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Loud Agenda in Silence and Omissions: A Critical Analysis of Binyavanga Wainaina's Memoir, *One Day I Will Write about This Place*

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Abstract:

A memoir is a literary genre, forming a subclass of the autobiography. The paper obtained critical analysis of Binyavanga Wainaina's memoir. It aims at identifying the silences and omissions in the memoir one day I will write about this place. Binyavanga emerges as an expert writer with sharpened artistic skills that are rare and unequalled in the modern African writing. In recent time he failed in handling the political scenario by been partisan in tribal mixing his views with politics. In my opinion, in as much as I agree that One Day I Will Write About This Place is a brilliant memoir, I equally feel that his biased political and ethnic stance cannot stand the test of modern literary times, leave alone political correctness.

Keywords: Literature, critical analysis, Kenya

1. Introduction

It is amazing to discover loud voices in silence. It is even more interesting to find substantive evidence of existence in a void. Reading *One Day I will Write About This Place* raised in me shouting questions that required urgent answers, of which I attempt to seek through this study.

This study aims at identifying the silences and omissions in the memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place* and how they highlight the motive of the writer. By silences I mean those issues not mentioned directly by the writer, but that are implied through the tone and timing of statements and claims made. Omissions shall be used to mean deliberate refusal to mention certain events however relevant they are at a given historical time. By using the silences and omissions as a pointer to the key motive in the memoir, I shall use the same paradigm to test the credibility of the text as a genre of literature.

The reason for studying this text was informed by the fact that it is one of the latest memoirs from Africa and the first major literary work by Binyavanga Wainaina. His style of writing is also unique, captivating and highly descriptive.

Since a memoir is a subclass of the autobiography, I shall carry out this study in the wider context of autobiographical genre. The two genres share a lot in common with a thin line dividing them.

2. Theoretical Review

In this study, I intend to employ two major theories; the theory of autobiography and the theory of the narrative (Narratology), with close textual analysis.

The theory of autobiography refers to the study of the autobiography and the issues that arise in the discussion of the genre. Autobiography theory is credited to Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) a German historian and philosopher. He, with other scholars of his time attempted to constitute the discipline of human sciences and saw biography and autobiography as central in the constitution. They argued that human sciences as a discipline is grounded in the understanding of human life and experience. They emphasized historicity or historical consciousness as an important factor in autobiographical criticism.

J. Muchiri, in *Women's autobiography: Voices from independent Kenya*, agrees with Dilthey he says, "autobiography (occupies) a central place as the key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural place as the key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and the very shape and essence of human culture." (Marcus 137). There is no doubt therefore that any form of autobiography, memoir included, cannot be divorced from history.

Another German, Dilthey's student, George Misch, views autobiography as depicting self-consumers by demonstrating how the concept of self, individuality and personality develop through history. Misch highlights the fluidity of the boundaries that demarcate autobiographical forms emphasizing their heterogeneity. It is then worth noting that the memoir, being a form of autobiography, places the author and the subject at its core thus providing unity in the text.

Roy Pascal, in *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, points to the historical and aesthetic approaches to the autobiography. Indeed Pascal is largely concerned with the element of truth in autobiography laying emphasis on the present

moment of telling the story. The element of truth in autobiographical genre is a feature that gives credibility to the text. The story must qualify in respect to facts if it is to persuade the reader of its authenticity. Smith and Watson define autobiographical truth as "an inter-subjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of life" (Reading autobiography 13). Determining levels or standards of truth in an autobiographical form tests the sincerity of the writers as well as their seriousness and intentions of writing. Truth in any form of autobiography, the memoir included, can either be subjective, historical or fictional. Subjective truth is that unique truth of life as seen and understood by the individual, historical truth is that truth that can be verified through history; and fictional truth which is artistry. It is this truth that I will endeavor to interrogate in the memoir in order to establish the motive of the writer.

The intention or motive of the writer of a memoir is another main tenet of this theory. When a writer decides to write a memoir, there is always a stimulus or motivation to that endeavor. The intention of the writer will greatly determine the memoir's perception by the reader. The intention or motive of the writer is verified by testing level of truthfulness and sincerity of the character. The theory emphasizes on the study of the reliability of the narrators testimony as a means of verifying the truth through interrogation of the narrators' voice and in the process uncover the character of the writers and possible hypocrisies and inconsistencies. This will determine whether one is driven by "Mercenary" motives or true inner compulsion to write.

It will be illuminating that I mention the need to focus on black autobiographical theory as a constituent of the wider autobiographical theory. The major concerns of this theory are group or collective identity and authenticity. The theory arises from the relations between autobiographical forms and ethnicity. It articulates a strong sense of community and emphasizes ties and responsibilities to the community. It also pays attention to authenticity in terms of the elements of cultural identity. The theory is relevant to my study because I focus on an autobiography form by a Kenyan and an African for that matter. The question of ethnicity and its influence on the writer is also my concern in this paper.

The second theory I have used in this study is theory of the narrative or narratology. I find this theory appropriate in this study because a memoir is a narrative in its form. The theory was so named by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969 and was popularized in the 1970's by a number of structuralist writers. Onega and Linda say that 'the definition of narratology has usually been restricted to structural, or more specifically structuralism's analysis of the narrative' (1997 xiii). Gerald Prince suggests that 'narratology can refer to structuralist-inspired theory which studies the functioning of narrative in a medium-independent manner and he attempts to define both narrative competence as well as what narratives have in common and what enables them to differ from one another' (1988,65). This then brings to the fore the question, is a memoir a narrative? The answer is obviously yes and is only differs from the other forms of narratives in terms of its structure. A critic must therefore strive to discover the characteristics of a text by looking at the abstract narrative system. However, the application of this theory in the study of a literary text poses its own challenges since different readers would emphasize different aspects of the text and consequently produce a different description. This is because reading is highly subjective and the description of a text is understood as a proposal that can be presented to others. The use of the theory of the narrative carries with it an advantage: It facilitates discussion of the proposed description.

There is need to provide the central concept of this theory as I will use such terms in the analysis of the memoir. In Narratology, Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, Mieke Bal defines the terms, narrative text, a story and fabula as follows.

A narrative text is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee (tells) the reader a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings or a combination thereof. A story is the content of that text and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and coloring of a fabula; the fabula is presented in a certain manner. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. (5).

Bal argues that the theory analyses a text based on the three layers, the text, the story and the fabula. A text is the medium or the signs that constitute the structured whole. They can be linguistic units such as words and sentences. He goes further to say that 'but they can also be different signs, such as cinematic shots and sequences, or painted dots, lines and blots' (5) This gives the narrative the strands in which the story is woven. The writer of a text chooses the medium in which to narrate the story and thus the text provides the finite structure needed.

To illustrate this further, there could be different text narrating the same story. A typical example that I can use to demonstrate this is the existence of different versions of the bible, yet they narrate the same story though with varying linguistic features. The King James Version for instance is different lexically from the New International Version but they narrate the same stories in all the books. The readers would narrate the same stories irrespective of the version they use. For my case, I will use the term 'text' with emphasis on the finite nature and structuredness of the narrative as opposed to its linguistic nature.

The fabula is the material or content that feeds into the story and chronologically related events. The rules controlling human behavioral informs the series of events in a story thus making it easy to understand the narrative text. In my study, I will be tracing the fabula in Binyavanga's memoir in an attempt to understand the narrative.

There are two very important elements of the fabula: the element of time and that of place or location. It is definite that an event will have its actor and will take place at a given time and in a particular place. Events, actors, time and location together constitute the material of a fabula. These elements are arranged in relation to one another in such a way that they produce the effect desired either convincing, moving disgusting or aesthetic.

A memoir is an account of events by specific actors in a specific time and in a specific place. Whatever effect the memoir achieves is subject to debate.

In this study I employ the two theories in the context of literary textual analysis because the memoir is an element of form. However, I rely more on the theory of autobiography because it addresses specific aspects of my study. I have also confined myself to textual evidence as opposed to extraneous information.

The 20th century criticism displayed a shift from emphasis on the author as had been the case earlier, to an emphasis on the text. While other criticism concentrated on literary history and biography of the author, F.R. Leavis, an English critic advocated for a close reading of the text itself, arguing that "the critic should analyze the words on page rather than work from extrinsic evidence" (Peck and Coyle 153).

The dual focus of literature is the form and content. Textual analysis and examination of a text discusses its artistry and effect with the aim of revealing the processes and intricacies of human experience.

Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia argue that "The text is a self-sufficient entity whose elements should be addressed within its own structure" (22). The approach enhances our appreciation of the relationship within form and content.

2.1. *The Memoir*

A memoir is a literary genre, forming a subclass of the autobiography. The distinction between the two is that of intensity. While the autobiography is centered on the author's experiences, the memoirs' focus is on the occurrences around and outside the writer.

Goe Vidal in his memoir, *Palimpsest*, gives his personal definition, 'a memoir is how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts double checked'.

What Vidal suggests is that a memoir relies more on the memory of the writer and pays little attention to historical facts and truth. This position is debatable because it gives a 'blank cheque' to the memoirist without audit queries. I believe that every piece of autobiographical form should be as factual as possible and the writer must pass honesty and impartiality tests. As earlier mentioned on the nature of autobiographical forms, the level of honesty determines the credibility of the memoir and has a bearing on its reception.

In *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya*, J. Muchiri says "Memoirs allow writers to narrate their stories as part of a larger story and their writing justifies the telling of the writers life stories without demanding that the writers commit themselves of a full disclosure as the autobiography does" (39) Muchiri puts the memoirist in the context of a larger story which I believe is the history which is verifiable and credible. If this is the case, then the memoirist has no excuse whatsoever not to account for his/her claims.

Although memoir may differ in structure from the autobiography, both are accounts of the writer's life, the former focusing on a specific period in time while the latter covering the entire life. Even though the focus of a memoir is public matters and other people, the little revelation of the self is of paramount importance. To ignore the memoirists' life is self-defeating since the credibility of the memoir as an autobiographical form depends on the reliability of the writer. If questions are raised touching on the writers' honesty then the credibility of the memoir is shattered. The so called "limited exposure" of the self in the memoir is what I am interested in and although limited, it can be an illuminator into other silences and omissions that the writer may want to 'hide'.

It is the little focus on the self in the memoir that informed my curiosity and desire to carry out this study. In fact, *One Day I Will Write About This Place* reveals more of Binyavanga Wainaina which leaves the reader with implied meanings and ideological stand points of the writer. I intend to illustrate how the little focus on the self can be more of a self-revelation than inhibition.

3. Research Hypothesis

The paper studies memoir to understand the implication and meaning of *One Day I Will Write About This Place*. It aims at identifying the silences and omissions in the memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place* and how they highlight the motive of the writer.

4. Methodology

A memoir is, as defined, a subclass of the autobiography. Its nature and features are largely drawn from the autobiography except in areas that clear distinction is evident.

The memoir is chronological in its structure. As noted earlier in the theory of the narrative (narratology), events are arranged in a sequence within a specified time of the writers' history. This feature shares the journey motif with the autobiography where there is a movement from one state of the self to the other. In a memoir a reader is taken through a journey of history from a certain stage of writes life but within the context of the wider story of the society she/he lives. This is echoed by Ngugiwa Thiongo in *Writers in Politics* when he argues;

Literature results from conscious acts of men in society.... at the collective level, literature as a product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodied, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming (5).

Ngugi's assertion is that any literary genre, be it fiction or non-fiction is a product of a society in which the writer lives. The memoir qualifies to be a literary work on this basis, of course among others. Indeed Ngugi goes further to highlight the relationship between the writers and their societies when in *Homecoming* he comments;

A writer responds, with his total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflict and tensions in the changing society.... for the writer himself lives in, and is shaped up, by history (47).

The chronological structure of the memoir is thus a parallel to history which is in itself chronological. This merges the writer of a memoir with the society and thus captures what Ngugi calls the 'tensions' and 'conflicts' in the changing society.

Memory is crucial in memoir writing. By definition, the term memoir is derived from the word memory. Smith Watson in *Reading autobiography* observes that "the writer of autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history (16).

The process of remembering is an active recreation of the past highly dependent on history. However, the process of remembering is highly subjective to the experiences of the writer. A writer may choose to 'forget' some painful experiences in his life like death, loss or failures and deliberately 'remember' some pleasurable experiences like tours and relationships. A literary scholar is aided by these silences or omissions in establishing the credibility of the work on the basis of truth.

There are two levels of memory. On one hand we have private memory which is individual and dependent on the writer's ability to recall. On the other hand, there is the communal memory which is collectively shared by communities such as ethnic, religious and family. Institutions such as schools, government agencies are custodians of memory which can easily be retrieved since they are documented. A writer of a memoir may choose to rely on communal as well as private memory in the course of his narrative. This balancing act is subject for a literary critic to investigate in qualifying a memoir and establishing the credibility of the author's claims.

Memory is also aided by such senses as smell, touch, taste and sound. These senses stimulate some memories and trigger the writer to remember certain events in the past. For instance, a smell of certain type of food could trigger one to think of childhood memories of hunger. The ringing of a bell for instances would trigger school days and in a split of time fond memories of childhood experiences would flash through the mind. Senses thus are sparks that ignite the memory flames.

Selectivity is another common feature in memoir writing. The author has the license to choose what to and not to include in the memoir. The time frame of the memoir is determined by the author and any other time outside that cannot be questioned. In studying memoirs, the critic will not question issues outside the timeframe of the memoir limiting the criticism to the time of the memoir. The content is also a selection of the author and since the memoirist takes the first person narration form, he/she owns and controls the narrative so that readers get to know only what the narrator says. This feature in a memoir is an opening for the critic to figure out the silences and omissions touching on certain parts of their lives and events.

Truth is the other feature that a memoir gives to communicate. As earlier stated, the level of truth is evaluated through the seriousness and intentions of writing of the writer. Truth, whether subjective, historical or fictional can be substantiated by use of Paratextual elements such as pictures, letters, speeches and communal documents. This assists in verifying facts and adds to the credibility of the narrative. The absence of these elements brings to doubt the claims of the writer and waters down the credibility of the work.

5. Results and Discussion

Binyavanga Wainaina's narrative memoir, *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, by all standards, meets the threshold discussed earlier to be a memoir. Binyavanga emerges as a skillful writer with sharpened artistic skills that are rare and unmatched in the contemporary African writing. Commenting on the memoir, Teju Cole, author of *Open City* sums up with the adjective "Brilliant". (Front jacket cover). Ngugiwa Thiongo rests this argument by saying:

Binyavanga Wainaina is a singer and painters in words. He makes you smell, hear, touch, see, above all feel the drama and vibrations of life below the brilliantly and concretely captured surface of things in Kenyan and Africa. The memoir bursts with life and laughter and pathos in every line and paragraph.' (back jacket cover).

There is no doubt that the memoir has received the acclaim that it deserves, and especially when it comes from canonical and legendary literary giants of Ngugi's stature. However, a more objective reading, devoid of emotions and excitement, Binyavanga is unmasked tumbling under the weight of clear political agenda: an arsenal he uses against his real (or perceived) enemies. *One Day I Will Write About This Place* silences and omissions scream louder than what Binyavanga speaks.

Binyavanga Wainaina was born in Nakuru Kenya in 1971, to a Ugandan mother and a Kenyan kikuyu father. I specify his father's ethnicity because it has a bearing in his writing. This mixed genealogy haunts him throughout his childhood as well as his adulthood. He attends Njoro Boys High School for form one class but later transfers to Mangu High School. He proceeds to Lenana High School for A levels studies.

After a brief stint in Kenyatta University, he moves to South Africa for Bachelor of Commerce Studies which he does complete due to his obsession with books.

5.1. A Hired Gun for a Mission

As mentioned earlier, a memoirist is driven into writing by a number of motives. The motives are varied, but a keen reader will not fail to identify the key motive in a memoir. Binyavanga employs selective memory when dealing with subjects of political nature. He first introduces politics by mentioning Idi Amin's tyranny in Uganda. (13) This is a mild touch that is highlighted in the context of the mother's ancestry. He then without warning crosses the border and lands in Kenya where he introduces Kenyatta in total contrast of Idi Amin. He says: 'Kenyatta is our president. He is the father of our nation. Kenya is a peace loving nation.' (13)

For a seven year old boy to comprehend such intricate political occurrences both in Kenya and Uganda is an overstatement on the part of the author. The way he captures the death and mourning for Kenyatta is both suspect and has some coating of bias. Kenyatta is presented here as a perfect leader, a sheep without blemish. The question that screams for answers is, if at seven years he could know of the killings in Uganda, he could have obviously 'heard' of the assassination of J.M. Kariuki two years earlier. This, he chooses to either be silent or refuse to remember.

The way he introduces Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi leaves a lot to be desired. He says of Moi, 'he is young, awkward and fumbling but clean tall and sharp in a suit,' (28). The description pays more emphasis on the character of the subject hidden in a crowd of superficial appearance. To claim that Moi is 'awkward and fumbling' far outweighs the 'clean, tall and sharp in a suit' attributes: the former touching on the character while the latter being superficial attributes.

His assault does not stop here. He goes further sarcastically to say, 'sometimes we like Moi because he fumbles like all of us. He isn't booming like Kenyatta or polished and sticks like Charles Njonjo (28). Not even an amateur in literature can fail to notice the deliberate contrast that boils from the pots of ethnicity. Even if this claim was true, Binyavanga ought to have been conscious enough to put poor Moi, a Kalenjin against Kenyatta and Njonjo: two Kikuyus. Nobody would be convinced that the writer did not have ethno-political agenda in this parallelism.

He goes further to tear down the new president saying, 'His English stumbles, his Kiswahili is broken and sincere; (28).

The author criticizes Moi as a person as well as president. This is evident when the talks of the school he attends. He is now eleven years and yet he gives astonishing claims on Moi's private life. He says;

Lena Moi Primary school used to be Lugard School, a whites-only school until the 1960's. Now it is named after Lena Moi, the abandoned wife of our president Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi. When Moi was vice president she slapped him during a Madaraka Day dance, in front of president Kenyatta, who laughed at him, and that made him angry and now we hear she cannot leave her farm. (32).

The claim is suspect on two grounds: First, at the age of eleven, no such rumors could make sense, leave alone circulate within reach of eleven year olds; secondly such a rumor even if it reached them was too complicated to make sense to them. It is obvious that Binyavanga had a hidden agenda in making these outrageous and frivolous claims.

To illustrate this further, the writer goes on to give a detailed explanation of Lena Moi's family as 'coming from an important Kalenjin family, the Bommets, a big farming family of one of the first in the Rift valley to become Christians and go to mission schools'. (32) This is not only laughable but outrageous claim for a young boy of eleven.

The onslaught does not stop here. Short gun bullets are shot unexpectedly. The best illustration for this is when, in the midst of watching Madaraka Day celebrations, he throws a statement, 'Gikuyus are complaining that Kalenjins are sitting on them.' (46). This statement is an example of deep seated agenda that keeps on escaping unnoticed.

When the writer sits CPE and makes to 'the top twenty students, in our province, Kenya's biggest province' (59), he claims that he is rigged out from the list of those joining the national schools. He hides in what he calls 'rumors' and makes a wild claim that 'names are matched to numbers, and scrutinized, word by word, line by scientific line, for Gikuyu names in a secret office of special branch people. (60)

A memoir's credibility is tested against its claims that ought to and should be as truthful as possible. For a serious literary work that has gained the recognition of the literary icons of Ngugi's stature to use rumors as source of serious claims is not only an insult to the genre but also a revelation of a well calculated agenda on the part of the author.

It seems that the author is blaming all the evils of his Gikuyu community on Mr. Moi; from his failure to get a position in a national school, to the transfer of teachers and head teachers, (Njoro High School and Mangu High School).

He then takes a break on the attack on Moi to go for studies in South Africa, and comes back with a real arsenal in 2002. He excitedly pronounces that 'Moi has been voted out. We have our first proper democratic government since 1960's'. (191) One interesting thing is that Binyavanga is silent on the process that led to the ouster of Mr. Moi preferred choice to succeed him. He is silent on who this heir was. He conceals the role played by other opposition leaders in the defeat of Moi's preferred heir. And the question is, was Moi contesting in the election for him to be ousted? All these silences and omissions go a long way in exposing the agenda of the author being that of setting, political scores.

What is startling is for the writer to choose silence where he is supposed to be shouting. The 2002 election was Kenya's defining moment that more elaborate mention was expected. He waits until three years later in 2005 that he painfully brings on board a significant player in the 2002 elections, Mr. Raila Odinga. The question that arises is; is the writer honest and sincere or he has been 'forced' to speak. Why introduce such a character rather late if the motive is not political. And more appalling is the shade in which Mr. Odinga is painted. He is just mentioned as having been promised the post of prime Minister but given the Ministry of Roads. (27)

All along Binyavanga has tried hard to portray himself as a non-tribal, but unconscious statements in a sentences betray (or reveals) him. He says, 'Now that Kibaki has lost the trust of non-Gikuyus, Gikuyus are terrified that if he loses power **we** will be victimized.' (207). By suggesting at the beginning that he is outside the 'Gikuyus' and later use the first person plural **we** at the end is in itself hypocritical. At one point he excludes himself from the subject he reluctantly wants to criticize and when appropriate, he becomes part. It sounds like Binyavanga uses victimization, to draw sympathy from the reader, a mission he fails terribly.

The political onslaught has shifted from Kalenjin to Luo; From Moi to Raila. In both cases, he paints the Gikuyus as the victims of the reverse onslaught. A very interesting claim is one that he deliberately parallels the life expectancy ages in central province and Nyanza. He says,

Nyanza province, RailaOdinga'sluo-speaking political heart land has a life expectancy of forty-four years; central province – Gikuyus who support Kibaki -has a life expectancy of sixty years (230)

A reader is left to wonder the agenda of this serious claim cleverly camouflaged in the media. It does not require extra effort to catch the sarcastic nature of this statement. Binyavanga is simply laughing loudly at the Luos, and by extension Raila.

Another claim, and seemingly loading credit to Kibaki as a Gikuyu president, is on how better things are. He says 'It is hard to say that things are not better. Government departments work. There are tax collection records. You can get your national exam results by text message. The largest bank in Kenya is a Micro Lending Bank. New sky scrapers are all over Nairobi.' (231). Binyavanga seems to have a clever way of throwing these statements where one least expects.

He pretends to be giving a balanced view by sewing some patches of his own tribe attack, but with a clear target in sight. As Bal reiterated in describing the three layers of a narrative, he says that fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events caused or experienced by actors. What Binyavanga has achieved is a systematic and chronological presentation of his tribe as, when convenient as superior, when it best suits, one that needs sympathy.

The biggest hypocrisy and dishonesty that bubbles through Binyavanga's memoir is when he says that he was going to vote Raila in the 2007 elections. He proudly says

I am going to vote for Raila. I don't love him. Kibaki is sort of okay. A bit sleepy, but there is no way I am voting from a second term for any president while this constitution is still alive. Too much power. I do not want to vote for a better Gikuyu land. I want to vote for a better Kenya. If I can't trust my vote to a leader of another tribe, I may as well take a green card and not go back! (234).

As described by Ngugi, Binyavanga is indeed a singer and a painter in words. It is a common sense that what is sang or painted may not necessarily be real, just good for the eye. In this claim, Binyavanga has not only sang a heroic song of the non-tribalist, nationalist and Kenyan, but in equal zest, he has painted a portrait of himself as having no tribal feature; the spotless sheep without blemish. This frantic effort fails terribly because it does more harm than the 'good' he intended. As I earlier stated, honesty gives credibility to a memoir and any trace of the inverse poisons an otherwise good piece of literary work.

What betrays Binyavanga is his supposedly refusal to vote and tearing up of his voters card. He precedes this with what he wants his reader to understand as the reason for refusing to vote.

I have had enough. Raila's party is now nakedly saying in rallies all over Kenya that their campaign is about forty two tribes versus one tribe - the Gikuyu. The Gikuyu have become "blemishes" in some parts of the Rift Valley blemishes that need to be stripped away. They have gone mad, our politicians. Kibaki has selected his own commissioners for the electoral commission. He has broken his promise to consult the opposition. One woman tells me she has volunteered her own money – and she is not rich – to help rig the election in Raila's constituency. She is a Gikuyu. (237).

What Binyavanga forgets is that he had declared, as a matter of principle that he was going to vote 'another tribe', and to be more specific, Raila. What is this that informed him earlier that has changed? What is it that defines a character: is it the courage to follow ones convictions or the cowardice of abstinence? Indeed, what the writer has achieved in this act of cowardice is to confirm who he is and the very agenda he had in the writing of this memoir.

When elections are finally conducted, Binyavanga is in the comfort of his hotel room in Lamu, following the elections. He chats with different people over drinks and a banker swears, 'Raila is dangerous... He can't win, whatever it takes.' This declaration is suspect and I suppose that the banker is a character employed by Binyavanga to echo his own position.

The way Binyavanga reports the election results and the chaos that follow is wanting as far as his political stand is concerned. He says,

Last night Raila was a million voters ahead. This morning we woke up and Kibaki had caught up. But we knew it would be close. People do not understand numbers, we say to ourselves. (244)

Binyavanga blatantly endorses the election results with two justifications. First, he says that *they* knew that it was going to be close and secondly, that 'people do not understand numbers'. What Binyavanga takes sides in an openly contentious issue that is unresolved to date. Indeed, it is on record that the chairman of the electoral commission confessed that he was not sure who won. For Binyavanga to claim that *they knew* that it was going to be close and that people do not understand numbers is an insult to reason and common sense. I would like to state that common sense is enough to realize that there is no way in less than six hours a trailing candidate can catch up with a leading candidate by one million votes. People may not understand numbers but that does not mean that people do not reason. This is a clear indication that he indeed was motivated by nothing but a desire to justify his political and tribal quest.

The way the writer reports the violence that rocks the country is not only biased, but also deliberate attempt to attract sympathy to his (ethnic) side. It does not require a forensic expert to unearth the writer's tribal and political agenda. It is obvious that Binyavanga insinuates that the perpetrators of post-election violence were mainly two communities, the Kalenjins and the Luos. In his summing up submission, it becomes even clearer when he says:

Several Kalenjin militias are marching on foot to Nakuru and baba won't leave. I am on the phone with him every hour, begging him. Paraffin and Matches cost less than a dollar a day. The ants have crawled out of the logs of Kenya; some will set their own city, Kisumu on fire, watch it burn and cheer. (245).

He goes on to say, 'In Nairobi, they will lift up your railway, the original spine, and start to dismantle it.' (245). Nobody needs to be told whom he is referring to.

A question that begs answers is, where are the writer's people in the violence? Is he claiming that his own people were only but victims and not perpetrators? Why is he silent on what happened in Naivasha, a few kilometers from where his *baba* was? This is not only ridiculous but totally, skewed rapporteur from an otherwise 'Brilliant' and 'skillful singer and painter in words'. I would not be far from the truth to see Binyavanga as playing a hired gun on a clear political mercenary mission.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Although *One Day I Will Write About This Place* is by all standards a 'brilliant' memoir in the recent times, Binyavanga Wainaina failed the test of honesty in his handling of issues of political nature. Despite struggling to paint his own portrait as a neutral, non-tribal individual, the image that comes out is that of a shrewd writer with all features of a tribalist screaming for attention. His attempt to hide behind his mixed parental background does not help matters. His chaotic style of writing betrays him when statements keep escaping from his subconscious self, without him noticing.

In my opinion, in as much as I agree that *One Day I Will Write About This Place* is a brilliant memoir, I equally feel that his biased political and ethnic stance cannot stand the test of modern literary times, leave alone political correctness.

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