



## Imagining cultural antecedents in constructing autobiographical self: Duncan Ndegwa's *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* (2006)



### Book review



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#### Abstract

This article argues that autobiography is a site in which cultural antecedents can be retrieved in the construction of the autobiographical self. The article relies on exploratory research design by interrogating literature related to the recollection and retrieval of the autobiographer's past to situate self in time and place. The article analyses *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* as an insight stimulating example and demonstrates that the author retrieves the provenance of his community, the Agikuyu's cosmology to construct an autobiographical self whose engagements in private and public spaces is highly motivated by the cultural history of his people and the primordial patterns of governance and social justice. The article argues that autobiographical writing is an important practice in which thinkers and practitioners of Africa's modern day's socio-cultural spaces can engage in the process of (re) production, circulation, consumption, archiving and retrieval of past African knowledges and cultural spaces in view of their significance in the modern world. This process would be important not only to restore the pride of place of traditional institutions of governance and social justice but also to assure that these past institutions remain relevant in the present and the future imagination of Africa's socio-cultural spaces.

**Keywords:** *cultural antecedents, organising principle, paterfamilias, socio-cultural space*



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## Public Interest Statement

The development of African autobiography has accentuated its place in the restoration of Africa's denigrated pre-colonial history by retrieving her story and situating its relevance to the evolving political and socio-cultural conversation in the present times. A usual assumption in the discourse of ethnicity in Africa is that it contributes to the problems which bedevil the continent. This article demonstrates that an investment in the cultural pride of any given ethnic history can retrieve significant cultural memories whose circulation may contribute to the reflection of the workings of pre-colonial institutions and their relevance to the governance of modern Africa.

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## Book Summary

Duncan Ndegwa's *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* was published in 2006. The ascendance of Mwai Kibaki as Kenya's third president in 2002 precipitated reminiscence of the Kenyatta State within the Gikuyu nation. The publication of this autobiography can, in part, be understood as a product of that reminiscence and as a celebration of Gikuyu cultural nationalism. The autobiography narrates the story of Kenya's first African head of civil service and first African governor of the Central Bank of Kenya. The autobiographer suggests that his success in public service, coterminous with that of Kenyatta, is a result of the cultural antecedents of his Gikuyu nation.

--*Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story*, 618 pages, Published by Kenya Leadership Institute

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## 1.0 Introduction

According to Onwudiwe (2001), citizens tend to have dual political sources of protection and identities: modern sovereign states and traditional ethnic authorities. The primary political loyalty of most people may be given to ethno nationalist groups rather than to legal states. Although ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism are expressions of collective public identity, yet their diverse experiences lead to competing meanings of national identity formations as each retrieves different historical memories. Ethnicity, for instance, is socially constructed: ethnic boundaries can be maintained or transcended. According to Worsley (1984), ethnic identities "may be retained or shed, old ones invested with new meanings, new ones may emerge and become readily adopted; the crucial consideration being whether they are useful". Significantly though, cultural ethnicity does emphasize primordial ties and a given common history of ancestry, shared cultural practices and a common language. Autobiographers as individuals owe their loyalty to different group identities including their primordial ethnic cultural group.

## 2.0 Re-imagining Cosmological World View as Cultural Antecedent

A significant manner in which one can reproduce cultural nationalism is to recall communal mythology. Communal mythologies are a significant site for the reconstruction of self-identity and

creating a significant sense of self awareness in private and public engagement. Duncan Ndegwa foregrounds his identification with his Gikuyu ethnic community and his sense of belonging to the community by instantiating its mythological primordial character. The instantiation of this primordial ethnic consciousness suggests some sense of nostalgia of a world gone by but which nevertheless defines the narrator's foundational sense of self, relative to his sense of history. In retracing the primordiality of his ethnic identity, the narrator gives a detailed analysis of the structure of the Gikuyu ethnic community, the descendants of Gikuyu, the ultimate patriarch.

The history of this pre-colonial Gikuyu community structure goes back to the time when Mwene Nyaga talked to Gikuyu on the clean and pure slopes of Kirinyaga and found that Gikuyu was in dire need of progeny. Mwene Nyaga, therefore, gave Gikuyu nine handsome mature males to marry nine of his ten daughters (Wamuyu the tenth daughter was not yet of marriageable age). The ten clans that emerged out of the first marriage of Gikuyu's daughters propagated into many people over generations. Their progression is immortalised through such age groups as Tene, Wemathi, Karirau, Agu na Agu, Tiru, Cuma, Ciira, Ndemi, Mathathi, Iregi, Maina and Mwangi. These age groups are all part of the Gikuyu social structure, history and legend. The cultural inevitability of change within the Gikuyu social structure heightens the narrative anxiety in the narrator's reconstruction of self by revisiting the oral archives of this primordial past. The great sense of kinship and collective sense of belonging to the Agikuyu primordial past heightens the symbolic significance of clan as the foundational base upon which self-identity can emerge and stage self at the public arena. These primordial clans which confer membership to the Gikuyu private and public persona include: Acheera, Agachiku, Airimu, Ambui, Angare, Anjiru, Akiuru, Aitherandu and Aichakamuyu.

These clans (referred to as the Mihiriga) are constitutive of an ordered and structured government derived from matriarchy. Each Muhiriga (singular form) bears a maternal reference connected to Gikuyu's daughter who first mothered it and who is, therefore, considered the progenitor. However, below the Muhiriga, Agikuyu government comprises Mbari from whom downwards, identity becomes paternalistic. The association of Muhiriga to matriarchy while Mbari is associated to patriarchy suggests a symmetrical gender balance in Gikuyu cosmology especially in regard to the structure of society. This symmetrical gender balance is a significant antidote to the colonial presumption of institutional victimhood of the place of women in the running of public affairs in precolonial African communities.

The Mbari or clan consisted of several Nyumba while several Mbari belonging to various Mihiriga would in turn form Ruriri, a full community, sometimes referred to as Nyumba ya Mumbi (The house of Mumbi). The gendered symmetric balance is also demonstrated at the level of Ruriri. The Ruriri pays allegiance to Mumbi (the community's founding matriarch); yet it is Gikuyu (the community's founding patriarch) with whom Mwene Nyaga entered a binding contract for progeny. This highly structured system of government informed a highly complex socio-cultural

matrix that oversaw an evolving ethnic network of kinship and solidarity by paying attention to nuanced ethnic symbolism. For instance, Gikuyu boys and girls would be circumcised after every four seasons. Those who underwent initiation became members of the same age-cohort otherwise referred to as age-grade (riika) irrespective of Mbari or Muhiriga or the district from which individuals belonged. The narrator seems to suggest that this early strategies of social cohesion crosscutting diverse Mihiriga prepared the youth in the formation of trans border networks which helped build a cohesive community. Riika was treated as a strong bond of brotherhood and sisterhood. Each riika was treated as a complete entity with a distinct name and identity.

Having mothered Mbari and Mihiriga, women continued heading families until men revolted. For the revolt to be effective, men timed it to coincide with when most women were pregnant. The revolt was meant to avenge persistent humiliation proffered against men by women folk for decades. Effectively, patriarchy replaced matriarchy (Ndegwa 2006). This revolt of men against matriarchy can be read and understood as a protest against excessive authoritarianism of any prevailing social structure and a greater need for a more democratic engagement of the civic population within the Gikuyu community.

The primordial Gikuyu government is presented as progressive and forward looking. This effectively challenges colonial myths on African societies as backward and primitive. For instance, the narrator asserts that the social organisation of Agikuyu recognised that shunting out change would lead to atrophy of all facets of the Ruriri. One such revolution, he argues, is associated with the Iregi generation. According to this version; Iregi (dissenters) promulgated a set of guiding principles that would govern society in the future. According to him, Agikuyu were initially nomadic but the revolution led by the Iregi generation initiated sedentary agriculture in the community. Such changes got the seal of approval at a grand event known as Itwika. The Itwika, a once-in-a generation event, was an all-inclusive constitutional review convention. It solemnised the handing over of the responsibility of ruling in the community, thus marking the development of power by the older generation to the younger generation after a period of about 30 to 40 years. For that purpose, the whole community was divided into alternating generations between Mwangi and Maina (or Irungu), Maina being the children of Mwangi and Mwangi, the children of Maina.

The Mwangi-Maina succession affirms the Agikuyu belief in passing the generational baton. It also symbolises the replacement of the departed. The Itwika whose ceremonies ran for 90 days, demarcated the past and the present through ushering in of new leadership. Being intergenerational, the generation handing over would do so at the age of around 55yrs. Delegates would be drawn from Kamatimu (freshly initiated members of society) to Athuri a Mathathi and Matura (the sages and philosophers elevated onto the august perch on grounds of age, experience and wisdom). The youth, Njama ya Kamatimu would comprise those eligible as junior warriors while fighting warriors came under Njama ya Ita. Both Njama ya Ita and Njama ya Kamatimu were hardly involved in the real business of Itwika. The Itwika was also an important

rite of passage for all decision - making councils of state – Athamaki (Kings), and Aramati (Trustees), the military council, as well as religious leaders. It was a moment when the structures that delineated the society of the Gikuyu were tested by dynamics of transition. Governance among the Gikuyu was organised through councils that included a village administration sub-unit called Kiama gia Itura and a sort of district council known as Kiama gia Rugongo. All councils above Kamatimu (junior warriors), except the war council (Njama ya Ita) were made up of married men normally over 30 years of age.

This highly structured and orderly social sphere is not, according to the narrator, the only basis of the Agikuyu pride in their cultural identity. Equally significant is the primordial communal tight hold onto its language, culture and world view. The Agikuyu oral culture has been instrumental in the storage of Agikuyu history, culture and literature through collective memory enabled by creative and captivating use of language. For instance, La Rue (2015) opines that the Gikuyu Mukuriri was a significant site for the preservation of Kenya's Agrarian past through flute music which was enacted during herding as well as in ritual dances. Wilson (2000) also asserts that Gikuyu political songs enhanced collective memories and contributed to the emerging concepts of ethnicity, identity and nationalism during the period of Kikuyu independent schools. The narrator recalls these as significant antecedents which helped shape the Gikuyu worldview. He argues that traditional songs, folktales, riddles and proverbs form a substantive reservoir of Agikuyu cultural identity. Gikuyu proverbs "draw from and extrapolate social and political issues; they capture epistemology, political awareness, justice and interpersonal relationships among other issues". They span a wide spectrum, touching on intellect, metaphysics, ethics, social and political philosophy as well as law.

The narrator opines that the Agikuyu work ethic as a social philosophy condemns laziness, idleness and laxity. It derides the procrastination and indecisiveness of the lazy. Consequently, Agikuyu children are apprenticed into work early enough to accompany the mother to the farm to start emulating grownups. Children would be assigned roles that should help them master work and trades by inculcating in them a sense of responsibility. As they grow up, children learn to value work, thriftiness and wisdom and how to set aside resources for a rainy day. This would explain the value of hard work and sense of responsibility that he prides his people to value.

The narrator further opines that according to Agikuyu political philosophy, heroes of war whose duty was to defend the community's sovereignty and wealth were recognized and decorated accordingly. In foregrounding this primordial character of his Agikuyu people which suggests a highly structured and regulated community, the narrator sets the stage to justify his emotive identification to the community. The narrator's rhetoric on the primordial character of his ethnic community sustains the argument that ethnic nationalism can be understood through bonds of blood, race, language, region, religion, and custom among others. His self-interpretation and the interpretation of events surrounding his life is significantly influenced by his ethnic

cosmological view. For instance, he acknowledges that, "...overshadowed by primordial instincts and predispositions, I explored the world in Nyeri, Nairobi, Europe and America, attaining graduate qualifications along the way". He justifies his ethnocentric worldview and identity. As far as he is concerned, the centrality of his ethnic community in defining his sense of belonging cannot be gainsaid. He argues that he can only interpret the rest of the world by standing on his ethnic pedestal:

The Agikuyu, to whom I belong purely by happenstance, are the people among other Kenyan communities I am most competent to talk about with a good measure of authority. That however does not mean I think any less of other people groups within Kenya or indeed anywhere else in the world. Moreover, I am convinced that to fully appreciate other peoples' perceptions of self and world views one needs to be thoroughly aware of his own people's traditions values and beliefs (77).

Although he argues that he does not hold his community above other communities, his ethnic pride is obvious. His Gikuyu ethnic nationalist consciousness and sense of belonging prompts him to write a congratulatory letter to Wangari Maathai (The 2004, Nobel Peace Prize winner) which he attaches to the appendices of his text. Despite the international context of Wangari's achievement the narrator anchors this achievement purely and squarely on her membership to the Gikuyu community. He sounds her out,

many of us trained to appreciate recognition, honour, greatness, morality and excellence through borrowed lenses more often than not overlook the underpinnings that constitute our second nature as Africans, Kenyans or Agikuyu. May I, then remind you that Wangari was the sixth daughter of the house of Mumbi (585)

The descending order of the identity formations that he foregrounds narrow down to the identity that he wishes to zero in on: Gikuyu cultural nationalism. The narrator suggests that to look at her achievement as a universal (global) phenomenon is to do so using a borrowed lens and proceeds to narrow down to what he calls our second nature, to the penultimate nature of our identity which is inherently ethnic. He clinches the argument by reminding Wangari that her name connotes a cosmological and mythical background which is also foundational to their existence (his and hers) as one people: The Agikuyu. To heighten their kinship bonds, he uses the fond name of Agikuyu: Nyumba ya Mumbi. The conviviality of this fond name rests on the premise that it recalls the Gikuyu community's primordial matriarchal character. Having set out the tempo of the letter, he proceeds to outline the specific attributes which the Nobel Peace Prize committee could

have considered in awarding her the prize. Such attributes as her love for the environment, he concludes, can be understood within Agikuyu ethnography.

Ethnic pride and strong sense of ethnic belonging and security in the autobiography is a consequence of the historical recollection and reinvention of cultural antecedents which play a significant role on how the narrator imagines and interrogates his present set of circumstances as well as those of Kenyatta who is the subject of his narrative. This ethnic pride is manifest at various intersections of his narrative. For instance, at Alliance High School, Agikuyu students form a welfare organization called Gikuyu Gitungati Ngerwani Thingiriani (GGNT). This welfare is meant to enlighten society through moral and political consciousness. The motto of welfare is "Education at any cost". This motto means that members should keep their mouths shut even when asked questions about the country but that they should seek answers to the social and political concerns of the day. On Sundays, when other boys go to the shops in the neighbourhood or attend Sunday service GGNT members gather under the vine lined wood near the school and hold an indaba (a furtive gathering). He dramatizes GGNT's proceedings thus:

...Kamau Kainya, our chairman... would say, "let us get that education first. Do not ask too much from Francis. He runs a school, not a country. He is not the Governor. Get education first and everything will be added unto you!"

"Objection!" someone would shout, "the settlers want to make us slaves forever", shouts of "Hear! Hear!" would ring in chorus from the rest. When the bell rang, Francis would wonder why a crowd of boys came marching to the parade ground from the bush and trees across the right side of the compound. I am sure he discovered what we were up to but wished to let the sleeping dogs lie (123).

GGNT members celebrate and show solidarity with Agikuyu leaders such as Kenyatta, Kirongothi Ndegwa and Jesse Kariuki of Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). Their other heroes include, Tirus Waiyaki and Jimmy Maina of Nyeri. The students also commiserate with the plight of squatters in the Rift Valley. His ethnic pride influences his relationship and levels of interaction with those around him.

The narrator reflects upon cultural antecedents to foreground a great sense of attachment and belonging to his Gikuyu nation. For instance, upon getting his scholarship to St Andrews in Scotland, the narrator tells us, with pride, that he takes a Mau Mau oath before travelling abroad. The oath is a solemn affair. Among other things, it binds people to commit themselves to the expulsion of the white people from the land belonging to Africans. It also calls for the oath taker to recognise Jomo Kenyatta as the leader of the African people. The oath commits people to respond to the call to kill enemies if called upon to do so by the Mau Mau. Johanna Kiratu is an

assistant chief in Nairobi's African district but a Mau Mau oath administrator administers the oath to him. Kiratu ensures that the narrator commits himself to the nationalist cause. The narrator says:

Had I not been leaving for Scotland, I would have eliminated the European had I been called upon to do so. My incarnation, tradition and culture had, after all, singled me out from miles away as a typical "kamatimu youth". My own father had inculcated in me that it is holy and proper to kill your enemies so when the oath was administered to me, it just confirmed what I already professed (146).

The ambivalent playing out of tension between his wish to pursue higher studies in Europe and his commitment to the Mau Mau nationalist cause largely spearheaded by his Gikuyu community is a significant expression of his imagined transformation from Njama ya Kamatimu into Njama ya Ita.

### **3.0 The Image of Paterfamilias as a Symbolic Power of Cultural Nationalism**

*Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, cleverly intertwines narration of self with the narration of the significant other (Kenyatta) whose image in the narrative is foregrounded as a projection of the author's extended sense of self. Kenyatta's image as an extended sense of Ndegwa's self is premised on shared cultural antecedents as children of *Nyumba ya Mumbi* with Kenyatta playing the role of paterfamilias to the younger Ndegwa. The image of a father figure in patriarchal societies is symbolically significant in navigating communal tensions and anxieties. The presence of a father figure in Gikuyu cosmology can be presumed to be delegated (Kenyatta, 1938). An important expression of this delegation can be discerned from the Gikuyu mythology of origin in which Mwene Nyaga gives the originator daughters to essentialise the existence of the community but significantly recedes from communal reference. The Gikuyu Ruriri's self-reference is to Gikuyu's wife, Mumbi: not to Gikuyu himself. The significant implicature of this spatial and temporal distancing between the father figure and its Ruriri in the narrative is symbolised by the huge age difference between the narrator and his subject of narration – who is also the accepted paterfamilias of the entire Gikuyu ethnic community. It is also symbolised by Kenyatta's absent presence in the narrator's psyche in the sense that Kenyatta was mythologised by his long absence in Gikuyu country during the struggle for independence in his sojourn to Europe. Many Gikuyu compatriots, just like the narrator, better knew the mythological Kenyatta than they did the Kenyatta of flesh and blood.

The narrator implicates self in Kenyatta's life through the title of the book. The title inscribes the narrative in Kenyatta's narrative. The title signals the shared experience between the narrator and his subject of narration. By foregrounding Kenyatta's life, he significantly distances the narrative from self. Yet, on the basis of that strategy he draws attention to self on equal measure.



Though the narrative is autobiographical the title suggests, it is more about Kenyatta than it is about the narrator. This presumes it to be an (auto) biographical mode of Kenyatta's life intersubjectively narrated by Ndegwa. The narrator cleverly anticipates this intersubjectivity by using the gerund 'walking' which mediates his life with that of Kenyatta. The gerund 'walking' invites the narrating self into the trajectory of Kenyatta's struggles in managing the transition of the Kenya state from a colony to a post colony.

Ndegwa's narrative begins with an unexpected visit from Kenyatta to his office which he says transforms him from a child of no destiny to a child of destiny. Kenyatta's destiny becomes his destiny. Kenyatta's image in Ndegwa's mind is mythical and highly influential to his sense of self identity. As an autobiographer he comes into existence as a narrator by appropriating Kenyatta's traits such as those he attempts to mirror himself. He foregrounds his significance in assisting Kenyatta craft the emerging Kenyan state. Bakhtin (1981) has argued that the self can never exist as a self-sufficient construct. Thus, the existence of the narrator is predicated on the existence of the other either as the conscious of the self or as in the case of Ndegwa as the significant other. Ndegwa creates images of Kenyatta as a mythical figure:

I have never considered myself a child of destiny. However, the events of one day in 1962 were as sudden and serendipitous as they were surprising.... I did not expect it to explode into the galaxy of opportunities and challenges it did soon after the appointment of one man and his unexpected visit to my office... the man was Jomo Kenyatta... it could not have dawned on me that he would make a beeline to my office and single me out from among several other colleagues... but he did. It was hard to describe what I felt just then.... I was being asked to serve a cult figure; a complex man whose stature and station were almost beyond my comprehension (1 -2).

Kenyatta's appointment as a Minister for Economic Planning and Development and his visit to Ndegwa explodes his (Ndegwa) stars into a galaxy of Ndegwa's opportunities. Ndegwa entirely appropriates Kenyatta's desires, feelings, emotions, thoughts and actions. As he walks Kenyatta back to his car, he looks at the Europeans peering from their offices at Kenyatta and what he reads in their minds is probably (according to him) what Kenyatta did, "they ... were not looking at an angel hot from heaven. Rather, they were staring at devilry itself: a "gawking at a fiend whose place was itself behind bars' ". The delegated authority and power of the paterfamilias is reflected in the authority and power the narrator appropriates in Kenyatta's Buriri (world). Kenyatta's eyes and ears become Ndegwa's. He sees and reads what Kenyatta should see and read, and hears what Kenyatta should hear. He says of his days as head of civil service:

...most ministers seldom addressed personal letters to Kenyatta. Instead they used me as a conduit for transmission of their request...I gave such service because right from the onset, my relationship with Kenyatta took such a personal character that it was not possible to distinguish between personal grand's and official duties (269).

The narrator constructs co-agency in the narrative through intersubjectivity. His desires, thoughts and actions are in tandem with those of Kenyatta whom he shares a political perspective and whom he sympathises with. This co-agency suggests the narrator's continued transformation, from Njama ya Kamatimu through Njama ya Ita to an Aramati (trustee). At another level of argument, his co-agency is in tandem with the Gikuyu cosmological perception of collegiate leadership in which the Athamaki (Kings) worked closely with the Aramati (trustees) as well as Athuri a Mathathi and Matura (the sages and philosophers).

The narrator recollects national historical narratives and recreates them within his narrative mode informed by his perspective. The national narratives which the narrator weaves into his narrative can be glanced from the many pictures and portraits in his autobiography as much as they can from the printed letters. For instance, at the cover of the autobiography, sits a marble statue of Kenyatta's imposing image while below it is the subservient portrait of the narrator himself. At the end of the content page, is an enlargement of the same statue of Kenyatta with the inscription: 'Fountain of justice: Jomo Kenyatta's statue in the precincts of law courts, Nairobi.' His implication of Kenyatta to the just existence of the Kenyan nation is predicated upon Kenyatta's everlasting image at the law courts where justice is dispensed for the citizens of the country. The statue actually sits in the yard of Kenyatta International Conference, the most significant and monumental building in Kenya's capital city, Nairobi.

The image of Kenyatta as a Mthamaki (King) in this page can be contrasted to the image of the miserable African boy child who covers the first page of part 1: 'The Agikuyu, a Village Boy and the Red Strangers'. The young boy with dreadlocks (such as was worn by the Mau Mau freedom fighters) represents the image of resistance to an adverse environment which the autobiographer suggests to be the adverse environment whence he came. The picture's inscription: 'The face of African Boy: a child of no destiny' is reinforced by the autobiographer's assertion that his star exploded into a galaxy of opportunities after his meeting with Kenyatta.

The misery and hopelessness of the child of no destiny comes to life and destiny is shaped for him by the presence of the image of Kenyatta as the imposing portrait of the 'Fountain of Justice'. In all, the narrator has 38 pictures, portraits or the artist's impressions of which more than half are pictures of Kenyatta at various functions. The image of Kenyatta looms large in the narrator's psyche. The pictures of splendour which the narrator includes in his (auto) biography partly suggest why Kenyatta is such a hero in his life. In one portrait, the autobiographer displays a caption from the Financial Times: 'London inscribed: the fast and the slow: the art of financing'.

In another, he displays a fifty-shilling note with Kenyatta's portrait and his signature outside the note with an inscription: 'The signature that turned paper into money (1967-1982)'.

The narrative is divided into four parts and 41 chapters. In these parts and chapter headings, the narrator deliberately distances the narrative from self and foregrounds the image of Kenyatta and the history of his people (both the Gikuyu and the Kenyan nation). Part 1 entitled 'The Agikuyu, a Village Boy and the Red Strangers', hardly points at the narrator. Sandwiched between the Agikuyu and the red strangers, the self-reference of 'a village boy' foregrounds the tensions between the colonial agents and the traditional Gikuyu elements in which the village boy is trapped. His helplessness is underscored by his opening sentence: 'I have never considered myself a child of destiny'.

The narrator's coming of age and the formation of his self-consciousness is captured in the subsequent part 11 'My Youth, Kenyatta and the Quest for Freedom'. Kenyatta and the quest for freedom (though the freedom implied here is that of Kenyatta, that, it is not qualified in part implies the narrator's own freedom) informs the narrator's youth and perhaps his own coming to age. The helpless, village boy trapped between the Gikuyu culture and the colonial structure blossoms into youth as Kenyatta struggles to achieve Kenya's freedom. In part 11, the heading shifts unequivocally to 'Kenyatta's Hurdles and Triumphs'. His final heading 'Minding the Pulse of the Nation' suggests his coming of age. Yet, the thrust of the narrative is not so much on the minder but on the nation whose pulse must be minded. The narrator deliberately distances self and foregrounds Kenyatta as the key protagonist in the narrative.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

Duncan Ndegwa published his autobiography four years into the Kibaki state. Kibaki and the narrator share an ethnic membership. The return of a Gikuyu presidency caused significant euphoria in the Gikuyu nation and revived memories of the Kenyatta state. The portrait of Kenyatta returned to the Kenyan currency. Kenyatta speeches played out in the streets. An Ethiopian peasant Lema Ayanu was flown into the country presumed to be the legendary Mau Mau hero General Mathenge. Ndegwa's autobiography forms part of that revival of Gikuyu cultural nationalism.

In post - colonial Kenya, ethnic and class identities contribute significantly in making the growth of nationalism and the creation of a national identity a great challenge. Networks of actors within ethnic and class identities are created to include or exclude subjects within the state frequently to the detriment of national cohesion. The emerging state inherits ethnic identities from the outgoing colonial structure as part of the colonialist epistemology. Participation in public spaces becomes tied to one's ethnic identity and networks of ethnic actors sometimes supersede or even threaten networks of national actors. Before colonial conquest, ethnic communities in the geographical area that eventually became Kenya had quarrelled and fought over such mundane

needs as pasture for their animals, water catchment areas or land for farming but they did not use their ethnic differences for political competition or political gain. The coloniser forced these communities into a national arrangement called the Kenyan state.

Thus, began the quest for nationalism and the elusive search for a national identity. Members of a given community found that they needed to make choices in their loyalty between the national entity and the ethnic entity. The colonial structure encouraged subjects to pay greater loyalty to their ethnic membership before showing loyalty to their national membership (Hobsbawn 1990, Smith 1986, Anderson 1983). This was necessary for the colonial structure to fully control their subjects. To effectively control the subjects of this new identity called Kenya, the coloniser balkanized communities into different ethnic identities and effectively played out tensions based on their differences. During the colonial period, the colonial agents played out ethnic differences between the nationalist movements as part of their strategy to divide the nationalist movement and to derail the nationalist project. The incoming nationalist elite inherited ethnicity as part of the residual colonialism. This article has argued that far from being adversarial, cultural difference can create an array of possibilities in which cultural antecedents could be retrieved from diverse cultural repertoires to enrich meaningful nationalist conversations on how civic populations could interact both in private and public spaces as well as between individuals and institutions.

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**Bionote**

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