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Politics of Death: A Comparative Necropolitical Analysis of Andrew Morton's Moi: The Making of an African Statesman and Babafemi Badejo's Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics

Odanga Erick Omondi, Peter J. Muindu, Josephine Maingi
[1]*Corresponding Author,*
Department of Arts and Social Sciences, Garissa University, P.O Box 1801-70100, Kenya, School of Education.

Abstract: This study sought to examine the reproduction of necropolitical power and politics of death through a comparative reading of the selected texts. Using Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and Chandra's ethnic essentialism, the study investigated the representation of political violence, populist counter-narratives and state sanctioned exclusionary practices within the postcolonial political landscape in Kenya. The study used a qualitative comparative textual analysis to examine the political characterization, narrative strategies, narrative silences, representations of repression, ethnic mobilization as well as resistance. The study found that albeit contrasting political identities, the two biographical accounts intersect in their reproduction of the underlying logic of necropolitical power. Morton privileges national stability, political order and paternal care ultimately downplaying the coercive practices which underpinned Moi's rule. Badejo on the other hand, amplifies Raila's experiences of political persecution and detention hence constructing him as a symbol of democratic resistance. This counter-narrative however, remains complicated with regards to its dependence on populist constructions of political legitimacy and ethnic mobilization which ultimately reproduces the exclusionary structures they seek to challenge. The study puts forth the arguement that political biographies are not mere accounts of individual political lives but rather discursive sites where suffering, political authority and violence are contested, reproduced and legitimized. The apparent opposition between authoritarian power and political resistance conceals a shared necropolitical logic in which vulnerability, the political appropriation of suffering and violence become instruments of political justification.

Keywords: Necropolitics, populism, state-sanctioned exclusion, political violence, ethnic essentialism

Introduction

The study of power has increasingly moved beyond the understanding of sovereignty as the authority to govern towards the examination of how power produces political subjects, how it determines conditions of exclusion and inclusion, how it exposes particular populations to violence and finally how it regulates life and death. Michel Foucault in his concept of biopower conceptualizes modern power as operating through mechanisms that regulate populations and discipline individual bodies. Therefore, power is exercised through surveillance, institutions, regulation, the administration of life and classification and not just direct coercion alone. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics surfaces within the problematic that the regulation of life raises the question of what actually happens when political authority determines which lives are to be protected and those that are to be rendered vulnerable.

Mbembe (2019) further extends the concept of biopower by putting violence, sovereignty and death central to the analysis of political power. Mbembe's postulation on necropolitics is the capacity of sovereign authority to determine who should be left to live and who should be left exposed to violence, conditions of extreme vulnerability or death. Mbembe's formulation connects contemporary exercises of sovereign violence to histories of colonial domination as well as the production of unequal political spaces.

Necropolitics goes beyond the mere act of killing to encompassing insecurity, exclusion, political production of vulnerability and conditions in which some subjects are rendered more exposed to violence and premature death than others. Mbembe's idea of necropolitics is literary significant in the sense that political power is not just exercised through institutions but it is also represented, narrated and interpreted through texts. The importance of political-biographical writing lies in the space it occupies between narrative construction and historical documentation. Political biographies do not just reproduce political reality as a neutral sequence of events. The biographers instead construct certain representations of political subjects and the political environment of the subjects through characterization, selection, narrative organization, emphasis description and interpretation. The literary study of political biographies therefore extends beyond asking what particular political leaders did to interrogating the representation of those leaders, narration of their political authority, construction of opponents, the positioning of vulnerability and resistance within the narratives and how meaning is given to violence.

As is the case in most African states, the political systems have been analyzed through the lens of the politics of the belly, a term that was coined by Jean-Francois Bayart. In many African states, the fight for power is vested in the capacity to accumulate more resources and keeping hold of clientelist networks Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis (2020). This reality has created a space for an environment structured for the acquisition of political prowess not through ideas but immensely through the struggle for political survival. According to Branch and Cheeseman (2021) post-independence leaders employ the use of brutal force marked by central coercive power to maintain absolute control over many different ethnic groups in their countries. This shows the institutional inheritance of the colonial times which was built on the mentality that the winner gets to take everything. In this regard, the opposition must use the autocrats' own methods in order to have his legitimacy justified. The environment of exclusionary politics is therefore created as the challenger seeks to gain traction by employing the autocrat's methods to maintain a space of relevance.

As noted by Cheeseman (2019), the consolidation of political power in a small ethnic group in a way vastly subsumed the promise of independence. This opens to the view of how Kenyan state has been understood throughout its political history. This has been shown through vicious cycle of hope and despair. Mueller (2020) gives an account of how state-owned machineries like the judiciary and the police were used to neutralize challengers by suppressing any form of dissent. Such an oppressive and autocratic policy could not brook any criticism and dissidence became inevitable. This autocracy gives birth to the rise of Raila as he seeks to destroy it. In his biographical account, Raila sought to dismantle autocracy but he relied on mobilizing different communities and establishing a loyalist base among the people.

The comparative reading of MortonsMoi: The Making of An African Statesman and Badejo's Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics gives room for the examination of the relationship between power and resistance. This comparison makes it possible to question how the exercise of political power is represented from Moi's perspective and how that same political environment is represented from the position of Raila hence revealing contradictions, transformations and continuities in how political authority is represented that may remain obscured when each text is examined independently.

Statement of the problem

Existing scholarship on Morton's Moi: The Making of An African Statesman and Badejo's Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics have focused largely on establishing the biographical and political importance of Moi and Raila as the political subjects with comparatively little attention to how they represent and textually construct necropolitical authority. Extant studies on these texts have glossed over the existence of shared necropolitical logic in the biographies. The study addressed this gap through a comparative necropolitical analysis of Morton's Moi: The Making of An African Statesman and Badejo's Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics by focusing on the ways in which political authority produces conditions of vulnerability, disposability, textual strategies used to represent such conditions and the forms of resistance emerging in response to necropolitical power. The study therefore positions the texts as literary texts whose narrative constructions participate in the production, negotiation and contestation of meanings about political authority in Kenya and not merely as records of political lives.

Objective of the study;

i. To examine the representation of state-sanctioned exclusionary practices, political violence and the emergence of populist counter-narratives that challenge or reproduce necropolitical power in the selected texts

Study design

This study adopted a comparative case study research design using qualitative textual analysis supported by systematic content analysis. The qualitative component enabled close reading of narrative strategies while the content analytical component helped in coding of the recurring necropolitical markers and comparing patterns across the two texts.

Limitation of the study

This study was confined within the walls of comparative analysis of Andrew Morton's *Moi: The Making of an African Statesman* and Badejo's *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics* through the lens of Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics. On the same vein, the study focused on the time ranging from 1970 up to the early 2000s ensuring that it captured Moi's era and Raila's rise to the arena of politics in Kenya. The analysis was therefore strictly restricted to the textual content in the two biographical accounts. This study may have been limited following the subjective nature the two primary biographical accounts. Morton's account of Moi appeared to be more of a hagiographical nature which may have made it obscure the darker necropolitical reality

during Moi's era. Badejo's account of Raila despite being analytical it only packaged the presentation of Raila as an emblematic hero of resistance.

Data Collection

Data was collected using close reading and thematic coding focusing on narrative strategies, episodes of coercion, violence, detention, political exclusion and crisis governance. There was also the extraction of textual segments

Primary Data

The primary sources of data were the two biographies, that is, Andrew Morton's *Moi: The Making of an African Statesman* and Babafemi's *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics*.

Secondary Data

Sources of the secondary data were scholarly works on Kenya's political history on repression and violence and also theoretical texts by Achille Mbembe, Fanon and Chandra.

Data Analysis

The study analysed the data through a comparative thematic and necropolitical framework, treating Andrew Morton's *Moi: The Making of an African Statesman* and Badejo's *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics* as literary texts through which sovereignty, violence, power and the management of life and death could be examined. The analysis did not summarize the two works but interrogated how each text constructs political authority and represents the relationship between the political elites, populations subjected to different forms of power and the state.

The analysis proceeded through close textual reading and thematic coding where relevant passages from the primary texts were identified, extracted and organized around recurring analytical categories derived from the study's research questions and the concept of necropolitics and ethnic essentialism. Particular attention was given to the representations of political exclusion, coercion, sovereignty, political marginalization, citizenship, resistance and the production of subjects whose lives become politically expendable. These themes provided the analytical lens through which the political experiences represented in the two texts were interpreted.

A within-text analysis was first undertaken to establish the distinctive political narratives advanced by both Morton and Badejo. The study then moved to cross-textual comparison where convergences and divergences were examined in the ways the two texts portray the exercise of political power. This comparative stage allowed for the analysis to identify not only similarities in the operation of political authority but also the differences in the mechanisms of exclusion, political actors, historical context and consequences for the governed.

The analysis went ahead to further distinguish between direct and indirect forms of political violence. Direct forms included repression, the use or threat of physical force and coercion. Indirect forms included marginalization, political exclusion, unequal access to power and institutional practices that determine whose interests are protected and whose lives are rendered vulnerable. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics was not simply used to refer to physical death but to examine the broader political processes through which state and political power determine who is protected, who is excluded, whose existence is treated as expendable and who is exposed to vulnerability.

Most importantly, the study analyzed the texts within their respective historical and political contexts rather than treating their representations as interchangeable. Morton's account of Moi was therefore examined in relation to its portrayal of African state formation and political leadership, while Badejo's text was read in relation to the specific dynamics of Kenyan politics. The comparison subsequently brought these contextualized readings together to demonstrate how different political environments can produce distinct manifestations of necropolitical power.

The final stage involved interpretive synthesis. The coded themes were compared across the two texts to establish broader patterns concerning the relationship between sovereignty and the control of life, political legitimacy and exclusion and leadership and coercive power. Where the two texts presented a competing and ambiguous representations. The tensions were retained rather than resolved artificially. The analysis therefore sought to reveal the political mechanisms underlying the narratives and not simply reproducing the authors' descriptions of political events.

Necropolitics and Populist Counter Narratives

Necropolitics and the Postcolonial African State

According to Mbembe (2019) the understanding of modern sovereignty is embedded in the ultimate capacity to dictate and influence the conditions under which the citizens may live or die. Far away from Foucault's biopolitical school of thought which squarely focuses on management of life, Mbembe's necropolitics goes further to emphasize the ability of the state to expose some populations to suffering, permanent insecurity, death and even abandonment. According Achille Mbembe, African states in the postcolonial era gravitate quite often towards operating through states of exception where violence becomes normalized and legal protections are suspended. It is on this regard that sovereignty is exercised not just through institutions and laws alone but through the continuous management of fear, vulnerability as well as exclusion.

Mbembe's necropolitical framework is particularly instrumental in the understanding of Kenya throughout its political history. In the postcolonial era, the Kenyan state consequently employed strategies of detention, surveillance, torture, electoral violence as well as ethnic exclusion in order to maintain political authority. According to Lynch (2020) the history of violence has often been concealed under the umbrella of narrative of national unity and reconciliation by the Kenyan state's management of memory and justice. Mutua (2023) equally observes that coercive mechanisms that have been passed down from the colonial masters have been relied upon frequently by the governance in Kenya after independence. Biographies of Morton and Badejo are hereby put to use as literary avenues through which negotiation and representation of necropower is done.

Nyayo as a Necropolitical Formation

Morton in his account of president Moi, he repeatedly expresses Moi as a leader who is in all regards committed to love, peace, stability of the nation and national cohesion. When thrown under necropolitical magnification, Morton's account shows silences that are so significant regarding the coercive tools that kept his rule alive. In his most striking of aspects Morton in his account puts much emphasis on order and discipline. He repeatedly puts forth the notion of president Moi as a father figure who is responsible for not only maintaining national harmony but also promoting it. He says that;

he has often been described as a humble man, although he can also be quite vain in a very male, African way ~ comes across on first meeting. Many who have enjoyed an audience with him have described their conversation as like talking to one's father. (Morton, 1998, p. 5).

At the very onset the message coiled seamless to be rather a harmless one, but this paternal image only plays a huge task of wiping away traces of coercive dimensions of authority as he packages president Moi as a loving and caring father. Morton at the inception of his account, sails the citizenry through the Christian life of Moi. He writes:

the most striking feature is the number of well-thumbed bibles that fill the shelves. Before he retires each evening, Moi reads from the Holy scriptures, particularly favoring the New Testament (Morton, 1998, p. 4).

Morton presents president Moi as a devout leader whose leadership is not only tethered to his own principles and culture but also his firm Christian beliefs. This portrayal presents Moi as a morally upright leader. By pronouncing his habit of reading the Bible every evening, Morton constructs an image of a president whose leadership and decisions are guided by Christian values making Moi's authority seem as stemming from moral conviction rather than political force. Morton is able to shift the attention away from the strategies used by the state in the exercise of its power. He focuses more on ethical character and spirituality hence creating an impression that leadership is itself primarily based on religious commitment and personal virtue. It softens the image of an authoritarian regime as it does not foreground the coercive instruments used by the state. This way he manages to blur the coercive dimensions of the state authority. According to Adebanwi and Obadare (2021) narratives of paternal politics often serve to make dominance legitimate by putting up obedience as a way of committing loyalty to the family. According to Mbembe (2019) this kind of imagery is representative of or as part of symbolic performance of sovereignty. Morton makes Moi a disciplinarian and a protector and as a leader, the citizens are deemed to submit to his authority in exchange for state protection and security.

On the contrary, however, historical records show that the Nyayo state was significantly inclined towards detention without any trial, torture of citizens, suppression of any form of dissent and surveillance. Branch and Cheeseman (2022) believe that president Moi consolidated his authority among the citizenry by use of extensive control of political opposition which came to place following the failed 1982 coup attempt. When Badejo gives his account of Raila's dreadful experiences, he provides solid evidence of this reality under the rule of president Moi. Badejo notes;

After the coup attempt, President Moi and those around him decided to go strong on all forms of opposition to prevent a repeat performance. He purged the civil service, cabinet and party hierarchy. Senior civil servants were required to be life members of KANU and promotion depended on the extent of expressed loyalty to the President and his Nyayo ideology of "peace, love and unity." The move to arrest University lecturers in

the pre-coup days, intensified. Those lecturers who did not want to go to jail, pledged loyalty to the President as part of their ethnic groups. Student movements were also cowed as the State took close interest in who became student leaders. Academic freedom suffered. (Badejo, 2006, p. 125).

The term that Morton uses "purged" inadvertently exposes the exclusionary logic of sovereignty. In this era, political loyalty grew to becoming the only currency and condition that promised participation within the state. Those who were deemed disloyal to the state were with no doubt expunged from their positions of influence and subjected to various forms of political marginalization. Mbembe (2019) argues that the manifestation of necropolitical power is seen through the creation of populations whose political existence is rendered precarious. This process is further exemplified by the purge as stated by Badejo.

Political Martyrdom

The integral feature entailed in necropolitical governance is the deliberate use of state apparatus and instruments like detention and imprisonment as mechanisms or measures of disciplining political bodies in cases of dissent. Badejo continuously underscores the brutality of Raila's state-sanctioned detention as a moment that defined a complete take off in his political career. Raila himself says that;

The eventual proscription of KPU and detention of its leaders have been the driving force in my political career. I needed to counter the government's refusal to accept challenges to its rule and stem out the rapid reversion of the constitutional opposition to its ethnic bastion. (Badejo, 2006, p. 78).

In "What is left unsaid" Correia and Caetano (2024) say "This process of telling a life, is mostly, one of creating a biographical narrative, where events, people, interpretation and emotions are mixed" (p. 1397). He argues that when people tell stories of their lives, they don't just list facts but construct the story based on how they feel, memories or even the situations they are in. This reveals a profound structural irony in that the same dissent that the state tries to eliminate or do away with through repression is the same dissent that it finds itself reproducing or cultivating to back to life unexpectedly. The remarks by Raila only show how state repression inadvertently produces the very opposition it seeks to eliminate. By throwing Raila among other dissidents to brutal punishment, torture and detention in prisons like Shimo la Tewa, in order to eliminate opposition through administration of fear, the state itself ends up transforming the likes of Raila into symbols of resistance. According to Stanley (1992) "both biography and autobiography lay claim to facticity, yet both are by nature artful enterprises which select, shape and produce a very unnatural product for no life is lived quite so much under a single spotlight as the conventional form of written auto/biographies suggests" (p. 4). Badejo selects and shapes Raila's suffering and packages it into a narrative of struggle where political authenticity is achieved.

According to Mueller (2020) it is from the experiences of repression that political protest movements frequently derive legitimacy and relevance. Political suffering therefore serves as a political currency that can be converted into political authority later on.

Badejo tends to romanticize suffering treating detention itself as a literary device through which Raila is metaphorically baptized from ordinary politics into martyrdom. His suffering changes to the greatest testament of his transformation ultimately becoming the evidence of his moral superiority. Badejo on this regard, constructs Raila as a byproduct of his victimhood. His political rising, relevance and legitimacy is assumed to be born from his suffering.

He gains political recognition from his own communal base through his torture and sacrifice putting a strong seal to his political becoming. Mbembe (2019) postulates that necropolitical regimes often create spaces whereby the citizenry can exist within the confines of suspended life. This way, prisons, torture chambers as well as detention centers ultimately turn into avenues where sovereignty is exercised directly upon the body. The political prisoner, here, occupies a liminal position between exclusion and citizenship. The imprisonment of Raila is mirrored as a symbol to the broader operation of necropolitical power within the Kenyan state.

Discursive Production of Political Enemies

The manifestation and operation of necropolitics is not limited to physical violence but is equally seen through language. Before a sect of the citizenry can be excluded physically, their exclusion is first made or done symbolically. Badejo says;

Charles Rubia and Kenneth Matiba, former members of President Moi's cabinet emerged in early 1990 and in an unprecedented move, called for the repeal of Section 2A of the Kenyan Constitution to allow the formation of other political parties. The reaction from the establishment was, as expected, sharp and threatening. The two leaders were instantly transformed into tribalists who wanted to plunge the country into chaos by the introduction of ethnic politics. A countrywide campaign was orchestrated to demonise them as enemies of the Kenyan people. KANU sponsored political rallies where, the effigies of the leaders were publicly burnt. (Badejo, 2006, p. 122).

The statement only gives a revelation to how political enmity is created by the state. Badejo labels the opposing figures as tribalists, troubleshooters or rather being major threats to the aspect of national unity. According to Horowitz (2022) ethnic labeling is an important tool used frequently as a mechanism to delegitimize political competitors. Serious measures are easily levied upon opponents regarded as threats to the core of national cohesion as they become easy to make justified. In the same vein, Mbembe (2019) posits that necropolitical power requires the construction of dangerous others with whom for the sake of the necessary collective survival grows the urgent need for exclusion.

For this process to be deemed significant it heavily relies on its ability to normalize repression. In this case, violence becomes politically framed as an umbrella of protection and not oppression making construction of enemies a crucial element of necropolitical governance.

The Politics of Resistance

In Badejo's biographical account of Raila, he utterly positions the understanding of Raila as the central victim and challenger of Kenya's necropolitical order. Badejo in his narration, repeatedly emphasizes on attributes of resistance, courage and sacrifice. Badejo positions Raila as:

Raila Odinga is a goal-getter. He is a political wizard. A very courageous and intelligent man. As far as ethnicity is concerned, he initially came out as a Luo Chief. But now he has a national image. He has managed to go beyond ethnicity to be a strong party leader. Raila can get along with anybody. He does not have Religious, Class or Ethnic bias. He fits everywhere. During the campaign he interacted everywhere. (Badejo, 2006, p. 337).

He imbues Raila in heroic language transforming politics of the opposition into a moral struggle between freedom and oppression. According to Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, however, necropolitical systems always end up generating their own challenges. Raila emerges and secures political legitimacy within the same structures of violence that sustain authoritarian rule. This results into reproduction of the logic of exclusion through resistance. In the account, Badejo unintentionally when discussing Raila's influence among Luo communities acknowledges this tension. He writes;

At the individual level, the tendency in Kenyan politics is that Raila has been suffering from three things: The first is the fact that he is the son of Jaramogi, who was a controversial and principled politician. His being a Luo in this struggle has meant passionate following by most Luos and disdains from many a Kikuyu and associated ethnic groups in the elite exploitation of ethnicity. (Badejo, 2006, p. 317).

Badejo inadvertently reveals that opposition politics remain glued within the unseen confines of ethnic mobilization. Consequently, in as much as Raila challenges state repression, he evidently relies on political mechanisms very similar to the ones used by the state itself.

The Commodification of Suffering and Political Authority

Morton and Badejo in their accounts convert suffering into political legitimacy. According to Morton, the need for strong leadership and national discipline justifies suffering. Badejo identifies with the idea that resistance and democratic struggle are made legitimate through suffering. It is on this regard that violence is made narratively productive and rich across Badejo's and Morton's accounts. Badejo's account of Raila lays bare the necropolitical operations of the postcolonial Kenyan state. The text positions itself within Mbembe's understanding of death-world, the space where the state exercises its sovereign rights to render it's subjects disposable. Raila recounts rather in harrowing terms his first ever detention without trial. He notes:

There was knocking on the door and Raila woke Wycliffe Oduor Ombaka, his host's junior brother who was sleeping in an adjoining room to get the door. As the door opened, Agung'a was the first to come in. He told Raila that "these people" wanted to talk to him. The people identified themselves and demanded that he came along with them. Raila told them he would see them later as he had somethings to do. They insisted and he had no choice but to follow them. (Badejo, p. 109)

The state exercises its sovereign power by putting Raila in a liminal zone. He is left in a precarious situation where his rights are taken away from him and rendered powerless. The sovereign uses its capacity to determine who may live and who should die and who should be put in existence in the liminal space between the two. When describing the conditions of his detention, Badejo writes:

I spent ten days standing in water. That is when you know how long the night is. The cell was like a tank. It had automated doors that closed tight. Water would reach the legs. They would pour cold water on you at midnight and at 5 am. Then they would blindfold you and take you to the interrogation room on the 24th floor. (Badejo, p. 119)

Badejo's description of Raila's detention experience aligns with Mbembe's concept of the living dead. Raila is kept in a state of permanent precarity under sovereign control. The prison cells are ultimately transformed into a microcosm of the necropolitical state. Within the cells, life is maintained only to be subjected

to continued suffering and domination. With regards to Lynch (2020) in Kenya, political memory is organized more often around competing narratives of victimhood. Badejo and Morton's accounts transform historical suffering into symbolic resources by which political figures can deploy in contemporary struggles. Violence is on this regard treated as a commodity or item of use to protect, maintain and ensure legitimacy. Political detention, exclusion as well as repression are transformed to sources of moral authority turning historical trauma into political capital.

Conclusion

The study has showed that political violence constitutes a foundational element of the Kenyan state instead of being perceived as accidental deviation from democratic governance. It has also demonstrated through Mbembe's theory of necropolitics that detention, repression, surveillance, ethnic exclusion and electoral violence function as mechanisms through which sovereignty is exercised. While Morton largely sanitizes these realities through narratives of paternal leadership and national stability, Badejo transforms them into narratives of resistance and democratic heroism. Despite their apparent differences, both biographies participate in the production of political legitimacy through selective representations of violence. Morton and Badejo's accounts reveal that necropolitical power is not just exercised through death but also through continuous management of exclusion, fear, vulnerability and even memory. On this regard, political life-writing emerges as a powerful literary technology through which the Kenyan state's necropolitical machinery is concealed, justified and ultimately reproduced.

Recommendation

The study examined the patterns of clientelist mobilization used by Raila and Moi to mobilize their political authority. It further investigated the use of ethnic essentialism and patronage networks by Raila and Moi and the study found that both Moi and Raila essentialize ethnicity in the mobilization of political authority and influence. The study recommends scholars to extend the comparative analysis of Morton's *Moi: The Making of An African Statesman* and Badejo's *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics* to investigate how narrative biographical silences, narrative strategies and characterisation as well as representation of political suffering shape public perceptions of leadership, political violence and legitimacy.

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