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Ikisiri
Ujumi Mweusi (Black Aesthetics) has been applied widely to Kiswahili poetry, drama, and popular music, yet contemporary Kiswahili novels are still read through postmodernist categories. In this article, the focus is on how KW Wamitili and Said Ahmed Mohamed adapt *Ujumi Mweusi* in *Nguvu ya Sala (*1999), *Harufu ya Mapera* (2012), *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* (2012), and *Dunia Yao* (2006). The argument is that Black Aesthetic theory and self-critical aesthetics are core. The four novels were purposively selected because they belong to the contemporary period (1999–2012) and each stages the encounter between African and non-African values at a different scale: the family, the nation, the diaspora and the globalised world. Passages from a close reading of the primary texts were coded manually against Molefi Kete Asante's three Afrocentric tenets and Pio Zirimu's notion of *ujumi*, then triangulated against published criticism. The analysis is comparative rather than developmental. The novelists draw on mbinu rejeshi (flashback), prolepsis, dayalojia (dialogism), African cosmological symbolism and political allegory. Richard Ngunze (*Nguvu ya Sala*) models communal moral repair; Isabelle, Caliban and Jimna (*Harufu ya Mapera*) embody elite betrayal; Afida (*Mhanga Nafsi Yangu*) dramatises the migrant's psychological wound; and the spirit-being Mize (*Dunia Yao*) asserts African metaphysics as autonomous knowledge. The authors in the novels engage Asante's three tenets but stretch them, relocating the colonial wound to the diaspora and voicing the restorative tenet through dystopian critique. *Ujumi Mweusi* in contemporary Kiswahili novels emerges as a critical, self-reflexive aesthetic in which African-derived values judge both Western hegemony and African elites, refining Asante's restorative model. The findings are based on one researcher's reading of four novels and are not generalisable. The use of a predetermined coding frame reduced interpretive bias. The article offers teachers and critics of Kiswahili literature an Afrocentric framework for reading the contemporary Kiswahili novel beyond imported formalist categories and models the use of *Ujumi Mweusi* as an analytical grid alongside narratology and realism.

Utangulizi

In Kiswahili novels, concepts such as social critique, philosophical inquiry, and formal experimentation are prevalent. Over the past three decades, authors such as Kyallo Wadi Wamitila and Said Ahmed Mohamed have produced texts that traverse realism, dystopia, and metaphysical allegory (Aiello, 2015; Gromov, 2019; Khamis, 2005). However, there is a limited understanding of what makes *Nguvu ya Sala, Harufu ya Mapera*, *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu*, and *Dunia Yao* distinctively African in their aesthetic order, that is, in the values, symbols, and formal choices by which African writers and readers judge artistic merit. In this article, the gap is addressed by reviewing *Nguvu ya Sala* (Wamitila, 1999), *Harufu ya Mapera* (Wamitila, 2012), *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* (Mohamed, 2012), and *Dunia Yao* (Mohamed, 2006) through the lens of Ujumi Mweusi, "Black Aesthetics" (Asante, 1993; Zirimu, 1971), a critical tradition that insists African artistic production be evaluated by African-derived criteria of beauty, meaning, and moral purpose. The four novels were chosen because they represent two of the most prolific and formally adventurous Kiswahili prose writers of the post-1990s period. Additionally, the novels represent each stage of the encounter between African and non-African values at the family, nation, diaspora, and globalized levels. The criteria for why each of the four articles was chosen are included in the methods section.

Existing scholarship on the four selected novels has been substantial but theoretically dispersed. *Nguvu ya Sala* has chiefly been studied for its handling of plot, setting and characterisation through a structuralist lens, with attention to how the novel's flashback architecture builds its message about family and faith. *Harufu ya Mapera*, by contrast, has drawn narratological attention: Studies of narrative levels and focalisation across several Wamitila and Said Ahmed Mohamed novels, including *Harufu ya Mapera*, have examined how prolepsis, embedded dialogue and shifting cognitive focalisation shape ideology and characterisation in the contemporary Kiswahili novel (Osango et al., 2024).

Dunia Yao has attracted the largest and most theoretically varied body of criticism of the four texts. It has been read as an experimental, dystopian novel that unsettles the optimistic developmentalism of earlier African fiction (Aiello, 2015). *Dunia Yao* is a text engaging directly with the pressures of globalisation on African social and economic structures, and as a philosophical departure from literary realism through its spirit-character Mize. According to Rettová (2016), the shift is "from mimesis to Mize," which is from realist representation to a mode of narration grounded in African metaphysics. Later, (Rettová, 2017) reads the novel alongside other Afro-phone visions of the future. *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* has meanwhile been read through the lenses of realism and the fantastical, of discrimination and racism, and, most directly relevant here, of immigrant identity crisis and psychological rupture (Mwamzandi, 2019). What is largely absent from this rich but scattered critical field is a framework that reads artistry, characterisation and theme together, across all four novels, as expressions of a single underlying African aesthetic commitment. As a result, the author in this article therefore treats Ujumi Mweusi as a theory, with defined tenets against which textual evidence can be systematically checked.

Kiswahili literary criticism has for a long time evaluated the novel primarily through imported categories such as realism, narratology, and postmodernism, with the effect that the specifically African aesthetic values embedded in the texts (communal moral vision, oral-derived technique, indigenous cosmology, the psychological and political situation of the Black subject) are frequently noted in passing but rarely organised into a sustained theoretical argument (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Given that *Nguvu ya Sala, Harufu ya Mapera, Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* and *Dunia Yao* each, in different ways, stage the encounter between African and non-African value systems, they offer a productive corpus for testing whether, and how, Ujumi Mweusi operates as an organising aesthetic

across artistry, characterisation and theme. In this article, the author argues that the four novels adapt and contest Black aesthetics theory. The authors, KW Wamitili and Said Ahmed, mobilise indigenous techniques and cosmology to unsettle Eurocentric formal conventions, but they also turn a dystopian, self-critical perspective on postcolonial African elites and on the Black subject's own complicity. As a result, they redefine *Ujumi Mweusi* as a critical and advanced Asante model to fit the migration, metaphysical, and postmodern forms of the 21st-century Kiswahili novel. The central question answered in this study is: to what extent, and in what ways, do KW Wamitili and Said Ahmed Mohamed adapt *Ujumi Mweusi* through artistic technique, characterisation and theme to contest Eurocentric literary conventions and to critique postcolonial African society? The study was guided by three objectives:

- To analyse how KW Wamitili and Said Ahmed Mohamed adapt indigenous and oral-derived artistic techniques in *Nguvu ya Sala*, *Harufu ya Mapera*, *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* and *Dunia Yao* to contest Eurocentric formal conventions.
- To assess the extent to which characterisation in the four novels dramatises, complicates, or resists the psychological, socio-political, and civilisational recovery of the Black subject envisaged in Asante's tenets.
- To interrogate how the thematic concerns of the four novels extend or challenge Asante's model of Black Aesthetics, particularly where dystopian critique of postcolonial society coexists with the affirmation of African values.

Ujumi refers to the criteria a given society uses to judge the beauty and worth of its art (Zirimu, 1971). Black Aesthetics, or Ujumi Mweusi, is the critical position that every society, including African societies, possesses its own such criteria, and that these criteria are the appropriate measure of African artistic achievement. Zirimu (1971) argued that critics unfamiliar with African cultures are ill-placed to judge the aesthetic value of African art. Later, Asante (1993, 1999), within the broader Afrocentric paradigm, posited that African cultural production is a psychological, political and civilisational project. African people are placed at the centre of their own history and interpretation as agents (Asante, 2007; Mazama, 2001).

For this article, three tenets associated with Asante's (1999) formulation of the theory are used as an analytical grid: (i) the healing of the Black person from psychological injuries inflicted by colonialism and denigration; (ii) the improvement of the Black person's political, social, economic and religious standing; and (iii) the demonstration that the Black person is foundational to world civilisation rather than peripheral to it. Fanon's (1952) psychoanalytic account of colonial alienation in Black Skin, White Masks provides complementary grounding for the first tenet, particularly in relation to characters who internalise a devalued self-image after contact with European culture.

The tenets were applied to the texts at three levels, which include artistic technique, characterisation and theme. The first tenet, originally framed around the colonial encounter, is extended to contemporary migration so that Afida's experience of racism in *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* is perceived as a present-day, diasporic form of the colonial wound. The second tenet should be interpreted positively (the authors model accountable institutions) and negatively (dystopian satire of *Harufu ya Mapera* and *Dunia Yao* exposes the betrayal of the standing by African elites). The third tenet is extended to metaphysical realism, where the spirit-narration of *Dunia Yao* is read with African worldviews in which the spirit world and the world of the living interpenetrate (Rettová, 2016, 2017).

Method

The study adopted a qualitative, descriptive, and library-based research design, which is well established in Kiswahili literary scholarship for the analysis of purposively sampled prose texts. The four novels, two by K. W. Wamitila (*Nguvu ya Sala* and *Harufu ya Mapera*) and two by Said Ahmed Mohamed (*Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* and *Dunia Yao*), were purposively selected on four grounds. First, together they span the period 1999-2012, generally regarded in Kiswahili criticism as the era of the "contemporary" or experimental Kiswahili novel. Second, authors in the novel stage the encounter between African and non-African value systems at a distinct scale, namely the family (*Nguvu ya Sala*), the nation (*Harufu ya Mapera*), the diaspora (*Mhanga Nafsi Yangu*) and the globalised world (*Dunia Yao*), so that together they allow all three of Asante's tenets to be assessed across domestic, national, transnational and cosmological settings. Third, pairing two novels per author allows a limited intra-author as well as inter-author comparison. Fourth, each novel has already generated an identifiable body of independent scholarship, on plot and setting (for *Nguvu ya Sala)*, on focalisation and prolepsis (for *Harufu ya Mapera*), on realism, magical realism and immigrant identity (for *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu*), and on postmodern, dystopian and globalisation themes (for *Dunia Yao)*, against which a *Ujumi Mweusi* reading could be triangulated. Notably, other novels by the same authors were considered but excluded. For instance, Mohamed's early realist novel *Asali Chungu* predates the contemporary period, while Wamitila's *Unaitwa Nani?* and the remaining novels of both authors do not place the African/non-African encounter as centrally, or at as distinct a scale, as the selected publications.

In this study, the mode of analysis was comparative and synchronic. The author considered 1999 to 2012 as a single contemporary period. The researcher compared the four novels across authors and settings. Publication dates were used to contextualize the text, meaning that the author in this article does not claim that *Ujumi Mweusi* develops in a linear approach.

Primary data were generated through a close reading of the four novels, in their original Kiswahili editions (Mohamed, 2006, 2012; Wamitila, 1999, 2012), informed by the tenets of *Ujumi Mweusi* set out above. Secondary data, consisting of published theses, journal articles and book chapters, were used to triangulate the readings. Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) thematic analysis process was applied. First, the author read each novel in full to understand the plot, setting, and character. Second, re-reading enabled the researcher to identify passages, narratives, and characterisation choices relevant to the study. Third, these excerpts were coded manually, without software, in an analysis matrix whose rows were the three objectives (artistic technique, characterisation and theme) and whose columns were Asante's (1999) three tenets. Fourth, related codes were grouped into themes, and each theme was checked against the full matrix for consistency across the four novels (Saldaña, 2021). Codes that did not fit the a priori frame, such as dystopian decay, migration and technological alienation, were added inductively and later produced the cross-cutting finding that the novels use *Ujumi Mweusi* critically. The coding frame is summarised in Table 1, and findings are presented in the next section, organised by objective.

Table 1: Coding Frame Linking Asante's Tenets to Codes and Themes

Tenet (Asante, 1999)	**Codes: Artistic technique**	**Codes: characterisation**	**Codes: theme**	**Resulting theme**
(i) Psychological healing from colonial denigration	*Mbinu rejeshi* (flashback); ironic naming (*Motoni/Peponi*); spectral voices	Guilt and moral repair (Susan Nzisa); alienation and self-devaluation (*Afida*)	Colonial and racial wound; moral restoration	The wounded self and communal repair
(ii) Improvement of political, social, economic and religious standing	Prolepsis; political satire and allegory; biblical allusion	Elite betrayal (Isabelle, Caliban, *Jimna*); faith-based household leadership (Richard Ngunze)	Accountable leadership; institutional renewal; dystopian decay (inductive)	Betrayal from within and the demand for accountability
(iii) African civilisation as foundational	Yoruba cosmological symbolism; typographic experimentation; intertextuality (Okot p'Bitek)	Spirit-being as knower (Mize); reader of African texts (*Afida*)	Autonomy of African epistemology; pan-African inheritance; technological alienation (inductive)	African knowledge as an autonomous measure
Cross-cutting	-	-	Migration/diaspora (inductive); dystopian decay (inductive)	Critical (self-reflexive) *Ujumi Mweusi*

Interpretive bias was limited by a fixed coding frame from the theory before the detailed re-reading, so that passages were not selected only after a conclusion had been reached. Passages that complicated the theory, such as scenes of dystopian decay in *Dunia Yao* and *Harufu ya Mapera*, were deliberately recorded in the matrix as counterevidence. The researcher's position as a Kiswahili scholar working within Afrocentric criticism is acknowledged.

Results

Artistic Techniques Adapting Indigenous Resources against Eurocentric Form

In *Nguvu ya Sala,* Wamitila constructs the novel around a main plot line tracing the relationship between Richard Ngunze and his daughter Susan Nzisa, interwoven with subordinate plots involving other family members. The dominant technique is mbinu rejeshi, a mirror-like flashback structure in which the reader meets Richard as an adult before being taken back, through retrospection, into his earlier life. The cyclical rather than linear ordering of time echoes an oral-narrative sense of circular, communally remembered time rather than the strictly forward-moving chronology associated with the European realist novel. The novel's very title *Nguvu ya Sala* – "the power of prayer" – signals a further formal choice: prayer and biblical allusion function as a structuring moral idiom through which the family's crises are narrated and resolved, situating communal, faith-based ethics rather than individual psychology as the novel's organising value.

Harufu ya Mapera similarly departs from a single, tidy plot line. Reviewers have described it as a novel of "political dynasties", and scholarship on its narrative technique has identified. Wamitila's use of prolepsis – anticipatory flash-forward – to foreshadow, for instance, how the character Isabelle would come to regret confiding a secret to the duplicitous Caliban, who in turn betrays her to Jimna. This manipulation of narrative time, together with the novel's satirical treatment of dynastic politics, functions as an artistic strategy for exposing the corruption of postcolonial elites, a recurrent concern of Black Aesthetic and Afrocentric criticism, which insists that African art should speak directly to the political condition of African societies.

Mhanga Nafsi Yangu is the most formally experimental of the four texts, combining realism with elements of the fantastical: the protagonist Afida is accompanied by hallucinatory or spectral presences, including the ghost of her late father and an internal "voice" that periodically interrupts the narration. The novel's chronology is deliberately non-sequential, opening in medias res with Afida already airborne, travelling from a homeland referred to ironically as Motoni ("Hell") to a destination referred to as Peponi ("Paradise"); the narrative then moves backward and forward to fill in her history. This inversion of "hell" and "paradise" is itself an artistic technique of ironic renaming that destabilises the reader's assumption that the West represents unambiguous progress, a device consistent with Black Aesthetic scepticism toward Eurocentric hierarchies of value.

Dunia Yao is the most overtly Africanist in its symbolism. The novel draws on West African (Yoruba) cosmology, giving voice to a spirit-being, Mize, who identifies himself in the text as a messenger of "Bwanamkubwa" and as "Orisa-nla", a deity figure from Yoruba religious thought rendered here in Kiswahili narrative form (Mohamed, 2006). Typographic experimentation, capitalisation, italicisation, and bracketed asides are used to dramatise a breakdown of stable identity and communication under the pressure of globalisation, with a computer recurring as a symbol of technologically mediated, and therefore alienated, human connection. The deliberate importation of a pan-African, rather than narrowly Zanzibari or Kenyan, cosmology into a Kiswahili novel is itself an artistic assertion of a shared Black aesthetic and spiritual inheritance that transcends national and ethnic boundaries within Africa.

Characterisation: Wounded, Betraying, and Knowing Selves

Character construction across the four novels consistently dramatises the tension between an African moral or spiritual self and the disorienting pressure of external, often Western-coded, value systems, the terrain mapped by Fanon (1952) and later by Asante's (1999) first tenet, the psychological healing of the Black subject. In *Nguvu ya Sala*, Richard Ngunze insists that his family embody a Christian and communal moral standard; his daughter Susan's struggle with guilt after telling a lie, and her eventual recognition that untruth is a moral failing she "learned" from her upbringing rather than a personal defect, models a communally anchored, rather than individualistic, account of conscience and moral repair.

Afida, the protagonist of *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu*, is the clearest embodiment of the identity crisis at the centre of Black Aesthetic and Afrocentric concern. As Mwamzandi (2019) demonstrates, Afida migrates from an underdeveloped homeland (Motoni) to a developed Western destination (Peponi) in search of opportunity, marries a European, and is progressively estranged from her family, her religion and her culture; her eventual death signals, in Mwamzandi's reading, the collapse of the immigrant's dream under the weight of racism and cultural dislocation. Read through Asante's first tenet, Afida's arc dramatises the psychological wound that Black Aesthetic criticism seeks to diagnose and, implicitly, to heal: a Black subject who internalises the host culture's devaluation of her origins loses, rather than gains, in the encounter with the West.

In *Dunia Yao*, the spirit-character Mize, who can "give himself a body" and appear to the human character Ndi in seductive human form, personifies an African cosmological order that is older than, and independent of, European epistemology; his self-description as one who "knows the languages that are in your heads and the false feelings that are in your hearts" positions the African spiritual imagination as a form of superior, or at least autonomous, knowledge (Mohamed, 2006). This directly dramatises Asante's third tenet: that the Black person, and by extension African cosmology, is foundational rather than derivative. Rettová (2016) reads Mize as marking the novel's decisive turn away from mimetic, realist characterisation toward a mode of characterisation grounded in African metaphysics, in which a spirit-being can be as narratively substantial, and as

epistemologically authoritative, as any human character. From a Ujumi Mweusi perspective, this is more than a technical experiment: it is an aesthetic claim that African ways of knowing the world are adequate, on their own terms, to the demands of the contemporary novel.

By contrast, the dynastic figures of *Harufu ya Mapera,* Isabelle, Caliban and Jimna are characterised principally by betrayal, manipulation and the pursuit of political advantage, functioning less as individualised psychological studies than as social types through which Wamitila indicts a postcolonial political class that has abandoned communal African values of loyalty and stewardship in favour of self-interest. Read against Asante's (1999) second tenet, these characters operate negatively: rather than modelling the improvement of the Black person's political standing, they dramatise its betrayal from within, so that the reader's implied task is to recognise, and reject, the very behaviours the characters exhibit.

Themes: Extending and Testing Asante's Tenets

Read together, the four novels can be organised around Asante's (1999) three tenets. The first tenet, psychological healing from colonially induced injury, is most explicit in *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu*, where Afida's tragedy is a cautionary thematic statement about the psychic costs of uncritical assimilation into a Western, racially hostile environment (Mwamzandi, 2019), and is echoed, in a domestic register, in *Nguvu ya Sala's* concern with restoring a child's moral integrity after a lapse into deceit.

The second tenet, improvement of the Black person's political, social, economic and religious standing, organises the thematic core of *Harufu ya Mapera*, whose satire of political dynasties is an implicit demand for accountable, communally oriented African leadership, and is present as well in *Nguvu ya Sala's* insistence that religious and familial institutions can be sites of moral renewal rather than mere social convention.

The third tenet, the demonstration that the Black person is foundational to world civilisation, is most fully realised in *Dunia Yao*, where the incorporation of Yoruba cosmology into a futuristic, globalised setting asserts the continued relevance and authority of African epistemology in a world reorganised by globalisation and technology; a comparable, if quieter, assertion runs through *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu's* intertextual references to African and African-diasporic literary voices. Among them are Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol, which Afida reads in her attempt to understand herself and the world she now inhabits. These references position African literary and oral tradition as an indispensable interpretive resource even within a cosmopolitan, transnational setting.

Discussion

Based on the analysis, it is evident that despite differences of setting, register, and authorial orientation, the four novels converge in confirming what *Ujumi Mweusi* theory attributes to African art. They diagnose the psychological cost of colonial and neo-colonial denigration, they hold African political and religious institutions to an African-derived standard of accountability, and they reassert, whether through communal moral realism or through cosmological fantasy, the autonomy and authority of African value systems. This convergence supports the study's underlying claim that Black Aesthetics offers a coherent, internally consistent framework for reading contemporary Kiswahili prose that is at least as productive as, and arguably more historically and culturally apposite than, the narratological categories that have dominated much recent criticism of Wamitila's and Mohamed's novels.

This convergence needs qualification. In the novels, the authors claim African-derived values remain sufficient as a measure in postcolonial African societies. The dystopias are judged and found wanting by standards of communal loyalty, stewardship, spiritual balance and moral accountability

that come from within African thought. The authors in the novels move beyond the largely restorative emphasis of Asante's (1999) formulation towards what may be called a critical or self-reflexive *Ujumi Mweusi*. Thus, this study's central contribution to Kiswahili literary scholarship is that in the contemporary Kiswahili novel, Black Aesthetics is a standard of judgement turned inward as much as a celebration of African identity.

At the same time, the four texts are not uniform in how comfortably they fit the theory. *Harufu ya Mapera's* characters are drawn with a satirical flatness that serves political critique more readily than psychological healing, while *Dunia Yao's* postmodern fragmentation sits in some tension with the theory's more affirmative, restorative aims; these tensions suggest that Ujumi Mweusi, like any single theoretical lens, illuminates certain aspects of these texts more fully than others, and that its application should be complemented, rather than replaced, by the narratological, realist and postmodern readings already available in the literature.

The comparison also illuminates an authorial and geographical difference within the corpus that is worth naming explicitly. Wamitila's two novels, set largely within Kenya, tend to locate Black Aesthetic renewal in domestic and national institutions, specifically the family, the church and the political dynasty, and to imagine repair as a matter of restoring integrity within those institutions. Mohamed's two novels, by contrast, are more consistently transnational: *Mhanga Nafs*i Yangu tracks a Zanzibari woman's migration to Europe, and Dunia Yao stages its cosmological argument on a deliberately unlocalised, futuristic "world" stage. This difference does not, however, follow a neat chronological or generational line. *Harufu ya Mapera* and *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* were published in the same year (2012), yet one is national and the other transnational in scope. Comparably, Mohamed's *Dunia Yao* (2006) is more speculative than Wamitila's later *Harufu ya Mapera*. The variation is therefore better explained by each author's orientation than by date of publication, and the author in this study makes no developmental claim about the period. This suggests that *Ujumi Mweusi* in the contemporary Kiswahili novel is not a single fixed programme but a flexible aesthetic commitment that can be realised equally through the intimate, realist register of the family novel and through the expansive, speculative register of the transnational or futuristic novel. This flexibility is itself consistent with Asante's (1999) insistence that Afrocentric criticism must be responsive to the diversity of Black experience rather than prescriptive about its form.

A limitation of this study is that it is desk-based, and no field data, such as interviews with authors or readers, were collected. The selection of four novels by two authors also means that the findings cannot be generalised to the contemporary Kiswahili novel. In addition, the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, which may have introduced interpretive bias.

Conclusion

The researcher in this article has argued that *Nguvu ya Sala, Harufu ya Mapera, Mhanga Nafsi Yangu* and *Dunia Yao* can be productively read as a coherent corpus through the lens of Ujumi Mweusi (Black Aesthetics). Across artistic technique, characterisation and theme, the four novels enact the theory's central concerns. The concerns are the psychological healing of the Black subject from colonial and racial injury; the improvement of the Black person's political, social and religious standing; and the assertion of African civilisation as foundational. In pursuing these concerns through markedly different formal registers, the four novelists demonstrate that Ujumi Mweusi is not a single style but a shared aesthetic and ethical commitment that can inhabit realist and non-realist form alike. These registers include the domestic realism and flashback structure of *Nguvu ya Sala*, the political satire and prolepsis of *Harufu ya Mapera*, the fantastical, transnational narrative of *Mhanga Nafsi Yangu,* and the cosmological, postmodern experimentation of *Dunia Yao*.

The study's principal contribution is to bring together, under one explicit theoretical grid, findings that have until now been scattered across separate narratological, ideological and identity-focused studies of individual novels. Second, the author demonstrates that Black Aesthetic theory, long applied in Kiswahili criticism to poetry, drama and popular music, is equally productive when applied systematically to the contemporary novel if it is read elastically enough to accommodate migrant, dystopian and metaphysical forms. The conclusions are limited by the study's design. Also, the results are based on one researcher's close reading of four purposively selected novels and would be strengthened by collecting reader-response or author-interview data. Future research might extend this framework to a wider corpus of contemporary Kiswahili fiction – including, for instance, Said Ahmed Mohamed's *Babu Alipofufuka* and *Nyuso za Mwanamke*, or Wamitila's *Bina-Adamu!* and *Msimu wa Vipepeo*. A comparative study extending the framework to Kiswahili poetry and drama of the same period would also help to establish whether the patterns identified here are specific to the novel or characteristic of Kiswahili literature more broadly.

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