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Is Peter Your Real Name? An Autohistoria-Teoría Exploration of Self-Identity Conflict through Cultural Naming and Colonial Renaming among the Kikuyu People of Kenya

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ABSTRACT
This study critically examines the enduring impact of colonialism on cultural and personal identity through the imposition of European names on the Kikuyu people of Kenya. Orchestrated by Christian missionaries and colonial administrators, this renaming served as a deliberate mechanism of cultural domination, severing vital connections between individuals and their ancestral, spiritual, and communal roots. In Kikuyu cosmology, names carry deep significance, linking individuals to lineage, memory, and land. The disruption of this system constituted a profound erasure of identity. In response, Kikuyu communities developed a dual naming practice: European names were adopted in colonial public domains, while indigenous names were preserved in private and familial contexts. This negotiation of identity under colonial rule illustrates both the psychological fragmentation imposed by colonial structures and the cultural resilience of the colonized. In the post-colonial era, the reclamation of traditional Kikuyu names has emerged as a powerful act of resistance and self-determination, even as European names continue to persist in contemporary Kenyan society, reflecting the lasting legacy of colonial power. Drawing on archival sources, missionary records, church registers, oral histories, and interviews, the study employed thematic analysis informed by postcolonial theoretical frameworks, including those of Foucault, Fanon, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Cultural validity was maintained by grounding the analysis in indigenous epistemologies, while reliability was ensured through triangulation and thematic consistency across diverse data sources. The findings underscore naming as a critical site of cultural struggle, highlighting how acts of linguistic imposition and resistance shape collective memory, post-colonial identity, and the ongoing quest for cultural sovereignty in Africa.

KEYWORDS
Colonialism; Kikuyu; cultural decolonization; post-colonialism; indigenous heritage; self-identity; dual identity.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In the summer of 2024, I had the privilege of being invited to present my scholarly work at the Oxford Roundtable Conference in the United Kingdom. The conference is an exclusive gathering of approximately 40 renowned educators from across the globe, and it offers not only enlightening presentations but also profound, informal conversations. These interactions provided fertile ground for deep intellectual exchanges, particularly regarding issues of identity and education.

During one of these exchanges, while introducing myself to a fellow participant from Latin America, she asked me a seemingly straightforward question: "What is your name?" I instinctively responded, "*Peter*." However, her follow-up question caught me off guard: "Is that your real name?" I was momentarily confused. Why had she asked such a question? What was wrong with the name I had given her? Her question lingered in my mind and triggered a series of reflections on the complex interplay between identity, names, and colonial histories.

As our conversation unfolded, it became clear that her inquiry was rooted in a much deeper exploration of how colonialism had disrupted and redefined the self-identities of indigenous communities. She spoke passionately about the erasure of indigenous names and the imposition of colonial names, a theme that resonated with my own experience. She had based her presentation on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, particularly her concept of *autohistoria-teoría*, a form of autoethnographic writing that interweaves personal and collective histories to challenge dominant cultural narratives (Anzaldúa, 2021). Her presentation shed light on the ways colonized peoples navigate the fragmentation of identity imposed by external forces and how they seek to reconcile these fractured selves.

Anzaldúa's theory of *autohistoria* resonated with me on a personal level, as I reflected on my own experiences with renaming and identity. In our discussions, I noticed striking parallels between my own experiences and those of the indigenous communities she had studied, particularly the ways in which names—once sacred markers of cultural identity—became sites of colonial intervention and displacement. By the conclusion of the conference, I realized that this encounter had sparked a new intellectual journey for me. I left the conference with a renewed sense of purpose and clarity, knowing that my next study would explore the complex dynamics of self-identity, renaming, and the lasting impacts of colonization.

This experience set the foundation for this research, which aims to examine the personal and collective identity conflicts caused by cultural and colonial renaming, using *autohistoria-teoría* as a framework. Through this lens, I seek to explore how individuals, particularly among the Kikuyu people of Kenya, navigate the tensions between their indigenous identities and the names imposed upon them by colonial powers (Thiong'o, 1965; Anzaldúa, 2021).

INTRODUCTION

The legacy of colonialism is often discussed in terms of economic exploitation and political domination, but the cultural impacts of colonization are just as significant, particularly when it comes to identity. Zeleza (2006) noted that one of the most striking examples of this is the imposition of European names on African populations, a practice that served to undermine indigenous cultures and assert colonial authority. In the case of the Kikuyu people of Kenya, this process was particularly intense, leading to a complex interplay between traditional Kikuyu naming systems and the colonial imposition of Christian or European names.

The Kikuyu Naming System

The Kikuyu naming system is a complex and integral aspect of their cultural, social, and spiritual identity. It operates as a sophisticated mechanism for the preservation of lineage, the transmission of cultural values, and the maintenance of spiritual connections between the living and their ancestors. As the largest ethnic group in Kenya, the Kikuyu approach to naming reflects a deeply embedded worldview in which the individual is intricately connected to family, community, and ancestry. Within this system, names carry profound significance, functioning as conduits for cultural transmission and serving as symbols of the Kikuyu ethos, where past, present, and future generations are continuously interwoven (Kenyatta, 1938; Njogu & Maupeu, 2007).

A central component of the Kikuyu naming system is its role in preserving ancestral memory. Children are traditionally named after close relatives, particularly grandparents and other kin, in a practice that ensures the continuity of familial ties and the commemoration of deceased family members. According to Kenyatta (1938), this practice, known as *kirira*, not only honors the legacy of elders but also forms a spiritual bond between the child and the ancestor. The bestowed name becomes a vessel for the values, wisdom, and characteristics of the deceased relative, thereby ensuring the ongoing influence of the ancestor within the family. As Njogu and Maupeu (2007) suggest, this system reinforces Kikuyu cultural resilience, as ancestral names act as a cultural thread that sustains the collective memory and heritage of the community.

In addition to ancestral naming, the Kikuyu naming system is closely linked to the *riika*, or age-set system. The *riika* denotes a cohort of individuals initiated into adulthood at the same time, sharing common rites of passage, responsibilities, and social roles. The use of age-set names such as Maina, Mwangi, and Irungu reflects an individual's association with their *riika* and serves as a marker of their collective identity. Kenyatta (1938) asserts that the *riika* system is fundamental to Kikuyu society, as it fosters social cohesion and continuity across generations. Members of the same *riika* are bound by a sense of mutual support and communal obligation, which further strengthens the interconnectedness of Kikuyu society (Njogu & Maupeu, 2007).

The circumstances surrounding a child's birth also significantly influence the selection of a name. Kikuyu tradition holds that names should reflect significant events, conditions, or experiences at the time of birth, including the time of day, season, or major occurrences during

pregnancy. For example, a child born during the rainy season might be given a name such as Kariuki or Muriuki, which convey meanings related to revival or regeneration (Njogu & Maupeu, 2007). Additionally, names can be derived from specific attributes or possessions associated with the individual being honored. For example, a person who owned many cows might be named Wang'ombe, while one who had extensive land could be named Waithaka. This practice highlights the adaptability and depth of Kikuyu naming conventions, as names carry not only symbolic meaning but also practical identifiers of an individual's role or characteristics within the community.

The Kikuyu naming system has also been shaped by interactions with neighboring communities, particularly the Laikipia Maasai and the Dorobo. These cultural exchanges have led to the incorporation of names from the Kimaasai and Dorobo languages, particularly in regions such as Nyeri and Nyandarua in northern Kikuyuland and Kiambu and southern Murang'a in the south. Names like Ndung'u, Ndirangu, and Ndiang'ui, derived from Kimaasai, and Kamau, Ngugi, Njoroge, and Thiong'o, which have Dorobo origins, reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of Kikuyu naming practices (Njogu & Maupeu, 2007). These borrowed names demonstrate the cultural fluidity and exchange that have characterized the Kikuyu people's interactions with their neighbors, contributing to the diversity of names within the community.

Moreover, Kikuyu names are often imbued with aspirations for the child's future character and virtues. Parents select names that reflect desired qualities such as courage, wisdom, and resilience, qualities that are highly valued in Kikuyu society. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012) notes that names like Njogu and Muruthi embody qualities of strength and determination, which resonate deeply within the Kikuyu cultural context, particularly considering the community's historical struggles, including colonialism and environmental challenges. The naming process, therefore, is not only a reflection of the past but also a projection of hopes and ideals for the future, as it seeks to shape the character and destiny of the next generation.

In essence, the Kikuyu naming system functions as a multidimensional framework that preserves cultural continuity, reinforces social cohesion, and connects individuals to their ancestors, community, and environment. It serves as both a repository of history and a dynamic tool for navigating the challenges of the present and the uncertainties of the future. As Thiong'o (2012) suggested, the power of naming in Kikuyu culture lies in its ability to sustain both individual and collective memory, ensuring that each generation remains rooted in its heritage while adapting to new circumstances. The Kikuyu naming tradition exemplifies how a community can maintain its identity through cultural practices that are deeply anchored in spiritual, historical, and social foundations, yet open to adaptation and change.

Colonial Imposition of European Names

Kenyon (2003) observed that the British colonization of Kenya was not merely a political or economic venture—it was a calculated assault on the cultural and spiritual foundations of the Kikuyu people. Among the most insidious tools of this colonial project was the imposition of

European or Jewish names, a practice that was deeply intertwined with the spread of Christianity. Missionaries, often the vanguard of British imperialism, acted as cultural gatekeepers, introducing the Kikuyu to Christian doctrines while simultaneously erasing their indigenous identity through forced renaming. Conversion to Christianity was typically tied to the adoption of a Christian name, which was administered during baptism. These names, derived from biblical figures or European traditions, were presented as superior and "civilized," and they were required for participation in the emerging colonial economy (Brown, 2007; and Berman & Lonsdale, 1992).

Cesaire (2000) observed that the naming imposition was not a benign or symbolic gesture; it was a form of cultural domination and control. By forcibly renaming individuals, the colonial authorities sought to strip them of their pre-colonial identities, effectively erasing the rich Kikuyu heritage and replacing it with one that conformed to Western ideals. As Fanon (1963) articulates, colonialism operates not only by seizing land but by assaulting the soul of the colonized, and the act of renaming was a direct attack on the self-worth and cultural continuity of the Kikuyu people. Renaming was not just a matter of religious conversion; it became a mechanism of subjugation. European names served as markers of allegiance to the colonial state, and those who refused to accept them were often marginalized or excluded from opportunities within the new colonial society (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992).

Moreover, as Sarte (2004) observed, the imposition of these names symbolized a deeper ideological agenda of the colonial regime: to reshape the consciousness of the colonized. By replacing indigenous names, which carried significant ancestral and spiritual meanings, with European ones, the British were effectively severing the Kikuyu from their past and their cultural anchors. Thiong'o (1965) notes that the renaming of Africans was a deliberate strategy aimed at dehumanizing the colonized, reducing them to subjects of the empire who were expected to internalize their supposed inferiority.

Thus, the colonial imposition of European names in Kenya was far more than a superficial change. It was a calculated act of cultural erasure, a means of enforcing loyalty to the colonial state, and an attempt to control the minds and identities of the Kikuyu people. This practice, while framed as a requirement for social and economic inclusion, was part of a broader strategy of domination, one that sought to rewrite the history, identity, and future of the colonized.

Struggle and Adaptation

The forced renaming of the Kikuyu people by colonial authorities was not met with passive compliance, but with a complex struggle for identity preservation and cultural survival. For many Kikuyu, traditional names were more than mere labels; they were the embodiment of personal identity, ancestral connection, and a deep-rooted heritage that spanned generations. As Thiong'o (2012) asserts, language and naming are central to cultural survival, and for the Kikuyu, the imposition of European names represented a direct assault on their sense of self. In response to this colonial pressure, resistance emerged, not only through outright defiance but also through strategic adaptation.

Rather than relinquish their names entirely, many Kikuyu developed a dual identity, adopting Christian or European names to satisfy the demands of the colonial state while retaining their Kikuyu names in private and communal settings. This bifurcated identity allowed them to participate in the colonial economy and society, where European names were often a requirement for employment or educational opportunities, without severing their connection to their cultural roots. This form of resistance is reflective of what Thiong'o (1965) described as "the survival instinct of the colonized," where adaptation becomes a means of cultural preservation amid oppressive circumstances.

The dual-naming system also served as a subtle act of defiance. By maintaining their Kikuyu names in the private sphere, individuals preserved the essence of their cultural and spiritual identity, undermining the colonial project's attempts to erase their heritage. As Berman and Lonsdale (1992) argue, while colonial powers sought to reshape African identities to fit their imperial narratives, the Kikuyu found ways to resist this redefinition by creating a parallel existence—one that allowed them to function within the colonial system without fully submitting to it.

However, this adaptive strategy also introduced tensions within Kikuyu society. A generational divide began to emerge, with younger Kikuyu, who were more deeply integrated into the colonial system through mission schools, churches, and the workforce, often embracing European names more readily than their elders. The elders, deeply anchored in traditional practices and values, viewed these names with suspicion, seeing them as a symbol of submission to foreign rule and a rejection of Kikuyu heritage (Kenyatta, 1938). This generational conflict reflected broader struggles between tradition and modernity, as the younger generation found themselves caught between the pressures of adapting to colonial demands and the desire to honor their cultural inheritance.

This divide was not only generational but also reflected broader social and political dynamics. As the colonial state expanded its reach, names became markers of alignment with or resistance to the new order. Those who adopted European names were often perceived as collaborators or beneficiaries of the colonial system, while those who clung to their Kikuyu names were seen as defenders of the community's cultural integrity (Fanon, 1963). In this way, the naming struggle became a symbol of the broader battle for autonomy and self-determination.

Thus, the Kikuyu people's response to colonial renaming was far from passive. Through resistance and adaptation, they navigated the complexities of colonialism, preserving their cultural identity even as they engaged with a foreign system that sought to erase it. This duality of existence—where European names were used in public, and Kikuyu names in private—was a testament to the resilience of the Kikuyu people and their refusal to allow colonialism to fully strip them of their heritage.

Post-Colonial Reclamation of Identity

After Kenya gained independence in 1963, the reclamation of cultural identity became a central feature of the post-colonial era. Among the Kikuyu, one of the most visible acts of this reclamation was the resurgence in the use of traditional names. This movement was not merely symbolic; it was a powerful act of resistance against colonial legacy, a conscious rejection of the cultural domination that had been imposed for decades. Reclaiming Kikuyu names was an affirmation of indigenous identity, and it was deeply intertwined with the broader project of decolonizing Kenyan society. The restoration of traditional names paralleled the efforts to revive indigenous languages, rituals, and customs that had been systematically eroded by colonialism (Mazrui, 1995).

The use of traditional names became a form of cultural restoration, a way for the Kikuyu to reconnect with their history and heritage. As Thiong'o (1997a) asserted, the post-colonial period marked a critical moment when African societies began to resist the cultural erasure perpetrated by colonial powers. The revival of Kikuyu names was part of a broader reclamation of language, as language is inseparable from identity. Thiong'o emphasized that colonialism was not only about territorial conquest but about the domination of the mind. The act of renaming was a tool for severing the colonized from their history, and therefore, the post-independence reclamation of indigenous names was an essential step toward cultural liberation (Thiong'o, 1997b).

The restoration of Kikuyu names was also a political act, tied to the broader nationalist movements that had fueled the fight for independence. Leaders of the independence movement, like Jomo Kenyatta, who himself bore a Kikuyu name, embodied this rejection of European-imposed identities. Kenyatta, originally born as Kamau wa Ngengi, adopted his Kikuyu name as a statement of resistance and unity with his people (Kenyatta, 1938). The re-adoption of Kikuyu names became a way for many Kenyans to declare their allegiance to their indigenous culture and reject the inferiority that colonialism had sought to instill.

However, despite these efforts, the legacy of colonial renaming continues to exert influence in post-colonial Kenya. Many Kenyans, including the Kikuyu, still bear Christian or European names, a reflection of the enduring impact of colonialism on personal and collective identities. This duality—between traditional and European names—highlights the complex and painful legacy of colonial rule. As scholars like Berman and Lonsdale (1992) have argued, the colonial experience left a deep imprint on the consciousness of African societies, and names remain a contested space where the tensions between tradition and modernity, indigenous and foreign, are played out.

For the Kikuyu, this tension between European and traditional names is a constant reminder of the fractured identities created by colonialism. While the post-independence period saw a resurgence of Kikuyu cultural practices, the pervasive influence of Christianity and the colonial system continues to shape identity in Kenya. Mazrui (1995) notes that the persistence of European names is not merely a relic of the colonial past but a reflection of the

hybrid nature of modern African identities, shaped by both indigenous and foreign influences. This struggle over names is emblematic of broader challenges facing post-colonial African societies, as they grapple with the ongoing legacy of colonialism while striving to reclaim and affirm their cultural heritage.

The post-colonial reclamation of Kikuyu names thus represents a broader struggle for cultural survival and identity. It is a process of healing, an effort to mend the ruptures caused by colonialism, but it is also a reminder of the enduring scars of that period. As Thiong'o (1997a) argues, the decolonization of the mind is a continuous process, one that requires vigilance and intentional efforts to reclaim the narratives, languages, and identities that were suppressed. The Kikuyu experience with names is a microcosm of this broader struggle—an ongoing effort to reconcile the past with the present and to assert the right to define one's own identity.

Research Objectives

1. Examine the historical imposition of European names on the Kikuyu people during British colonization and its cultural implications.
2. Explore the role of Christian missionaries in the renaming process and their influence on Kikuyu cultural identity.
3. Investigate how the Kikuyu responded to the forced renaming, focusing on the dual identity system and its significance in maintaining cultural continuity.
4. Analyze the post-colonial reclamation of traditional Kikuyu names as part of broader decolonization efforts in Kenya.
5. Assess the ongoing tensions between colonial and traditional Kikuyu names in contemporary Kenyan society.

Research Questions

RQI: How did the colonial imposition of European names impact on the traditional Kikuyu naming system and cultural identity?

RQ2: What role did Christian missionaries play in the renaming process, and how did this influence Kikuyu social and cultural structures?

RQ3: How did the Kikuyu people navigate the imposition of European names, and what strategies did they employ to preserve their cultural heritage?

RQ4: In what ways did the post-colonial period lead to the reclamation of Kikuyu names, and how has this influenced identity formation within the community?

RQ5: What are the continuing effects of colonial renaming on the Kikuyu people, particularly in terms of generational identity conflicts and cultural survival?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of renaming in colonial contexts has been extensively examined within the realms of post-colonial theory, anthropology, and cultural studies, revealing its profound implications for cultural domination, identity erasure, and the negotiation of selfhood. The imposition of European names on indigenous populations, particularly in Africa, functioned as a strategic tool of cultural subjugation, severing individuals from their ancestral ties and forcing them into the mold of colonial identity. Scholars like Thiong'o (2012) and Karanja (2012) have illustrated the alienation caused by the forced adoption of European names, viewing it as part of a larger project of colonial domination aimed at supplanting indigenous identities with Western norms and values. This process of renaming, as theorized in post-colonial discourse, has been understood as a critical mechanism in the colonial endeavor to assert power over not just the political and economic spheres but the very identities of colonized people (Fanon, 1967).

Colonial Naming as Cultural Erasure

The imposition of European names in colonial contexts functioned as a deliberate and systematic mechanism of cultural domination, identity disruption, and social engineering. Far from being a benign administrative exercise, the act of renaming colonized individuals was deeply embedded within the broader colonial project of epistemic violence and cultural erasure (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1978). As Michel Foucault (1977) argues, power operates not only through coercive institutions but also through the regulation of discourse, classification, and identity. Naming, in this regard, becomes a disciplinary practice—a way to structure knowledge and legitimize control over subject populations.

In colonial Africa, and particularly in Kenya, the renaming of indigenous peoples was a central tactic in the broader colonial strategy of reordering society according to European values and worldviews (Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). European names were often assigned during Christian baptism or upon entering mission schools and colonial institutions, signifying not only religious conversion but also a symbolic severance from one's ancestral lineage and spiritual traditions (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2008; Peterson, 2004). These foreign names encoded ideological hierarchies that reinforced the presumed superiority of Western civilization and the inferiority of African cultures. As Thiong'o (2012) powerfully notes, language and naming were central tools in the colonizer's arsenal—vehicles for dismembering the African psyche and implanting colonial logic.

Among the Kikuyu people, naming is not a trivial act but a deeply sacred practice rooted in cosmology, genealogy, and spiritual continuity (Kenyatta, 1938; Karanja, 2012, Lynch, 2016). Names denote one's place in the family lineage, spiritual destiny, and ancestral responsibilities. They carry meanings that bind the individual to community memory and to the land. Colonial authorities, however, disregarded this intricate system, replacing traditional Kikuyu names with European ones that bore no relationship to the local cosmology or social structures. This imposition disrupted the Kikuyu's ontological order and severed critical ties to kinship and ancestral veneration (Macharia, 2020; Thiong'o, 1997b).

The renaming of Kikuyu individuals during colonial rule, particularly through missionary efforts, introduced a duality of identity that had lasting psychological and cultural consequences. While individuals were compelled to adopt European names for baptismal certificates, employment, and legal documents, many continued to use their indigenous names in private or familial contexts (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Mutonya, 2010). This duality often created internal conflict, forcing individuals to negotiate between externally imposed colonial identities and their suppressed but resilient indigenous selves. Such bifurcated identity structures—what Bhabha (1994) terms "the colonial mimicry of hybridity"—revealed the depth of colonial intrusion into personal and collective consciousness.

Moreover, colonial renaming must be understood as an instrument of symbolic violence—a Foucauldian regime of truth that established Western identity markers as normative while pathologizing African ones (Foucault, 1977). By stripping individuals of names that carried spiritual, historical, and communal meaning, colonial systems enacted a form of ontological erasure. The renaming of Africans was not merely about integration into a colonial bureaucracy; it was about remaking the African subject in the image of the colonizer (Mbembe, 2001; Thiong'o, 1997a).

This erasure extended into broader social institutions. Schools, churches, and colonial administration offices became sites of linguistic and cultural reprogramming, where names, languages, and belief systems were strategically replaced (Banda, 2009; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997). The effects were intergenerational, disrupting not only individual identity but also the transmission of cultural knowledge and ancestral memory. As scholars have noted, the renaming process was intimately linked to the colonial desire to produce compliant, alienated subjects disconnected from indigenous epistemologies and more easily governed through Western paradigms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Thiong'o, 1997b).

Even in the postcolonial period, the legacy of colonial renaming persists. Many African countries, including Kenya, continue to wrestle with questions of cultural identity, heritage reclamation, and the residual effects of imposed naming systems (Makoni et al., 2007; Mutonya, 2010). For many individuals, reclaiming indigenous names has become a symbolic act of resistance and cultural revival, asserting a return to precolonial frameworks of identity and belonging. Yet the scars left by the colonial naming regime are not easily healed; they manifest in fractured identities, linguistic alienation, and contested historical narratives.

In conclusion, colonial renaming was not a peripheral aspect of imperial governance—it was a central, insidious tool of cultural destruction. By replacing indigenous names with foreign ones, colonial powers sought to overwrite African worldviews and assert epistemological dominance. For the Kikuyu and other African communities, names were not just labels; they were vessels of memory, spirituality, and identity. The colonial project of renaming, therefore, constituted a profound assault on the very foundations of African personhood and cultural continuity—a legacy that continues to shape the terrain of postcolonial identity and resistance.

The Role of Christianity and Missionaries in the Renaming Process

The role of Christian missionaries in the renaming process during the colonial period is a significant and often contentious subject in post-colonial scholarship. As agents of both religious and colonial ideologies, missionaries were instrumental in facilitating the broader imposition of Western values and institutions in colonized African societies. According to Berman and Lonsdale (1992), missionary activity in Kenya was intrinsically linked to the colonial project, as the process of converting Africans to Christianity was not merely about religious belief but also about reshaping cultural identities in accordance with European ideals. This dual role of missionaries as religious and colonial agents underscored the centrality of Christianity in the wider project of colonial assimilation. The Christianization of African communities often went hand in hand with the imposition of new identities, particularly through the practice of renaming, which has had enduring cultural and psychological ramifications.

In the Kikuyu context, the act of Christian baptism—particularly during the colonial period—was a pivotal moment in the renaming process. The baptismal ceremony, often viewed as a formal rite of passage into the Christian faith, was typically accompanied by the bestowal of a new European or biblical name, which was presented as both a spiritual rebirth and an emblem of moral transformation. These names were frequently derived from biblical figures or European saints, serving to link the newly converted African individual to the Christian world and, by extension, to the European colonial world (Laird, 2014). The introduction of these names, while framed as marks of personal salvation and spiritual progress, simultaneously functioned as tools of cultural erasure. As Laird (2014) contends, the imposition of Christian names was not simply an act of religious conversion but also an attempt to sever indigenous individuals from their ancestral cultural practices and identities. The names bestowed upon converts were part of a larger project to reframe African identities within a colonial and Christian framework, thus undermining the significance of pre-colonial naming systems and the cultural narratives they carried.

The renaming process also carried with it a profound social and psychological dimension, as individuals who resisted the adoption of European or Christian names often faced significant social and institutional exclusion. Elia, (2016), Friedman (1991) and Hofmeyr, (1991) all emphasized that the pressure to adopt these names was immense, as conversion to Christianity was closely linked with access to colonial institutions, education, and social mobility. Christian names were viewed as markers of "civilization" and "progress," and those who refused to embrace them were often marginalized within the colonial social hierarchy. As such, the act of renaming was not merely a private or religious matter; it was a means of securing one's place within colonial order. For many Africans, the acquisition of a Christian name represented an entry into the modern world, which was seen as synonymous with Western values, technological advancement, and social mobility.

This integration into the colonial system through naming was especially evident in the case of Kikuyu, where the renaming process facilitated a deeper entanglement with both the

religious and socio-political structures imposed by colonial rule. The Kikuyu, like many other African ethnic groups, had their own rich and complex system of names, which were tied to their social organization, spiritual beliefs, and ancestral heritage (Kenyatta, 1938). These names, deeply embedded in the Kikuyu worldview, reflected a cosmic order and a connection to both the spiritual and the material world. The introduction of Christian names by missionaries sought to replace these indigenous markers of identity with European Christian symbols, positioning these new names as not only a sign of religious affiliation but also as a symbolic rejection of African traditions (Mudimbe, 1988).

The missionaries' role in the renaming process can thus be understood as part of a broader colonial strategy to reshape African societies. The process of Christian conversion, facilitated by the missionary practice of renaming, was a means of integrating African individuals into a global system that prioritized Western ideals of rationality, progress, and civilization. This project of cultural assimilation was further reinforced by the establishment of colonial education systems, where the use of European names was often a prerequisite for entry into formal schooling and later, employment within colonial institutions. The use of these names, according to Hofmeyr (1991), came to signify not only religious adherence but also social acceptance within the colonial system, making the renaming process a deeply political act.

As the colonial project progressed, the significance of these newly acquired names became even more pronounced. The possession of a European or Christian name marked the individual's symbolic break from their indigenous roots, positioning them within the colonial social order as a subject of European civilization. However, this renaming also produced a dissonance within individuals, as the imposed European identity clashed with the cultural and spiritual identities, they held dear. This internal conflict, which continues to be a prominent feature of post-colonial identity formation, underscores the deep psychological and cultural impact of missionary-driven renaming practices. The conversion to Christianity, and the renaming that accompanied it, thus represented not only an act of religious conversion but also an attempt to reshape African identities in ways that served the interests of the colonial power.

In conclusion, the role of Christianity and missionaries in the renaming process is a key aspect of understanding the broader colonial project. Missionaries were not merely religious agents; they were also central to the imposition of Western cultural norms, including the renaming of African individuals. Through the act of renaming, missionaries sought to replace indigenous names and identities with European ones, thereby facilitating the integration of African peoples into the colonial system. This practice of renaming was not merely about religious conversion; it was a tool for social control and cultural assimilation. The enduring legacy of missionary renaming, and the internal tensions it created, continues to shape post-colonial identity negotiations, as individuals and communities continue to grapple with the complexities of their colonial pasts and their ongoing efforts toward cultural reclamation.

Dual Naming and Identity Conflicts

The phenomenon of dual naming, in which individuals retain both indigenous and European or Christian names, has been the subject of extensive scholarly exploration. This practice is not merely a simple adaptation but an intricate form of cultural negotiation and, at times, resistance. Chinua Achebe (1975), in his seminal work on post-colonial African identity, suggests that dual naming represents a delicate balancing act between indigenous cultural systems and the imposition of colonial forces. For many Kikuyu individuals, the retention of both traditional and European names allowed them to navigate the colonial order while simultaneously preserving links to their ancestral heritage. However, this duality is not without its challenges, especially for younger generations who were increasingly integrated into colonial institutions and globalized systems.

In the Kikuyu context, names were far more than identifiers; they were deeply intertwined with familial legacy, spiritual beliefs, and communal belonging. Kikuyu names often carried ancestral significance, representing familial ties and a connection to the land and the divine (Karanja, 2012). The introduction of European or Christian names, typically through colonial mechanisms like missionary baptism, forced individuals to reconcile competing identities. The emotional and psychological toll of this conflict is evident in both historical accounts and autobiographical narratives. As Thiong'o (1997a) observed, the struggle to reconcile these two identities often led to feelings of dislocation, alienation, and confusion. In the case of my own dual naming experience, my birth name, Ndiang'ui, bestowed upon me by my Maasai grandfather, symbolizes a warrior's legacy and a deep connection to my ancestors. However, after being baptized and given the Christian name Peter, I was presented with an identity that clashed with the one my family had fought to preserve for generations.

This conflict between traditional and imposed names was particularly poignant for younger generations, like me, who were caught between the pressure to conform to Westernized norms and the desire to honor their indigenous roots. The bifurcation of identity created tensions within Kikuyu families, with older generations often clinging to traditional names, while younger generations—especially those who had access to colonial education and opportunities—adopted European names in hopes of securing social mobility (Kenyatta, 1938). As I grew up, I found myself navigating these competing cultural systems, vacillating between the pride I felt in my ancestral name and the societal expectations attached to my Christian name. This identity conflict not only led to personal emotional struggles but also highlighted the generational divide in my family. My local bishop, who had given me my Christian name, saw it as a mark of spiritual transformation and personal growth. On the other hand, my parents and elders viewed my Maasai-based name as a vital link to our family's past and ancestral ties.

This dynamic reflects broader tensions within post-colonial societies, where individuals are forced to live with the legacy of colonialism while simultaneously attempting to forge a new identity in the modern world. As colonial powers sought to erase or replace indigenous systems of knowledge, language, and tradition, the practice of dual naming became a subtle yet powerful

tool for survival and resistance. However, it also placed significant emotional and psychological burdens on individuals, particularly those caught between the old and the new. The tension between indigenous identity and the pressures to assimilate to Westernized ideals remains a defining characteristic of post-colonial experience (Mudimbe, 1988).

In conclusion, the phenomenon of dual naming exemplifies the internalized struggles of post-colonial identity. As seen in my own experience with the names Ndiang'ui and Peter, the clash between indigenous heritage and colonial imposition creates a complex and layered sense of self. This ongoing negotiation of identity, fueled by both historical trauma and contemporary global realities, continues to shape the lived experiences of individuals in post-colonial societies, underscoring the need for further exploration into the psychological and cultural implications of dual identities in the post-colonial world.

Post-Colonial Reclamation of Identity

In the post-colonial period, there has been a significant effort to reclaim indigenous names as part of a broader decolonization movement. Frantz Fanon (1967) argues that reclaiming traditional names is an act of cultural resistance, a refusal to accept the colonial imposition of identity. In Kenya, this process of reclaiming indigenous names was not immediate but developed gradually as part of a broader movement to reject colonial power structures and assert African identity. The return to traditional Kikuyu names symbolizes more than an aesthetic or nostalgic return to the past—it represents a profound cultural and intellectual act of decolonization (Odhiambo & Nyamwaya, 1995). The recovery of these names is integral to the broader struggle for independence, both politically and psychologically, as it signifies the rejection of the colonial system that sought to erase indigenous identity.

However, the legacy of colonial renaming remains entrenched in contemporary Kenyan society. Despite efforts to return to traditional names, many Kenyans continue to bear European and Christian names that have been passed down through generations. These names act as enduring markers of colonial history and continue to complicate identity formation, creating tensions between traditional and colonial identities. Ndigirigi (2011) highlights that the persistence of European names within Kenyan society is a testament to the lasting impact of colonialism, which continues to shape cultural and social dynamics long after political independence. The tension between indigenous and colonial names is not simply an issue of historical memory but reflects the ongoing struggles for cultural self-determination and identity negotiation in post-colonial contexts.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of renaming in colonial contexts has profound implications for cultural identity, selfhood, and the post-colonial experience. The imposition of European names in colonial Kenya served as a tool of cultural erasure, disrupting indigenous ties to heritage, lineage, and community. The involvement of Christian missionaries in this process further embedded colonial values into the social fabric of Kenyan society, as the adoption of European names became a symbol of religious and cultural assimilation. While dual naming offered a form of cultural negotiation, it also gave rise to generational and identity conflicts that

persist in post-colonial contexts. Efforts to reclaim traditional names represent vital acts of resistance and cultural reclamation, yet the lingering presence of colonial names complicates the quest for a unified post-colonial identity. The study of colonial renaming practices, therefore, provides critical insights into the psychological and cultural legacies of colonialism, highlighting the ongoing struggle for identity and self-determination in post-colonial societies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws heavily from Autohistoria Teoría, a framework pioneered by Gloria Anzaldúa in the early 21st century, which blends personal narrative, history, and theory to facilitate self-exploration and identity excavation through writing. Anzaldúa's approach invites the author to weave personal experiences into broader cultural, social, and historical contexts. While Anzaldúa initially focused on the Chicana experience, her framework extends to other marginalized communities, including Indigenous and African diaspora peoples.

Autohistoria Teoría challenges traditional linear narratives by integrating the marginalized self as both the subject and the storyteller. Through this framework, memory, culture, and lived experience intersect with theoretical discourse, allowing the author to reclaim narrative control from colonial and oppressive forces. This method of personal testimony, when placed in dialogue with collective struggles, transforms the author's subjectivity into a form of historical consciousness. In this way, personal stories and identities cannot be fully understood in isolation from their social, cultural, and political contexts.

In contrast, heteroautobiography, aligned with traditional Western autobiographical structures, tells life stories from an external narrator's perspective, often shaped by foreign cultural lenses. Autohistoria teoría, on the other hand, centers the subject in control of their narrative, particularly useful when analyzing the colonial renaming practices imposed upon the Kikuyu people. This study employs autohistoria teoría, alongside post-colonial theory and cultural studies, to examine the psychological, cultural, and social impacts of renaming and the resulting self-identity conflicts.

The Role of Christianization and Missionaries in Renaming

The renaming of indigenous peoples in colonial contexts was a central strategy for cultural domination, as argued by scholars such as Thiong'o (1965) and Frantz Fanon (1967). Christian missionaries played a pivotal role in this process in Kenya, where the imposition of European names often accompanied baptism and was a symbolic break from traditional Kikuyu beliefs. Berman and Lonsdale (1992) note that missionaries facilitated this renaming to recast Africans as Christian subjects, using the practice as a tool for social and spiritual transformation. Renaming was not merely a spiritual gesture but part of a broader effort to assimilate Kikuyu individuals into the colonial economy and political structure.

Michel Foucault's (1977) theory that naming functions as a mechanism of power is particularly relevant in this context. The act of renaming served not only to reorganize society but to suppress indigenous knowledge systems and devalue the Kikuyu's ontological connection

to their ancestors. This erasure of cultural identity was a form of social control, reinforcing European values and structures while marginalizing Kikuyu spirituality and community continuity.

Dual Naming and the Negotiation of Identity

The concept of dual identity, as articulated by Achebe (1975), resonates deeply within this study. Post-colonial societies often grapple with dual consciousness, where individuals navigate between indigenous and colonial identities. The Kikuyu, like many other colonized peoples, developed a strategy of dual naming, maintaining traditional names within their communities while adopting European names in colonial spaces. This duality, while facilitating survival within the colonial system, created significant identity conflicts, particularly for younger Kikuyu generations more integrated into colonial structures.

Jomo Kenyatta (1938) discusses how this generational divide reflected the broader struggle between traditional values and the pressures of colonial modernity. Younger Kikuyu, bearing European names, often felt distanced from the ancestral traditions upheld by their elders. The duality in naming thus became a site of cultural negotiation, reflecting the broader post-colonial challenge of navigating hybrid identities.

Post-Colonial Reclamation of Identity

Following Kenya's independence, the return to traditional names became a powerful act of cultural reclamation. Fanon (1967) emphasizes that reclaiming indigenous names is integral to the process of decolonization, enabling individuals to reclaim their history and heritage. While many Kenyans continued to bear European names as markers of their colonial past, the post-colonial resurgence of Kikuyu names reflects a broader effort to assert cultural identity in opposition to colonial legacies.

Despite this reclamation, the psychological tensions between colonial and indigenous identities persist, as highlighted by Ndigirigi (2011). The enduring presence of European names serves as a reminder of the colonial past, creating a complex interplay between the two identities in post-colonial Kenya.

Autohistoria Teoría and Self-Identity Conflict

Autohistoria teoría provides a vital lens for understanding the self-identity conflicts that arise from renaming. As Anzaldúa (2004) explains, this approach emphasizes the autobiographical and historical intersections of identity, particularly among colonized peoples. In the case of the Kikuyu, the tension between the indigenous name "Ndiang'ui" and the European name "Peter" represents a larger struggle for control over one's identity in the face of colonial imposition. Autohistoria allows individuals not only to recount their personal experiences but also to rewrite history from their perspective, offering the potential for healing from the trauma of renaming.

In this study, autohistoria serves as a powerful tool for deconstructing the psychological impact of colonial naming practices. The act of reclaiming traditional names becomes an assertion of agency and a way of resisting the erasure of Kikuyu cultural heritage. This

framework positions the individual's personal narrative within the broader context of the Kikuyu people's collective struggle for self-determination.

The Ship of Theseus

The Ship of Theseus paradox offers an insightful metaphor for understanding identity continuity in the face of renaming. The paradox questions whether an object remains the same after all its components have been replaced. Applying this concept to renaming, the name change—from "Ndiang'ui" to "Peter"—may be seen as the replacement of one of the "parts" of the self, yet the core identity remains unchanged.

Much like the Ship of Theseus, where the ship's essence persists despite its parts being replaced, a person's identity may continue through renaming, especially when cultural heritage, personal experiences, and self-conception remain intact. This metaphor serves as a final reflection on whether colonial renaming fundamentally alters identity or merely replaces superficial elements, while the "true self" continues to exist beneath the imposed layers.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative, decolonial methodology anchored in autohistoria teoría as formulated by Gloria Anzaldúa (2004). The aim is to provide a critical examination of the self-identity conflict among the Kikuyu people of Kenya, focusing specifically on the cultural and psychological tensions engendered by the colonial practice of renaming. Autohistoria teoría—which bridges personal, historical, and cultural narratives—enables a deeper interrogation of the ways in which identity is shaped and reshaped within the matrix of colonialism, post-colonialism, and cultural resistance. By focusing on the subjective and collective dimensions of identity construction, this methodology challenges dominant Eurocentric historiographies, offering a reclamation of the indigenous Kikuyu experience.

Data Collection

This study employs a qualitative, decolonial research design anchored in *autohistoria teoría*, a methodological and epistemological framework developed by Gloria Anzaldúa (2004). This approach integrates personal experience with collective cultural and historical memory, enabling a nuanced interrogation of identity formation under systems of colonial domination. Centering the Kikuyu people of Kenya, the research draws from a robust corpus of interwoven data sources, each selected to illuminate the symbolic, psychological, and structural dimensions of the colonial renaming project.

Primary data consist of colonial administrative records, church baptismal registers, and missionary correspondence housed in archives in Kenya and the United Kingdom. These documents reveal the institutional mechanisms through which European names were imposed as tools of social control, religious conversion, and bureaucratic standardization. They offer critical insight into how colonial authority was exercised at the level of language and personal identity, particularly within missionary education and civil registration systems.

Complementing these institutional records, the study examines Kikuyu literary and autobiographical texts, particularly the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. These narratives function both as testimony and theory, offering embodied accounts of identity bifurcation and cultural resistance. They provide insight into the psychological negotiations undertaken by individuals who were forced to navigate dual systems of naming.

Oral histories were conducted with Kikuyu elders and community members to recover indigenous naming practices, ancestral logic, and the spiritual and cosmological dimensions embedded in names. These testimonies are vital in re-establishing localized knowledge systems and rooting the study in lived epistemologies often excluded from formal historiography.

A reflexive, autoethnographic layer—central to the *autohistoria* methodology—further deepens the inquiry. The researcher's personal narrative, shaped by the duality of the Christian name "Peter" and the indigenous Kikuyu name "Ndiang'ui," serves as an analytical lens for exploring the embodied consequences of cultural fragmentation, as well as the ongoing process of reclaiming identity and self-definition.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a rigorous thematic analysis process that identified patterns, tensions, and transformations within narratives related to naming, power, and identity. Themes emerged inductively through close reading and iterative coding of archival texts, oral histories, literary accounts, and autoethnographic reflections.

Three core thematic categories structure the analysis. The first, cultural erasure and identity fragmentation, interrogates how colonial renaming operated as a mechanism of symbolic violence. This theme captures the severance of individuals from ancestral lineages, spiritual identities, and communal belonging. It documents the psychological alienation experienced particularly within colonial institutions such as churches, schools, and administrative structures.

The second theme, narrative reclamation through autohistoria, explores how indigenous voices—especially those transmitted through oral tradition and literature—disrupt colonial historiographies. These counter-narratives reassert suppressed cultural memory and reconstruct identity within frameworks of indigenous epistemology. Anzaldúa's *autohistoria teoría* is used here to privilege lived knowledge as both method and content.

The third theme, resistance and cultural resurgence, examines the intentional revival of traditional Kikuyu names as acts of epistemic disobedience and cultural resilience. It highlights the role of naming in the postcolonial assertion of sovereignty and self-definition, as well as the transmission of cultural memory across generations.

The analysis draws on theoretical insights from Michel Foucault (power/knowledge), Frantz Fanon (colonial alienation), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (language and decolonization). These frameworks were instrumental in unpacking the relationship between naming, colonial authority, and identity negotiation in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Validity and Reliability

Although this autoethnographic study relies heavily on personal experiences, secondary sources, and narratives passed on to the author, rigorous methodological strategies were implemented to ensure both validity and reliability. The reflexive nature of *autohistoria teoría*—which positions personal narrative as both method and subject—necessitates careful calibration between introspective insight and empirical scrutiny. To this end, the researcher's lived experience is embedded within a wider matrix of archival records, oral traditions, and literary texts, enabling a multi-dimensional and culturally grounded inquiry.

Cultural and construct validity were ensured by anchoring the analysis within Kikuyu epistemologies—specifically, traditional naming systems, kinship structures, and oral genealogies. These cultural frameworks were not only descriptive tools but analytical instruments, allowing the study to interpret identity disruptions through a decolonial, community-centered lens. By rejecting Eurocentric historiographic norms and centering Kikuyu cosmology, the research maintains epistemic integrity and cultural authenticity.

Triangulation across diverse data sources—including missionary records, government decrees, oral accounts, literary texts, and personal testimony—enhanced the credibility and depth of the study. This methodological layering ensured that key themes were not idiosyncratic but consistent across time periods, mediums, and perspectives, minimizing interpretive bias and reinforcing analytical validity.

Reliability was established through the recurrence of dominant motifs—such as identity duality, symbolic violence, and resistance—across distinct data categories. These patterns emerged independently within archival material, oral narratives, and autoethnographic reflections, attesting to the dependability and coherence of the findings.

Far from being a methodological limitation, the researcher's personal narrative—straddling the names "Peter" and "Ndiang'ui"—functions as a critical epistemological tool. It gives embodied form to the cultural conflicts explored in the study and serves as a site of both inquiry and insight. This reflexive positioning aligns with decolonial research ethics, which call for transparency, relational accountability, and the prioritization of indigenous knowledge systems. Together, these methodological strategies offer a robust, interdisciplinary contribution to scholarship in postcolonial identity, cultural memory, and decolonization.

Limitations

The study's reliance on historical and autobiographical sources presents several methodological limitations, particularly in terms of the subjective nature of memory and narrative. Personal recollections are susceptible to the distortions introduced by the passage of time, cultural shifts, and the influence of dominant external narratives. Memories, while powerful, are often reconstructed and influenced by contemporary interpretations of the past, which can create challenges in determining their historical accuracy (Nora, 1989). As a result, the possibility of inconsistencies and selective memory looms large when working with personal and autobiographical sources. Yet, within the framework of autohistoria teoría, these perceived

limitations are reframed as strengths. Rather than viewing subjectivity as a barrier to historical analysis, autohistoria teoría values the lived experiences and memories of individuals as essential to understanding complex socio-cultural phenomena (Anzaldúa, 2004).

This study deliberately embraces these subjective narratives as critical components in reconstructing a Kikuyu-centered historiography. Conventional historical methodologies, which often prioritize objectivity and distance from personal experience, have historically failed to capture the complexity of colonized peoples' lives. Such approaches frequently sanitize colonial records, omitting or distorting indigenous voices to fit the dominant narrative. In contrast, autohistoria teoría offers a radical methodology that acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of memory and narrative but argues that this subjectivity offers deeper insights into identity formation, cultural resistance, and the emotional legacy of colonial trauma (Anzaldúa, 2021). Rather than dismissing these narratives as unreliable, the study reframes them as invaluable resources that reveal layers of meaning and experiences ignored by colonial archives.

Moreover, the use of autohistoria teoría allows the study to transcend conventional historical analysis by providing a decolonizing framework that privileges the voices of the marginalized. Through this lens, the self-identity conflicts caused by colonial renaming are not merely examined as historical facts but as lived realities that continue to influence individuals and communities today. By situating the narratives of Kikuyu individuals within this framework, the study not only interrogates the historical and cultural implications of colonial renaming but also foregrounds the resilience, adaptability, and resistance of the Kikuyu people. This methodology underscores the power of personal stories in challenging hegemonic discourses and constructing a more inclusive, Kikuyu-centered historiography (Said, 1978).

Autohistoria teoría acts as a potent tool for decolonization, reclaiming silenced voices and empowering individuals whose histories have been marginalized or erased. By weaving together subjective memory, lived experience, and critical historical analysis, this study constructs a more nuanced understanding of the impact of colonialism on identity and culture. It is through this methodology that the study seeks to give voice to those previously silenced, reasserting their place at the center of the discourse and challenging the limitations of traditional historical methodologies that have long been rooted in colonial frameworks (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Self-Narrative: Peter Ndiang'ui

The personal narrative of the author—born *Ndiang'ui* but later baptized *Peter*—serves as a case study within the broader discussion of identity conflict. This dual naming, deeply rooted in both Kikuyu tradition and Christian colonialism, highlights the complex dynamics of cultural identity negotiation in a post-colonial world. The author’s story is not only a reflection of individual struggle but also a microcosm of the broader Kikuyu experience, one marked by the collision of indigenous and colonial identities. This autoethnographic account provides a visceral, first-hand exploration of the tension between honoring one’s ancestral name and navigating a colonial-imposed identity, deepening the reader’s understanding of the psychological impact of cultural renaming.

In conclusion, this methodology not only scrutinizes the colonial legacy of renaming but also amplifies the voices of those who continue to navigate the consequences of that legacy. Through the lens of autohistoria teoría, the study serves as both a personal and collective reclamation of identity, offering a pathway for understanding the deeper implications of cultural survival in the face of erasure.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The inquiry, "Is Peter your real name?" penetrates far beyond mere curiosity, serving as a gateway into the complex intersections of colonialism, cultural identity, and the enduring legacies of imperialism. For the Kikuyu people, names are not merely markers of identity but are imbued with deep cultural, spiritual, and historical significance. These names function as vessels of collective memory, spiritual belief, and ancestral lineage, forming the foundation of Kikuyu social structures (Kenyatta, 1938). Within Kikuyu culture, naming is an act of cultural perpetuation that is intrinsically tied to the land, the clan system, and a collective sense of purpose that transcends individual identity. Each name carries profound symbolic weight, acting as a living testament to historical legacies, familial ties, and the spiritual cosmos (Macharia, 2020). The imposition of European names during Kenya's colonial period, however, was not a neutral practice but rather a deliberate ideological project aimed at severing colonized peoples from their cultural roots and embedding them within Western frameworks of domination and control (Fanon, 1967).

Colonial Renaming as a Mechanism of Cultural Domination

The process of colonial renaming, facilitated primarily by Christian missionaries and colonial administrators, was central to the broader strategy of cultural domination and the erasure of indigenous identities (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992). This renaming was not only an act of religious conversion but also a systematic method of integrating colonized peoples into Western epistemologies, political systems, and economies. For the Kikuyu, the forced adoption of European names represented a fracture in the continuity between their identities, land, and ancestral lineage. Thiong'o (1965) contends that this practice of renaming symbolized a concerted effort to sever the Kikuyu people from their spiritual and historical foundations, resulting in internal identity conflicts that continue to resonate through generations.

In traditional Kikuyu society, names serve as vital anchors that connect individuals to their familial and ancestral ties. These names are imbued with specific values, responsibilities, and roles, underscoring the deep connection between identity and land (Cooper, 2005 and Macharia, 2020). The colonial imposition of European names, particularly through Christian baptism, sought to erase these intimate connections and replace them with identities that were more aligned with colonial administrative and ideological objectives (Mudimbe, 1988). Therefore, the adoption of dual names—where individuals retained their indigenous Kikuyu names alongside European Christian names—was more than a cultural shift. It reflected a broader phenomenon experienced by colonized peoples worldwide, as they navigated the

tensions between their indigenous worldviews and the demands imposed by colonial regimes (Fanon, 1963).

The Role of Christian Missionaries in Renaming Practices

Christian missionaries were pivotal in the renaming process, introducing European names under the guise of spiritual transformation and religious conversion. As Berman and Lonsdale (1992) have observed, missionaries were instrumental in the broader colonial project, promoting Western values, customs, and beliefs, which included the widespread adoption of Christian names. These names were not merely symbols of religious conversion but were closely tied to the process of cultural assimilation. Laird (2014) argues that Christian baptism, often accompanied by the adoption of a European name, marked a significant rupture from traditional Kikuyu practices and beliefs, embedding European cultural frameworks into the everyday lives of the Kikuyu. For many, this new identity symbolized a form of spiritual rebirth, but it simultaneously contributed to a profound alienation from their cultural heritage (Hofmeyr, 1991).

Missionary efforts were not isolated occurrences but formed part of a larger colonial apparatus that aimed to exert control over the bodies and minds of colonized peoples. The imposition of Christian names was a key tactic in this strategy, as it signified a new identity that was in alignment with Western systems of authority. The renaming process was, therefore, both a religious and political act, reflecting the multifaceted nature of colonial domination. While European names served as markers of Christian conversion, they also facilitated the integration of colonized subjects into colonial legal, educational, and economic systems, often erasing or marginalizing indigenous identities in the process (Brown, 2007; Mudimbe, 1988).

Dual Naming and the Struggle for Cultural Survival

The practice of dual naming, in which individuals retained both traditional Kikuyu names and European Christian names, emerged as a means of navigating the fraught terrain between indigenous identity and colonial power structures. As Achebe (1975) eloquently demonstrates, dual naming allowed colonized individuals to negotiate the competing systems of meaning that defined their lived experience. The indigenous name symbolized continuity with Kikuyu traditions, while the European name facilitated integration into the colonial system. This duality became both a form of resistance and accommodation, as Kikuyu individuals sought to maintain their cultural heritage while complying with colonial expectations.

However, the dual naming system also introduced significant identity conflicts, particularly for younger generations. As Kenyatta (1938) highlights, the generational divide caused by the adoption of European names often led to familial tensions. Younger Kikuyu individuals, who were increasingly aligned with European cultural norms through education and missionary influence, found themselves estranged from older generations that adhered to traditional values. These identity conflicts have been well-documented in autobiographical and ethnographic works, where the psychological and emotional toll of navigating dual identities during the colonial period is evident (Thiong'o, 1997a). The tension between indigenous and

colonial identities created a complex internal struggle for many Kikuyu individuals, as they were forced to balance competing allegiances to tradition and modernity.

Reclaiming Kikuyu Identity in the Post-Colonial Era

In the post-colonial period, efforts to reclaim indigenous names became an important aspect of the broader project of decolonization. Fanon (1967) argues that the reclamation of traditional names represents a crucial act of resistance against the cultural legacies of colonialism. For many Kikuyu, this process involved rejecting their European names as part of a larger effort to reassert their cultural identity and historical continuity. However, this reclamation was not always straightforward, as the lingering influence of colonial power structures continued to complicate identity formation (Odhiambo & Nyamwaya, 1995). While some individuals successfully shed their European names, others retained them due to the generational transmission of these names, underscoring the enduring complexities of post-colonial identity (Ndigirigi, 2011).

The tension between indigenous and colonial identities remains an ongoing challenge in post-colonial Kenya, particularly as younger generations adopt more globalized, cosmopolitan identities influenced by Western education, media, and technology. As Mbembe (2001) notes, this generational divide speaks to the broader conflict between modernity and tradition, as well as between indigenous and colonial legacies. For many Kikuyu, the struggle to balance these competing influences continues to shape their sense of self, as they grapple with the dual legacies of their indigenous heritage and the colonial past.

In conclusion, the question of "Is Peter your real name?" reveals the deep cultural, historical, and political dimensions of naming practices in Kikuyu society. Names in Kikuyu culture are far more than personal identifiers; they are symbolic markers of ancestral lineage, spiritual belief, and collective memory. The colonial imposition of European names, particularly through the efforts of Christian missionaries, was part of a larger project of cultural domination that sought to erase indigenous identities and replace them with Western frameworks of power. The practice of dual naming, while providing a means of navigating colonial control, also created profound identity conflicts that continue to resonate in the post-colonial era. The ongoing struggle to reclaim indigenous names is emblematic of the broader process of decolonization, as Kikuyu people—and colonized peoples more generally—work to reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their place in the post-colonial world.

Addressing Research Questions and Further Exploration

RQ1: How did the colonial imposition of European names impact on the traditional Kikuyu naming system and cultural identity?

The study addresses this question by discussing how the colonial imposition of European names disrupted the traditional Kikuyu naming system, which was deeply intertwined with familial lineage, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs. As noted in the study:

"The imposition of these names led to a disruption of the Kikuyu naming system, severing individuals' connections to their ancestral roots and identity."

In Kikuyu culture, names were not just identifiers but carried significant cultural meaning tied to history, family, and spirituality (Kenyatta, 1938). The renaming imposed by the colonial state fractured this continuity, creating an ideological shift that distanced Kikuyu individuals from their cultural heritage. As Thiong'o (1965) argues, this renaming "dismembers individuals from their cultural and spiritual heritage," thus highlighting the colonial project's role in reshaping indigenous identities.

RQ2: What role did Christian missionaries play in the renaming process, and how did this influence Kikuyu social and cultural structures?

Christian missionaries played a central role in the renaming process, which was a deliberate effort to impose colonial and religious values. The study emphasizes that:

"Christian names became symbols of both spiritual and colonial control, influencing Kikuyu social structures by reinforcing Western norms and values while undermining traditional practices."

This renaming was not solely a religious transformation but also a mechanism of cultural assimilation, intended to replace Kikuyu identities with Westernized Christian names. As Berman & Lonsdale (1992) note, the renaming served as a tool for colonizing individuals' identities and promoting European social norms. The influence of missionaries helped solidify colonial social structures, which disrupted the Kikuyu way of life and undermined the traditional clan and kinship systems (Fanon, 1963).

RQ3: How did the Kikuyu people navigate the imposition of European names, and what strategies did they employ to preserve their cultural heritage?

The Kikuyu people employed various strategies to navigate the imposition of European names, including dual naming. The study explains:

"Many Kikuyu individuals adopted European names for colonial purposes, such as during baptism, but also maintained their traditional Kikuyu names in private or within the family."

This dual naming system served to preserve cultural heritage while complying with the demands of the colonial system. As noted, the retention of traditional names in private spaces allowed Kikuyu people to maintain continuity with their cultural identity. The post-colonial reclamation of Kikuyu names further signifies an ongoing effort to restore cultural ties severed during colonialism (Thiong'o, 1997a). This strategy reflects a cultural resilience and an attempt to preserve indigenous identity amidst the colonial pressure for assimilation.

RQ4: In what ways did the post-colonial period lead to the reclamation of Kikuyu names, and how has this influenced identity formation within the community?

The study highlights how the post-colonial period was pivotal in the reclamation of Kikuyu names as an act of cultural resistance. It states:

"Following Kenya's political independence, many Kikuyu individuals began to reject their colonial names as part of a broader movement to reclaim their indigenous identities."

The reclaiming of Kikuyu names was a conscious effort to reconnect with ancestral roots and assert cultural sovereignty. This reclamation became central to identity formation within the

Kikuyu community, helping people assert their historical and cultural significance in a post-colonial context (Kihoro, 2019). However, the study also notes that the persistence of European names, especially in formal and institutional settings, continues to create a complex negotiation of identity, where individuals navigate the tension between embracing indigenous traditions and adapting to modernity (Mbembe, 2001).

RQ5: What are the continuing effects of colonial renaming on the Kikuyu people, particularly in terms of generational identity conflicts and cultural survival?

The study addresses the continuing generational identity conflicts arising from colonial renaming. It notes:

"The retention of European names has caused tension within families, as younger generations who are more aligned with globalized identities struggle to reconcile their indigenous heritage with modern, Westernized identities."

This dual identity, where individuals maintain both colonial and indigenous names, creates a generational divide, as older generations may continue to value their European names while younger generations reject them in favor of reclaiming traditional Kikuyu names. The study further explores how these tensions contribute to broader cultural survival issues, as the Kikuyu community attempts to navigate the legacy of colonialism while preserving their cultural identity in an increasingly globalized world (Appiah, 1992). This ongoing tension exemplifies the complexity of cultural survival in the face of historical trauma and the challenge of reconciling modernity with tradition.

In summary, each research question has been addressed by exploring how the colonial renaming process impacted Kikuyu cultural identity, the role of Christian missionaries in this transformation, the strategies employed by Kikuyu people to preserve their heritage, the post-colonial reclamation of names, and the continuing effects on generational identity. Through these discussions, the study contributes to understanding the complex interplay of colonialism, identity, and cultural survival.

Limitations

While this study provides critical insights into the cultural conflicts engendered by colonial renaming, it is important to recognize its limitations, which restrict its broader applicability and generalizability.

Firstly, the exclusive focus on the Kikuyu people, while deeply insightful in understanding the effects of British colonialism, presents a limited perspective that may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of experiences among other ethnic groups in Kenya or colonized populations globally. The Kikuyu's encounters with British colonial authority are not necessarily reflective of other ethnic communities, such as the Luo, Maasai, or Kalenjin, who interacted with different colonial dynamics and cultural forces. The experience of colonialism in Kenya varied based on geographic, social, and cultural factors, and as scholars like Lonsdale and Berman (1979) have pointed out, Kenya's ethnic groups responded in diverse ways to colonial policies, including renaming practices. Additionally, extending this analysis to colonized populations under French, Portuguese, or Belgian rule, who experienced different forms of cultural erasure and identity renegotiation, would offer a broader comparative framework. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1965), the colonial project sought to strip indigenous communities of their names and identities across Africa, but the methods and impacts of these practices differed based on the specific colonial regime. By neglecting these variations, the study misses an opportunity to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the global experience of colonialism, renaming, and identity formation.

Secondly, the study's heavy reliance on theoretical frameworks, such as Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *autohistoria-teoría*, while intellectually enriching, limits its empirical grounding. Although *autohistoria* provides a valuable lens for exploring the psychological and cultural impacts of renaming (Anzaldúa, 2021), the study lacks direct empirical data from the communities affected by colonial renaming. The absence of fieldwork, interviews, or surveys creates a gap between the theoretical analysis and the lived experiences of individuals in contemporary Kenyan society. Researchers like Njogu and Middleton (2007) have demonstrated that empirical engagement—such as interviewing individuals who navigate the legacies of colonial renaming—can provide invaluable insight into how identity is continuously renegotiated in everyday life. Incorporating these methodologies would strengthen the study by grounding its theoretical assertions in concrete, real-world experiences, offering a more nuanced and multifaceted examination of the impact of colonial legacies on identity formation and cultural survival in post-colonial Kenya.

Finally, the study's limited exploration of the intersection of gender with colonial renaming is a significant shortcoming. Colonial renaming practices were not uniformly experienced by men and women; instead, gender played a central role in how individuals were renamed and categorized within both colonial and indigenous social structures. According to Oyěwùmí (1997), gendered colonialism imposed foreign gender norms and hierarchies on

African societies, which had their own pre-colonial understandings of gender roles. By failing to analyze how colonial naming practices affected men and women differently, the study overlooks a key dimension of identity formation. For instance, women often faced dual layers of oppression—both racial and gendered—under colonial rule, and their experiences of renaming could have unique implications for their social status, cultural identity, and personal agency (Oyěwùmí, 1997). A gender-sensitive analysis, drawing from scholars like Nzegwu (2006), would uncover additional layers of complexity in the decolonization process, demonstrating how patriarchal structures intertwined with colonial power to shape gendered experiences of renaming and identity negotiation.

In conclusion, while this study offers important insights into the cultural and psychological impacts of colonial renaming, its limitations—including the narrow focus on the Kikuyu people, the absence of empirical data, and the lack of a gendered perspective—constrain its broader relevance. Future research that adopts a more comparative approach, incorporates empirical methodologies, and engages with the intersection of gender and colonial renaming will contribute to a richer, more intricate understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of colonial and post-colonial identity formation.

Implications of the Study

This study provides a critical exploration of the psychological and cultural ramifications of colonial renaming on the Kikuyu people and offers important insights into the complex interplay of identity, culture, and history in post-colonial contexts. The question, "Is Peter your real name?" encapsulates the profound tensions between colonial legacy and cultural survival. This seemingly simple query opens a window into the ongoing struggle for identity, which is marked by historical wounds and psychological conflicts caused by the imposition of foreign names. As individuals in post-colonial societies continue to navigate dual identities—one shaped by colonial powers and the other by indigenous traditions—names become symbols of resistance and negotiation in the face of past and present struggles (Fanon, 1967; Mbembe, 2001).

One of the key findings of the study is that colonial renaming was not merely a passive process but a deliberate act of cultural subjugation. The imposition of European names by colonial administrators and Christian missionaries disrupted the Kikuyu naming system, which had been deeply intertwined with family lineage, spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices (Kenyatta, 1938). The Kikuyu people, like many other African communities, viewed names as more than identifiers; they were markers of ancestral connection and communal identity. The introduction of European names not only severed these vital connections but also imposed an alien cultural framework that redefined individuals in terms of colonial ideals. This disruption continues to shape identity formation in post-colonial Kenya, where individuals continue to grapple with the psychological effects of these imposed identities and the internal conflict between maintaining indigenous roots and adapting to modern, globalized identities (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1965; Mudimbe, 1988).

The study highlights that the reclamation of indigenous names in post-colonial Kenya is far from a nostalgic act but a powerful form of intellectual and cultural resistance. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012) asserts, the process of decolonization requires not only political sovereignty but also intellectual liberation. Reclaiming Kikuyu names becomes an essential part of the decolonization project, symbolizing an effort to assert agency over one's identity and resist the continued psychological hold of colonialism. This act of renaming represents a reclaiming of history and an assertion of cultural pride, which is particularly important in the context of post-colonial societies where colonial legacies continue to shape social structures and individual lives (Fanon, 1967). While Kenya achieved political independence in 1963, the psychological impacts of colonial renaming continue to reverberate, affecting how individuals in post-colonial societies view themselves and their place in the world (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1997a).

Furthermore, the study draws attention to the persistence of colonial influences in post-colonial societies, which complicate the reclamation of indigenous identities. European and Christian names have become associated with modernity, cosmopolitanism, and religious devotion (Mbembe, 2001), making it difficult for individuals to fully disengage from these colonial legacies. The continued use of colonial names thus represents a complex negotiation between tradition and modernity. This study suggests that the reclamation of indigenous names must be viewed as part of a broader effort to decolonize not just personal identities but the societal structures that were built during the colonial period. This ongoing process of cultural and intellectual reclamation is crucial for the survival of indigenous identities and the assertion of cultural sovereignty in a world still shaped by colonial legacies (Mudimbe, 1988; Fanon, 1967).

In addition to personal and cultural resistance, this study also addresses the generational conflicts that arise in post-colonial societies. As younger generations increasingly engage with globalized identities, they often find themselves at odds with older generations who hold onto the European names inherited from colonial times. This generational divide reflects the complex interplay between modernity and tradition and highlights the continuing psychological and emotional toll of colonialism. The act of reclaiming names, therefore, is not simply about recovering the past but is deeply entangled with the struggle to define one's present and future identity in a post-colonial context (Mudimbe, 1988; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1965).

In conclusion, the study underscores the deep cultural and psychological significance of names in post-colonial societies. It challenges the notion that colonial legacies can be easily erased, proposing instead that decolonization is a dynamic, ongoing process that requires the redefinition of identity at both individual and collective levels. The reclamation of Kikuyu names is not just a symbolic act of cultural revival but a vital step in the larger project of decolonization. As individuals and communities continue to navigate the complex realities of globalization, this study calls for a broader re-examination of the ways in which colonial histories continue to shape contemporary identity. The process of reclaiming one's name, and by extension, one's heritage, reflects the broader challenge of self-definition in a world still influenced by the enduring legacies of colonialism. It is through this ongoing re-articulation of identity that post-

colonial societies can hope to reclaim their past, redefine their present, and assert their future (Fanon, 1967; Thiong'o, 1965).

CONCLUSION

The seemingly simple question, "Is Peter your real name?" serves as a profound entry point into the complex entanglement of cultural identity, colonial legacies, and personal dissonance. This question, seemingly innocent, carries within it centuries of historical weight and psychological ramifications for individuals from colonized communities. Among the Kikuyu people, as well as many other African ethnic groups, names are not just identifiers but profound expressions of ancestral heritage, communal bonds, and a deep historical consciousness (Kenyatta, 1938). The colonial imposition of European names fractured these vital connections, forcing individuals to navigate an internal divide between two competing identities: one constructed by the demands of colonial powers, and the other deeply rooted in indigenous cultural and social frameworks (Thiong'o, 1965). This duality reflects the broader, ongoing struggle inherent in post-colonial identity formation, where formerly colonized societies continue to negotiate the tensions between preserving and reviving cultural heritage and engaging in the modern world—a world increasingly shaped by the enduring shadows of colonialism (Fanon, 1967).

The reclamation of traditional Kikuyu names in post-colonial Kenya, therefore, is not merely an individualistic exercise in nostalgia, but a vital act of cultural resistance and intellectual reassertion. Thiong'o (1965) astutely argues that decolonizing the mind is as crucial as achieving political sovereignty. The recovery of indigenous names, as part of the broader decolonization project, represents a powerful act of intellectual and cultural emancipation. While Kenya formally attained political independence in 1963, the psychological effects of colonial renaming and the imposition of foreign identities persist well into the present day (Thiong'o, 1997a; Mudimbe, 1988). These names, embedded with colonial histories, continue to resonate in the psychological and emotional landscapes of post-colonial societies, impacting generational identity and the ways in which individuals view themselves within a broader social and global context. Even as efforts toward cultural reclamation flourish, the prevalence of European and Christian names persists, underscoring the deep-rooted and pervasive colonial influences that continue to shape Kenya's religious, social, and political spheres (Fanon, 1967). For some, these names carry connotations of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and religious devotion (Mbembe, 2001), indicating the layered and multifaceted nature of post-colonial identity negotiation.

Ultimately, as Vidal (2011) observed, the question of renaming transcends the recovery of lost heritage; it touches upon the ongoing, ever-evolving pursuit of self-definition within post-colonial contexts. As Fanon (1967) contends, decolonization is not a singular, conclusive event, but rather a continuous process of self-liberation and rearticulation. The act of reclaiming and reasserting indigenous names is thus inseparable from the broader challenge of decolonizing the very structures that colonialism erected—economic, political, and cultural. The

decolonization of names, while necessary, cannot occur in isolation; it must be part of a broader and more comprehensive reevaluation of the self, one that challenges not only historical legacies but also contemporary global realities (Thiong'o, 1965). Decolonization, in this sense, becomes a dynamic and ongoing negotiation, where identity is constantly redefined in response to both past oppressions and the current realities of a globalized world.

In conclusion, the question, “Is Peter your real name?” encapsulates the profound and multifaceted nature of colonial renaming. For the Kikuyu people, names are deeply embedded in their ancestral heritage and spiritual beliefs, serving as markers of continuity, belonging, and identity. The imposition of European names during the colonial period was not simply a matter of cultural exchange but a deliberate effort to erase indigenous identities and impose a new colonial framework. Despite efforts to reclaim traditional names in the post-colonial period, the legacy of colonial renaming continues to complicate the process of identity formation in Kenya today. Through the examination of colonial renaming, we gain insight into the broader dynamics of identity, power, and resistance in post-colonial societies, as individuals and communities continue to negotiate the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and colonial legacies. The act of reclaiming and redefining names is deeply symbolic of the larger project of cultural and psychological decolonization. It reflects a continuous process of self-definition in a world still haunted by colonial histories, where the search for authentic identity is never complete but is always evolving. The journey toward cultural self-determination and identity reformation is thus not linear, but rather a continual and multifaceted process that demands both personal and collective reevaluation in the face of enduring colonial legacies and the ever-shifting forces of globalization. It is only through this ongoing rearticulation of identity that post-colonial societies can hope to reclaim their past, redefine their present, and assert their future (Fanon, 1967; Thiong'o, 1965).

Final Thought

As observed by Cohen & Dey (2009), the process of renaming, especially in a colonial context, often raises questions about whether a change in name fundamentally alters a person’s identity. In the case of my study, renaming could be seen as the replacement of one of my "parts “my name—but my core identity, rooted in cultural heritage, memories, and experiences, remains continuous. This invites an exploration of whether a name change, imposed or voluntary, alters one's identity, or if the "real you" persists. The study analyzed how colonial and cultural renaming affects the self-perception of identity while emphasizing that deep cultural connections and personal experiences often maintain continuity, even as external identifiers, like names, change. Renaming, especially during colonization, was often a deliberate act of erasure or transformation. The imposition of new names on indigenous people was intended to overwrite their cultural identities, replacing familiar aspects of their heritage with foreign constructs. In this study, despite this attempt at transformation, many individuals retain a sense of their original identity. The name "Ndiang'ui" represents an ancestral and cultural connection that survives beneath the colonial imposition of "Peter." This tension between the indigenous

identity and the imposed name reflects a broader exploration of cultural resilience in the face of transformation. Even as external names change, the core identity rooted in tradition and heritage may remain intact.

There is also the possibility of dual identity. This includes one identity representing the pre-colonial self (embodied by the name Ndiang'ui) and the other representing the imposed identity (embodied by the name Peter). This duality raises important questions: Do these names represent entirely different people, or are they two expressions of the same underlying person?

To bring this concept together, it just serves as a metaphorical framework of the ship of Theseus remains the same despite the gradual replacement of its parts, my identity could be seen as continuous, even after the external change of a name. The renaming to Peter, like replacing planks on a ship, doesn't necessarily mean the essence of who you are has changed. The "real self" might persist through these changes, anchored in deeper aspects of self—cultural, historical, and personal. The name change, while significant, becomes one part of the broader identity that remains intact, much like the ship's identity persists despite transformation.

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