to do that,' Lu answered, alone this time.

'Hmmm,' Wanja asked, no longer sure who to direct the question to.

'So, will this man still be your mother's son's father?'

'No. My mother will.' Jamila paused, before adding 'Eh ... be mother, not father.'

'So, everybody who comes here tomorrow will understand this? How come I never heard of this practice before? Women just don't marry women,

not in my culture.’ Wanja was still trying to make sense of what she had learned. She continued, ‘Jamila, who will act on your mother’s behalf at the negotiations tomorrow?’

‘You are missing the point, Wanja!’ Lulu was no longer sitting. ‘Gogo Rotich does not need anyone speaking for her. She has earned the right to be a female husband. She will speak for *herself*, she will negotiate the bride price *herself*.’

Wanja looked to Jamila to see if she was going to fact check what Lulu just said, like she usually did. But nothing. Not this time.

‘But say, oh – I mean, how does one earn the right to be a female husband? What is that anyway? Who decides ... grants you the right to be that? And what is new wife called?’

‘Slow down Wanja, let me break it down for you my poor confused friend.’ Lulu was already on her feet. ‘Gogo Rotich is a woman and she is a husband. Everything a husband gets to do, she will do. Bride price, speeches, hosting the celebrations – it is all her.’

‘Ai Jamila, how do you feel about this? Have you had this conversation with your mother? What does she say, how does she explain this?’

‘Oiy! Unlike you, I don’t ask a lot of questions. What would be the point? She would simply tell me she owes tradition to her fathers, not her children – or something along those lines.’

‘Good thing we have Lulu here then,’ Wanja said.

‘And, just so you know, this is not like the other un-African thing,’ added Lulu. ‘And besides, we are not like you people.’

Wanja could feel the irritation rising in her. She bit hard on her lower lip until she tasted blood. As usual, it took Lulu a bit of a while to notice that Wanja was no longer talking. Jamila chose to go into the house at that precise moment, further heightening the awkwardness between the friends.

Lulu broke the silence. ‘Wanja, I am so sorry. I didn’t mean to be rude. I am trying to be supportive of Jamila.’

‘I know what you are trying to do.’ Wanja didn’t make it any easier for Lulu to explain her intentions.

Lulu leaned in, lowered her voice, and said 'Look here, I know this sounds strange to you. It is strange to me too. I have heard that this is a possibility but I have never known of any female husbands.'

'So how do you know so much about it?' Wanja asked, unsure why her voice also lowered.

'Reading and gossip.' Lulu whispered the latter bit. 'Between you and me, I have always thought Mrs Rotich was a strange one. Have you seen her at the *baraza*? She gets a place at the big table! She sits among men!'

'Isn't that because she is considered an elder? And rich too.'

'I guess so.' Wanja pulled back, drew the bowl of shelled peas towards herself, and started running her fingers through them. 'I wonder how much of these we need to shell, as it's already looking like we could feed the entire neighbourhood.' She then picked one out, tossed it into the air and caught it deftly between her front teeth. Seeing the admiration in Lulu's eyes, she then proceeded to do it a half dozen times, each time throwing the peas higher and without missing a single catch.

Suddenly, Wanja wrapped her hands to her throat and made choking sounds. Lulu was on her at once, spilling some of the peas to the ground as she closed the distance between them.

'Just kidding, Lulu. Just kidding. I am fine.'

'What fine! Look what you made me do. We have to pick these up. We will be here all afternoon.'

'Sorry, didn't mean for that to happen. Hey, but now I know you are quick, both with your tongue and your feet.'

Together, they started to pick up the peas and put them back into the bowl.

'Want to bet that tomorrow one of the kids will be like, "Oh mummy mummy, I don't want to eat that green stuff"?' Wanja said, in the best child-like voice she could muster.

'Oh child, peas aren't green. So eat up,' Lulu replied, in a low and husky voice.

'Mothers don't sound like that,' Wanja corrected her.

'Gogo Rotich does!' Lulu paused briefly, before adding, 'Sorry about the comment about your people.' She sounded remorseful.

'Thanks.'

'Wow, look at this place,' Wanja pointed out, when all the peas were back in the bowl. 'It is so beautiful. And this is home to Jamila, is she lucky or what?'

Lulu was silent for a while before she finally sighed.

'Huh! You know what Wanja, I don't think I'm sorry about what I said about your people.'

'Oh Lu, just when I ...'

'You girls get to inherit your father's wealth! Lots of land like this,' she said, pointing to the farmland that stretched for quite a while in front of them.

'Yes, but my father isn't anywhere as rich as this – though we do each get something. Actually, my father has already allocated me and my siblings our bits of land.'

'So, this Wanja sitting with us, in the last year of high school, already has wealth! Lucky thing!'

'I don't have it yet, big difference. I can't believe that a woman like Gogo Rotich can work so hard all her life and leave nothing for her girls.'

'She can, but only if there is a son among them. It is because part of the wealth is ancestral land which must be tied to a male.'

'And any random male will do?' Wanja asked, quite incredulous.

'I have heard that if the woman she marries already has a son, then that would make an acceptable heir.'

'That makes it an adoption then, an adoption of sorts.'

'Meh!' Lulu shrugged. 'It is not always easy to explain the ways of a people.' Lulu then leaned in and whispered so softly that Wanja almost missed it. 'And yes, I agree with you. It's kinda like one of those same same situations.'

'What,' Wanja asked, 'just a moment ago you were ...'

'Shhh! Here she comes,' Lulu said. Then, more loudly, 'That is truly un-African.'

'Are you two whispering about the same same?' Jamila seemed a lot more composed as she took her place on the steps. 'Well, catch me up, who are we talking about?'

Lulu straightened up, rolled her shoulders then spread her hands a little, before tapping them on her thighs. At once Jamila and Wanja knew that Lulu was about to make a speech that only she thought was important. Most times when Lulu said she had something important to say, it was usually some insignificant gossip – though she could make it sound like the day's headlines. Wanja held back the temptation to giggle. For such a tiny person with a voice to match, Lulu could get anyone listening. She adjusted her posture in an exaggerated show of impatience. She puckered her forehead in concentration, placed one hand on her hip and with the other snapped her fingers in her friends' faces. When she got this earnest, you would think she was auditioning for a spot in a cheerleading squad.

'Shhh, someone is coming.' Jamila shut Lulu up before she uttered a word.

They waited for the someone to walk past. But they didn't. Instead they plonked another huge bag of unshelled peas in front of them and were gone without a word. Maybe it was the size of the bags, but Wanja's face dropped. *This is never going to end*, she thought, massaging the back of her neck. She tried to straighten up as she caught Jamila's keen eyes.

'Hey, you guys are my guests. Let's take a break from this,' Jamila said, getting to her feet quickly.

'But I am yet to tell my story,' said Lulu. 'It is about a certain Mrs Someone who is seeing a certain someone!'

'I can show you around the farm and you can tell us your gossip, um ... I mean story, okay Lu?'

'Okay. And hey,' Lulu whispered, as she got up and gestured for them to lean into a covert huddle over the bag of peas, 'How about we drop this pile on someone else.'

This time it was Jamila who had a twinkle in her eye. 'Or we could just leave it here? Some aunty is bound to come along and think we need help.'

Jamila was becoming more of herself – maybe it was plotting mischief that was energising her? She led the girls along the hedge away from the house, towards the stile, to avoid the many greetings and possible questions from the women who were busy chatting and preparing vegetables for the

koito. Wanja hesitated at the steps as she anxiously checked out the empty field.

‘Don’t tell me you are afraid of cows?’ Jamila asked.

‘All the way to each of my bones.’

‘Your bones need not worry. Mother rotates the animals around the different fields, so we should be fine in this one.’

The grass in the field was patchy and, save for a few trees, the field was empty. Wanja looked back at the main house and a small orange orchard which had come into view. Cypress trees interspersed in the hedge, which now cast long shadows. On a less busy day, the compound around the house would look a lot bigger and greener. A few men were beginning to arrive, possibly to set up tents.

‘Did you always live here?’ she asked Jamila.

‘As long as I can remember. My father inherited all of this from his father.’ Jamila paused briefly, before adding, with a sigh, ‘He’s been dead a few years now.’

‘So that cross we saw back there ...’

‘Mm-hmm,’ Jamila nodded, as though she could not trust the words to come out of her mouth.

‘I’m sorry,’ Wanja said – though she was waved off by Jamila.

‘But yay, there is a wedding tomorrow. I mean an engagement, and that is just as exciting.’ Lulu couldn’t handle the brief silence that followed, and her excitement sounded a little forced.

Wanja turned to Jamila: ‘I agree, tomorrow is supposed to be a happy occasion.’

Jamila shrugged.

‘Are you shocked that this is happening?’ Wanja asked.

‘Of course, ...’ Lulu began to say, but Wanja nudged her to let Jamila speak.

‘I guess I am not really shocked. Can’t say I have not heard of *kilalmat*.’*

‘Ki- what?’

‘*Ki-lal-mat*. It means to start a fire. What her mother is doing, marrying another woman just to get a male heir,’ Lulu explained.

'So, whose fire is being lit, your mother's or your father's?'

'Don't really know,' said Jamila.

Lulu lifted her shoulders in a half shrug.

'What Lu, there is something out there that you do not know?'

'I have heard it talked about for a while, but I never thought she was actually going through with it,' Jamila said, a touch of sadness creeping back into her voice.

The friends walked on in silence for a while, Jamila's step a tad slower and her feet occasionally kicking blackjack plants and clumps of grass. Every time Lulu looked like she was going to say something, Wanja would nudge her to remind her to give Jamila some space.

'How do your sisters feel about it?' Wanja finally asked.

'We have made peace with it. At least, that is what we say,' Jamila answered.

'Uh-huh, I see,' Wanja said aloud, but still she did not see it. What a strange tradition!

'I can accept the marriage, but what I cannot accept is why Mother thinks we are not enough just because we are female.' There was a venom in Jamila's voice that Wanja had not heard before.

'It is tough to fight against an established way of thinking,' Wanja offered.

'But Mother has never seemed bothered by what others expect of her.'

'In this case, she either gets a son or you risk losing your entire inheritance to your paternal uncles or relatives, right?'

Jamila looked up as if to say something to Wanja but changed her mind. She stopped walking abruptly, forcing Lulu and Wanja to do the same. Wanja watched her as she turned around to look back to the house. Her gaze seemed to sweep all around her, but when she turned to Wanja, her tears were evident.

Wanja looked to Lulu. Was there a hint of tears in her as well? If Jamila had a nosebleed, Lulu would too in solidarity, of that she had no doubt.

'Lu?' she asked.

‘Just thinking. Jamila, your mother would get married just to guarantee your inheritance, and you Wanja, your father has already taken care of your future. My mother would not even stick around for me. When things got tough between her and my dad, she left. Has had nothing to do with me ever since. I do not know where she is. My stepmother did not want me around, so I moved in with my grandparents. I have parents who do not care what I do or who I do it with. Nope, not an ounce of care for who I am.’

The friends put their arms around Lulu, but she squirmed out of their embrace.

‘Stand still so we can hug you,’ Jamila commanded.

‘Only if you catch me,’ Lulu yelled, as she sprinted off with her friends in pursuit. Jamila had her in a tight embrace within fifty meters, and by the time Wanja finally caught up all Wanja could do was gulp air by the mouthfuls.

‘I knew your people were distance runners, but sprinters?’ Wanja said, when she could breathe again. ‘Got to sit.’

Lulu and Jamila sat down too.

‘Lulu, I didn’t know that about you, and we have been friends for about a year.’

‘Know what about me?’ Lulu asked in an award-winning display of ignorance.

‘The thing about your family.’

‘Oh yeah that. I don’t let it get me down. Look, this is not about me today.’

Jamila nodded and stood up abruptly. ‘Maybe we should go get those peas shelled after all.’

She led the way back.

‘All this time I was so mad at my mother that she didn’t care about us as girls. But it is because she does, that she is getting married.’

‘Look who’s ready to embrace stepmama!’ Lulu said in a singsong voice, her hands in a raise-the-roof gesture as she did a twirl.

Wanja threw an alarmed glance at Jamila, and was relieved that Jamila had a small but amused smile as she watched Lulu. It was the brightest Jamila had worn all day.

‘It’s going to be a big change for you, Jamila,’ said Wanja. ‘Who knows, maybe one day it won’t matter to your community if one has sons or daughters.’

They had just gotten onto the path when someone familiar with the family overtook them with a ‘happy *koito*’ greeting. Instinctively they lowered their voices until they were confident he was out of earshot.

‘One thing is bothering me guys. If everybody knows a woman is getting married to another, and they are coming here tomorrow to celebrate it, why the hell are we whispering?’ Wanja yelled that last bit out.

Lulu and Jamila looked at each other and shrugged.

‘Hmmm,’ said Jamila, ‘I guess it is who we are. Certain things aren’t talked about freely and *kilalmat* is one of them.’

‘It is just the kind of thing that gets whispered about,’ said Lulu.

Wanja was mulling over Lulu’s response when they got back to the stile. She let Jamila and Lulu go ahead of her. She was at the top of the stile when she looked up to Jamila’s home, which was in the midst of transformation. The sight was a familiar one. White tents had gone up, a loud pronunciation of a marriage celebration. To the opposite end, she could see a stack of firewood next to the makeshift kitchen. This time tomorrow, the spicy aroma of roast meats will be in the smoke. This time tomorrow, women will be getting married amidst great celebration. Oh, Lulu, nothing here is being whispered about, she thought with a wink to the heavens. And she jumped off the stile and ran to catch up with her friends.

**Kilalmat* literally translates as ‘to start a fire’. It is an obscure Kalenjin tradition in which a woman who is wealthy and is either childless or has no sons can marry another woman in the hopes of getting a male heir. In getting a son, her lineage is then started. Only a son can ‘start a fire’ for her.

This story explores the right to marriage and family. From the UDHR:

Article 16: (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

I am the Mau

'Walk with me son,' my father said to me. And, without looking backwards, he set off.

I followed. It was the day I turned ten. We walked in silence along the path on the forest floor. Occasionally I would step off the path to allow others going in the opposite direction. My father, of course, did no such thing – nor was he expected to, unless we came across another elder. Then they would both stop and lift clasped hands to each other in respect, but no words would pass. He would also stop from time to time to examine a plant or to redirect a renegade vine.

Presently, he stopped by a *yemdit* tree, upon whose branches sat a log beehive. Father hadn't uttered a single word since we left home. We sat on the log, me opposite him on a spot he pointed to, and I had my first formal lesson in beekeeping.

'See that tree, the *tongotwet*, and that other one the *kureyet*? Both those trees are important to us. The honey from the nectar of both make for good medicine. They cure a lot of ailments. They cure: one, the chest,' ticking off the list on his bent fingers, 'two, the stomach ...'

'Three, the bones,' I had heard this so many times.

'Three, the bones.' Father went on as though I hadn't said a word. 'There is a fourth cure too, though nothing to concern yourself with. Your mother will teach your sisters all about that – it is for ... um ... it works for women and their issues.'

'Yes *Bamongo*.'

'But today is about you. Look around, and remember this spot.' He stood up and beckoned me to do likewise. He pointed to the hive right above the spot I was sitting and said, 'Now that is yours.'

I nodded. I knew what that meant.

'Son, we are bee keepers. It is what our people do, it is what we have always done. This is the same tree of my first hive.'

'*Wei Bamongo*.'

'Son, you never forget the taste of your first harvest. I was about the same age as you are now. My first one came after the dry season. My father

told me not to rush to harvest my new hive. He taught me to smoke bees. I did what he always did. I gathered dry grass, lit it and, when it was smoking, gently placed it in the hive and then waited for the bees to calm down. That first harvest had a taste of wild flowers that lingers on.'

'Is that why you like eating flowers?'

'Only certain types. They always take me back to my first harvest.'

When Father spoke of setting up hives and of blooming flowers, of bees bearding and bees swarming, of the whitish grey of the dry season honey and the reddish brown of the rainy season honey, I knew the words out of his mouth went beyond him to the generations of fathers before him. He was indeed the son of the Mau.

*

The last time my father and I went to that spot was just before I started university. Father walked behind me. It was raining. We walked slowly, pushing through the damp foliage and taking in the earthy smell. I stopped occasionally to pore over plants or to redirect the creeping ones as I had seen Father do countless times before. I took my time to allow him to catch up. His steps had slowed with the effort of avoiding the underbrush that grabbed at his feet, and his back stooped a little more than I remembered. Father had me count his hives with him. When he gave me my first hive, his were more than 300 but that number had dwindled to 84.

'It is all slipping away,' he sighed.

I said nothing. He slung one side of his thin blanket over his left shoulder as he readied himself to climb one of the *kureyet*. I wanted to do it for him.

'*Bamongo*,' I said, as respectfully as I could, 'let me.'

He had turned and looked at me briefly, his eyes betraying something I was unsure of, before he continued the ascent up the tree as swiftly as I had always remembered. There was something about him that day. He had been tender on that last climb – touching and smelling the bark, and tasting the leaves with devotion. He had taken his time. His fingers were delicate when reaching into the hive for honeycomb, and even more so when they removed the few bees that still sat on the comb. The sun filtered through the

trees making it difficult to read his eyes. When he descended, something about him reminded me of the great prophets coming down the mountain with God's word. Had my father communed with God? Did he know that he was never going up that tree again?

Once back on the ground, Father took the honeycomb, broke it in half, and then broke it in half again. He took one of the pieces and kept halving it until he had a handful of little pieces. He paused and bowed his head slightly in calm reverence. Then he began to throw the bits as he made pronouncements in every direction. 'This is for you my fathers'. At some point I heard him say, 'I am sorry.'

Purged, Father then sat down on his log.

'Son, we are the last generation to call this home. We, and by that I mean me and my age mates. Those of us who were born in this forest, and have never known a home anywhere else. We are the last to call Mau home. You were born here but I don't think your children will come into our world.'

I wanted to say something to assure him that I understood his reverence for the Mau, but I did not know what words to use.

'Son, promise me,' his voice urgent, 'promise me that when your sons come along, you won't let them forget that we were once a people. We are the Ogieks.'

'I promise *Bamongo*.'

He held my gaze for a moment to make sure I understood what I had just promised.

'Now they say they want to protect the forest! What have we been doing for generations, have we not watched over this Mau? How dare ...? How can they say they want to look after the Mau?'

My father was on his feet, pacing. Clenching and unclenching his fist and jaw. His voice rising and dropping suddenly. 'We *know* how to live with the forest.'

That last bit was both quietly forceful and forlorn. Was he speaking to me or someone else? There was a sadness in his voice, a longing for something that was just out of reach.

*

We had barely enjoyed a full honey harvest, after that last time, before the government notice arrived. It warned us that the Mau had to be 'depopulated'. We laughed it off. How were they ever going to do it? It was unthinkable. But then more notices came, and still we hoped nothing would come of them. Ejecting the Ogiek out of the Mau was just as ridiculous as draining Lake Victoria of its fish, we said. But when the government arrived in police vans to deliver the notice in person, a meeting of all the Mau Ogiek was called. We gathered at the open space closest to the stream. We took our places as boys, warriors or elders. It was my first meeting as an initiated member of the clan, and so I took the warriors' position alongside my *bakules*. We had an exalted spot with a sweeping view of the Ogiek and our forest home. The elders sat on the ground to one side, the older ones on the old, fallen tree trunk. Some elders were huddled and speaking quietly. The women and children sat opposite them, on the ground chatting, and occasionally a voice would be raised to call an errant child back.

The first elder, who really was the youngest in the group, stood up. He read the notice out, pausing to translate and explain its contents. He explained that the Mau Forest had come under government protection as a national heritage. The Mau, he said, was a significant water catchment area for the region and, over the years, the rainforest had shrunk to just a quarter of its original size. That much we agreed with and murmured so in cautious approval. The young elder held up his hand for quiet and then went on to say that, because of the forest destruction and land lost to agriculture and timber, the government had decided that it was urgent to restore and rehabilitate the Mau. This included resettling all its inhabitants. The cautious murmuring from before burst as tempers sparked.

'*Shenzi* government!'

'Take my land, take my life!'

'Then they will have to dig up our ancestors and umbilical cords so we can find peace in a new land!'

The clan became a crowd and the crowd was on the verge of becoming a mob. Had the young elder not been one of us, had he not been the son of Mzee Nyongi our spiritual guide, I believe the crowd would have found a way to make him unsay everything he had said.

Mwalimu Rono rose next and walked to the centre. She taught me in primary school, and she was old then and was still old now. The only thing new was the cane she had in her hand. *Mwalimu* was what we all called her.

'Our sacred trees have been cut down to make way for what they call development. Between them, and let's not forget the other outsiders nibbling at our feet for charcoal and maize, and building houses where children once played freely, they have choked the life out of the Mau, and choked us as well,' she said.

'Look around you,' she instructed.

I looked around at my community, whose life was nestled in the Mau. There were more than 20 families in this spot we called Heaven's Breath, a large verdant open space. The ground was damp as usual, as was the air. A few huts, built in and amongst the trees, were in view. The ground sloped east towards the bubbling stream. On any other day, the melody of the birds and the monkeys and the stream buoyed the meditating soul.

'Look around you,' *Mwalimu* Rono instructed again. 'We love Heaven's Breath but we do not want the entire Mau to be this open. That will happen if nothing is done about the outsiders. We are beekeepers and our way of life does not destroy the Mau. Young man, we need you to tell that to the *serikali**, you hear me?'

Up until then, my father had listened quietly, shaking his head and occasionally spitting on the ground. He was next to speak. When he rose, it was as if he was holding up the entire Mau. The clan went quiet immediately and leaned forward.

'Yes, my people, it is true that our Mau has been destroyed. Large chunks of the forest have been lost but who has done this to our Mau? Is it not those outsiders – those who are destroying the Mau for charcoal? When you come to the edge of the forest,' my father turned his body to the right and pointed, 'the new edge – what do you see if not the Kiptagich Tea Plantation – who owns that?' He then turned to point to his left, 'And what sits at the edge of the forest, creating a new edge, if not a timber factory? They are certainly not owned by the Ogiek.'

My father seemed to understand the threat the Mau faced from deep within his being. I could hear in his voice the pain of one being ripped away

from his world. In his stooped back there was fatigue and regret too, when just a season ago he had been climbing trees and inspecting beehives.

'We must talk. We need to talk. We cannot be foolish. This ground is ours. They say they want to re-settle us elsewhere, but what other forest do they want to take us to? We have lived here with all our fathers and I intend to leave this to my children.'

His voice and hands were raised in exasperation. There was none of the usual stammer in his voice and his open hands were shaking in fury. He turned to the young elder: 'Tell them the Ogiek are the very first conservationists. We the Ogiek know how to live with the forest. We the Ogiek are the Mau. We are the environment they are trying to conserve. Without us there is no Mau and without the Mau, we as a people no longer exist. I am Ogiek. I am the Mau.'

'I am Ogiek, I am the Mau,' chorused the village.

With that my father sat down and another elder took his place. I drew my coat closer.

'Young man, tell the Kenyan *Serikali* that we have the knowledge to look after this forest. They should seek our counsel in this matter. I am Ogiek, I am the Mau.'

One after the other, elders stood to reinforce what another had said.

'We must fight for our lives and our livelihood. We must be prepared to die for the Ogiek or there will be no Ogiek left after these ones here.'

'It is just that we should be able to hold onto what is ours.'

And so it went on, each speaker punctuated by a more fiery 'I am Ogiek, I am the Mau.' By the time the meeting ended, the call to arms was clear: the beekeepers seemed a murmuring, angry swarm.

*

It was not until several months later that I realised how much I had underestimated that call. I got home from university to find my *bakules* sharpening *pangas* and inspecting bows and arrows. They were humming a song that was only ever sung in *tumin*. A war song! These were my age mates, all twelve of them. I looked from one to the other and on each face was a resolve that I had not seen before. We did not have that look at *tumin*

when we swore that we would always protect our own. But that was not in war time, so we had sworn with the seriousness of a school assembly loyalty pledge. This time my *bakules* shared the same taut look as they hummed through tight lips. I did not need to be told that their purpose was singular, but I asked anyway.

‘What is going on?’

No response.

Somewhere along the way I had become out of step with them. I wanted to fight for the Mau but not like that.

‘How many?’ I pressed on.

‘Every clan is getting ready,’ someone replied.

I stumbled out. I had to get distance. Space. I needed to breathe. I didn’t know where I was going but I trusted my legs to take me there. And then the path was there, and my feet followed. I could feel the temptation to break into a run, but I willed my feet to slow down: I did not want to outrun my thoughts. Words were whizzing in my head but taking forever to step in line – into coherence. Slow down, I commanded, slow down! But it was my thoughts that heeded my command, not my feet. And so I ran – then jogged. My feet propelled me into a sprint. Pain in my side ... pushing past it ... trying to breathe. But still I ran, and would probably still be running now if I had not tripped against a buttress root, which caused me to stumble and reach for a log. I closed my eyes, put my head between my legs and tried to breathe. I was gulping in air. *Breathe in deeply, exhale slowly.* I opened my eyes. My shoes were covered in sludge. And they were my good shoes – I hadn’t had time to change out of them. The sludge came all the way to the hem of my drenched trousers.

Then the buzzing came. First from a distance and then closer. In the wind I could hear the words ‘Mau, Mau’. The buzzing grew louder. It took a moment for me to realise that the buzzing sat right above my head; then my eyes followed. Something was familiar. It was not just the buzzing, but the specific spot from which it emanated. Bees! One was right next to my ear. I went to flick it off, but my hand was held in mid-action by my father’s words – *work with the bee.* I stood up slowly and carefully stepped back over the log. I watched the bee as it made its way up the tree to what was a familiar sight.

Aiya! Could this be the very same hive? The light poked through the trees and spread widely so I couldn't really be sure. No, not possible, I thought. How? I squinted across the forest canopy and then around me. I recognised the *yemdit* tree right in front of me. That must mean that the trees on either side of me would have to be ... yes, indeed they were the *tongotwet*, and that other one the *kureyet*. I stood stunned for a little while longer. There I was, at the same spot. I looked above me and saw a hive box and immediately knew it was the one. My very first hive! The very same one my father gave me when I turned ten, when he told me about the ways of the Ogiek and taught me about bees. It was years later, at that same spot again, where he showed me his oneness with the soil and with his fathers.

Longing for that oneness, I sank onto my father's log. The memory of that moment stabbed me. I leaned over and grabbed the back of my legs until the pain eased. Then, pushing past fatigue, I fumbled in my pocket for a newspaper clipping that had been everywhere with me in the last six weeks. The Mau was perpetually in the news. *Two Ogiek killed in land clash*. My father had given his life for the Mau and here I was wringing my hands, without the stomach to join my *bakules* in mounting a challenge against the police. Tell me *Bamongo*, tell me you understand!

'Son, we are fighting the same war but your battle is different from mine,' he'd said to me. 'So, go to school. Learn to speak the language of the government. We need you to take our fight to the offices where these decisions are made.'

I closed my eyes to hear him better, but he was slipping away. I swallowed hard. A tightness began to form inside of me; I balled my fists and pushed them into my ribcage to dislodge the knot causing me to gasp. The knot moved upwards and settled as a lump in my throat. I had to bite hard to stall the cry that almost escaped me. My tears were not far off, but so too was my anger, and I chose to embrace the latter. I was on my feet.

'Speak to me Mau! Our umbilical cord is buried deep in this soil. You gave us life but you have taken my father. This soil here that is ours, didn't you say not to let go?'

My voice was raised, but the words that left my mouth were not mine but my father's. He was gone but, in the forest, he was alive, offering a

libation of honeycomb to his fathers and reminding me that I was Ogiek. But I had only just started at university. By the time I was done and ready to challenge the government, would there be a Mau left? The war was real and present and we were armed with bows and arrows against a big government. How do you fight a government without being trodden into the very soil you are fighting for? The fight was over. A greater god had won. The Mau was lost.

I got up to leave. The Mau had already changed anyway, the government said, and our habits were changing too. Living away from home had allowed me to imagine a new kind of home as possible, too. Maybe that would not be so bad after all? Maybe someday I would raise my sons there? But I would keep the stories of the Mau alive.

I came to a stop immediately. *My sons!* Somehow my feet had brought me to the very spot I stood on when I made that promise to my father. *Son, promise me – promise me that when your sons come along, you won't let them forget that we were once a people. We are the Ogieks.*

The hollowness of that promise had stayed with me. Those who cared deeply enough to give their lives for the Mau had failed. I didn't know how I would be able to hold onto the Mau. I couldn't reduce the Ogieks to a story. I couldn't let the Mau die without a fight. Father wanted me to fight one battle, my *bakules* another. I had to face the fight that was on my hands right then. I must, I knew, fight for my father, who had given his life to the Mau. And for his fathers, who were now my fathers. I did not know what would happen from then on, but I knew my feet were fixed on the path I must tread.

I am Ogiek. I am the Mau.

*serikali – means government in Swahili.

Some of the dialogue in this story has been adapted from news sources quoting actual members of the Ogiek about their fight for the Mau. Dialogue has been used from the following sources:

Doku: Conservation Refugees – Expelled from Paradise (The MarketFilm, 2014, 17:29).

Kenya's Ogiek: The Guardians of Mau. (Mongabay, 2018, 5:15)

The Ogiek Factor in conserving the Mau Forest Complex (Akolo, 2018, 1:34).

This story explores the right to: own property; practice one's culture; not be discriminated against; and to self-determination. From the UDHR:

Article 17: (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 27: (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

From ACHPR:

Article 21: (1) All peoples shall freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources. This right shall be exercised in the exclusive interest of the people. In no case shall a people be deprived of it.

From the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Article 2: Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.

Article 3: Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Westgate: A Four-Part Story

Things Immeasurably Great

Juma bound up the stairs two at a time, all the way to the top floor. There were four apartments on each floor and his father's door was at the back of the building next to the window. Juma rapped on the door and waited. Leaned out to look out. All seemed quiet. All was quiet save for his own breathing. (It was then he noticed he was not panting too heavily and he became a little pleased with himself. Just three months ago, he would have required at least five minutes to catch his breath.) The apartment complex was about a year old and the odor of emptiness still filled the space. No one else lived on this floor. Father had shown him the new place only a few months ago. He had said he wanted a quieter place to work in and under no circumstance was Juma to tell anyone about the new office, not even Mother. Juma knew not to ask questions. They called it the warehouse.

The door finally opened but, instead of his father, out came a stranger. They both seemed startled to see each other.

'He is alright,' his father's voice from inside the room assured the stranger. 'Bye *Mheshimiwa*,' his father said.

Juma took another look at the man, who was wearing a driver's uniform, as he hurried away down the stairs.

'*Mheshimiwa*? Why are you calling that driver honourable? Oh, is that ...' he began to say, before he was spun around and his father's large hands clamped hard on his mouth and pulled him inside the apartment.

'Shhhh!' His father hissed.

Juma was not afraid of the face millimetres from his: the tiny eyes, the larger than usual flared nostrils, and the menacing mouth open just enough for breath to warm up Juma's already heated face. It was only after they heard a car start that his father let go.

'What did he want? Why ... what are you doing with him?' Juma began to ask.

His father ignored the questions and stepped back to move a step stool away from a cupboard door. Juma was aware of the false top of the

cupboard shelf. Had Father put something in or taken something out? Why? He searched his father's eyes for a clue.

'Listen boy,' his father met his challenging gaze, breathing down on him, eyes blazing, 'How does the chili you do not eat inflame your tongue?'

Juma shrugged a response. He knew father was not going to say any more about the stranger.

'Boss,' he began. out of habit, 'it is about Hassan and Abdi. Where are they? I can't get a hold of either one.'

'Really?' his father said, sounding irritated. 'I run a big business, you want me to do your job now?'

'No, I just meant it is unusual they are not picking up my calls.'

'As long as they are doing what they are supposed to be doing, I wouldn't worry about them. They are probably out of range. You know how some of the long-distance driving can be like.'

'But they are not just drivers, they have become my friends. Which is why I wanted to see you. You were the one who gave them their briefings. You insisted that you were the one to do it.'

'So?'

'I haven't heard from them since.'

'And again, so?' His father wore a bored look.

'A few days ago, you said to me to tell them what they wanted to hear.'

'Yeah, yeah, the bit about how every act of service was service to God? Juma, did you come all the way to rehash some old pointless conversation? I am a little too busy for that.'

'It was an unusual thing to insist on. *Service to God?*

His father shrugged. 'It sounds good. Maybe we can make it the company motto!'

The acid in his father's words was unmissable. Juma went quiet for a little while, unsure how to proceed. He had expected his father to reiterate 'the service to God' in some form, or offer some excuse, but none was forthcoming. There was nothing new about his father's arrogance, but the cause – the cause had always seemed important to him. Surely his father couldn't be that flippant about their faith and their business? How many times

had he heard Father say that their business was in service to their faith community?

‘Juma, what is it you have trouble understanding, that they wanted to hear that their job was noble?’ His father made no effort to conceal the mockery in his voice.

‘All this time, all this time I have worked for you ... I got my friends Hassan and Abdi involved.’

‘How are they your friends? You only just met them. I have asked you not to confuse business and friendship. They were hired to do a job. They got what they wanted.’

‘They wanted respect and to do a respectful thing. Hassan wanted honest work! Abdi just wanted to serve! Where are they?’ Juma pressed, refusing to be derailed.

‘They did their duty. They did some work for me in town.’ Juma’s father perched himself on the edge of the desk and leaned over slightly to pick out a coin from a little pile. ‘Since you insist, the Kirimatt, west of town.’

Father paused briefly. With his eyes fixed on Juma, he then tossed the coin high, caught it, held it up and waited. Juma looked back defiantly, wondering what his father was waiting for, before the dots began to connect.

‘You mean ...’ began Juma, disbelief entering his voice. ‘But ... there was an explosion there. Was that them ... you?’

His father tilted his head slightly to the right, said nothing, and then flipped the coin again.

‘So much was lost in the explosion,’ Juma’s voice was rising. He tried to rise too but his father’s eyes pinned him to his chair. ‘But that was Jebri!l’s store! There were many other shops there. Oh God, Jebri!l.’ His voice lowered as did the shivers down his spine.

‘Don’t expect me to be sorry for him.’

‘But he lost so much.’

‘He rattled a rattle snake is what he did!’

Juma quivered. It was no secret that his father and Jebri!l did not like each other.

‘My friends, where are they now?’

'Your recruits you mean. It was easy you know – all that stuff about protecting our faith.' Father laughed out loud.

'What did you say to them?'

'What they wanted to hear. That Jebril was financing the enemies of our faith to destroy us.'

'So, you used them,' Juma spat out.

'Learn my boy, it is the way it is supposed to be.' He threw the coin at Juma, before adding, 'that is how you make plenty of those.'

'By blowing up your enemies?'

'But I will say this of Abdi, and his faith in the desert god,' Father continued, ignoring Juma's remark. 'Aa ... ha! That made it all too easy. Cost me almost nothing.' His lips turned upwards at the corners. 'The kind of price I like to pay. Azana on the other hand ...' he chuckled, not even bothering to finish the sentence about a man whose name he mangled at every opportunity.

'What happened, Father?' Juma asked, his breath trapped between teeth. 'And for what?'

'They wanted money and they got it. Plenty of it.'

'This could cost them their lives!'

'Well that is what their lives cost!'

Juma's world darkened. He was on his feet, his fist hurtling towards his father's face only for his father to grab his fist and force him down on his knees. His father had him in a choke hold. Juma struggled briefly in vain. His father wasn't a big man but he was very strong. Juma felt himself lifted from his knees and into the chair he had been sitting on.

'The boy thinks he has become a man! Where did the time go?' Father was standing over him.

Flinching from the look of disgust on his father's face, Juma looked down at his own clenched fists. His watch strap had loosened, so he adjusted it.

'Right, take a closer look at your watch. Have you any idea what it cost? That could have put Hazana and his entire family through school.' His father was speaking in that annoying soft voice that forced you to listen up. There would be consequences for not paying attention.

'Look out that window. Look at the protection I have built around your life. That is my money. That is you – safe.'

'Waweru,' Juma began, choosing to call his father by his name.

Hissing again, his father leaned over him so that his face hovered just above Juma's. It wore a slightly amused look. Juma arched further back, his hands gripping the arm of the chair.

'Does a baboon laugh at another's behind?' His father smirked. 'You didn't tell your *friends* I was your father, did you?'

Father straightened up and took a step back. Juma dug his feet into the carpet, and his fingers into the palm of his hands, as he searched for an outlet for his anger. His right hand found a folded newspaper. He grabbed it and brought it down on to the table – hard. He banged away several times until he was exhausted and oddly sated. Then he dropped his head as he expelled his breath, and slowly became aware of a growing ache in his right wrist. He must have banged it against the table. He reached for his wrist, which was resting against the newspaper, and rubbed it for a while with his other hand. His eyes rested on the paper, which was now ripped, but the first couple of lines stood unbowed before him. *This is a war against Kenya and Kenyans. It is a war that every one of us must fight*, it read. Right now, he was in a war with his father and there was no victory in sight. He picked himself up, and was just at the door, when it came to him. The stranger in the driver's uniform was not a stranger at all. He had seen him somewhere. He closed his eyes to try and remember, but the thought was pushed out by another.

Juma turned back to the man staring daggers at him. Surely his father would not ... no! That was unthinkable ... going too far! He leaned against the door and took in a deep breath, his body shaking and immobile at the same time. His eyes sought his father's for answers, some indication ... anything. Even some assurance of coincidence would suffice. Two days had not passed since the Westgate terror attack. Could his new friends have been responsible? No way. Hassan maybe, if he was really desperate for money but Abdi, no way. Not the Abdi he had come to know. How could Abdi go from running errands to making a political statement?

His feet finally walked him back into the room. He collapsed into the chair his father had dumped him on moments ago. Nothing made sense. He knew his father transported goods that were not always legal. It is why he insisted on people he could trust. But terrorism! No, that was too much. Could his father really do it? Did ... could a vendetta against his personal business rival grow into an attack on innocent people? No. He couldn't do it. Or could he?

Thoughts and questions bounced around Juma's head, but everything in his being shouted, 'Hell no!' No way could his father, could he, Juma, be involved with the attack at Westgate. And of all the young people he had introduced to his father's business, Abdi was the least likely to do anything remotely violent. He was not like the other boys, he didn't really seem to need the jobs. Most of the boys Juma recruited talked about making money and making it big. But it was only talk. Not for Abdi. He was bound for university. He had a bright future ahead of him. Why would he get involved?

'Tell me Father,' Juma's voice came from a distance, slow and deep, 'if Abdi made the choice to do this for you, what did you say to convince him it was justifiable? And that *he*, Abdi, was the one to carry it out?'

A small silence followed. Father finally straightened up a little, seemingly unnerved by Juma's tone.

'Have you not heard? People are attracted by things that are immeasurably "great",' Father replied, using only one finger to air quote his explanation. 'Once I convinced him that Jebril was harming our faith community, it was not hard at all. Fighting injustice is a noble cause, is it not?' The smirk was back. 'He really was something, that Abdi friend of yours, wasn't he?'

Juma looked up sharply, startled at the use of the past tense. He nodded his head, choosing to focus on the Abdi he knew and not on the sarcasm in his father's tone, which might also have held a tinge of admiration.

'It was almost a shame to use Abdi,' his father went on. 'It was almost as if he was willing to lay his life down for the sake of others. Remember when he refused to deliver goods to the flower farms because they dammed water from north river, which denied the people living downstream sufficient

clean water? He wouldn't take 10K for a four-hour job. I knew then he was no ordinary driver.'

'That sounds like Abdi. That Abdi wouldn't blow up someone's store. That Abdi would not be found anywhere near Westgate. What the hell did you say to him?'

'People are complex. He saw a need to push back. His way of responding to a higher calling, I guess.'

'So you turned him into a terrorist?'

'Why do you care anyway? You have known for a long time that our business was ... um ... shall we say flexible?'

'Yes, trafficking in contraband is not the same, the same as ... this.' Juma swore, and slammed his fist on the headlines. He looked up at his father and a sudden thought crossed his mind. 'Why are you doing this? Who are you working for?' Wait a minute, was that him? The *mheshimiwa* in the driver's uniform?'

'That is not a name you will utter here,' Father snapped at him, rising to his feet abruptly and thumping his desk as he did so. 'Not in here, not anywhere, understood!'

Fear had crept into Father's voice. The harshness of his words couldn't mask it. Juma tried to catch his father's eyes but he was pacing the room, swearing and muttering under his breath, the pulsating vein in his neck prominent. He had never known his father to show fear. A terrifying reality hit Juma then, as his worst fears were confirmed. He did not need any more words from his father.

Juma picked up the newspaper again. The two-day old images showed a shopping centre engulfed in smoke. 'This is war,' President Kenyatta had said. His missing friends and the attack on Westgate morphed into one. And he, Juma, was one with it too. Somehow he had brought Abdi and Hassan into the mess he was struggling to make sense of. He couldn't trust his father's word, but what difference did it make? He was a terrorist too, or the son of one. How could he extricate himself from it all? He wanted to run from the toxicity in the room, but the weight of reality had him crushed. He had played a part in it and he knew retaliation was on its way. From Jebril or the law, it was coming. And this was only the beginning.

Not One of Us

Amina's heart beat a little faster as she began to understand what was happening. The TV was loud, but she wasn't interested in the sound. She focused on the images and in particular one of a woman of a certain build. She thought she recognised her by her gait, but it wasn't quite right. She kept her eyes trained on the TV, desperately trying to remember what her mother had worn that morning. Her breath got louder and shorter as she fought the urge to blink. There was only one whose eyes she wanted to see. She knew the long curly hair and four piercings on each ear lobe would be tucked into her scarf.

'Following the Westgate attack, President Kenyatta has directed that the security agencies be decisive in their response to any threat. The police crackdown began at 10am in Eastleigh,' the reporter was saying, with an artificial intonation on the 'leigh'. If she wanted to listen to someone mispronounce her town, she could have tuned in to CNN or BBC she thought with irritation.

'It's Isili, you twit' yelled Amina. 'Isili, not Eastleigh. Just Isili. Isili *ndiyo* home!'

Feeling a little dizzy from her outburst, Amina collapsed into the sofa. One by one she watched the women get loaded onto trucks. An arm in fatigues reached out to help a wailing woman. A heavy-set mother clung tightly to her child. A soldier hopped off the truck to help her up, but she still she clung to her baby. The mother kept looking over her shoulder and then around, though the crowd of onlookers remained motionless. Amina watched them too. The mother did not cry out to them. Yielding, she handed her child to the soldier beside her and watched them load her little girl onto the truck. She stepped back a little, gathered her maxi dress, and with her left hand held it to her hip. It was then that Amina noticed she was carrying a little boy's jacket. The mother's eyes left her baby to look around one more time. The camera zoomed in to her anguished eyes. More soldierly arms reached for her, and she raised her arms to receive help, but hesitated and stepped

back again. Her deep breath was visible but this time she did not look away. Her little girl looked on, hair parted neatly in the centre with two unfinished plaits. Amina tensed her shoulders. The camera found the mother again, just in time to catch her legs swing off the railing and disappear into the truck.

‘Some are demanding money so you can keep your ID,’ cried another, who was being interviewed.

Her eyes were a deep brown and her voice was forceful. The woman was cursing the police to a reporter, shaking her pointing finger. As she spoke, she kept adjusting the scarf flowing over her left shoulder, more out of habit than necessity. Amina tried to lick the dryness from her mouth and failed. The next comment shot Amina right out of her seat.

‘They just took my neighbour. She is a Kenyan. She showed them her ID,’ a woman in a blue chador, holding up her own ID, said angrily.

Amina’s body began to tremble. She pulled the jumper she was wearing closer. Her eyes came to rest on the red devil on the Manchester United logo. She brought the jumper to her nose and then buried her face in it. It was her dad’s jumper and she could still smell him on it. Whenever she wore it, her dad would say ‘If only I had three Aminas to fit into my best jumper.’ He would twirl her around and thank God for the one that he had. It had been two years since he died. She couldn’t lose her mum now. A painful gasp escaped her.

The reporter turned to give the microphone to someone else, but the blue *chadored* woman wouldn’t be ignored. She reached for the mic and pulled it towards her again.

‘Whether you are a Somali from Somali or a Somali from Kenya, it does not mean anything.’

Trying to control her rising nausea, Amina alternated between paying close attention to women in the background, to just sweeping through the herd of head scarfed women in long flowing black dresses. Any one of them could be her mother. Why couldn’t mother have worn a skirt suit like she did when she went to work!

Once in a while the camera panned onto the onlookers. They seemed calm. But why wouldn’t they? They did not look the part. They did not stand out as refugees. They were of a deeper, darker complexion. They did not

have aquiline noses to betray them, their tightly curled hairs were not hidden by a *shash*, nor were their shoulders covered by a *garbasaar*. Maybe, just maybe, if it was one of their own mothers in trouble, their circle of compassion would enlarge.

‘Please don’t be the one. Please don’t be the one.’ Amina prayed fervently as she dug her fingers into the folds of her jumper. The constrictions in her chest were crushing her. She collapsed once more onto the sofa. She was cold. She was hot. She held onto dad’s jumper even harder as she tried to contain the tingling and chills in her arms and hands. She squeezed her eyes shut and focused on breathing. ‘Dear God, dear God, dear God,’ she repeated, until she could hear her voice above her pounding heart.

Amina heard from the Isili-mispronouncing reporter that 82 illegal immigrants had already been deported to Somalia. ‘This is a war against Kenya and Kenyans. It is a war that every one of us must fight.’ The president was being quoted on TV. Then, ‘After the break, we take you to Kasarani Stadium where the men are being held.’

Then, from behind her, came the sweetest voice ever: ‘And that is your break from TV.’

Amina whipped her head around so fast that she had to hold onto the sofa. She hadn’t heard the door. But Mother was there. Standing just inside it!

‘Mum!’ Amina screamed, as she sprang out of the sofa and into her mother’s arms, knocking the shopping bags on to the floor.

‘Watch what ...’

Mum began to scold her, but Amina was just happy to hear her voice. She held on until her breath steadied. When she tried to speak, a loud sob left her instead. Mum let her cry it out.

‘Sweetie, what has got you so worked up?’

‘It is what they are saying, I was afraid you had been deported too.’

‘What? Where would you get such a crazy idea?’

Amina pointed to the TV.

‘Huh, they are still talking about Westgate. How many times have I told you not to believe everything you see on TV? Here, come sit down.’

‘But Mum, it is the news,’ Amina said, clinging to her mum’s arm.

'Deportations are not for citizens, Amina.'

'The woman on TV said they were deporting anyone who was Somali.'

'Well, we are Somali by tribe but we are Kenyan citizens. We have nothing to worry about.'

'But the other Somalis ...'

'Are from Somali,' Mother shrugged. 'Not much of a difference if you ask me. We are one people. Only a border separates us. You know some of my mother's people live on the other side of the border, right?'

Amina nodded. Her body was light with relief that Mother was home. She snuggled in close and rested her head on her bosom, eyes following the rise and fall of her mother's chest. It was soothing to hear Mother's heartbeat instead of hers, which had been pounding with fear moments ago.

'Why are they doing this to us?' she finally asked.

'Unfortunately, those involved in Westgate terror attack were from Somali.'

'Our Somali?' she asked, dreading the answer.

'No Amina, but because our culture and language is similar, they now consider us an enemy, I am afraid that makes us all guilty in some way.'

Amina shuddered slightly and Mother rubbed the side of her right arm gently. Mother went quiet for a little while before she sat up and turned Amina around to face her.

'This is the equivalent of wearing the colours of the rival team in a tense football match.'

'But I thought we were on the same team.'

'We are. But not everyone thinks that.'

'That sucks!'

'Don't get me wrong *tete*, but I get it. I get it when they say they are tightening security. Taking out a few bad people today may save lives tomorrow.'

'*Aai* Mum, whose side are you on?'

'Isn't that what we all want? An end to all this,' pointing to the TV.
'*Ptho shetani!*'

Amina looked up quickly. Mother had managed to click her tongue and spit out a swear word at the same time.

'That is how the law responds to terrorism,' Mother added, her upper lip still curled.

'Deporting mothers? Separating them from their children? That's ... er ... that's ...'

'Cruel? Criminal? Violent?' her mother finished for her.

A little heat began to wrap itself around Amina's neck and face.

'Amina, violence begets violence as they say.' Mother paused briefly, 'Oh God, this is never going to end'.

Amina looked up. a little alarmed. There was something new and unsettling in Mother's voice. Was Mother giving up? She felt another wave of nausea begin to rise in her. She bit down on her lip.

'Dad used to say you pick up one end of the stick, you also pick up the other.'

'Precisely, my girl. No matter the source of the terror, we are the ones trodden on like grass.' Her mother continued, more to herself than to Amina. 'It is hard to explain the root of violence.'

'Huh?'

But Mother explained no more. With a sigh, she peeled herself from Amina's tight embrace and made her way to the kitchen. Amina stayed close.

'What is going to happen to us? What are we going to do, Mum?'

'Live our lives.'

Mother reached for the kettle.

'Pick up the groceries, Amina,' Mother said, as she grabbed milk out of the fridge. 'Don't just stand there, the groceries off the floor!'

But Amina stood still, staring at her mother who was filling the kettle with milk before turning it on.

'We are a part of a community of caring people who know us. But you and I will be fine. You and I belong. We will be fine, you will see.' Mother's voice lowered and trailed off.

Amina wanted to believe her, she really did. But instead she reached around her mother and turned off the kettle before taking her hand to lead her back to the sofa. The tingling in her fingers was beginning again, so she drew dad's jumper in until she was fully wrapped in it.

*

The Non-Hiding Place

Mwita knew he was a coward and that was fine with him. The battle fields were littered with the bodies of men who were once brave, but he, he would see his mother again – one day, he hoped. Now, watching the cows drink from the stream, he too paused to drink in the moment. He made the effort to notice that, further upstream, he could see a couple of boys not only watering their cows but also taking a bath. A few mango trees, in full bloom, seemed to grow wild a little further in. The stream was quickly getting muddied as the cows drank their fill.

‘In those shoes, will you be sprinting after the goats?’

‘You a city boy!’ Was that a statement or an accusation?

His cousins had been taunting him all morning. Uncle had shushed them with a wave of his hand – Mwita called him ‘Uncle’, though he wasn’t sure how distant of a relative he was. Uncle acted older than he really was. He carried a walking stick, though it wasn’t clear why. Village life seemed to have aged him. When Mwita showed up on his doorstep a few days ago, trying to explain who he was, it had been easier than he expected. Uncle had listened and nodded from time to time, never saying much.

‘Show him the *singira* for the night,’ Uncle had instructed to no one in particular. He hadn’t said much since then. This morning, Mwita offered to look after the cows, so Terigin could go to school.

‘But it’s not my turn today’ – Terigin had tried to argue, but Uncle’s wave silenced the child.

Watching the cows at the stream, Mwita was aware Uncle was watching him too. He knew he would need to explain himself sooner rather than later.

Picking out a spot, Mwita sat on a greener patch of grass. He was a comfortable distance from the cow dung that chequered the ground, so he leaned back on his hands to enjoy the sun on his face. The reward for his cowardice.

Your instructions are simple, drive in and park the car in the basement. Legally Mwita wasn’t old enough to drive, but he had been driving

for the last year. Then again, there were a lot of illegal things he had witnessed in the past year. It wasn't illegal to not go to school though, even if he had woken up every morning and got dressed for it. That kept mother content, and she worked even harder to keep him in school. She was out of the house before the sun and came in after had gone to bed. It was good that way. He missed her a lot. He knew she did not have to work so hard, but how could he explain he had more money in his school bag than she could make in a month?

Mwita would never forget the moment the commandant whipped out a wad of cash and threw it in his direction. 'I have a job for you. A driving job.' He had winked at Mwita before adding, 'A job for a real man.'

Your instructions are simple, drive in and park the car in the basement. And wait.

Mwita arrived at the village ahead of the news headlines. He arrived before Kenyatta urged everyone to fight back in the war against Kenya and Kenyans; before he declared terrorism as the philosophy of cowards. Mwita stared into the distance as Uncle sank onto the ground beside him. Perhaps the truth could wait for another day.

'Start wherever you will,' Uncle's voice carried a calm authority.

'What do you mean?' Mwita tried to buy himself some time. He was armed with several stories. Commandant had drilled them in explanations to suit any occasion. Mwita knew just the thing to say, but he had no desire to do so. However, the truth was still optional.

One of the cows began to wander away from the group and Mwita made to stand up. His uncle's hand was gentle on his.

'Don't trouble yourself with that. It won't get far. And, even if it did, someone will bring it back to me.'

'Huh? What if they don't know whose cow it is?'

That seemed to amuse his uncle. 'Everyone knows whose cows are whose. See that dung there?' he pointed to a dried pile directly in front of them. 'I know whose cow dropped that.'

Mwita's mouth opened in awe. 'Really?'

'Just kidding young man. This isn't the city. There are no strangers in our midst.'

Uncle paused for a while. Mwita willed him to continue talking, as he hadn't made up his mind what to say.

'City kids don't flee to the village unless they have to.'

Haiya! Mwita was thinking. He felt cornered but strangely calm about it. Too bad he would have to run again.

'One other thing, your mother, I don't think I know her.' Another pause. 'I asked around and she is from Dalget, beyond that valley,' pointing to the right.

'Oh I'm er ... I'm sorry.' Mwita began to get up and, once again, Uncle's hand restrained him. 'I am in the wrong place.'

'You are a restless little ant, aren't you? Young man, you have a lot to learn. Just because I do not know her doesn't mean she isn't one of us.'

That startled Mwita even more.

'Look at this stream. This stream here,' this time he pointed at the stream with his right index finger 'It waters my cows, waters the next village too. Around here, that is a good enough bind.'

Silence. Mwita took in the strangeness of the moment and of the strange village talk.

'Here they come,' Uncle stood up abruptly. 'Come and see.'

Mwita followed Uncle to a higher point. He was about to ask who was coming when suddenly a group of runners, perhaps close to twenty, came into view. Some looked elite in their colourful Nike shirts and skinny shorts, and some were in no way striking. Alongside them ran a bunch of barefooted kids eager to catch up.

Mwita watched them with a familiar sense of pride.

'They do this every day. I like to watch them beat their bodies up on this hill and down into that valley.'

They watched the runners till they were out of sight. Uncle rested his left arm on Mwita's shoulder. Mwita did not dislodge himself; instead he squirmed secretly.

'Son, if you are ever going to give yourself, any part of you, be sure it is for the right reasons.'

*

The Pledge

It was two years since Abdi disappeared and thrust Kamili into the position of eldest son. Kamili was sitting up reading a book when his mother walked in with just a tap on the door.

'I thought you might like some tea,' she said, as she placed the flask on a side table and a big plastic bag on the floor next to it. She then poured out tea into the only cup she had brought in and sat on the edge of her son's bed.

Kamili could see that she hadn't slept much. She was wearing the face she had been wearing for the last year.

'Thanks,' Kamili said as he watched mother drinking the tea.

As usual, Father would be asleep in the next room. He was rarely awake these days. Kamili knew Mother brought the tea in just so she could talk to him. He liked that. He liked that she sought him out a lot. He wondered if she used to do the same with Abdi.

'Two years today,' she announced.

Nobody needed reminding. It was all they thought of.

'It's time to bury him,' she added, when he did not respond.

Kamili nodded. They had had this conversation before. Mother always said she would wait for a year for Abdi's return and that in the second year she would wait for his body to come home. But she never talked about what she would do after she stopped waiting.

'You mean like an official thing?' Kamili asked.

'No! No. We will free him but never let go of him in our hearts. We will say goodbye to him as a family.'

Kamili understood. The neighbours hadn't wanted to have much to do with them after Westgate. He knew they were whispering. The polite greetings had since stopped. Those who grieved with them soon after Abdi disappeared chose to stay away.

'I don't want any trouble,' one neighbour had bothered to explain. The Bandas had been labelled as troublemakers, and Kamili was sure one of them had placed the call that saw his father whisked away one morning as

he prepared to go to work. It was months before father came back. He had been asleep since then.

‘And father?’

‘He understands. I think he does, I hope he does.’ Mother had taken to interpreting Dad’s needs or thoughts. Kamili doubted if his father appreciated it. Father was always forceful with his opinions. Sometimes Kamili would look at him lying in bed and wonder if all the knowledge and passion which had mesmerised his students was still there, locked up somewhere in a safe in his brain – or if it had all evaporated.

‘Tell me again son. Tell me again.’

‘Mother, I will never join them.’

‘Swear it.’

‘I swear.’

Kamili was startled the first time Mother made him swear it.

‘But Mother, that is so weird, so awkward.’

But she had made her own pledge that she wouldn’t lose another child to awkwardness. Now Kamili thought of it as a pledge to be practised routinely. Sometimes it was awkward, at times serious and sometime just plain amusing. Today, it was sombre.

Mother pulled out a note from her pocket. Kamili did not need to read it. He knew its’ curt contents by heart, and so did mother.

Dear mum and dad. It is my turn and I must heed the calling. Sorry. You have my love forever. Abdi Banda

‘We know your name you goose,’ Kamili had said one occasion. But on many others, in anger, he would want to scream, ‘You are NOT a Banda!’

‘Kamili, please don’t get tired of listening to me. I will keep talking until we do not need to do so anymore.’

‘Mother, you know I value our talks,’ said Kamili.

Perhaps if he hadn’t lost his friends he wouldn’t enjoy her company so much. At first, he was uncomfortable with mother’s talk-lectures, as he liked to think of them. It irritated him that she would say the same things over and over. But one day she let slip that she blamed herself for not preparing Abdi well enough to make the right choices, so Kamili accepted he was now getting a double portion of her attention: he was 16 after all. And even though

his sisters were a lot younger, they too got an abridged version of the talk-lectures.

‘Kamili, who are you most angry with? Frustrated with?’

‘Huh?’

‘Al-Shabaab took your brother ...’

‘And the state my father!’ Kamili cut in, his voice guttural as a familiar pain stabbed him.

His father had come back a different man. Actually, less than a man – barely a human being. Where was the man who had made Abdi and Kamili sit through the heated dinner conversations he had with his fellow intellectuals on the political turmoil in Kenya, while they enjoyed *nyama choma*? That man had lost all interest in any conversation that went beyond a few phrases. With time, Mother had found out that he had spent time in a cell far away. He had described it as driving for a whole day in the direction of the setting sun.

‘His mind is not clear,’ she had tried to explain. ‘He insists white people asked him many questions about Al-Shabaab.’

‘Do you think so, Mother?’ Kamili had asked.

‘Who knows my child? He doesn’t know for sure where he has been. But if it is to Kampala he was taken, I wouldn’t be surprised. After the outrage of Guantanamo, I imagine the same people would carry out investigations in places like Kampala.’ Mother’s lip turned at its edges. ‘Wouldn’t surprise me in the least.’

‘But why Kampala?’ Kamili asked

‘It is far away. The most logical reason would be to avoid scrutiny.’

The anger that rose in Kamili was a familiar one. It happened every time he imagined his father locked up on suspicion that he knew something. His father was now a broken man, both in spirit and in places too inappropriate to mention. Kamili was even angrier at Abdi for ripping them all apart.

‘Kamili, I also imagine you must be feeling conflicted about who to be more mad at. I feel the same way. I want to hit out at someone.’

It was hard to imagine Mother wanting to hit out. But when Abdi first left, her words either hit with molten anger or stopped you in cold fury. It was

tears and anger all the time. In this last year, she had been mostly calm when she was stitching or knitting, which seemed to be most of the time. But it was the kind of calm you imposed on yourself.

‘Mother, either way we lose, don’t we? Abdi called it a calling.’

His mother sat up and her voice trembled.

‘I don’t want you calling it that. It is not a calling. It cannot be.’

‘If you had a choice, what side would you fight on?’

‘Son, I would choose my family. I would choose your father, you and your sisters. I would choose Abdi.’ Mother put her cup down on the floor and moved close enough to hold Kamili in her arms. ‘Son, we are not limited to two bleak choices.’

Kamili was a little uncomfortable with the hug, but he knew every time she hugged him she was also hugging Abdi.

‘Wangare Mathaai, let her speak to us today.’

‘Bloodied but unbowed,’ Kamili echoed.

‘Yes, her life showed us how. Together is how we each fight this war against Kenya and Kenyans – as a family, as a nation. Let me tell you a story I heard when I was a little girl.’

But Mother, you don’t tell stories anymore.

‘Today is different.’ Mother inhaled in loudly and then breathed out slowly. She picked up her cup and took another sip of tea. ‘I need today to be different.’ She began:

Ants lived in a colony at the bottom of the Great Mountain. They were hard working and had strong bodies. They looked after each other and had strong families. Every day, Queen Ant would remind them to be mindful of each other and their neighbours, so they could all continue to live in peace.

But, unfortunately for them, a family of elephants grazed close by and sometimes they would eat the plants that belonged to the ants. Sometimes they trampled on the ant home with their large feet and crushed the ant families. This brought a lot of suffering to the ant community. Some of the ants got frustrated that the Queen Ant was not doing enough to stop the suffering. So, they held a clandestine meeting.

‘We need someone to confront the elephants,’ said Safari Ant

Bullet Ant volunteered. 'That would be us. When the elephants trample on us, they do so because we are ants,' they said. 'We are strong. It is our duty to defend our colony.' And so, they set off to confront the family of elephants.

Young Elephant mocked them, saying, 'Such little things want to tell me how to live my life! With just one blow of my trunk you will be swept away.'

'We may be little, but we can fight back,' Bullet Ant responded. 'We will show you that we deserve respect.'

Elephant swung his trunk to hit them, but the ants ducked and grabbed onto the end of the trunk. They crawled up Elephant's trunk, causing him to sneeze and sneeze and sneeze.

Eventually, Elephant's lungs tired and he collapsed and died.

The elephants were confounded that creatures so tiny could fell one of their own. They set off the next day towards Ant Kingdom. As they crossed the river, they each filled their snouts with water with which they drowned Ant Colony. Hundreds of ants lost their lives.

Filled with anger and a desire to avenge their families, the ants waited till night fell. They crawled into Elephant Kingdom and up the snout of one of the elephants, causing him to sneeze and sneeze.

'ATCHAU CHOO!'

Kamili jolted forward. It was Abdi's choppy double sneeze.

'ATCHAU CHOO!'

Mother sneezed again, an unshielded sneeze! They were kids again and Mother was telling them one of her many stories. Mother on the chair, he and Abdi on the floor. Kamili shut his eyes and slowly leaned back till his head rested on the headboard. *It was Mother's old voice speaking.* And then there was silence. Sensing his mother's eyes on him, he opened his own slowly. Her eyes seemed a little clearer and a little smile touched them. Time collapsed. The two-year whirlwind evaporated and a small brightness sparked between them. Just as suddenly, it was gone. Kamili tried to snatch it back, but instead his hand dropped limp onto his thigh. Mother's hand flew to her throat to hide the lump, but Kamili heard her swallow it. Once again,

Abdi's shadow fell between them. The silence stretched on a little longer before Mother continued.

The next day, the elephants were back, trampling on the ants and their homes and their families. This went on for many seasons. Many lives were lost but still, no one gave in.

One day, as they buried one of their own, Mother Elephant announced something to the mournful group.

'It is time to number our dead. The ants may be tiny, but we cannot control them or their determination. Look how much damage they have caused us! We can no longer ignore the suffering our grazing habits have had on them. Surely we can find a way to feed our family without trampling on the ants?'

Meanwhile, the Ant Queen also decided that enough was enough. She called the Ant Colony together.

'It is time to number our dead,' she announced. 'We are now in a cycle of revenge attacks with the Elephant Kingdom. Every day brings more battles and more victims. We cannot go on like this.'

Fire Ant, whose turn it was to do battle with the elephants the next night, asked, 'What do we need to do?'

'We have to own our part in this. We also need to remember who we are. Remember when our families gave us the most joy, and we had peace with each other? We have proven we are strong enough to fight the elephants, but now we need to be strong enough to walk away and end this cycle of violence.'

The next day, Ant Colony sent a delegation to Elephant Kingdom with a message of peace. They came back, also with a message of peace from the elephants. All the animals gathered in the clearing later that day to mark the end of the conflict. They agreed on how to share food so everyone had their fill and no one would be trampled to death. Everyone was cautiously happy. Tension still existed, of course, but no ants have been flooded and no elephants have sneezed to death since then.

When Mother finished, Kamili felt a little lost. He did not know how to respond. She had not told him stories in two years. Abdi should be there. He should be there making fun of Mother's storytelling, interrupting her, seeking

clarification, irritating them all by announcing the moral of story before Mother was done. Kamili searched for something to say but found nothing.

‘Today, we bury Abdi.’

His mother’s words startled him: it was as though she had read his thoughts. His eyes flew open. There was also something new in her voice, something that began in the course of the story. He said nothing.

‘Then we can begin to live again. It has been long enough.’

Still, Kamili said nothing.

‘I have something for you.’

She reached for the plastic bag she had brought earlier and drew out a package wrapped in newspapers. Kamili swung his feet off the bed and sat up. He looked at her, puzzled. What kind of gifts accompanied such a day? Shaking, Kamili untied the ribbon gently and then ripped the newspaper wrapping. In it was a thick plain piece of black fabric folded into thirds.

He got off the bed to crouch beside it, so that he could place the fabric in the centre of it. His mother shuffled back to make more room. He turned to his mother, unsure what to expect, but she gestured for him to go on. Feeling a little unsteady, he lifted the folds to straighten out the fabric. He leaned in to examine the gift and then out for a fuller view. A small gasp escaped his lips.

Revealed was a patchwork of bold colours, different materials and shapes. Stitched around the edges were rectangular blocks of black and white and red and green. Larger square bits of clothing from Father’s and Abdi’s old clothes were woven in towards the centre, with smaller squares from his mother’s scarves, his sisters’ old t-shirts and his own. He reached for a square in faded yellow that used to be Dad’s running shirt. Oh, how Father hated yellow! But it was his football team’s colour. Instinctively, Kamili leaned in to sniff it. So that is where that shirt went, he thought, as he felt the strip of fabric next to it, which was what used to be Abdi’s shirt – one he too used to share. There were bits from his sisters’ baby dresses, and from clothes they must have worn every day when the Bandas were whole. His fingers lingered on a pattern of two elephants with their trunks intertwined, held up by a string of ants. He nodded knowingly. But if only he had known that would be their last safari to the Maasai Mara! He leaned back to take in

the entire patchwork. In the centre was a white shape of a hand outlined in red. He placed his hand over it. Intrigued, he turned to his mother.

'Look closely,' she said.

He removed his hand and leaned in. Marking off the space were words embroidered right around it. They read, '*We belong to you. You belong to us.*'

'Mother.'

How often Kamili had seen her stitch and knit and crochet? He never thought it had had anything to do with him. He felt a tug inside of him. He felt glad. He felt sad.

'One thing, Mother,' Kamili said with a small smile, laying his hand over the outline again. 'This quilt isn't big enough for my bed.'

'That is because it is supposed to hang behind your door. It is what I want you to see every day before you leave this room.'

She placed her hand over his. Her wrist was a lot stronger than he remembered.

'Tell me once again son.'

'I will never join them. I give you my pledge.'

'Now let's go lay your brother to rest.' But her hand remained firmly on his.

Although the UDHR does not mention terrorism directly, what is implied in this four-part story is that acts of violence against the public undermine fundamental human rights. Also implied is the need to protect social, economic and cultural rights 'to prevent the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism' (OHCHR, Factsheet p.46).

Things Immeasurably Great

This story explores the right to: life; social, economic and cultural security, and to not have any of your rights taken away. From the UDHR:

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 22: Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with

the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 30: Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Not One of Us

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that Kenya hosts about half a million refugees, with 55% of that figure made up of Somalis fleeing war from Somalia (UNHCR).

This story concerns the rights to: non-discrimination and ethnic profiling; and to the prohibition of refoulement. From the UDHR:

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 14: (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

The Non-Hiding Place

This story concerns the right to life; freedom and safety; and duty to others. From the UDHR:

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 29: (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

From ACHPR, Chapter II: Duties

Article 27: (1) Every individual shall have duties towards his family and society, the State and other legally recognized communities and the international community.

(2). The rights and freedoms of each individual shall be exercised with due regard to the rights of others, collective security, morality and common interest.

Article 29. (3) The individual shall have the duty not to compromise the security of the State whose national or resident he is.

The Pledge

The rights and duties explored here include the rights to: not be discriminated against; life and security of person; to not be tortured; fair trial; and to respect family. From the UDHR:

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10: Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11: (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

From the ACHPR, chapter II Duties:

Article 29 (1): the individual shall have the duty to preserve the harmonious development of the family and to work for the cohesion and respect of the family; to respect his parents at all times, to maintain them in case of need.

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