LOOK AT ME! LISTEN TO ME!

UNLEARNING THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE OF THE AFRICAN GIRL THROUGH *HERSTORIES* OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF ONE KENYAN GIRL

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Abstract

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UNLEARNING THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE OF THE AFRICAN GIRL THROUGH THE *HERSTORIES OF ONE KENYAN GIRL*

In challenging the western myths, mistakes, and stereotypes that are grounded in coloniality and misrepresent the African girl, this research presents *herstories* of the lived experiences of one Kenyan girl. In addressing the dearth of information in scholarly works concerning the African girl, *herstories* are put forward using the voice of a Kenyan girl, not "restoried" and not retold in the third person. A theoretical framework of decoloniality and African feminisms confronts the colonial discourse that uses tropes to create images of vulnerable girls, victimized by an uncivilized environment and suffering from hunger, poverty, and a lack of education whose only hope is the "western savior."

Drawing on Storyworlding, a new feminist methodology with a future-oriented way of thinking, one Kenyan girl and I collaborate to generate *herstories*, giving rise to a new identity of the African girl and shattering the web of coloniality that has enveloped her. By viewing her as an "ordinary" girl whose voice has been ignored and who has been misrepresented globally, we open new spaces for being and thinking about ourselves and others.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Do you have a pet lion? Do you ride a lion to school? Can I see your hut? While I was sharing a plate of "chipsies" (those melt-in-your-mouth Kenyan potato fries) in an upscale mall on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, with Furaha, a then 19-year-old recent high school graduate, she was incredulously describing interactions in the online video chat platform, Omegle, where she and other Africans are confronted by the "ignorance of white people who will abuse you and ask you ridiculous questions. They genuinely think this is what happens," she lamented, referring to the above questions. She went on to explain that sometimes students from abroad came to her all-girls' boarding school in Nairobi, and classmates were asked to be guides. As one of Furaha's friends was leading a group through the school grounds with its stately trees and exquisitely manicured lawn and shrubs, she was shocked when one of the visitors suddenly exclaimed, "I can't believe this is what we found. We expected to find you in rags, with no water." When others began to laugh, Furaha's friend was so embarrassed and upset that she could not finish the tour and ran back to her dorm room.

However, Furaha wasn't the only Kenyan girl who wanted to talk about western perceptions of the African girl. (Western is not capitalized throughout this work to repudiate the inherent superiority of any one group over others.) During June and July 2022, as part of my coursework, I conducted a research project in Kenya with 12 students from Furaha's boarding school. Over the course of a week, I traveled to the school every day and we met for two hours,

talking about issues that were important to them. Additionally, I spent three weeks in a home for orphaned and runaway girls located near the Maasai Mara National Reserve in southwest Kenya, both observing and interacting with girls who had found their way to this home to escape early marriage or abusive homes. Furaha was also instrumental in arranging for me to meet with eight of her schoolmates at the same mall in Nairobi where the two of us had met earlier. Sitting in the food court, between mouthfuls of pizza, roasted chicken, and chipsies, we spent the afternoon chatting about their girlhoods and their hopes and dreams for the future. During all of these meetings and informal conversations the girls raised their voices in concern about the western perceptions of Africa, Kenya and African/Kenyan girls. Four of the girls had this to say about those perceptions:

> "When you see on social media people say, like people from other countries, like the US and Europe, they think Kenya is a really bad place and all you see on TV are the people from Turkana that show we are poor and we need help instead of showing our pictures like right now. Show pictures of us having an intelligent conversation and that is why sometimes we are not taken seriously because mostly they think we are still natives, we are still in back time instead of coming here and taking pictures of women who are actually changing the game."

> "We are not from the forest, you know, we are intelligent people and what I want people to see about the Kenyan girl is a girl that is strong who has passed up all the things that were meant to hurt her, that were meant to bring her down because this negative publicity that is another thing that has helped her stand strong."

> "So is it true that basically what white people that live in the states still think is that we live in the desert and are poor? Like your reporters come and take pictures in Marasabit

who are going through hunger and your government doesn't try to tell them this is not true?"

"And the fact that people think Africa is a country. I can't believe that. It's like someone asks you, Oh, I have a friend in Nigeria. Do you know him? Or, can you walk to Abuja." (Abuja is the capital of Nigeria and some 3,000 miles from Kenya.)

The Single Side of the Story and Colonialism

These perceptions and concerns represent a single side of the story that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigerian author and feminist, warns about in her iconic TedTalk (2009) when she explores the negative influences that a "single" story can have. Adichie argues that single stories originate from misunderstandings or one's lack of knowledge. When the media or literature only tells one story it causes people to generalize and make assumptions about other groups of people and showing a people as one thing over and over again is what they become.

Moreover, these perceptions are what Mohanty (1991), an Indian-American feminist scholar, describes in her much-cited essay Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. She argues that western feminist texts have reduced all "third-world" women to a homogenous, monolithic Other which ignores the diversity of experiences within the group. Mohanty further posits that western scholarship portrays the "third-world" woman as constrained by family and tradition, uneducated and victimized and in need of saving by western feminists.

In *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, Keim and Somerville (2018) also discuss the single story in terms of mistaken images of Africa that are prevalent in our everyday lives and reinforce our biases. The authors dissect these African stereotypes and myths in the United States, such as the girls in my pilot study reiterated, using

examples from their own undergraduate teaching experiences as well as examples from African scholars to focus on what Africa is *not.* Although they acknowledge that there are some African American myths about Africa, they posit that the white American myths about Africans are the ones they consider "the most dominant, the most negative, and the most in need of change" (p. 12).

Diving deeper into this negative, one-sided story leads to questions of *how* and *why* "we" have become so mistaken about Africa, Africans, and the African girl. Chinua Achebe, the renown Nigerian novelist, poet and critic, speaks to this in his book, *An Image of Africa* (1977) when he states, "Quite simply, it is the desire, one might indeed say, the need, in western psychology to set up Africa as a foil of Europe…the image of Africa as the other world, the antithesis of Europe" (p. 12). Mpofu (2013) continues by asserting that to see Africa as "the heart of darkness" where natives needed to be civilized by Europeans was a necessary condition for the 1885 Berlin Conference during which the European powers greedily carved Africa into pieces for their domination and subjugation.

While the period of colonialism that followed the Conference ended when the African nations declared their independence, Mpofu (2013) notes that the toxic power that came about and defined culture and knowledge during colonialism lives on today. Decker and McMahon (2021) refer to this as the "colonized mindset" that westerners brought to Africa which viewed differences between the west and Africa not as cultural differences but as problems to be fixed, perpetuating the idea of African inferiority. Maldonado-Torres (2007) succinctly explains this as *coloniality,* or "the long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism and continue to define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production" (p. 23)

every day. It is within the concept of coloniality that the questions of *how* and *why* we have become so mistaken about all things African are answered.

Walsh (2023) posits coloniality as more than a descriptive term that refers to the domination in the colonial period by noting it is part of the "hidden stories, the local histories" (p.6) that were and continue to be global patterns, the matrices of power that persist in controlling and directing life today. Further, Walsh characterizes coloniality as a mechanism for not only understanding but also intervening in the systems and structures of power that view "western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence" (p.6). Walsh's approach to coloniality offers a space to make connections and bring together processes and experiences of learning to think *from* and *with* instead of to think *about* and to "unlearn" and "relearn," (terms central to Walsh's decolonial praxis and used throughout this research) as ways to shatter the colonial matrices of power. Specific to this research, such terminology points to unlearning the colonial narrative in western discourse that perpetuates myths and stereotypes about the African girl and relearning a new narrative through the *herstories* of the life experiences of one Kenyan girl.

Myths and Stereotypes as Constructed by Colonialism

Even African girls couldn't escape the tentacles of coloniality that created a single story of vulnerable victims in need of "saving" by the west. Such stereotypes and negative images are particularly prevalent in international development discourse which Escobar (1995) contends has created a place where abnormalities such as poor, undeveloped, malnourished and illiterate produce "universal, pre-constituted subjects" (p. 53) for westerners to help and to reform. In particular, girlhood in non-western countries has been bombarded with these stereotypes and myths and has "congealed into a single sad story in which imperiled girls await rescue, with

limited hope of success" (Gilmore & Marshall, 2010, p. 667), inciting the public to imagine themselves as the empowered saviors. Since the 1990s there have been calls from international foundations and other projects for those in the Global North to "save" girls in the Global South who lack the legal, material, and educational tools to negotiate for themselves. Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead (2007) contend that as development policy has taken up the subject of gender, fables and myths have proliferated, resulting in the characterization of the African girl as vulnerable, victimized by an environment of poverty and hunger, and lacking in education. Such is the stereotype that has proliferated in human rights and international development campaigns.

This view of the African girl is based on what Decker and McMahon (2021) refer to as the "development episteme," the knowledge system that has shaped development ideas about Africa and has been seen in western discourse since the 1800s. They further note that this development episteme has used both pictures and stories of African children to create a vision of poverty, poor nutrition, and limited access to schooling. The "idea of Africa" (Mudimbe, 1994) portrays the continent and the people as bogged down in the past and unable to pull itself out of the quagmire of poverty. This development episteme has created the fiction of vulnerable girlhood through images and stories that are "stripped of local context and redolent of colonial oppression" (Gilmore & Marshall, 2010, p. 684), entrapped by dire circumstances and in need of rescue by the benevolence of westerners, promoting the notion that development is the only lens for understanding African culture and society.

Brockington's (2014) book on celebrity advocacy and international development speaks to this development episteme as he scrutinizes publicity ad campaigns from 12 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) between February 2005 and 2006. His findings show a strong colonial presence in the images analyzed that erase the diversity and complexity of the so-

called “poor” countries. He contends that these images do not present the true stories but rather show the politics of colonialism and imperialism in which the “developing” world appears without history, anxiously awaiting development by the Global North.

The attention to girls in the development episteme has been growing since the early 1990s when the United Nations (UN) declared the years 1991-2001 as the Decade of the Girl Child (Cobbett, 2014). The first ever International Day of the Girl Child was October 11, 2012, with its official theme of ending child marriage. In his statement that day, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon noted how early marriage is connected to health, violence, abuse, and early/unwanted pregnancies, advocating for education as the best strategy to protect girls from these conditions. Cobbett notes that this focus on education is “infused with problematic constructions of girls as “victims and heroines” (p. 310) in which the girl from the Global South is portrayed as both a victim in need of education and a heroine who, by virtue of being educated, can facilitate the development of her country. While these constructions may be useful and contain some truth, they not only “prevent a more nuanced understanding of the complexity and diversity of girls’ lives” (p. 311) but they also create a negative development discourse such as previously mentioned by Escobar (1995).

Specifically, Calkin (2015) uses the NIKE Foundation’s Girl Effect campaign, launched in 2009 to invest in girls worldwide to alleviate poverty, as an example of this type of development discourse. She notes that such discourses are “overlaid with paternalistic tropes” (p. 655) that emphasize the need to save these girls in the name of empowerment and gender equality. In addition, the girls are promoted as “the world’s greatest untapped solution to eradicate poverty” (p. 655) as well as the single solution to solving global poverty (Switzer,

2013). Calkin quotes from *The Clock is Ticking* video used in the Girl Effect campaign which incorporates bold colors and animated characters with provocative language. The video begins:

> Hey, there, it's us again. We have a situation on our hands and the clock is ticking. When a girl turns 12 and lives in poverty, her future is out of her control. In the eyes of many, she's a woman now. She faces the reality of being married by the age of 14. Pregnant by the time she's 15. And, if she survives childbirth she might have to sell her body to support her family, which puts her at risk for contracting and spreading HIV. But the good news is there's a solution (p. 660).

And, of course, the solution rests in the hands of western savior. This, then, is the Girl Effect, or the idea that investing in the skills of girls is the key to encourage economic growth and reduce poverty in the Global South, and it has become a prime strategy of such groups as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and United States Agency for International Development in conjunction with corporations such as NIKE and Goldman Sachs (Hickel, 2014). Bent and Switzer (2016) show how this Girl Effect logic reduces the complexity of girls' lives that "reinforce artificial and colonial divides between and among girlhoods" (p.123) and doesn't account for the complex ways girlhood is practiced and experienced in different locations.

Furthermore, this logic brings into being a particular girl defined within "globalized neoliberal postfeminist politics in which girls' human rights take a backseat to their economic potentiality" (Switzer, et al., 2016, p. 52). While claiming to advance both gender equality and girls' empowerment, Boyd (2016) argues that the Girl Effect campaign actually accomplishes the opposite by reinforcing gender inequities and is a form of neoliberal exploitation. In the same

vein, Hickel (2014) contends that while this campaign claims to reduce poverty and hunger by empowering the girl, it ignores national structural deficiencies such as debt, financial crises, and government corruption that are the actual drivers of poverty and hunger. Koffman and Gill (2013) add that the Girl Effect feeds into the "Othering" of the Global South by picturing the area as a "homogeneous sphere plagued by patriarchy and harmful cultural practices" (p. 99).

Another campaign to support education of girls in the Global South was launched in 2013 with the Tide Foundation's release of the film, *Girl Rising.* To supplement the film, the Pearson Foundation designed a K-12 curriculum to mobilize students and teachers in advocating for girls' education and to raise their global awareness. Desai (2016) examines the film and curriculum as part of the larger development discourse described by Escobar (1995) that "anchors as truths certain storylines about the relationship between girlhood, education, and development through the production of affective encounters between viewer and curriculum" (Desai, 2016, p. 249). In this critique, Desai posits the Third World Girl is constructed by tropes rooted in colonial legacies in which empathy is elicited from the viewer, producing power relations in which the viewer/learner becomes the savior and the girl is the subject who is waiting for western help to reach her full potential.

Damaging discourse is also seen in social media activism that is many times condensed into hashtags and tweets such as #IAmMalala which Berents (2016) posits only serve to reproduce problematic and limited concepts of girlhood in the Global South. She further argues that such campaigns narrow the notion of girlhood and present idealized victims. Others note that girls are used as framing devices to understand violence and suffering (Cornwall, et al., 2007; Switzer, 2013; Cobbett, 2014) and appear as victims by their visibility in news and social media that shows them suffering unspeakable violence and tragedy.

Baird (2008) presents another issue, the issue of how describing girlhood in the Global South by those in the Global North reinforces colonial narratives. This thinking, of course, necessitates intervention by those in the Global North to "save" these unfortunate girls. In a slightly different turn, Sensoy and Marshall (2010) turn away from social media to discuss a novel written about Muslim girls in Afghanistan and note similarities with other novels about "Third World" girls. In the novel studied by Sensoy and Marshall, the author uses colonial discourse to represent the girls in the story as poor, uneducated, constrained, and in need of rescue by the West. Sensoy and Marshall posit that this representation where "First World" girls save "Third World" girls not only reinscribes the Orientalist construction described by Said (1978) but also reinscribes the colonizer/colonized relations.

In addition to these campaign discourses, many international development organizations that work in Africa also use "damaged-centered" (Tuck, 2009) websites as a way to solicit donations. Tuck's term, which she uses to describe research that documents people's pain and brokenness, appropriately characterizes these websites that use negative stereotypes and myths in their appeals for monetary donations. For example, Every Child Ministries (http://www.ecmafrica.org) works "tirelessly" to meet the needs of "vulnerable, broken outcasts" and bring "hope, practical help, and dignity to African children." Their vision of "building an Africa where children are valued and respected" and able to live "lives of hope and dignity" implies that children are not valued and respected in African culture. Moreover, Every Child Ministries is the "savior" who can change the lives of these helpless children.

While seeking donations for girls' sanitary supplies, the African Children's Fund website (https://www.africanchildrensfund.org) creates a stereotype of the African girl as missing school every month because of the lack of affordable sanitary towels, noting that "poor families cannot

afford sanitary towels or even underwear and many girls are forced to use unsanitary rags, animal skins, and even chicken feathers when they menstruate." The website also states that "they have even heard of young women digging holes in the ground to sit over in isolation all day."

However, it is not only non-governmental websites that use negative images and text to allure the western "savior." The World Bank in Africa website proffers pictures of and stories about African children that "reify a particular vision of what development looks like in Africa: poverty, poor nutrition, and limited access to schooling" (Decker & McMahon, 2021, p.2). In addition, the country-specific page for Kenya on the website of the United States Agency for International Development (https://www.usaid.gov) draws upon words that paint a negative, stereotypical picture of the Kenyan girl. "Youth, especially marginalized girls, lack agency and empowerment, further contributing to their feeling of being vulnerable and left out. Women and girls still spend long hours collecting water and firewood."

All of the above discourses are representative of the matrices of power of coloniality that use tropes to construct the girl from the Global South and that urge transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, philanthropies, and individuals to invest in the girl, creating images of vulnerable girlhoods with varied inherent dangers. Mignolo (2021) asserts that classifications such as these are fictions, created by "actors, institutions and languages that control knowing and knowledge and regard their own meaning as normal and natural" (p. 10). As Walsh (2023) acknowledges, coloniality is everywhere. "It is embodied, situated, and lived" (p. 4). To make fissures and cracks in this coloniality Furaha and I collaborate in a spirit of decolonial *withness* (Dennis & Zhao, 2022, p. 1048) to gather *herstories* which restores dignity and honor to the African girl that has been taken from her in the colonial discourses as described.

Through *herstories* of her life experiences as an "ordinary" Kenyan girl we step into her world and relearn a new narrative of being that breaks up the myths, fictions, and stereotypes of colonial western discourse that promote the image of the African girl as vulnerable and a victim of her uncivilized environment in need of saving by the western world. In so doing, we advance transnational understanding in which others can "see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet" (hooks, 2000, p.88).

Positionality as a Researcher

My story begins in 2015 when I first set foot on African soil and immediately felt an undeniable connection. After traveling for two weeks in Tanzania and Rwanda, meeting incredibly compassionate, warm and welcoming people, viewing magnificent wildlife that I had only seen in National Geographic or on TV, and experiencing a non-western culture for the first time, I was forever changed and when we returned home, I passionately threw myself into learning everything I could about East Africa. As a retired language teacher, I had launched myself into studying Swahili, the most widely spoken language in East Africa, once travel plans had been confirmed, not realizing how true Nelson Mandela was when he said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." At the time I had no idea I had taken a step towards decolonizing my mind. I didn't even know what those words meant! But what I did know was that the connections with the local people that I began making by speaking a few Swahili words was, indeed, priceless.

How the Single Side of the Story Became my Passion

Buoyed by these connections, when we returned home, I became obsessed with learning more and contacted the African languages department at Indiana University in search of a Swahili-speaking tutor. My first tutor was a Kenyan music student who returned to Kenya a few

months after we began meeting but we are still in constant contact. I stayed with him and his family during Summer 2022 when I was in Nairobi. My second Swahili tutor was also from Kenya and in her last year as a Master's student at Indiana University. We met once or twice a week, talked daily, and our relationship blossomed into a special friendship as we studied not just the language but also Kenyan culture and African literature. The literature I read transported me to Igbo village life in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where I saw the impact of colonization on the villagers. Through the letters that Ramatoulaye, a Senegalese woman, wrote to her best friend, Aissatou, in Mariamu Ba's *So Long a Letter*, I began to contemplate the struggles and successes of women in a society different from what I had ever known. I was lured to post-colonial Nigeria by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in the pages of *Purple Hibiscus* and saw the courage of women when faced with familial tensions and national crises.

Additionally, along with my tutor's friendship came an introduction to other Swahili speakers at Indiana University. I became an "honorary" Swahili student and provided support for the African Language Festival, hosted twice a year by the African Languages department. My husband and I were honored to serve on the Board of KILEO, Kilimanjaro Education Outreach, a non-profit group based in Bloomington, Indiana that bolsters educational efforts in East Africa. My "pet" project became Waluka Primary School, the school that my tutor had attended and where her mother had served as Principal. After an in-person visit to the school, I began working with the administrators to assess their educational needs and present those needs for funding to KILEO. Those efforts have resulted in the addition of a computer for faculty use, additional books for Form Four students, over 300 new desks, and ten new toilet facilities to meet the World Health Organization's recommended students per toilet ratio.

By this time, I was acquainted with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's book, *Decolonizing the Mind,* but just beginning to contemplate its relevance for me personally. Mignolo (2021) makes the point that coloniality is everywhere and with each succeeding trip to Kenya, I became more aware of the web of coloniality that still has a choke-hold on Kenya today. I have witnessed the effects of neoliberalism policies that allow outsiders to come in, buy up land near wildlife areas to build luxury lodges, and relocate those already living on the land to other less-desirable areas, all in the name of conservation and "helping" the locals by "sharing" the profits and agreeing to hire local people. However, these "shared" profits are but a small fraction of the profits earned. Moreover, whites still hold top managerial positions in many lodges while Kenyans are relegated to lesser positions, despite having the needed credentials to carry out managerial duties. Maasai women walk long distances to find water for their family and livestock while just a few miles away in private conservancies adjacent to the Maasai Mara National Reserve, tourists are sipping chilled beverages on land owned by the Maasai before being "negotiated" away. Such encounters gave coloniality a lived significance.

Moreover, I was experiencing "micro-aggressions" here at home as people asked why I go *there* or wanted to know if I was a missionary or if I was going on a church mission trip, assuring me that I could teach "those people over there a few things." And although no one has asked me if "those people over there" rode lions, one lady recently asked if I "rode in a buggy across the desert looking for lions?"

Thus, over time "decolonizing the mind" became more than a book title for me as I saw the realities of colonialism and wanted to refute the myths and stereotypes, particularly as they relate to the African girl. The strong, independent African girls and young women that I have met challenge the notion of the victimized girl in need of saving by the western world: young

women like Susan and her sister who, as they describe it, had grown up poor and walked to school barefoot but yet they were Fulbright scholars and are currently finishing PhDs here in the United States. Or, the seven-year-old daughter of one of our close friends in Nairobi who aspires to be an astronaut or maybe a rock star, depending on the day, and can't wait until she is 16 so she can make her own decisions. And, then there are the two Maasai sisters, one fourteen and one eleven who awoke on the day they were to be married and decided they would rather be eaten by lions than be married to older men and ran through the Maasai Mara National Reserve, hiding during the day and running at night, to reach a home they had heard about that embraced girls escaping from early marriages and female circumcision. While the fourteen-year-old girl is now only in second grade and her younger sister in fourth grade, they are both determined to get an education.

These girls are my passion. I do not deny that there is poverty in Africa or that there are people who need support, just as there is poverty in the United States and there are people here who need support. I do not deny some African cultures still support early marriages and practice female circumcision. However, presenting the African girl as a monolithic entity who is a vulnerable victim in need of being saved by the western world is a negative stereotype that hides the diversity and complexity of the African girl which I see firsthand. And that is the danger in the single side of the story. These girls have prompted me to tell another side of the story, a positive side, that opens new opportunities for understanding and makes cracks in the web of coloniality.

Using Passion in my Role as a Researcher

Some might think that I carry heavy baggage with me on this research journey as an "old" white, college-educated, privileged woman who grew up in an all-white town in southern

Indiana, an outsider, seeking to do research among Black girls in Kenya who have been raised and are living in a culture totally different from mine. But for the past eight years, I have been unknowingly and only more recently, knowingly *decolonizing my mind,* following the steps that Keim and Somerville (2018) offer in their book, *Mistaking Africa,* as a means to truly understand the differences in African culture. I only became acquainted with their work a year ago and was gratified to discover that I have been doing what they suggest to educate myself. I have been allowing Africans to be my teachers. I have been learning an African language, Swahili. I have been finding African friends, reading African novels, eating African food, listening to African music, and living in African cities and villages. In addition to these seven steps, I am constantly reflecting on and striving to unpack the privileges I have as a white woman.

Whatever people may think, within this "baggage" that I bring with me is a passion for the people, the culture, and the native language of Kenya, Swahili. South African feminist, Malaika WaAzania (2020), fervently argues that we should not exclude such emotions from our research because emotion does not mean a lack of reason. To treat it as such is rooted in the western definition of what is knowledge and what isn't. Carspecken and Saxena (2022) invite qualitative researchers to not only acknowledge the emotional work that it takes to understand others and the world but also to include love "as a rationale for research and as a support for the validity of their findings" (p. 1095). Therefore, I do not apologize for my passion but honor it in this research journey.

Similarly, some might also be concerned that biases come with this "baggage" and various western scholars offer advice concerning bias and research. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) succinctly posit, "What you see is what you are" (p. 111), encouraging researchers to be

conscious of themselves in the research process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stress that rather than trying to eliminate biases because of what you are, it is important to identify these subjectivities, monitor them according to the theoretical framework and the researcher's personal interests, and make explicit how they may shape the gathering and interpretation of data. In presenting strategies for validating qualitative research, Creswell and Poth (2018) list clarifying researcher bias from the beginning of the study as a way to ensure that the reader understands the position from which the researcher conducts the research.

But in a search through works on decoloniality and decolonizing research (Chilisa, 2020; Mignolo, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Smith, 2012; Walsh, 2023; Wilson, 2008) the word bias does not merit a mention in the index. What does appear throughout these texts are terms such as multiple realities, relationships, accountability, connections with all living things, and respect. The Cuban anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996) in encouraging empathy and vulnerability in texts, eloquently writes that making connections between one's personal experiences and the subject "doesn't require a full-length autobiography but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied" (p. 13). In this context, bias becomes irrelevant and what becomes relevant is the role I adopt as researcher (Figure 1) which includes the following tenets as drawn from feminist, Indigenous and African feminist scholars:

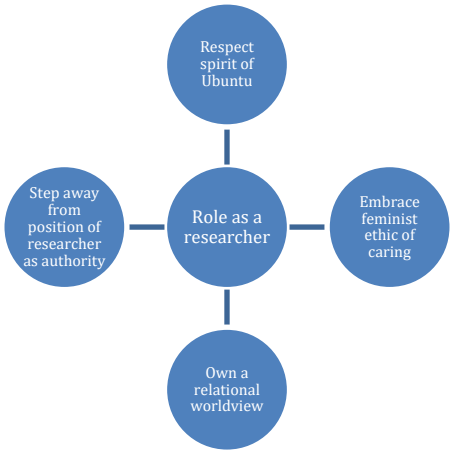
- Owning a relational worldview in which all systems of knowledge are relational, there is no one universal truth, and truth is informed by the multiple relations one has with each other (Chilisa, 2020; Wilson, 2008). This corresponds to Ntseane's

(2011) concept of communal knowledge making in which knowledge is constructed by all partners in the process.

- Embracing a spirituality that respects the interconnectedness of all things (Ntseane, 2011; Wane, 2008) and stresses communal well-being over individual prosperity, best described by the African philosophy of *Ubuntu,* a Swahili word which emphasizes an I/we relationship: I am we; I am because we are; we are because I am. For me, this underscores my responsibility to do more than scholarly research and to bring my whole self to the process, making connections with others as I proceed.
- Understanding that, as a researcher, I have the power to label, name, condemn, or describe the people that I am researching and to be cognizant to not abuse this power. Within my research context, I realize that I have an obligation to carry out my research without perpetuating western ways of knowing as superior to the other ways of knowing, including stepping away from the traditional position of researcher as authority and becoming researcher as an equal partner with Furaha, the Kenyan girl who shares her life experiences for this study.
- Bringing a feminist research ethic to this project that recognizes that relationships between the researcher and participants "rest at the heart of feminist ethical concerns" (Gringeri et al., 2010, p.393) and that research should be carried out in an "ethics of caring" (Dennis & Zhao, 2022, p. 1044) that lives on long after the research project is completed.

Figure 1

Role as a Researcher



Purpose and Significance of this Research

"I just want to offer a different way at how people look at us." Furaha's words refer, of course, to the western myths, mistakes, and stereotypes grounded in coloniality that misrepresent the African girl. Simply stated, that one sentence speaks to the purpose of our study and parallels the ideas of Yacob-Haliso and Falola (2021) in their three-volume reference book on African women. Their stated objectives include "debunking erroneous and misleading myths" (p. 5) about the identities of African women and "bringing their previously marginalized stories-*herstories*" (p. 5) to the world stage. However, this research goes one step further and presents something missing in scholarly research - the voice of an African girl. Kenyan activist Anne Moraa (2018) notes an urgent need for stories from girls that are true to who they are and "focus

on what the girls themselves say instead of just making assumptions about what they say" (p.328).

In addressing this need and using Furaha's own words, we present *herstories* of her lived experiences as a Kenyan girl to unlearn the colonial narrative with its western fictions about the African girl and relearn a new narrative that affirms her life experiences with the dignity that coloniality denies. *Herstories* are recounted here using authentic dialogue about her life experiences, not "restoried" or told in the third person, to lead to greater understanding of what is and what ought to be, challenging others to look at her and listen to her, in spite of what some see as the "incapacity of westerners to listen or to hear the other" (Darder, 2018, p.94). In addition, *herstories* become a source of "consciousness-raising, inspiration, and empowerment" (Zhao & Silberstein, 2022, p. 1063) for all humanity.

The significance of this research has historical roots, grounded in coloniality, that have encircled and strangled the voices of girls who have been "othered" and marginalized and has distorted their image on the global stage. The writings of Said (1978) and Spivak (1988), scholars concerned with the "Other" and the "subaltern," advocate unsilencing the voices of those previously silenced. In Said's (1979) highly celebrated work, *Orientalism*, he examines how Middle Eastern societies and cultures have been represented by the West in both fiction and non-fiction. According to Said, the idea of Orientalism is based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and the Occident which emphasizes the superiority of the Occident in contrast to the inferiority of the Orient and views the Orient as a homogenous group. He argues that the west constructed these stereotyped views about the East in order to control the Orient and take away its ability to speak for itself. Thus, Orientalism

becomes the approach for dealing with the Orient, "dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). Said (1993) further posits that negative racist stereotypes of the enslaved or colonized others were created and used to justify denying their rights and to build an image of the "Other" as childlike and inferior in need of guidance by their western superiors.

Similarly, the often-quoted subaltern scholar, Gayatri Spivak (1988) in her classic essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," argues that the subaltern or subordinate and oppressed people, particularly women, have been silenced by western groups and consistently marginalized by the colonizers with no platform to express their concerns and no voice to influence policy. She answers her question, can the subaltern speak, negatively, positing that although there is an agenda that includes participating in antisexist work among women of color and among women in class oppression in either the First World or Third World, "the building of a subject will cohere with the work of imperialistic subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization and the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever" (p. 90). Thus, as Spivak notes, when the white colonizers speak for the women it not only silences their voices but also leads to "truth" that expresses the colonizers' own interests.

Moreover, in his seminal work on international development discourse, Escobar (1995) contends that development *is* discourse and this discourse has constructed problems in the Global South in order to justify policy and intervention as a means of control by the Global North. He further argues that this discourse has not only created women as a homogenous group associated with poverty and hunger but it has also undermined women's productivity by seeking to portray them as reproducers, a concept that hinders economic growth in a country. In addition,

development discourses continue to be fraught with colonial tropes or discursive continuities as Ziai (2017) calls them which see the world in binaries of North/South, Self/Other, developed/undeveloped. In a later work, Escobar (2015) strengthens his argument by exploring how discourse of development can be redefined to focus on human progress not in terms of growth and consumption but rather in terms of human fulfillment that is not related to material goods. Such a reframing benefits the people that development has targeted for help instead of marking them as somehow inferior or undeveloped.

Speaking to the significance and purpose of this study, we do not pretend that Furaha's stories represent a monolithic image of an African girl or a Kenyan girl. However, by giving her a platform where she can share *herstories* as an "ordinary" girl whose voice has been ignored and who has been misrepresented globally, it becomes possible to unlearn one narrative and begin relearning another. In this new narrative the African girl is no longer seen as a childlike inferior, an Other, or a vulnerable victim consumed by an environment of poverty and hunger. Instead, the world sees an African girl who is in control of her own life, capable of making her own decisions, and not waiting on a western 'savior.'

Research Questions

Kim (2016) posits that research questions are used "not just as destinations that need to be reached" (p. 97) but also are used as a guide in the inquiry process that permits both meaningful and unexpected results to manifest themselves. In unlearning the colonial narrative of the African girl as seen in western discourse, the first step emphasizes the praxis of decoloniality as Furaha and I collaborate as equal partners to generate *herstories* about her life experiences, guided by the following research question that addresses "what" is generated in the context of "how" it is generated:

- What *herstories* of the life experiences of one Kenyan girl are generated as Furaha and I collaborate in a decolonial spirit of "withness" to relearn a new narrative of the Kenyan girl?

The following questions lead the analysis of *herstories:*

- What characteristics of one Kenyan girl emerge from the *herstories* of her life experiences?
- What is the new narrative of the African girl that is relearned from the characteristics that emerge from *herstories* of her life experiences?
- How does this new narrative unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl?

Definition of Terms

Girl/Girlhood

Who is a girl? What constitutes girlhood? Scholars in the relatively new field of Girlhood Studies have offered various definitions. Driscoll (2008) writes that the girl is an "assemblage of social and cultural issues and questions rather than a field of physical facts, however much the girl's materiality is crucial to that assemblage" (p. 14). Gannon and Gonick (2014) similarly argue that girlhood is a cultural, historical, and social construct shaped by social policies and institutions, interwoven with anxieties, cultural norms, and changes. Specifically concerning the African girl, Bellows-Blakely (2020) posits that "there is no singular or universal experience of girlhood in Africa" (p. 1). She further contends that girlhood has not had an agreed upon meaning either inside or outside of Africa. In a work discussing womanhood and girlhood in middle class Kenya, Muhonja (2017) discusses the complexity of identifying a "girl" by referencing other scholars who draw on indigenous Kenyan cultures that do not define girlhood by age but by such characteristics as knowledge and skills development, biological development, and relationship status. Muhonja doesn't "define" girlhood but rather offers an

alternative "conceptualization" of girlhood that centers the Kenyan girl as the driver of her own and others' actions and choices. Although this conceptualization rejects age as a limiting term for girlhood, Muhonja focuses her study on females between the ages of 13 and 19 and views this as a time when girls are establishing their independence and questions of identity become important.

But this is a study where the girl is the knowledge maker and narrator of her own stories. Therefore, I turn to five Kenyan girls that were crucial to my project in Summer 2022 who suggest their own definitions.

> Even if I am 27 and I have not married, I can't come home at midnight. I'm still a girl child. But, if you get married at say 14, you are a woman.
>
> A girl is a young female who is not married. 'Cause you can be young and be a female and be married and you are no longer a girl.
>
> A girl is basically a female child. You become a girl while still in your Mama's womb 'til you turn 18.
>
> A girl is a female at a stage where she gets to explore her youth. Find out what works for her. It is a stage of self-realization, growth in mind, body, and experience.
>
> I see it as an age thing. From childhood to somewhere around 25-30. I think a 16-year-old could have a baby and they would still be a girl. An 18-year-old could get married, leave home or go to college and she would still be a girl. The transition from being a girl to being a woman comes from maturity, psychological and physical, that comes with age.

Because there is diversity in defining a "girl" and in keeping with Muhonja's appeal to scholars and students in Gender Studies to "let go of the compulsion to attempt characterizations of a standard womanhood and girlhood" (p. 81), for the purposes of this research, the term "girl" is used to refer to any female who is not yet independent of her parents and girlhood will refer to

a period of exploration, self-realization, and growth both in mind and body of any female who is still dependent on her parents.

Outer Space

The struggle to find geographical terminology appropriate to a study seeking to unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl is real. The hegemonic terms that classify regions as First World/Third World and developed/undeveloped or developing reinforces a colonial mindset by implying that inhabitants of the Third World/undeveloped countries are somehow inferior. Mignolo (2021) speaks to this imbalance as he orders the various areas of human existence within the colonial matrix of power. He uses the terms *exteriority* and *interiority* in which each area of existence is "affirmed and established at the expense of those made destitute" (p. 36). Mignolo posits that exteriority is invented by those in the west, or in the interiority, to control and manage the destitute. Mignolo further notes that decolonial thinking happens in the exteriority, outside the boundaries of western epistemologies.

Outer Space is a similar term to describe an area of existence and draws from girlhood scholar Bae-Dimitiriadis's (2017) concept to "deterritorialize and reterritorialize" (p.371) those girls who live in previously disparaged spaces such as the African continent. Outer Space is an uncharted territory where opportunities are limitless and are not bound by western girlhood narratives, a place to reaffirm girlhood outside of "mainstream" culture. As a future-oriented approach, Outer Space offers a research site where girls who have been traditionally alienated are free to speak without being "spoken for" and can be heard without wearing a negative name tag. It is within this exteriority of Outer Space where Furaha and I collaborate as we gather

herstories to relearn a new narrative of the African girl. When I asked Furaha about using the term Outer Space, she laughed and replied, "Well, it's certainly better than Third World."

Thus, going forward, all references to Third World and developing/undeveloped countries are replaced with Outer Space where all humankind can speak for themselves and possibilities are not limited. In addition, as previously noted, west and western are not capitalized as a way to refute the idea that one group is inherently superior to another.

Framework of Theory and Praxis

Indigenous research scholar Bagele Chilisa (2020) notes that there is a growing need for social science research to break away from the current academic research traditions that are founded on Euro-Western thought and endemic to western institutions. Guba and Lincoln (2005) further elaborate that such research "needs emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one color" (p. 212). It therefore follows that the theory to frame research that seeks a relearning of the colonial narrative of the African girl also requires breaking away from western traditions. The first step in breaking away is to recognize theory and praxis as an intertwined process in which theory is praxis and praxis is theory. The following step is using theories that draw from Indigenous and African feminist scholars and are informed by their particular worldview.

Decoloniality

Decoloniality is not new. In their seminal work about decoloniality, *On Decoloniality,* Mignolo and Walsh (2018) state that decoloniality had its beginnings in the Americas over 500 years ago as part of the struggles, movements, and actions to resist patterns of power resulting from colonialism. They further describe decoloniality as "ways of thinking, knowing, being, and

doing" (p. 17) that are ongoing as coloniality survives even after colonialism ends and that seek to make visible "radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (p. 17). In a later work, Mignolo (2021) adds that decoloniality is an epistemic restoration of local systems of knowing and addresses injustice from the systemic effects of coloniality that is a "present and haunting ghost" (p. 12). In addition, decoloniality not only delinks with coloniality but also strives for re-existence which Mignolo describes as "the redefining and resignifying of life in conditions of dignity" (p. 3).

African scholar W. J. Mpofu (2013) asks the question, "What fundamentally is decoloniality" (p.10) as he discusses the concept in reference to Africa. He asserts that it *is* a philosophy of liberation but it is also not *just* a philosophy. Rather, it is like an extended family with its theories and paradigms that go "beyond the love of wisdom and approach the courage to think and love under impossible conditions" (p.10). When hegemonic western thought creates alternative facts that diminish humanity, "decoloniality probes the human condition and experience in search of a whole man" (p. 14). Mpofu metaphorically describes decoloniality as the "ideological and epistemic weapon of choice that will liberate the African imagination from the octopus grip of coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of power" (p. 117).

Interwoven with decoloniality as a process is interculturality which Mignolo and Walsh (2018) describe as "an instrument and tool of decolonialty's praxis" (p. 57). These scholars point out that interculturality is not the same as multiculturalism which only recognizes cultural diversity but rather interculturality is a continuous process with movement and action, a tool that creates new understandings, coexistences, and collaborations with those from, in this case, Outer

Space. Within this context, interculturality doesn't just affirm differences but offers new ways of "knowing, thinking, acting, being, and living" (p. 59) that respect values, knowledge, and wisdom of others. Mignolo (2017) refers to this as "delinking" from Euro-centric ideas of universality and truth and recentering or relinking with Indigenous structures. Similarly, Walsh (2023) discusses this same process but uses the terms "unlearning" and "relearning" what one thinks they know, terms incorporated in this study to unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl as seen in colonial discourse and relearn a new narrative.

Within this framework of decoloniality, decolonizing research scholars discuss decolonization as it activates decolonial thinking and doing. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), a Maori anthropologist, writes about the "research-imperialism-colonialism entwine," observing that research is "inexplicably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (p. 1) and has been perpetuated through the ways that information about Indigenous peoples has been gathered, analyzed, and then reported back to the west. She says research is one of the "dirtiest" words in the Indigenous vocabulary and calls western scientific research appalling and offensive, implicating it as one of the worst remnants of colonialism.

As a leading subaltern scholar, Darder (2018) posits that decolonizing research begins with the view that all humans are capable of producing meaning, regardless of where they are located socially, and all languages and cultures are significant. She also notes that a turn to decolonizing research humanizes research by calling on lived experiences to be heard and offer counter narratives. Additionally, Maldonado-Torres (2007) writes about the obligations of decolonizing projects in which dominant discourses are opened to questioning while Leigh Patel (2015) calls for decolonizing research that "decenters Whiteness, uproots the colonial genealogies, and dismantles the complicities of traditional research sutured to the stealing of

land, dreams, opportunities, and stories" (p. 99). Further, Alexander and Mohanty (1997) note that "the transformation of relationships, selves, communities, and practices of daily life leading to self-determination and autonomy for all peoples is central" (p. xxvii) in decolonizing the research process.

Because decoloniality responds to coloniality and "addresses the logic undergirding such and such event and at such and such moment and place" (Mignolo, 2021, p.486), it logically follows that decoloniality is the theoretical lens needed in our research study that seeks to extricate the African girl from the web of coloniality by unlearning the colonial narrative and relearning a new narrative that dignifies her existence. But this unlearning/relearning is a process in which theory and practice are inextricably interrelated and moves away from conventional thinking that theory must precede praxis as well as the idea that meaning can only be drawn from theory. For Mignolo and Walsh (2018), theory *is* doing and doing *is* thinking and thus decoloniality is rooted in the idea of "theory-and-as-praxis and praxis-and-as-theory" (p. 9), allowing us to heed the warning of Shane, the Lone Ethnographer (Gallman, 2019) and the intrepid heroine who has guided me with her sense of humor about complex information on this research journey. Shane admonishes us to not just let theory run the show but to actually use it as an instrument in research.

Accordingly, decoloniality is the tie that binds this research, bringing with it significance and relevance for all those caught in the web of colonialism today. Theoretically, it is fundamental to understanding how and why colonial discourse has characterized the African girl as a vulnerable victim within the false dichotomy of the "savior" and "those needing to be saved." As praxis, decoloniality is the tool to chip away at this characterization by creating a space for previously silenced/unheard voices of girls from Outer Space to speak out and thinking

with not *about* one Kenyan girl to excavate stories of her life experiences. Through our collaborative efforts we practice decoloniality to affirm her unique ways of knowing, thinking, and being and to respect her traditions, values and knowledge, not seeking universals but rather pursuing connections and relationships that will live on beyond this research.

African Feminisms

Moreover, because coloniality prevails in African gender conversations and has led to a widespread understanding that gender constructs in Africa have been influenced by the European colonizers, an understanding of African Feminisms is essential to this study. Ntseane (2011) writes "the reality of marginalization has been pushed further to the periphery due to gendered contexts defined by the legacy of colonialism" (p.308). These gender constructs were found in many of the colonial policies and not only left women with no social, economic, or political power but also embedded patriarchy in institutional structures (McFadden, 2001; Tamale, 2011). Clark (2018) also adds that the scholarship of some African feminists was made invisible and misrepresented during colonialism and remains so as coloniality persists. Reflecting on African women today, Clark observes that they continue to hold unequal power; their access to education and other resources is limited; and they continue to fight the colonial legacy.

However, there are other compelling reasons why African Feminisms are integral to this research. Choosing an Afro-centric theory, such as African Feminisms, goes hand-in-hand with decoloniality as both disrupt western-centered thinking found in colonialism and provides an ethical orientation to recognize African females from their own perspectives and in their own context (Knowles, 2021). Pindi (2021) argues that African Feminisms are a critical decolonial tool that provides a way to decenter whiteness and challenge the "imperialistic portrayal of the African woman" (p. 327) found in western-centered research frameworks. And, because theories

guide the way we make knowledge (Ampofo & Arnfred, 2010; Appiah, 2006; Moletsane, 2015), African Feminisms are an "ethical intellectual politics" (Mama, 2011) that locate African experiences within their own context, affirming the voice of the African girl as being central in this research process and offering the promise that knowledge-making is relevant and owned by the one making the knowledge. Likewise, Tamale (2020) argues that researchers must adopt paradigms that "acknowledge subjective interpretation of reality and are commensurate with Indigenous and feminist knowledge systems that are nonlinear, nonrational, and value laden" (p. 279).

While the need to include African-feminist theory is convincing, the diversity of both Africa and African women's perspectives makes it difficult to theorize one African feminism. Thus, the term African Feminisms has been adopted by many African scholars and will be used in this study. Dosekun (2021) notes that there is no one definition of African feminism as African women have differentiated their theories and positions in an effort to resist having western women and African men speak for them, with their main concern being a feminism that speaks to their diverse lives and their challenges. Obioma Nnaemeka (1998) writes that to explain African feminism, one must not look "to western feminism but rather to the African environment" (p. 9) where African feminism is proactive and rooted in its surroundings. More recently, Ouguir (2018) explains African Feminisms as an umbrella that covers feminists who may disagree on policy issues but agree that women are human beings who should be treated with respect and dignity.

With such a plethora of feminisms, the principles of various theories are explored in detail in Chapter Two. It is sufficient to note here that together the theories of decoloniality and African Feminisms allow space for understanding one African girl's life experiences that "go

beyond universalist assumptions of what it means to be a girl from Outer Space" (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2017, p. 372) and for unlearning colonial fictions and relearning a new narrative of the African girl. As these diverse and vibrant threads of African feminisms are woven together with the rich strands of decoloniality using a vivid background of one African girl's life experiences, an intricate and many-hued tapestry comes to life with a brilliant new story to tell.

The Way Forward

Drawing on both my personal experiences and current scholarly articles, Chapter One has introduced and described the compelling issue that drives this research, the colonial narrative of the African girl as presented in western discourse. This narrative portrays the African girl as a vulnerable victim of her own environment, impaired by a lack of education, mired in poverty, suffering from hunger and in need of a western "savior," a narrative grounded in the historical roots of colonialism that has marginalized the African girl and misrepresented her on the global stage. This leads to the purpose of this study which is to learn a new narrative based on the life experiences of one Kenyan girl as told through *herstories* and using her own voice within a theoretical framework of decoloniality and African Feminisms. Instrumental to this research is my positionality and role as a researcher which includes using a non-western paradigm, incorporating my passion as an asset, and striving to decolonize my mind as I embark on this crucial journey.

The literature review in Chapter Two reflects on the landscape of the African girl through scholarly articles concerning what is known but mostly what is not known about her, particularly in the field of Girlhood Studies, a discipline dedicated to girlhood themes and a space where African girl stories should be told but have been historically under-researched. An overview of studies specific to Kenyan girls further confirms the compelling need to present *herstories* as

most scholarly research addresses the problems they face and ignores their agential potential to overcome these obstacles. Notably, the voice of the African girl is silent. Finally, because this research is both feminist and Afro-centric in nature, the plethora of African Feminisms that were introduced in Chapter One are detailed here to locate African women within their own context and broaden the knowledge about alternative ways of knowing, being, thinking, and acting.

Chapter Three is a methodological overview of this study, including the process of decolonizing my mind as I wrestle with choosing a methodology that is both decolonial and feminist. On this challenging journey I shift from using a traditional narrative inquiry approach for framing this study to embracing Storyworlding, a relatively new and innovative feminist methodology with decolonial values. I also detail the collection of data in the form of *herstories* of the life experiences of Furaha and present the rationale for organizing her life experiences according to the micro spaces of daily existence such as home and school, the meso spaces of social and cultural institutions and customs, and the macro spaces of global events and social platforms. Finally, I explain why certain *herstories* were included and others were not as well as defend our choice to present the analysis of *herstories* in a conversation between the two of us.

It's Furaha's turn to speak in Chapter Four, the data chapter, where *herstories* of her life experiences are recounted through her own words. Taken from 62 Zoom conversations and two face-to-face meetings, totaling almost 75 hours of conversations, these stories are the heart of this research whose purpose is unlearning the colonial narrative of the African girl as seen in western discourse and relearning a new narrative through Furaha's *herstories.* The stories are presented spatially, as mentioned previously, within the micro, meso, and macro spaces of her life experiences.

As a praxis of decoloniality Furaha and I collaboratively analyze *herstories* in Chapter Five using an interview style format to discuss the characteristics that emerge from Furaha's *herstories* of her life experiences that define her as an African girl. This analysis is followed by a discussion of the new narrative of the African girl that is relearned from these characteristics that have emerged from *herstories.* Following our joint examination of the data, I synthesize the findings and offer conclusions using the theoretical framework of decoloniality and African Feminisms within the context of the research questions.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter in which I reflect about my growth as a person and as a researcher and about the research itself. I also address the implications and importance of this research from a scholarly standpoint, a feminist standpoint, and a personal and professional standpoint and offer suggestions for continuing on this decolonial journey.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

One can read countless articles about the purpose and importance of a literature review in scholarly research. My heroine, Shane the Lone Ethnographer, weighs in to say that researchers can do more and see further if they connect with other research in the same area. She invokes Bernard of Chartres who years ago wrote that we see more and farther when perched on the shoulders of giants not because it gives us keener vision but because "we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature" (as cited in Galman, p. 42). The Dissertation Warrior (Guy, 2017) also alludes to the benefit of the literature review to see more and farther, not because of the credence of other researchers but because by reflecting on the literature landscape, it becomes possible to understand what is known and what is not known. In this case, recognizing what is not known about the African girl from this review affirms the criticality of this research.

Despite a plethora of articles that describe how the "victimized" African girl has come to the forefront of the global stage, African girlhood itself has historically been under-researched and under-theorized (Decker, 2010; George, 2014; Haffejee & Theron, 2019; Katshunga, 2019; Switzer, 2018). Even in the field of Girlhood Studies where I expected to find research about and with African girls, most of the research and dialogue centers on white girls in the west (Jaksch, et al., 2022). While Black Girlhood Studies has been gaining recognition since the 1990s when scholars began drawing attention to the complex realities of Black girls in the west, the voices and experiences of African girls remain marginalized and mostly absent in scholarly works (Katshunga, 2019). "The African girl-child continues to hold less power, wealth, and voice both in public and private spheres than almost any group globally" (Oforiwaa, 2021, p.1). Therefore, this part of the review identifies the state of current scholarship concerning not only the African

girl but also the Kenyan girl within Girlhood Studies, a field that, while recognizing the uniqueness of the girl as a demographic category for study, is seemingly immune to African girl scholarship and to opening space for girls from Outer Space to be heard.

Girlhood Studies

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted that if we are to go forward we must go back and discover what we have left behind. In keeping with his words, we look back to understand the history of Girlhood Studies and what it has left behind, namely African girlhood studies. Before the emergence of Girlhood Studies as a scholarly field, research about girls was interdisciplinary and permeated the fields of sociology, psychology, education, history, literary studies, and media and communications studies, usually focusing on problems that white girls faced, including female juvenile delinquency, girls' labor practices, self-esteem, eating disorders, depression, suicide, and sexual abuse (Kearney, 2009). Kearney further notes that there were ground-breaking girlhood studies in the 70s and 80s but most studies at that time focused on understanding women (white women) more than girls. Only a few scholars such as McRobbie (1980, 1982, 1988, 1991), McRobbie and Garver (1976), McRobbie and McCabe (1981), and McRobbie and Nava (1984) researched girlhood as a separate social identity from womanhood but still focused on white girlhood.

Beginning in the early 2000s, more scholarly works on girls and girlhood appeared with the spotlight again on white girls. *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* the first peer-reviewed, scholarly journal devoted entirely to girlhood themes began publication in 2008, and with its publication the field of Girlhood Studies gained recognition. Johnson and Ginsburg

(2015) note that this is a good time to work in the field of Girlhood Studies as it has become a "legitimate and provocative academic and activist enterprise" (p. 1).

With this recognition of Girlhood Studies as a valid endeavor, Kearney (2009) posits that more recently Girlhood Studies scholars are approaching girlhood as a fluid construct rather than as a fixed identity that is determined by biology and age. Moreover, studies have expanded to include the many ways to become a girl, and in the introduction to their book, *Becoming Girl,* Gonick and Gannon (2014) observe that the general field of Girlhood Studies is interested in breaking down the idea of "the girl" as a unified culture, much as Mohanty (1991) talks about disrupting the idea of a monolithic "third world" woman. They contend that Girlhood Studies should emphasize differences, including how race, class, religious and other identifications and locations factor in on the lived experiences of girls and also argue that girlhood is a cultural, historical, and social construct shaped by their lived experiences. Similarly, Johnson and Ginsburg (2015) philosophize that Girlhood Studies must be connected to the sociological reality of girls, must understand that girls already have agency, and must include their own voices and honor their diverse communities, not speaking for them or trying to save them.

Driscoll (2008) similarly writes that the girl is an "assemblage of social and cultural issues and questions rather than a field of physical facts, however much the girl's materiality is crucial to that assemblage" (p. 14). Gonick (2006) adds that conceptualizing girls within shifting social, cultural, and historical contexts shatters popular narratives of girls in general, narratives that see girls in danger, similar to the colonial narratives in western discourse of the African girl as a victim. In *Girlhood: A Global History* (2010), Helgren and Vasconcellos also examine the girl as socially, culturally, and historically constructed with age being only one category that

defines girlhood. They offer historical insight on girls from a global perspective in order to challenge the idea of girlhood as a uniform and unchanging category. Girlhood scholars who contribute to this global history address the ways that the concept of girlhood has changed over time and in different locations in order to reflect local political, societal, and cultural considerations. Their emphasis is more on past experiences than Gonick, Gannon and Driscoll as they scrutinize how girls have shaped the changing discourse in their lives and how they have created their own agency.

However, despite acknowledging that girl and girlhood is diverse and complex, most of the research has been about white girls in the west, as previously noted. One notable exception is Ruth Nicole Brown's (2015) inspirational work that explores the creative potential of Black Girlhood, focusing on Black girls in the west. Brown founded SLOHOT or Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths as a methodology to celebrate and recognize Black girls as producers of their own culture and knowledge. In conducting research, Brown discovered that the girls had opinions about what she and others were doing, they made choices about what to say, and as a result, she and her colleagues abandoned their original research design and took the girls as experts on their own lives, becoming accountable not just to the girls but to themselves as well. They did their work together, were looked at suspiciously for developing relationships with the girls and were considered "traitors to science" (p. xiv). However, Brown notes that this suspicion is changing as girls' studies is developing a space of its own where girls, scholars, activists, and practitioners can come together to talk and to debate, building the girls' opinions into the conversations.

African Girlhood Studies

In another study that diverges from white girls in the west, Halliday's (2019) collection of diverse, interdisciplinary scholarly works on Black girlhood, one contributor specifically discusses girlhood in Africa. Katshunga (2019) addresses the African girl by calling for a Black African Girl Approach (BAGA) as a way to explore the stories of girls from Africa, stories that have propagated "tales of poverty, sexual violence, a dearth of education, and a diligent a historical belief that they are victims of their uncivilized environments" (p. 45). While I applaud Katshunga's turn to the Black African Girl Approach as a step towards bringing their voices and experiences to the global stage, this framework further adds to the negative, deficit-oriented view of the African girl as being an oppressed victim. I do not deny that there aren't those, such as the Congolese street girls she describes, who encounter harm in their everyday lives or that colonialism isn't at the root of the many oppressions faced, as I know first-hand that it is. However, to use BAGA and launch every study from the standpoint of gender, class, race, and age oppression is self-defeating and relegates the African girl to a victimized status, the antithesis of what Katshunga actually advocates. Such a perspective distracts attention from the complexity and fluidity of the African girl's actual lived experiences by focusing solely on oppressions and leaves no space to consider her future aspirations.

Additionally, although Katshunga explains that she uses "Black" to draw attention to the oppositional "White" supremacy, previous conversations with Kenyans question the need to draw attention to Blackness within the African setting because, as one Kenyan rhetorically asked, Aren't we all Black? Additionally, Kenyans who have traveled to the west say they had never felt racialized until they came to the United States, identifying as African and Kenyan

without a color designation. Abosede George (2014) confirms that in colonial Lagos "racial differences or the blackness of black girlhood was somewhat secondary" (p. 396) to gender, class, and generational differences. Further, Pindi (2021) notes that within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa where the population is predominantly Black, "the identity politics of African women goes beyond Blackness" (p. 339) and speaks more to their country and their ethnic group of origin.

Despite the paucity and negativity of western research on African girlhood, a few South African girlhood scholars highlight the resilience and agency of African girls. Mitchell, Moletsane, and Choonara (2021), in authoring the Introduction to Volume 35, issue #1 of *Agenda,* a publication dedicated to gender issues, commend the increasing attention being paid to African girls as evidenced by the articles documenting girl-led, from the ground up approaches to policy dialogue and policy change that were submitted for publication. In the issue, Yamile (2021) writes about her work with school girls in a rural community in South Africa in developing a digital tool to engage their community in dialogues that address gender-based violence. In this project, the girls took the lead in the community dialogues, making their voices heard as they advocated for social change. Her study is significant as it focuses on the girls' voices and positions girls as actors in their own social and political environments. Lange and Moletsane (2021) also explore girl-led activism that advocates against gender-based violence in South Africa. Similarly, in drawing attention to girls with disabilities in Zimbabwe, Peta (2021) highlights how these girls, through focus group discussions, have made significant contributions in national policy-making processes and advocates for girls with disabilities to have a space in national policy dialogues. These above-cited articles clearly smash into the web of coloniality

by showcasing South African girls with their own agency who are making their voices heard but more studies, such as this one, are called for to tear down that web and change the narrative of the African girl as a victim in and of her environment.

Studies Concerning Kenyan Girls

A Google search for scholarly articles specific to Kenyan girls did not unearth any study with the capability to break through the web of coloniality such as the few articles just cited. To the contrary, the search is noteworthy only because the findings perpetuate the notion that all girls in Kenya are faced with multiple obstacles in a particular setting. Although the studies are conducted in good faith as a way to draw attention to difficulties which I am certainly not minimizing here, they actually perpetuate the existing stereotypes of a vulnerable, victimized girl by only addressing complications and ignoring the agential potential of the girls to overcome these obstacles. Such research is reminiscent of early western girlhood studies (Kearney, 2009) that present the girl as a fixed identity within a specific, problem-related context.

For the most part, studies of the Kenyan girl fall into three main categories, education, health, and sexual-related topics, and within each category, a specific issue is deliberated. For example, in the area of education, Hockett (2021) conducts a qualitative study to look at attempts to improve the educational attainment of primary school girls in one rural community in Kenya. Chetcuti and Kioko (2012) investigate 120 girls' attitudes towards science in four secondary schools in Eastern Province, Kenya using both questionnaires and focus group interviews. Noting that Kenya is still lagging behind in equal educational opportunities for girls, Mwakio (2017) studies socio-cultural and economic obstacles that hinder the access to education for Kenyan girls.

Health and sexual-related research follow a similar pattern of addressing the Kenyan girl as a fixed identity within a specific context using quantitative studies that prioritize a particular health-related concern such as sexually transmitted infections, HIV risks, HPV vaccines, menstrual issues, sexual harassment and violence, and rape prevention. For example, Alexander, et al. (2014) studies 62 rural primary schools in Kenya to examine water, sanitation, and hygiene programs and the resources available for menstruating schoolgirls. Sexual harassment and violence among high school girls in urban slums in Nairobi are the subjects of a phenomenological study by Abuya, et al. (2012) while Mojola (2011) focuses her quantitative study on HIV risk among orphaned Kenyan schoolgirls.

Despite the proliferation of these deficit discourses that present the Kenyan girl as an object rather than as the subject of their own story, there are two noteworthy exceptions. In her book, *When the Light is Fire,* Switzer (2018) gives an ethnographic account of Maasai girls in contemporary rural Kenya, interspersing her narration with the voices of over one hundred girls with whom she conducted semi-structured oral interviews. The importance of Switzer's study is two-fold as she not only challenges the colonial narrative of African girls found in international development discourses and but she also incorporates the girls' voices in this challenge, noting that these Maasai girls, even in their particular and ordinary small ways, "participate as agents in their own lives" (p. 168).

Additionally, Muhonja's (2017) book on womanhood and girlhood in contemporary middle-class Kenya contests the treatment of African women and girls as a homogenous demographic group and stresses that their lives "must be understood as performances within specific cultural contexts" (p. iii). Using an interdisciplinary analysis, she examines questions

related to new rituals of girlhood and how these are recasting traditional societal roles and informing new conceptualizations about Kenyan girlhood. In addition, she centers women and girls as originators of their own actions, disrupting previous patriarchal centered constructions.

Reflecting on the landscape of African girl literature "from a 30,000-foot perspective" (Guy, 2017, p. 171) and also from zooming in for a close-up, as Guy, the Dissertation Warrior, exhorts the researcher to do, highlights a dearth of information about the African and Kenyan girl and suggests the need for more research. However, this isn't a call for just any research but rather a summons for decolonizing research that challenges the stereotypes and myths that trap the African girl in a web of coloniality, research that opens spaces where girls can speak and be heard, opening new dialogues and bringing a more inclusive and realistic understanding of African girlhood to the global stage.

African Feminisms

In this part of this literature review we are lifted up and borne of the shoulders giants, those African feminists who speak out, who draw attention to injustices, who applaud other women, and who seek balance and harmony in this world through caring relationships. As western feminists fail to address the African realities, we turn towards these African feminists and their diverse African feminisms to broaden the knowledge base about gender in African societies, to present the foundation for understanding new ways of thinking, knowing and doing as a practice of decoloniality, and to guide our knowledge-making.

As mentioned previously, African Feminisms are a crucial decolonial tool for framing Afrocentric, feminist research. Informed by African feminist perspectives that recognize African females in their own context and acknowledge them as legitimate knowledge makers, African

Feminisms provide the ethical orientation needed for this study that centers the African girl. To explore the landscape of African Feminisms literature, I call on Shane once again, that ethnographic sage, who notes that researchers connecting with others in the field is like "dwarves being perched on the shoulders of giants" (Galman, 2019, p. 42). In this case, we *are* lifted up and borne on the shoulders of giants, those African feminists who have spoken out, drawn attention to injustices, applauded other women, and sought balance and harmony in this world through caring relationships. These giants detail African Feminisms that are foundational for understanding the African girl within a social and historical context.

Commenting on why African Feminisms acquired a plural name, Nkealah (2016) explains that the diversity of African feminisms has emerged as African women respond to both white, middle-class, western and African-American feminisms to theorize their own feminisms within the history and culture of Africa. Ahikire (2014) adds that African Feminisms are a "myriad of various theoretical perspectives" (p. 8), originating from the complexities of African women's conditions and identities. Generally, Knowles (2021) posits that these many strands of African Feminisms defy the notion that African women can be lumped together in neat categories.

Concerning the objectives of African Feminisms in general, Mekgwe views (2008) these theories as a discourse that not only emphasizes concerns specific to African women but also questions characteristics of traditional African culture without denigrating them, understanding that certain traditions may be viewed differently by different classes of women. She warns against gender binaries and also points out that "women do not easily fall into neat categories" (p. 21). Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) posit that African Feminisms "reject dominant narratives that

generalize and essentialize the conditions of African women, men, and children and seek awareness of specific contexts, cultures, and peoples" (p. 619).

Additionally, Busia (2018) notes that despite the diversity of feminisms, most feminist studies have their link in praxis and particularly in Africa where feminism has been consciously linked to African realities. Specifically, Clark (2018) notes some common threads of African Feminisms such as challenges to patriarchy and attempts to control women's bodies as well as a non-antagonistic relationship with men. Particularly pertinent for this study is her opposition of African feminists to images of "African women as powerless, oppressed, and needing intervention" (p. 386).

From a historical standpoint, Filomina Chioma Steady (1981) was one of the first to talk about feminism in Africa. She uses the term *African Feminism* to delineate concerns that are distinct to African culture such as female autonomy and cooperation, the centrality of children, nature over culture, mothering and kinship. Steady refutes western feminisms, specifically as they emphasize separation from and conflicts with men because, in her view, African men and women occupy similar space, that of both being oppressed. In a later work, Steady (1987) talks about the roots of African feminism and expands her discussion of oppression as being embedded in the institutions of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, neocolonialism, and apartheid.

In her seminal work, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves,* Hudson-Weems (1993) rejects the term *feminism*, claiming that most African women see feminism as a term taken by white women to meet their own needs and demands. She argues that feminism as it originated in the 1880s was racist and further contends that this issue should not be divided along gender lines when African women are living in a racialized and racist society. In place of feminism, Hudson-

Weems coins the phrase *Africana Womanism* to grasp the reality of African women, an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent, grounded in African culture and focused on unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women. Hudson-Weems explains that *Africana* identifies the ethnicity of the woman and establishes her cultural identity with a direct link to Africa and her ancestors while *womanism* adds humanness in the sense that plants and animals can be female but a woman can only be a human. She characterizes the African woman as being family-centered, male compatible, strong, spiritual, and committed to mothering and nurturing in a world in which African men and women share a similar space, that of both being oppressed. For Hudson-Weems, it is important that African men and women work together against white supremacy. She sees the concept of *Africana Womanism* as a first step in defining the African woman, in setting goals that are consistent with African culture and history, and in solving problems on a collective basis within African communities where eliminating racist influences in their lives is the first priority.

Nah Dove's Afrocentric approach is similar to that of Hudson-Weems although Dove focuses more on how African women have contributed to society. In an article defining her African Womanist theory, Dove (2003) draws on the writings of Cheikh Anta Diop who discusses the demeaning treatment of African women in societies dominated by Western culture. In characteristically Afrocentric tradition, Dove highlights the contributions made by African women from the past to present day, citing both famous warriors and less well-known mothers. Dove also stresses that African culture emphasizes male-female relationships that are complementary rather than emphasizing conflicts between African men and women and posits that appreciating and understanding this is the basis for any theory that deals with women in an

Afrocentric paradigm. Citing specific African women, such as Queen Nzinga from Angola, who were instrumental in resistance efforts as well as citing the untold stories of brave African women, Dove argues that these stories must be reconstructed to understand and define African cultural identity. She also applauds the role of women as mothers who have also played a critical role in resistance movements and speaks out for reclaiming knowledge of the ancestors and practicing their values and beliefs.

In another theoretical perspective, African feminist and activist, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, outlines the need for African women to define themselves and asserts that the African woman must be conscious of three things: she is a woman; she is an African; and she is a Third-World person (1994). Ogundipe-Leslie offers Stiwanism or Social Transformation Including Women in Africa, STIWA for short, as an alternative to Western feminism. While this model emphasizes social equality and partnership with African men, it also seeks to correct the economic inequality between men and women in Africa. While Hudson-Weems, Dove, and Steady offer theoretical perspectives for African feminisms, Ogundipe-Leslie with her activist background, goes a step further and stresses that a social transformation is needed to build a harmonious society that is not constantly at war with men. Also unique to her philosophy, Ogundipe-Leslie cautions African women to be aware when criticizing their own cultures so that they are not seen to be admiring Western ways.

Nnaemeka (2004) draws on her extensive work with nongovernmental organizations and grassroots agencies in Africa as well as her work in African studies, women's studies, and cultural studies, as she proposes what she calls *nego-feminism,* the feminism of negotiation or no ego feminism. To explain *nego-feminism* Nnaemeka notes that African feminism is unique and

has its roots on the African continent and in the African environment where an African worldview can be found in local cultures. She further states that any African feminism should be built on indigenous knowledge and, with this foundation, the shared values of compromise, balance and negotiation become the basis for *nego-feminism.* Unlike what I would call "static" feminisms of *Africana Womanism* and *African Feminism,* this feminism is something that women "do" – what they do not just for themselves but for others by negotiating and compromising, particularly as they negotiate the "patriarchal land mines" (p. 378). Nnaemeka refers to *nego-feminism* as being dynamic and regulated by shifting local and global urgencies.

Critical of the above feminisms that have avoided politics, radical African feminist (as she self-identifies) Patricia McFadden (2001) calls for new agendas to restructure social institutions that focus on the "lived politics of contestation." She criticizes African legal systems for being "blatantly" patriarchal by refusing to recognize marital rape as a crime, allowing polygamy (this has since been declared illegal), defining children to be the property of men, and inheritance practices that allow men to inherit women as a form of property. McFadden also calls for bringing African feminist traditions to the global women's movement to help formulate new theories and methodologies and encourages women to write about themselves and speak for themselves. However, writing in 2016 and living in her "elderly" black body, she explores the notion of a feminist *contemporarity* which questions her previous thinking that the state can be transformed by just engaging and insisting. McFadden argues that disparities in state infrastructures are so deeply ingrained and the balance of power is so wide that feminists will need movements where transformation starts at the individual and community levels. For this

aging radical African feminist, the most urgent task of African feminists now is to disavow Nationalism and create new notions, theories, and practices that will support a different future.

Within these various ideologies, Sadiqi (2018), one of Africa's contemporary feminist scholars, reflects on feminism today. She argues that feminism is a perspective on life that encompasses understanding how men and women can forge a comfortable life together. She notes a common theme in African feminism despite various policy differences. This commonality defines a feminist today as one that is "aware of women as human beings with specific concerns and aware that women and their concerns deserve respect" (p. 277). Decker and Baderoon (2018) also discuss African Feminisms today and note the diversity of forms and their vibrant, if somewhat tense, relationships with one another. For them, this diversity is not a disadvantage but encourages innovation and the ability to challenge patriarchal structures from many fronts.

Finally, no commentary on African Feminisms is complete without a brief mention of African women authors. Although Mekgwe (2008) observes that most African women writers have either rejected the feminist label or waver between endorsing and refuting it, the fact remains that the works of African women writers have been instrumental in promoting feminist viewpoints. Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba, and Tsitsi Dangarembga are just a few of the writers who have put forth feminist ideas in their classic novels. These literary works critique gender relationships, patriarchal structures, men, and gender inequality and are quite heterogeneous depending on the regional, social, and religious origins of the authors (Arndt, 2002). Of course, no "literary feminism" discussion is complete without citing Chimamanda

Ngozi Adichie whose contemporary writings and TED Talks have encouraged us to see the dangers in the single side of a story and have urged us all to be feminists.

Summary

The literature landscape is now complete. By standing on the shoulders of giants together with using both a wide lens and a telephoto lens to survey the landscape, it becomes possible to connect the elements and provide context for this research, just as a landscaper connects the natural world with symmetry and balance. The missing elements have been identified and by choosing an Afrocentric theory, such as African Feminisms, to go hand-in-hand with decoloniality as discussed in Chapter One, it is possible to disrupt and unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl as a vulnerable victim and, in the process, relearn a new narrative of the African girl that is based on realities, not myths and stereotypes. This union of African Feminisms and decoloniality shapes the methodology in Chapter Three of "how to" unlearn one narrative and relearn another, a methodology that breaks free from a western framework and expands new ways of knowing and being.

Chapter 3: Methodology Overview

Research Questions

Being in qualitative research is like "walking swampy lowland" (Kim, 2016, p. 31) and without proper gear to navigate the swamp, one would quickly become mired in the sludge and mucky water. When combined with decolonizing research, the entire research process becomes a "messy, complex, and perhaps impossible endeavor" (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 7). Maneuvering through this quagmire of western research methods in a cross-cultural, decolonial context demands a different kind of gear, much like pulling on knee-high gaiters over short muck boots, as the activity of research becomes transfigured. Smith (2012) posits that "questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms" (p. 197). But even with the gaiters, it was almost impossible to escape the quicksand of research questions. I grasped and floundered, escaping only when I grabbed onto the collaborative praxis of generating Furaha's *herstories* of her life experiences as a lifeline, recognizing that "how" we generate *herstories* is a vital decolonial tool to be used in conjunction with "what" *herstories* we collect. Thus, the following question addresses "what" is generated in the context of "how" it is generated:

- What *herstories* of the life experiences of one Kenyan girl are generated as Furaha and I collaborate in a decolonial spirit of "withness" to relearn a new narrative of the Kenyan girl?

The following questions guide the analysis of *herstories:*

- What characteristics of one Kenyan girl emerge from the *herstories* of her life experiences?
- What is the new narrative of the African girl that is relearned from the characteristics that emerge from *herstories* of her life experiences?

- How does this new narrative unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl?

With the research questions now on firm ground to steer the course, it becomes possible to begin navigating through the research.

Decoloniality/Decolonizing Methodologies

However, even though I had escaped the quagmire of research questions, other questions still swirled about *how* to do decolonial research. By the very nature of decoloniality, which seeks reality, not truth, and does not conform to linear patterns, one finds oneself again slogging through the swampy lowland, grasping for anything to pull oneself free. I grabbed at Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies* for answers and found that decolonizing methodologies are not so much concerned with "the actual technique of selecting a method" (p. ix) but more attentive to the context in which research problems are designed and the implications of the study for the participants and their communities. According to Smith, this doesn't mean rejecting all western theory and research but rather it requires centering Indigenous concerns and worldviews and understanding research and theory from the Indigenous perspective in order to get the story right and tell the story well.

Still floundering in the muck without specifics, I seized Catherine Walsh's, *Rising Up, Living On* (2023) in which she affirms "there is certainly no model or manual to follow" (p.115), only a series of considerations such as being upfront about one's own subjectivity in relation to the subject and the research problem, guaranteeing that all of those involved have a voice in the "*what, why, how, with whom,and what for* of the study" (p. 116), and realizing that knowledge is

always situated and local. Patel (2015) still left me thrashing about with her caution that methods commonly found in qualitative research such as observations, watching, coding, and interviewing can still be viable in decolonizing research as long as they are not be used "in a fashion that mimics a desire for the mythological objectivity" (p.63) of some research designs because life isn't controllable, concurring with the philosophy of Mutua and Swadener (2004) that life is indeed messy and complex.

Suddenly I was beginning to realize that there are no steadfast guidelines as I engaged in the decolonial work of "thinking, doing, sharing, and collaborating" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 245) with someone from a different part of the globe. I was pulled to safety with Wilson's (2009) relational methodology as I recognized that I was not searching for a single, objective truth but rather I was seeking the realities of this Kenyan girl. Wilson posits that a relational methodology is based on four principles: relational accountability in which all parts of research are related and the researcher is accountable to all; respectful representation where the researcher listens, pays attention, acknowledges and creates spaces for the voices of the researched; reciprocal appropriation through which the research benefits both researcher and researched; and rights and regulations during the research process. This emphasis on relationality is key in developing a decolonial attitude and turning to decoloniality.

Narrative Inquiry as THE Methodological Tool?

Nevertheless, I was still left without the tools to begin excavating Furaha's stories. As a beginning doctoral student, I was initially drawn to qualitative research because of what I would call its "humanness" in which there are no scientifically-based, technical solutions to a problem.

Once the ideas for my research began to come together, I was pulled into the web of narrative inquiry which has story as central to human experience as a way to "honor the sacredness of our humanity" (Hendry, 2007, p. 496). Central to narrative inquiry are the four "turns" of Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) which they consider essential for anyone to take before conducting a narrative study. These turns resonated with the spirit of decoloniality and seemed relevant in the journey to decolonize my mind.

The first turn, as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) describe it, is to recognize that the researcher and the researched are in a fluid relationship in which both are learning from the other and to embrace a relational role between researcher and researched, similar to thinking *with* the participant and not *about* them as seen in all decolonial work. Both Chilisa (2020) and Wilson (2008) agree that relationality is at the center of every indigenous research encounter and stress building relationships with *all* stakeholders as well as the community. In their recent scholarly article introducing Storyworlding, Dennis and Zhao (2022) note the importance of building on relationships with one's participants and value participants for their own sake, not just because they are research participants. Chilisa, et al. (2017) and Bae-Dimitriadis (2017) also call on the research participant to act as a co-producer of knowledge.

Turn two is a turn from using numbers as data to using words as data. Although narrative research does not totally reject numbers, it recognizes that words capture the nuances of experiences and relationships in human stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and help avoid the "sterile and deadening quality" (p. 16) of linguistic discourse when data is represented in numbers. In addition, as a tool of decoloniality, words help build understandings that cross locations and differences to contest colonial claims.

The authors describe the third turn as a turn from focusing on the general to focusing on the particular which lends value to a specific experience, setting, or people and aligns with the concept that decoloniality is an epistemic restoration of local systems of knowing (Mignolo, 2021). This local turn is crucial in practicing decoloniality which seeks to re-exist lives in dignity for peoples in their own particular locale.

Finally, turn four means recognizing and embracing multiple ways of knowing and understanding (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Chilisa, 2020; Wilson, 2008) which, from a decoloniality perspective, translates to what Walsh (2021) calls "an epistemic reconstitution to counter the epistemic destitution of coloniality" (p. xx). Walsh clarifies that this epistemic destitution wiped out the fundamental belief in indigenous epistemology in which all knowledge is relational and there is no one way of knowing (Wilson, 2008) as outlined previously.

However, despite my initial fascination with narrative inquiry and even though Pinnegar and Daynes' four narrative turns interlock with aspects of decoloniality, narrative inquiry as "the" research methodology seemed to fall short with its western implications, particularly in regard to analyzing data. And so, deep in the throes of decolonizing my mind, I found myself buried once again, this time in the quagmire of western research tools. Creswell and Poth's (2018) tools for analyzing narrative research data include "restorying stories and developing themes often using a chronology" (p. 105) and " telling stories using a variety of ways involving restorying, theorizing, and narrative segments" (p. 106). They speak to collaboration only in terms of how the stories are collected. Although Kim (2016) repudiates the traditional role of researcher as the authority figure by using the term "midwife" to describe how the researcher should cooperate with informants to deliver "healthy" stories, she "flirts" with many tools to

transform the “messy” data into meaningful stories, tools such as composing song lyrics, writing a short story, or creating a poem. Even the esteemed narrative inquiry scholars, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), emphasize that narrative inquirers spend “many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained in different sets of field texts” (p. 131). This restorying and transforming stories ignores one purpose of this research which is to give voice to a Kenyan girl through *herstories* of her life experiences.

In addition, the tools available to frame interviews failed to take into account the relationship that Furaha and I were building. All of the scholarly discussions about the “kinds” of “successful” interviews such as the two-sentence format interview format (Kim, 2016) as well as specific interview “protocols” such as the narration phase vs. the conversation phase and understanding interviewing “as a series of steps in a procedure” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164) left me shivering in the murky lowlands of western research where the Zoom conversations between Furaha and I did not follow established formats and protocols for successful interviews but rather were conversations between two people making connections, seeking understandings, and developing a caring relationship.

Despite this growing disillusionment with certain features of narrative inquiry, I remained steadfast that stories are central to being human. In his influential work on making stories in law, literature, and life, Bruner (2003) writes that stories lead us to see people in new and different ways, give shape to things in the world, and open new possibilities. The renowned Laguna storyteller, Leslie Silko (1977), explains that stories aren’t just for entertainment; they are everything. Later she notes "You don’t have anything if you don’t have stories” (1993, p. 3).

Masta (2018) posits that a combination of narrative inquiry and Indigenous theory/methodology work together as they both emphasize stories and storytelling to unleash the voices of the marginalized and the silenced.

Perhaps Masta was right. A combination of methodologies would be a way to finally emerge from the swamp. Audre Lourde (1984) notes in the title of her essay that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" to bring about genuine change, and Chilisa and Ntseane (2014) support research methodologies that move gender research away from Euro-western methodologies. Saavedra and Nymark (2008) urge scholars to theorize in spaces that might not be considered theoretical from the western academic perspective while Sandoval (2000) advocates using eclectic frameworks from various disciplines and paradigms. Gordon and Gordon (2006) take a slightly different stance, suggesting we can use the "master's tools," but we must develop additional tools and build our own houses. When enough houses are built "the hegemony of the master's house will cease to maintain its imperial status" (p. ix).

The Turn to Storyworlding as a Methodological Tool

And so, I embraced Storyworlding as a way out of the quagmire to frame a decolonial house, using traces of narrative inquiry combined with Storyworlding, an emerging feminist methodology to "engage in culturally informed and ethnographically rich stories through which we establish our being together" (Dennis & Zhao, 2022, p.1036). Together, inside this house, Furaha and I collaborate to gather *herstories* of her life experiences to bring down the colonial narrative of the African girl as seen in western discourse.

Storyworlding has evolved over the past four years as a group of passionate women gathered to talk about how they became feminists. Out of these meetings the Feminist Research

Collective was born and the Women We Love Project (http://www.ofwomenwelove.org) was inspired by a new storyworlding methodology (Zhao & Silberstein, 2022). Presented as a participatory methodology in which women join together to gather stories from other women they love and present these stories through a digital platform, the underlying philosophical values speak to this research with my passion for the Kenyan girl. These values also support a decoloniality stance with the emphasis on other ways of knowing, doing, using local knowledge and valuing an "ordinary" person.

In general, the Storyworlding approach connects the two concepts of storying and worlding and is committed to four concepts:

- A communitarian ethics of care,
- The lives of lesser-acknowledged women,
- An emphasis on putting situated local knowledge into dialogues, and
- An orientation toward love as a dynamic, methodological orientation (Dennis & Zhao, 2022, p. 1037).

In alignment with the beliefs of decoloniality, Dennis and Zhao (2022) describe storyworlding as a "counter-oppressive, future-oriented way of thinking" (p. 1037) that critically engages with historical and everyday power structures through loving and caring collaborations, particularly relevant for projects such as this one seeks to generate stories that expand our understanding of both people and places. Storyworlding assumes that stories do more than reflect a life experience. They are a way to make meaning with other people (Dennis, et al., 2020). With the emphasis on using situated local knowledge in telling stories that are not often told, stories of "ordinary" women who do "ordinary" things, storyworlding creates spaces to

embrace our commonalities, celebrate our differences, and gain new and deeper understandings of ourselves and each other in the process.

Dennis and Zhao (2022) address the relationship between stories and worlds by turning them into verbs, storying and worlding. To shift from understanding "story" as a noun to "storying" as a verb moves the story from being an end in itself to being an action that links stories and storytellers, audiences, and cultures (Dennis & Zhao, 2022). Storying thus becomes the praxis of decoloniality as Furaha tells me *herstories*, creating a new narrative of the African girl that chip away at the web of coloniality.

In further patterning decoloniality, Dennis and Zhao (2022) address the notion of power by looking at who is "storying" and why they are "storying" in order to counter master narratives, to let silenced voices such as Furaha's be heard, and to foster new spaces for our own "being" and how we think about others. Inherent in storyworlding is a feeling of "withness" in which we are all in this together, not just physically but also mentally and spiritually by being accountable to one another as women and feminists (Dennis & Zhao, 2022), the same accountability crucial to Wilson's (2008) Indigenous research principles. Within this concept of accountability, I am not researching *about* Furaha or *on* Furaha but rather I am researching *with* her and feeling *with* her as together in this journey.

Additionally, in shifting from "the world/worlds" to "worlding," Dennis and Zhao (2022) turn again to praxis by inviting ordinary women, women that have been marginalized and ignored, to share their life experiences and to make themselves visible in the world. In contrast to the "worlding" of Spivak (1990) in which local populations were "persuaded" to accept European reality as their own, this "Worlding" specifically searches out stories from ordinary

women whose stories have been ignored to engage in a "transnational, cross-generational, love-inspired dialogue that eschews repression and control" (p. 1039), envisioning new worlds where lives and experiences are interrelated and hold endless possibilities for the future.

With the proper methodological tools now in hand, it becomes possible to start building a new house that will cause the "master's house" to lose its colonial grandeur. Built in an atmosphere of love and caring, using a solid foundation of decoloniality and African Feminisms, framing with a Storyworlding/narrative template, and adding *herstories* as the finishing touches, this new house has space for those who have been ignored and marginalized to find comfort and to feel free to speak out. It is within this house where Furaha tells *herstories* of her life experiences and where together we act to unlearn the narrative of the African girl found in the "master's house" and relearn a new narrative born in a house filled with compassion and hope.

Context/Setting of the Study

Geographically, Kenya is located in sub-Saharan East Africa with coastline on the Indian Ocean. Linguistically, it is a diverse country with over 60 ethnic languages spoken in addition to the two official languages of Swahili and English. It is interesting to note that most Kenyans, including Furaha, speak three languages: Swahili, English, and their mother tongue or language of their ethnic group. While there are many numerical statistics about Kenya's size, population, and economy, those numbers are just that - numbers that have little relevance in Furaha's *herstories.*

What is relevant to this decolonial research is a look at the socio-historical phenomena (Fox, 2008) in Kenya which leads to the discourse of colonization. All of Africa became the

"white man's burden" (Decker & McMahon, 2021, p.33) after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 which was organized by the German chancellor to appease the increasing greedy imperial rivalries. Under the guise of spreading civilization in Africa, the countries participating agreed to divide the continent into "spheres of influence" and East Africa was divided between Britain and Germany. Ten years later, in 1895, Kenya was declared a British protectorate and remained under British rule until 1963 when independence was achieved.

The long-standing patterns of colonialistic power that were put in place in Kenya have continued within a web of coloniality, leaving a powerful/powerless dichotomy. Within this dichotomy, the woman suffers twice, as a colonized subject and as a woman (Tyagi, 2014). Moreover, although it is debated whether the idea of patriarchy was brought by the colonizers or whether it already existed in the traditional culture, the fact remains that colonialism instilled patriarchal beliefs and values and by the end of the colonial period women were left with few rights (Mkegwe, 2008). According to Muhonja (2017), Kenyan societies today are still defined primarily as patrilineal and patriarchal (Wambui, 2013; Maseno and Kilonzo, 2011; Omwami, 2011; Rarieya, 2007; Odhiambo, 2007; Ligaga, 2012; Mutongi, 2007; Sanya, 2013). In addition, Keim and Somerville (2018) argue that many of the mistakes and misrepresentations about Africa originate in the colonial period when exploitation required thinking about Africans as being inferior. Although Furaha was born in 2004, long after the colonizers left, she has been "learned" in colonial discourse as being less than her western counterpart. This research seeks to "unlearn" this fiction, and "relearn" a new reality.

Herstories as Data

The term *herstories* was coined in the 1960s during the second wave of the feminist movement in the United States to refer to what was left out of "his story." The intention was never to replace or be a synonym for "history" but rather to emphasize that women have been neglected in the standard history books. As such, *herstories* pay special attention to women and represent feminist viewpoints.

And that is what these *herstories* do - pay special attention to Furaha as both an African and a Kenyan girl. *Herstories* are not biographical or a linear life history but rather stories of her everyday life experiences, "small" or "short" stories that when taken together give meaning to her life, affording the opportunity to unlearn colonial western dialogue about the African girl and at the same time, to relearn a new African girl, respecting her unique lived experiences within her specific cultural context. These experiences deconstruct the "truths, beliefs, values, and norms that are still presented as normal and natural" (Chilisa, 2020, p. 55) and lead to a better understanding of a person commonly excluded from master narratives. Further, it is through *herstories* which bring out multiple ways of knowing and being and legitimize her localized experiences, that western discourses and narratives are challenged (Zhao & Silberstein, 2022).

However, traditional definitions of "small" and "short" stories have shortcomings that mark them as inappropriate for a decolonizing research approach. Georgakopoulou's (2006) definition of "small" stories as stories that emerge in natural settings and are embedded in everyday social interactions is certainly acceptable. However, he emphasizes *how* the story is told and *who* it is told to instead of focusing attention on *who* is doing the telling and *why* they are telling the story (Dennis & Zhao, 2022), concepts more suited to a decolonial/storyworlding

approach that is concerned with breaking the power structure of *who* tells the story in which the *who* has traditionally been those from the west, not from the Outer Spaces.

Barkhuizen (2016) uses a "short" story approach and defines a "short" story as "excerpts of data extracted from a larger set of data such as conversations, interviews, written narratives, and multimodal digital stories" (p. 660). These "short" stories are analyzed thematically by content and context, embody action, and have a temporal dimension. This focus implies action over thoughts and beliefs and emphasizes a beginning and an end to each story, not a viable framework for stories of life experiences that overlap and intertwine with unique cultural traditions.

Our study prefers to draw from Zhao and Silberstein's (2022) "ripple" stories which they describe as "microscopic and personal intergenerational narratives" (p.1052) of ordinary women whose lives are similar to a ripple in the sea and different from the "waves" used to describe the the different feminist movements in the United States. Appropriating the notion of "ripple" stories for this research and knowing that Furaha and I share an affinity for ice cream, we liken these stories not to the ripples in the sea but to ripple ice cream with ribbons of sweet syrup swirled throughout to create a colorful and deliciously creamy treat. Thus, Furaha's *herstories* take on the form of ripple stories, small narratives about ordinary life experiences, flavored with Kenyan culture and traditions that together shape an extraordinary narrative that promotes greater understandings and challenges the narratives of coloniality.

Generating Herstories

Before any data was collected, I sought and obtained Institutional Review Board approval from both Indiana University and the United States International University-Africa, located in Nairobi, Kenya (see Appendix A). In addition, I obtained a research permit to conduct research in Kenya (see Appendix B). My participant signed the approved Consent Form before any data was collected; however, that form is stored on my Google drive to protect her privacy. Conversations that took place in Kenya were recorded, have been transcribed and coded and are also stored on Google drive. All Zoom meetings between Furaha and I are recorded and stored in Kaltura on the Indiana University website and all transcripts of the conversations have been printed, dated and stored in my personal files (see Appendix C for a list of Zoom meetings, dates, and length of time talked).

Furaha and I "met" on a What's App call almost three years ago when she was a student at a private secondary boarding school for girls in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. My first Swahili tutor was the music teacher at the school who introduced the two of us by phone. We had hoped to meet when I visited the school in 2021 but had been unable to do so. We talked off and on over the next several months until we met in person in Summer 2022 while I was doing a pilot research project at the school, just after she had graduated. I spent time with her while I was in Nairobi and we quickly connected. Our friendship blossomed as we went shoe shopping, hung out in a bookstore, ate ice cream, and just enjoyed getting to know each other. Additionally, she organized a group of her girlfriends to meet with me in one of the many malls in Nairobi where we devoured pizza, chicken, and chipsies as we chatted about their Kenyan girlhoods and their hopes and dreams for the future. Currently, Furaha is in her second year at Mt. Kenya University, a university not far from Nairobi.

In August 2022, I asked Furaha if she would like to assist me in a project for a Narrative Theory and Inquiry class and she readily agreed, just recently admitting that initially she had concerns about the time commitment. After just a few Zoom meetings, the seeds of my dissertation began germinating and I was thrilled when she accepted the invitation to share her life stories with me.

When we first started meeting our relationship was casual and a bit cautious, one reason being our age difference. In Kenyan culture, respect for elders is given primary consideration and can create a barrier to a true intergenerational friendship. Recently, Furaha told me that when we began our weekly Zoom meetings, she was afraid she wouldn't have anything to say or that the stories she shared were not worthy for any kind of research. However, the more we talked and grew to understand one another, our relationship deepened, the age barrier between us began to crumble, and she came to realize that I valued her "ordinanry" stories. Our "semi-structured interviews" from the first few meetings gave way to deeper conversations about a particular event or situation, a relationship, feelings, or experiences - past, present, and future. In between our Zoom conversations, we began to text daily just to check in on each other and our friendship finally closed the intergenerational gap. In fact, when we were spending time together in Nairobi in October 2023, the owner of the villa where we were staying asked how long we had known each other because our familiar and warm camaraderie suggested we had been friends for years.

While generating *herstories* in a spirit of decoloniality, I was mindful of being humble and respectful and worked within a paradigm that combines the previously discussed principles

of Indigenous research, Storyworlding, and decolonizing research. Specifically, this paradigm embraces:

- Being connected to the local cultural and historical realities of Furaha's life as an "ordinary" Kenyan girl.
- Not seeking to "save" her, speak for her, or decide what is best for her.
- Respecting and honoring her diversity and her Kenyan culture.
- Valuing her voice, paying attention to that voice, and constantly reflecting on my privilege to avoid filtering out that which I might deem unimportant.
- Carrying out all research in an atmosphere of care and love.

Before the first few Zoom conversations in September 2022, I prepared by jotting down a few broad questions or topics that seemed relevant to exploring Furaha's experiences growing up as a Kenyan girl. For example, in our first interview I asked Furaha to tell me about her experiences as a girl growing up in her family. She was a bit hesitant about "what I wanted to know" (and to be honest, it was a horribly general question) but once I assured her that it wasn't about what I wanted to know but what she wanted to tell me, her words flowed like the Mara River at the end of the rainy season and meandered like all the twists and turns in that famous river. We went from social expectations for girls to how she and her cousins revolted against their gendered chores to dowry to life in *upcountry* to Kenyan aunties.

By October, when our relationship began to deepen, a simple comment like Furaha excitedly pointing to her new ear piercing and saying, "Look what I did today!" brushed aside any pre-planned questions and stories bubbled out leading to an array of related experiences, like the first time her mom wore jeans, a heated discussion between all of the aunties about piercings

and tattoos, and her sister's secret smiley piercing. From then on, I followed a loose protocol and merely perused the transcript of our previous conversations to extract any loose ends and to note details that Furaha needed to clarify. Our meetings began to fall into a comfortable routine with the first few minutes spent greeting each other and catching up on our lives since we last talked. A thread might appear in those few minutes that led us into an as-yet-uncovered topic such as talking about religious views one Sunday when she had just returned from Mass. In addition, clearing up loose ends and clarifying details could open new possibilities that neither of us had imagined. Sometimes I would simply ask if she wanted to talk about anything in particular. It soon seemed like there was never enough time to cover everything and we both found ourselves making notes about what we wanted to discuss during our next Zoom conversation.

Even with a paucity of scholarly specifics on the "hows" of data collection in decolonial work, I found that collaborating in a spirit of caring and love, as particularly important in a storyworlding approach, guided us well as we collected *herstories*. This spirit has enabled us to have meaningful, respectful conversations that have connected us and led to deep understandings, feeling a sense of "withness" that we are in this together, to relearn a new narrative of the African girl.

Organizing and Analyzing Herstories

Back in the swampy lowlands of the Zoom written transcripts from 62 conversations and almost 75 hours of video chats, the first daunting task was to create a "clean" transcript from the one Zoom supplied that was fraught with errors in translating Furaha's English spoken with a

Kenyan accent. Watching each video and editing the transcript at the same time offered the opportunity to identify themes in *herstories* as well as note other details such as the who, what, when, where, and why of each experience or event that Furaha recounted. At the same time, I constructed a table (see Appendix D) to record and organize the conversations by themes/topics to facilitate analyzing the stories.

Organizing by Themes/Topics/Meanings

As I began filling in the table, of themes/topics, I assigned meaning to her experiences but this "meaning" was from my own perspective. For example, one of the assignments in a narrative inquiry class was to present a segment of data collected from an interview and analyze that data. Furaha had recently shared the story of getting a second ear piercing so I did an artifactual analysis of the ear piercing (see Appendix E), doing a member check with Furaha to determine if the meanings that I attributed to actions and things were indeed her meanings. The next assignment was to "restory" data so, in deference to Furaha's love of music, I searched for the lyrics of a song sung by a favorite singer of hers and applying the same rhyming/syllabic pattern, I created a song, using her words, based on the ear piercing (see Appendix F). Despite Furaha's insistence that I had grasped the meaning of the story and despite her exuberance over the song I had created, I entertained niggling doubts that these approaches to analyze the data didn't reflect the values of Indigenous/Afro-centric/African Feminist research that Chilisa (2021), Wilson (2008), and African feminists advocate. The more we talked, the more I read, the more I decolonized my mind, the more I realized that to use Furaha's words and then interpret them or restory them was not really giving her a voice, no matter how many "member check-ins" we had.

With this epiphany, I began questioning previous efforts to look at the stories according to the meaning of her actions, such as "resistance to norms, taking initiative, responsible for herself," as noted in the chart in Appendix D. Even if done collaboratively, this approach left little space to imagine new possibilities that are based on her different ways of being, knowing, and doing because I assigned meaning from my *own* way of being, knowing, and doing. I felt "boxed in" as I was only focusing on individual characteristics. Additionally, this perspective did not foreground the ethical orientation of African feminisms to recognize Furaha as an African girl within her unique cultural setting. In returning to the landscape metaphor that I used for the literature review, this was like zooming in on the landscape of her personal characteristics without zooming out to capture the broader landscape of her experiences as an African girl.

Organizing by Routines, Relationships, Roles, and Rituals

I then considered organizing *herstories* by using Saldana's (2022) four Rs to analyze life using qualitative data: Routines, Relationships, Roles, and Rituals but discarded that method for various reasons. Routines didn't seem appropriate for those ordinary "things" like Furaha's love for music and learning to drive a car and those experiences certainly didn't fit in the other categories. It was difficult to separate Roles and Relationships as experiences in those categories seemed to spill over and blend together. Personally, I dislike the word Ritual because it can connote a negative event, such as a Satanic ritual or witchcraft rituals. Finally, as with the other approach that I tried, the four Rs didn't prioritize Furaha as an African girl with her own unique experiences and within her own cultural context.

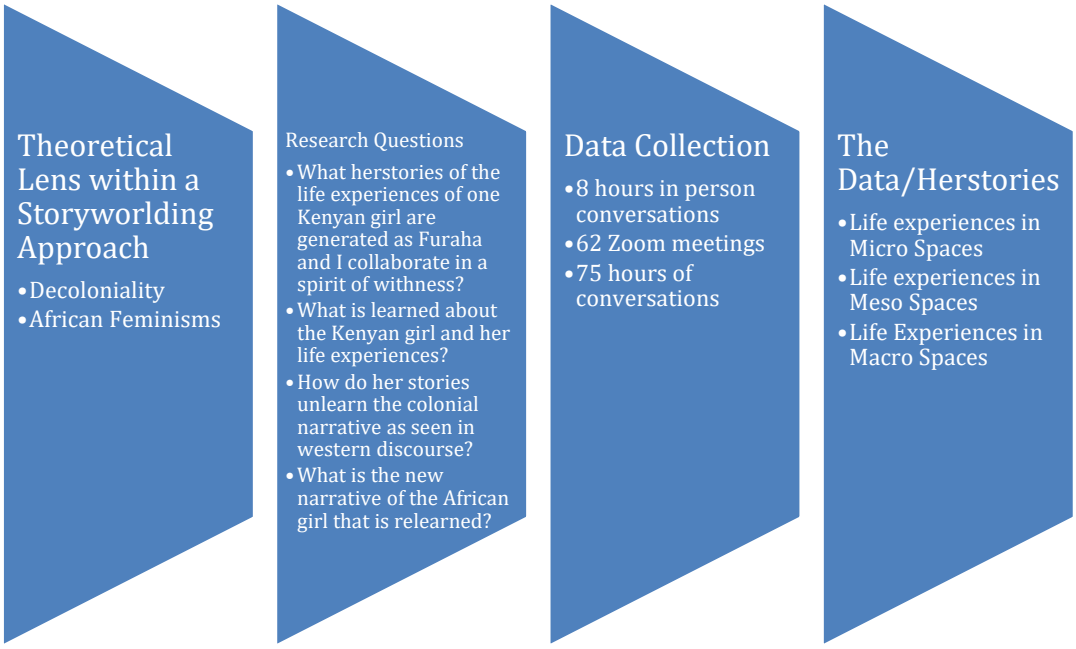
Organizing by Experiential Spaces: Micro, Meso, Macro

Seeking a way to more fully appreciate Furaha's experiences themselves, I turned to exploring *herstories* not just by scrutinizing the personal characteristics that emerge from her experiences and shape her identity but also by considering the wider spatial landscape of the experience itself. Heuristically, *herstories* began to fall into three categories: *herstories* of experiences in *micro* spaces or the daily living spaces such as home, school, church, or just walking down the street; *herstories* of experiences in *meso* spaces or those spaces that are uniquely cultural, including dowry ceremony, a discussion about ancestral spirits, and holiday traditions; and *herstories* of experiences in *macro* spaces of global events and social media platforms.

While these categories are not mutually exclusive as *herstories* overlap, intertwine, and move from one category to another just as life experiences do, they are a tool to not only open a place for the emergence of the characteristics that define Furaha's identity as an African girl but to also create fresh understandings and coexistences, affirming new ways of knowing, believing, and doing that respect the different values and knowledge. Additionally, this categorization enables others to visualize themselves in similar spaces and celebrate the commonalities that we share as human beings on the same planet (see Figure 2 for a summary of this methodology).

Figure 2

Summary of Methodology



Summary

Finally, it is possible to emerge from the quagmire of research methodology in which I initially found myself immersed. By developing a firm theoretical base of Decoloniality and African Feminisms for sound footing, guided by relevant Research Questions and using the appropriate tools, it was possible to begin extricating myself. The decolonial Storyworlding tool cleared waters muddied by colonial narratives with its emphasis on stories of those previously marginalized and its praxis of researcher/researched collaborating in an atmosphere of caring and love. Using "ripple" stories of ordinary experiences flavored with rich, cultural traditions removed more muck to make way for new perspectives to emerge, freed from colonial myths and stereotypes. With the organization of Furaha's *herstories* according to the spatial landscape of the experience itself, my extraction became complete. Once out of the swamp, the process of

generating the data or *herstories*, in contrast to being in the quagmire of research methodology, was like floating in the sun-kissed ocean waters where one could stay forever. These *herstories* are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data/*Herstories*

Overview

Finally, it is Furaha's turn to speak and the world's turn to look at her and listen to her. What follows are her own words, not re-storied and not edited. These are ordinary stories, stories about her experiences while growing up as a girl in Kenya generated from 62 Zoom engagements and eight hours of meeting in person in Nairobi in 2022, totaling almost 75 hours of conversations. Some stories unfolded out of Furaha's excitement about a recent event. Other stories were triggered by a memory or in response to a specific question I asked. Sometimes one story morphed into several stories about a related, or maybe even an unrelated, event. These are not stories that evolved from "tell me why you aren't a vulnerable victim" but rather stories that unfolded from my genuine interest in her as a person and her willingness to let me in her life and share *herstories* with others.

Obviously, not all of *herstories* are recounted here and together we made the choice of which stories to include and which not to include. With my teaching background and Furaha's love for learning and commitment to furthering her education, we had many conversations about the Kenyan educational system, including corporal punishment, which we decided to leave for another paper. Because social media plays such a big role in her life, almost every conversation had a reference to some social media platform and it was impossible to include them all. We had other discussions about topics such as abortion and addiction which we decided not to share because of their sensitive nature. A few stories, while culturally rich, do not contribute significantly to her life experiences nor offer any new insights on her identity, such as the delightful tales she told about stereotypes of the multiple ethnic groups found in Kenya. Thus,

herstories that appear here are those we considered the most salient to her identity as a Kenyan girl within her unique cultural setting.

As outlined in Chapter 3, *herstories* are organized according to the three spatial landscapes of her experiences: *herstories* of experiences in *micro* spaces or the daily living spaces such as home, school, church, or just walking down the street; *herstories* of experiences in *meso* spaces or those spaces that are uniquely cultural, including dowry ceremony, a discussion about ancestral spirits, and holiday traditions; and *herstories* of experiences in *macro* spaces of global events and social media. In telling *herstories* Furaha uses Swahili words and phrases unique to her world whose meanings are noted in Appendix G. Additionally, the dates in parentheses at the end of *herstories* are the dates when our conversations took place.

It is now time to meet Furaha.

Furaha's Introduction

First of all, I want to say I wouldn't want to be viewed as a victim. We've already been portrayed as damsels in distress, that we need help. That we need help because of what we are going through. We *are* being circumcised. We *are* being sold, as in marriage. But, the first thing I want people to know about me is that this is only one side of the story. We are more woke than they think. You know, there are two different sides to an acorn. I'm not saying those things don't happen. You know a lot of girls *are* sold into marriage. They *are* still being circumcised but this is the other side where I am going to university. I am aware of things going on in the country, things going on in the world. I'm aware of my talents and my possibilities.

I am from a family of four, my sister and I and my mom and my dad. I feel like I have very involved parents. They were never detached. My mom was a stay-at-home mom for a long period of my growing up. My dad works for the Kenya Revenue Authority. But my sister and I

never really built a relationship until recently because since my sister had been in *Class 4* she went to boarding school. So, we didn't get a lot of time to do that relationship. I was just the annoying little sister.

I grew up in Nairobi. It's the most important city in Kenya. There's very different sides to it. There's very high-class areas and then there's places like *Kibera*. It's always bustling with activity. There's no slow motion. Everyone is walking so fast. It's very diverse and there's a lot of different cultures, different people. And it has the best restaurants and there's so much diversity in the food too. But it's also dangerous because there are con men and con women and everyone is looking for a means of survival.

On holidays and random weekends, we would go to Nyeri, *up country or ushagoo or ushamba.* So, in general, up country is where the grandparents live and most people have their own land there. Everything is more calm. You have the big outdoors in Nyeri so you could just walk outside anytime. I used to be really really excited to go there because, remember my sister was in boarding school, so that's the only time I would have people my age around me. (2/11/22; 6/4/23; 6/28/23)

Experiences in Micro Spaces of Daily Life

Being Bitten by a Stray Dog

"See in this picture, if you check closely, I have kind of like something white that is wrapping around my leg. So that is a dog bite. A few weeks before that I was going to school. We were going for a school trip to a place called Rock City. It was such a wonderful place and my dad had paid for the trip for me. It had a swimming pool and a merry-go-round and there was this one called a Banana Boat which looks like a banana and you get inside and it feels like the most scary thing because it goes so high and we loved it and hated it at the same time. And

when I was going to school in the morning a stray dog bit me. It bit my leg. I still have this scar. I didn't feel anything when it bit me. I didn't feel the pain. I didn't feel it at all.

And so then a lady was passing by and she made the dog go away and she was like, you need to go back home and all that. And I was like OK, I'm going back home. So I turned and I didn't continue in the direction I was going, towards school. But there was another route that I could use to school. Remember, this was a day when we were going for a trip and trips used to be so so fun. I was like, if I go home, my mom is going to be like, No, now you can't go for the trip. So, I just took another route and I went to school and I told my friends I had been bitten by a dog and one was like, Don't tell the teacher. So they took me to the washroom and we washed it and put a little band on it and we went for the field trip. We spent the whole day and we had fun.

And then, I came back home and my dad had gotten me a Scout uniform that I had been wanting for so long and I was so excited. So I took the Scout uniform and put it on and modeled for them. Then afterwards, once I had done everything, I sat down and I remembered and then the fear started heating because I was in *Class* 6 or 7 and I was aware that rabies is very bad but I wasn't aware of how dangerous it was but I did think it caused something. I was sitting there thinking how am I going to break this news to my parents. I was waiting for my mom to get out of the sitting room because that's where my dad was. So she went to the kitchen and I told her in a low voice so my dad wouldn't hear. I was so scared. I felt like he would be angry at me. I showed her the wound and of course, she went and told my dad. He just asked what happened and I explained to him and we just went to the hospital. I got a tetanus and had to go to the hospital about five times for a rabies shot." (9/30/22; 3/5/23)

Deciding to Get a Second Ear Piercing

"Guess what I did today? I got another ear piercing! I was in town and it was so weird. You know here, one thing when you are walking in town, people are literally, they will grab you and pull you into a random matatu. They will grab you and pull you into a random shop. It's so annoying. So this one, he's just following me, laying for me, and he's like Come, we'll do your eyebrows. You know we have manicures. We have pedicures and everything. We can give you a piercing and whatever. And then, I just, I just, you know the norm is to just ignore them. Ignore them and they will go away. And I just kept walking. I had talked to my aunt about this, about getting another ear piercing, this past weekend. I was like I really wanted to do it and it really is a huge thing. I've thought about it for months. I told her I didn't know if I should go for it or not and she said just go for it if it is something you want. So when I reached a bit further I thought maybe I should just ask how much it is. So I just turned and it was like he knew I was going to turn. He grabbed my hand and I got it done.

It was a huge thing because I remember one time we were in the living room and my sister asked this same aunt, that is the aunt that shaved her head and had hair only on the top and she put a butterfly tattoo over her heart and this one auntie was all up in her business, telling her these are demonic things and all that. So my sister asked that auntie, she said she was thinking of getting a piercing and she said I don't know whether I want to do my nose or my tongue. My mom was there and my mom was like if you get a nose piercing don't step foot in this house. I thought my sister never went with it but I just came to find out that she found a different place to pierce. There's this thing called a smiley that you get on your gum above your front teeth and you get a small ring so when you smile you see it. So she just doesn't wear it around my mom or she just doesn't smile. So my mom is yet to see it.

So it was a huge deal to my mom because a lot of people have the first piercing and it's considered a small thing. It's considered cute. A lot of moms get one for kids when they are just months old. And my mom actually did the first one for me before I was able to decide for myself. But she says one is the maximum. You should stop at that. When you get the second one people assume you're doing too much. It's like you're starting to go overboard with the whole thing. It gives you a certain rep and you are assumed to be a bad girl, having more than one. So it means if I get a second one, I'll get another one, and a third one and a fourth one and I'm going to want a piercing somewhere else." (10/13/2022)

Singing

My dad's younger sister, I think I told you about her, she lived with us for the longest time and so when I was young, very very young, she was in high school and she would come home with these CDs and they were full of music. They would play them around the house before school. And there is a radio station called Classic 105 and every morning before school they would be playing on the radio. I grew up on Celine Dion and Shania Twain and they used to play a lot of *kitambo* songs, you know, songs from the 90s, a long time ago.

On graduation day, *PP 2* graduating to *Class* 1 and *Class* 8 graduating to secondary school, different classes had to come up with different things to do. We were doing a *Luo* song and another teacher taught us a *Meru* song. The teachers would tell you to go home and write a song and come back and teach the class and we will choose one to be performed and they chose mine. It was a *Kikuyu* song that my mom wrote for me. The thing I like about those folk songs and I appreciate that I grew up doing them is that it teaches you a lot of different languages. Like I can sing *Luo* for a song. I can sing *Kamba* for a song. Like they are quite a number so that it's nice to have so much to know, so much variety. These are the traditional songs, so we

still have those, like my mother singing around the house. So I love those because like in high school, we were so many and from different tribes so you had to learn everyone's song and you find that you know a little bit of Luo, you know a little bit of *Kamba*, you know a little bit of *Kikuyu*. It's the best! That's why I like them because they teach you a lot!

I just knew that I liked music and listening to songs but I didn't know I could sing until *Class 7.* We had our first music festival then and this teacher arranged for us to go to the festival. And so girls went for auditioning. They were trying to find people to join the choir. The trainer, who had been brought in for the auditioning, he would press a key and tell you to sing. When it came my time, I was getting everyone right. I was in tune and singing nicely apparently. He was like, hey, did you know you can sing? And, I was like, No. So we were doing group stuff and he was like you need to have a solo. You need to have a trio. You need to have a duet. But unfortunately, we proceeded to the next stage but the school didn't allow us to go.

So when I got to high school it became clear that I could sing. But the first thing everyone said is don't join the Music Society. It will waste your time and people in music society are undisciplined. Our physics teacher was so against it because if you go to music fest you miss classes and he used to call them *anasa.* It's like a Swahili word. How do I explain it? It's like fun, too much fun. *Anasa* is like going clubbing every day and all that. I joined regardless. I remember in *Form* 1 there was a musical with Joseph in Egypt. And it was the best. It was the best thing ever. There were costumes and all that and you were so excited. It was such a great experience to just try new things and do all that.

I'm not a very expressive person and when I'm going through things, I'll keep quiet. I feel like music is a form of expressing yourself, expressing your emotions, and you can get lost

in it in the best way possible. I am shy and I do have stage fright and you start your shaky shaky but then you really get lost. I feel like when I'm singing, I get a different character, like I'm not Furaha, the quiet girl. You become a different person, like you tune the whole world out. I love it because it exposes you to new people and it did build my confidence definitely. In *Form 1* I had a few songs for Music Festival. For *Form* 2 I had a solo and things that just require you to stand up and be seen and I'm not really one who likes to be seen. I just like being in my corner in the moment. I'm usually very introverted and singing has helped me get out of my comfort zone and chase my ambitions. So it has definitely built my confidence. It's so wild! It's so wild! It infatuates me how wild it is! There's so many genres. I mean like music is just a world of possibilities!" (10/24/22; 10/30/2022)

Learning to Drive a Car

"I want to tell you something exciting I did this week. I drove a car for the first time! Is that weird or is that funny? I'm nineteen. So the first time I drove a car I was nineteen years old and it was a manual! I've always wanted to drive and I was so excited to learn. One of our neighbors, her name was Kylie, I was hanging out with her and her dad called her to come and go for the driving lesson. I was seated in the back and the only thing going through my mind was oh, my goodness! She's so lucky. How amazing that she gets to do that!

So my school has a driving school and back in October I had talked to my dad and he had accepted to pay for it. The problem with the driving schools are they are a bit pricey but the one for the school was cheaper and I got to start this week. So I went there on Tuesday and the funny thing is that I was the only one on that day so I had the class to myself. And the instructor was like, oh, you're really lucky because other days it's sharing the car. So normally you have class for a week before they let you drive but I got to drive on Tuesday. We got to the field

where people usually practice and he just gave me the basics. This is the gear. This is the clutch. These are brakes and this is how you turn on your blinkers and everything. I was so nervous because I was like, I think you should know I've never done this before. He was telling me if it was automatic it would have been so easy so I struggled a little bit but in a few I understood it and I was driving and I was so excited. He was like it normally takes a lot for people to understand but you're like a natural.

So on Wednesday I drove again and he said Let's go to the highway. It wasn't the highway but it was a two car lane that's not very busy. But I was still a bit anxious. I had a million excuses ready but he wasn't taking any of that. So I ended up driving and doing better than the others in the car. It helped me get over my fear and stop limiting myself and not believing in me because that's what was happening. I was like, no, everyone is going to do so much better than me. And after I did that I thought why was I focusing so much on doing better than other people? It was not even a competition. We were all there to learn. I should just take it as, you know, a way to better myself, to help myself, to stop focusing on other things and other people.

It's also motivated me to get my own car because you have so much control. You can go wherever you want and you're not limited by public transport. You don't have to worry about safety, like walking in town at night. On Wednesday I had the written first and I learned about signs and all that. I feel like I'm still struggling a bit because like it's so hard to push the stick to change the gears but it feels so motivational. It's like yes, let me do this. Let me learn now. I don't want to stop. I want to keep going. It's like opening a new door with new possibilities and I'm very excited." (12/2/22)

Applying to Boarding School on My Own

"When I was in *Class 7* the school I was in was very close to home, walking distance, and my school started a boarding facility and all my friends boarded. And so every morning I went to school they would just tell me stories of how fun it was. How at 7:00 PM they went to the swings and they made stories in the dark and woke up and had breakfast together. You know, during the day you are in classes and you do not have that much time together but you see, like at 4:00 PM when the classes are over, you have time to talk and do all that and so I felt left out at home and I told my dad that I want to go to boarding school and he was like, no, it's not happening. Nope! My dad was like what do you need boarding school for. And so that went on for weeks. And so I bugged him. One day I just went to the headmaster's office and I told him would you kindly give me all the requirements for boarding school. My parents want to see them. And I took those requirements and I went home and I just placed them on the table so when my dad came home he'd see them. Finally, he gave in but within the first week I was homesick and I was like what? How am I getting myself out of this situation when I'm the one who said I wanted to be in boarding school. But then those feelings ended and I was good. But I thank God that I did because now that if I didn't that would mean that when I went to high school that would be my first boarding experience away from home." (10/23/2022)

Being a Flower Girl

"So this friend of the family requested my mom to allow me to be a flower girl in his wedding. During those days that was such such such a privilege. That was before 2012 and weddings were a big big deal. We used to go for practice like to practice the entry to the church and it was the one moment where you get to have the shiney, shiney things. I don't know what you call it. Oh, glitter! You got to have glitter on you. And that was amazing. And going to school the next day to have glitter on you was like, yes, I'm from a wedding.

The most exciting part of the wedding was walking down the aisle with your new male friend. We went down the aisle like two people, like partners. And the thing is, how do I say it? The awkwardness. The awkwardness came from the fact that at that age girls are like, oh, my goodness, boys and boys are like oh, my goodness, girls. And your partner has to be a boy. The whole thing is giggles and all that, and your friends making fun of you and saying like, Furaha, sitting in a tree, K I S S I N G.

The other fun part was when the bride and the groom were taking pictures. It's like a tradition where the groom carries the bride in his arms. It's very rare here to see adults showing affection in public so to see the groom carrying the bride was a "What are they doing?" moment. That and the kiss in the church.

I loved my dress. It was white cream and had little green flowers. And the shoes were so nice. There was this lady that would take our measurements for everyone and the dress would be made by the same person and they look exactly the same. You can't wear them like before the wedding. You try them on in the morning before the wedding. It's a princess moment!" (9/30/22)

Experiences in the Meso Spaces of Kenyan Culture and Traditions

Speaking Three (or More) Languages

"Like I see people on the internet being so shocked when someone is speaking English, Swahili, and something else. So like when people are speaking one language, I'm like, What? You're supposed to know at least three! Over here you grow up learning three. You grow up with them and it is so easy when you're young. It is so much easier learning it than when you are older. And, you know, it's just instinct. You'll start speaking English, then you'll go to *Swahili* and then you go to *Mother Tongue* and you'll go back. You'll bounce between languages

based on so many different things, like certain topics. If we were speaking in like *Kikuyu* and we started talking about things that are more scientific, I do not know the terms in *Kikuyu* so I will tend to like go to English. If we were talking, let's say about COVID 19 or a certain disease and we are talking about the hospital and you're talking about certain medications and the doctors, I would switch from *Kikuyu* to like English because that's where I will be able to speak about the terms even better. And then, if we move to another topic and I am familiar with the vocabulary, like if we're just talking about TV shows, mostly it's *Swahili*. But basically most of the time you don't even realize when you are doing it. Honestly, it just flows.

In my house if it's serious or official or something to do with school or something, mostly it's *Swahili.* My dad will switch to English once in a while then. If it's instructions or something of the sort my mom tends to talk to me in *Kikuyu*, not all of the time, some of the time. I feel like I go in and out of these spaces and sometimes it's like it's not good. So sometimes I tell her, mom, you know, speak to me in *Kikuyu* so that I can clock in a bit more. And that's when she'll speak to me in *Kikuyu*. Here's the thing, mostly when she's speaking to me in *Kikuyu,* I'll reply in *Swahili*.

When I'm in *Nyeri*, it's easier to work on my *Kikuyu* because my grandma will speak to me in *Kikuyu.* But also I struggled in *Nyeri* because whenever I went there the *Kikuyu* was a bit different than when I was in Nairobi. My mom and my dad talked *Kikuyu* to each other all the time so when they're talking to each other they'll use all *Kikuyu* but when they're talking to us they would use some *Swahili*, some English, so that we get it. Okay, like if they want to tell me to pass a spoon, they'll say the word in *Kikuyu* and pass me the spoon. I was OK with *Kikuyu* but I wasn't very good.

I remember I had the toughest time, I had a problem with the greetings in Nyeri. It's not just like they have like the normal greetings that all people use. So when we went to my great grandmother's, she's passed now, we would stand at the gate and she'd be like repeating the greetings and we used to have a whole lesson every time. I don't know why it was so hard for me to get it. It took me years. I can't say it took me years cause I still feel like I haven't really mastered it. Language is definitely one of the problems that was there.

And so when we went to *Nyeri* and my cousins are playing with their friends and all that and they are talking *Kikuyu*, it would be, I would be a little bit left out because I couldn't understand like very very well. For example, we were going somewhere or we were playing games, I'd be bored because I'd be like, I'm not really understanding. So I'd stay away from the rest for sometime. But when it was just my cousins, they were flexible. They could speak anything but their friends could not. Most of them did not speak *Swahili* or English. So my cousins adjusted whenever their friends came but I couldn't make that sudden change. It made me feel left out and I'll tell you an example. There is this cousin of mine. We are so close in age, a lot of my cousins are. We are like one year apart so with one of my cousins she had this friend of hers who is also a cousin but a very distant cousin. Whenever we were the three of us, you know, whenever the other girl came and they're speaking *Kikuyu* to each other and they're laughing and doing all of that I used to feel so bad and I just used to leave and I'd be like, it's OK but what I remember is that it would make me be like I just want to learn so that I can interact with everyone the same way. It was definitely a challenge!

And another thing, but it's not in *Nyeri* now but in *Laikipia* where my mom is from. Now there I'd have the toughest time talking to my cousins because most of them, like to this day, they are a bit better in *Swahili.* They speak *Kikuyu*. They are not good with like English and

all of that so that's where I had the toughest time. So whenever we went I couldn't talk to anyone and my sister was very very quiet and it was only my mom, my dad, my sister and I. When we got there and we met my other cousins and my sister was older than me so she was allowed to have a phone and I'm just bored. I like playing but I can't play with these children because we don't know the same games. We don't speak the same language and my sister would be in a corner by herself because she's bored also because there's no electricity so she can't charge her phone. I used to hate it honestly,

But we've grown to understand why we have to go there because my grandmother lives there. So right now when we go there we are going with an agenda. We are going to see *cucu* and it's good because she's nice but back then we didn't understand. And so, we used to beg our dad, that we're like No, please. Do we have to go back? Let me just go there for one day. And you can't tell your mom because that will hurt her. She wouldn't understand it and we don't want to hurt her feelings. So we just suck it up and stay there.

I feel like speaking three languages has made me very flexible. When I'm in school I speak English because that's the official language so I have mastered the art of speaking it in official settings. When we go to the rural areas, especially my mom's side, not a lot of people speak English and it's mostly *Kikuyu*. I've just learned to switch, like I'm not rigid. And at home I'm speaking *Swahili* most of the time." (9/23/22; 12/15/22; 5/2/2023)

Family Roles, Relationships, and Responsibilities

"I feel like I grew up with the knowledge that the responsibilities in the house are supposed to be the girl's responsibility. Things like cleaning and cooking and all of that. My mom was a stay-at-home mom for a long period of my growing up. There are some girls, based on their culture, they grew up with the knowledge they were learning to clean and cook for their

husbands. In my case, I was raised with the knowledge of learning to cook so that when I move out I don't starve myself. I don't have to buy take out. I have the skills and know how to prepare something for myself. I was also raised in the knowledge that I am a girl and I have to be clean all of the time. I learned how to wash dishes, how to wash my own clothes. Honestly, I think most of my close friends have the same narrative.

When we were growing up, when my cousins came or we went to *Nyeri*, when it came to things like washing clothes, doing the dishes, cooking, those would all be the girls' responsibilities and getting food for the cows, the boys would do that and they would be sent for the shopping. They wouldn't accept to do things like doing the dishes and washing the clothes. We girls were like we can't continue doing everything because theirs was minimal and ours would be everyday. We used to be like these boys go for an hour and do something and come back and they have nothing else to do. And they'd be like your work is so simple. So that's when my cousins and I talked to our aunts and my mom and we told them we were not comfortable with the whole separation of chores. We were in *Form* 2, I think, at the time. They said we should try to switch chores so we switched for the day. They did the home chores and we did the ones the boys were going to do and it was horror! Maybe because we weren't used to it, I don't know, but we were like, it's OK, we can go back to the usual. Theirs was little but it required strength and stamina and all that but ours was softer and we would take longer. The only thing we did that day was to go try to get grass for the cow and my cousin cut herself and it was just this whole catastrophe. But now, if the boys are not going to chop the firewood or they're not going for the cows, the work is divided at home. And now, it's not the same anymore. Now we share chores and all that.

People here, it's just how they've been taught. You know, they grew up seeing their mom in the kitchen and not the dad. For like the generation that are the Millennials, their generation, like my uncles, not all of them will necessarily accept to go to the kitchen and do something. But like for me and my cousins who are my age, now when we are all together as a family we'll be like the girls will make lunch and the boys will make supper.

Right from school we are taught here, one thing that we are taught, and this used to be such a common question on *CRE* tests, right from *Class* One to *Class* Three, who is the head of the family? The choices just used to be father, mother, children and obviously the answer was father. I know that in most homes what I've seen mostly is the father who makes the decisions. You'll ask your mom can I go out and they'll tell you Okay but go ask your dad. And it's not for me only but for my friends. Even growing up most children are afraid of their father just because the dad holds the power in the house. So something that you grow up with around the clock doesn't seem as weird because it's what we're used to.

When I got that dog bite I went to the kitchen and told my mom in a low voice because I didn't want my dad to hear. At that time when I was younger, I used to fear dad so much. I felt like he would be angry at me. I don't know why I was so anxious. I think, well, growing up the men are usually like the authority figure. Everyone that I have had a discussion with when they were younger, they used to be afraid of their dad. It's like when you are seated in the sitting room, this is for most of my friends and I, and your dad comes home home from work you just leave and go to the bedroom. I don't know why it just happens. At this point, I'm thinking maybe because you weren't interacting as much because he goes to his office the whole day and I spent the day with my mom. She wasn't working and when she was working, she had a shop and the shop was like inside the house and there was like a window where she would sell from.

He was like an authority figure. So like in every household there's the seat for the dad and when he comes in you just stand up and move to another one. It's just little things like those ones that used to happen. But right now, it's not like that 'cause I can sit somewhere and he'll come and he will sit somewhere else. I also feel like if you do something bad, you just feel like they have more strength so if they punish you, it's going to be bad.

But growing up obviously is when you begin questioning some things, some tiny, tiny things that go on around you because I remember we had these heated discussions in class in high school about things to do with the family system. So many girls supported the opinion that we should break some of the cycles we were brought up around. The man should not be the only one in the family making a decision, especially decisions concerning children. So, for example, my dad says Furaha will go to boarding school. My mom should also be able to give her opinion on that.

And then the question came in where the father is the one providing. I remember one thing we observed was that when the man is the one providing that's mostly when the woman is not allowed to have an opinion. That's just the way it is. We didn't even think about it but afterwards, I'm saying like when we are grown, now we think about it. It's not like I grew up around like much of it because my mom does give her opinion a lot on most of the things and they do pass. It's not really something that was very obvious. It's not something that made me uncomfortable. You know if you're brought up from a child knowing that tea should be taken with bread you don't really question it a lot. When you get tired of taking tea with bread is when you're going to start questioning, like why can't I take it with cake?

One thing also in high school was our physics teacher. He was a chauvinist, a male chauvinist and he was very opinionated about things that did not even involve him. He would

just come and say a certain statement and then just leave. Like he can't believe we live in a society where a woman can employ a man. I do not know whether he knew he was riling us up, whether he did it intentionally but we used to be so livid. And he would just continue with the physics concept. We would just look at each other. We were so shocked. He used to say things in class and we would just let them pass because some of the things for so uncalled for. He never used to hide it. He believes women should be in the kitchen and he would say things like if we put you in a competition with the boys' school right now in the physics exam that would defeat them because if our mean score was higher than theirs that would make them less of a man because how could a man be defeated by a woman. These are the things that make you start questioning why is this? And then you realize these families that just have a single mother, you can't say the dad is the head of the family in that situation. So things like those are the ones that, you know, made us start questioning things we were so used to seeing around us.

Honestly, what I would want and what I will stand for in a relationship is that we have to make decisions together. I think teamwork makes the team work and you can't just take everything in your own hands. I feel like we should have mutual respect from the most crucial matters to the least crucial matters, if you are deciding on curtains to put on the windows, buying bedding and everything, they'll tell you those are the things women will buy and if you are buying a house, they'll tell you the man will take care of it. I think we should both go buy the house and we can both come and choose the bedding to put on the beds. Just equality, you know. With respect, of course." (9/16/22; 10/6/2022; 10/13/2022; 12/15/2022; 2/5/2023; 3/5/2023).

African Aunties

"Aunties! It's a love-hate relationship. So we have this thing here where your child is not just your child, it is the child of the community. A lot of Aunties feel the need to poke into your business. They feel the need to make their opinions very valid, very known to you. So, personally, my aunts are more from my dad's side. They're very modern. If I can say like they are very modern, they live in the now. But there are some that are very cultural. I couldn't go in a dress like I am wearing today to a family reunion. It would be very inappropriate.

So for me, I think I am a bit young. I haven't had a lot of experiences with them, but I can tell you the experiences my aunties had with their aunties. So there's my dad's younger sister. She's the one that lived with us when I was very very young and she just moved out a few years ago. We had like a big sister/small sister relationship. She would always guide me in like things to do with school, making decisions, friends. And then I got a bit older and even right now, things to do with boys. I just go to her. She's just that cool auntie, like she'll be my gossip partner, not in a malicious way but you'll just talk about everything.

This auntie, she believes it's her body. She can do whatever she wants. So she shaved on this side of her hair and then the other other side and her hair was on top. So we went to the family gathering, my grandmother's sisters' side, and one of my grandmother's sisters was like, How can you get a husband with hair like that and she said this to her in front of people and in front of children. She would say something very snarky and then say like in a sarcastic way, *lakini maisha ni yako.* And anything my aunt would wear would be a problem. She'd be like you can't go serve your father when you're wearing that. You can't go to church in that. And the funny thing, this whole time my grandmother didn't have a problem with any of that. But that Auntie was very on my aunt's case about everything and so my aunt hated her and they have a very complicated relationship up to now. That was the first family gathering.

At the second family gathering she had a butterfly tattoo right over her left breast and the other aunt did not fail to tell her that what she had done was not right, that tattoos are demonic. She used to tell my grandmother she shouldn't condone such a thing in her house; you shouldn't give them so much freedom. For them it is a love-hate relationship with their aunts so they have tried their best to not be judgmental about our decisions. You see these memes about African aunties and I can tell you 100% that it is true. Some of them are brutal.

My aunties show me every day to live life on your own terms, you know. Don't let anyone dictate because if they started listening to their aunties they would be scared like doing their hair a certain way. So they just do what they want, what is good for them. I'm close to pretty much all of them. They're good companions. They are my best cheerleaders and I'm thankful that they have also taught us the importance of a like a family unit. Them and my parents, every small holiday we are together. They have taught us how important it is to stay together and live together in harmony and to not hold grudges because they're four girls and they fight all the time but then they come together and hash it all out and they're good. They also don't let their grudges affect our relationships with my cousins. And my mom, she shows me every day how strong she is and that encourages me. They brought us up with so much love and security and they've talked about loving the people closest to you and just giving your all." (9/16/22; 5/2/2023; 5/20/2023)

Christmas Traditions

"We don't have Santa growing up but we did have certain traditions. Christmas is to be all about new clothes. The exciting thing is you would get a whole new set of clothes on Christmas Day and we used to have matching clothes, like my sister and I, and matching shoes,

matching hair styles. We used to love it. It was such a privilege. Getting braids on our hair was the best thing you could get as a child and so we used to be so happy.

You start disturbing your mom in December, reminding her that she has to go buy for Christmas. Our parents used to go to this place in Nairobi and buy those clothes and they bring them home like four days before Christmas. So you could see them but you can't wear them until Christmas Day. And it's just anticipation building and building and building because you've seen them and you feel like they are so pretty but you're not allowed to wear them yet. So what my mom would do is tweak our clothes a little bit just so my sister doesn't look completely like me. Like the same shoes and sweaters the same color. This picture was taken at a certain salon we used to go to and someone just came and did that set up and the carpet and the background and the small tree. So we went and got our pictures taken.

And we used to spend Christmas at my grandparent's place in Nyeri. We would stand together for pictures with our cousins in our matchy, matchy clothes and play games and play some music. Back then music was like a luxury because of the radio and all that and radios weren't everywhere. So at that age another thing that excited us was being together and playing hide and seek. During the day our moms would wake up and they would cook and they would do everything. And then they would come and lay out your clothes. Oh, my goodness! I remember we would be so impatient, like you just want to wear your Christmas clothes because you are so excited. The women would be in the kitchen cooking like *pilau, chapati, kachumbari* and everything else. And after they finished cooking, they would come and get us all dressed up and you'd feel brand new.

And the men would be on the other side of the house like doing the roast meat. That's the day that we get to eat a lot of meat. And another thing is *chapati.* A while back *chapati* used

to be like a luxury according to how our parents tell us because they didn't have it as much as we did. These days, you know, *chapati* is a bit more common but back then, like eight or ten years ago, it used to be a big deal. And the thing that made it interesting was that when the mom was cooking the *chapati,* you're not allowed to have any until they are all done. And that used to kill us! You anticipated so much. I think that was what put the fun it in, just waiting. So you shower first, you wear your new Christmas clothes, and then you sit down and eat meat and *chapati.*

A tradition that we have built in our family is that every Christmas we slaughter a goat. And the interesting thing is there is this part of the goat that only men can eat. It's the scapula, the shoulder part of the goat. It's like a flat bone. So the men bring a platter of roasted meat and serve it to everyone, and whatever man is served that bone, when he finishes eating it he has to pierce it. If he forgets to pierce it, he has to buy a goat for the homestead for next Christmas. And it's usually my dad that gets that piece.

We did a Christmas tree once. We had like decorations and everything. Our neighbor has a place where it has Christmas trees growing, those trees that are used as Christmas trees. So we went. Those guys that have something in their *shamba* that they don't need, they don't sell it to you. They just give it to you. They have it in plenty and it doesn't make sense for them to sell it and so my grandfather talked to the person and we went and the guys cut the Christmas tree and we brought it to the house and we decorated it. It was so hectic and such a mess and we did not know what we were doing for the life of us. By the time we got it in the house it did have a couple of branches left. The experience was nice and it was the thought that counted."
(9/23/2022; 11/16/2022; 12/22/22)

Religion

"I go to church most Sundays. I am Catholic. The back story is my mom was born and raised a Presbyterian and my dad was born and raised Catholic. Since childhood I've been going to the Catholic Church. You start with Sunday School where you're basically taught all the basics about Jesus but we also learn about that in CRE, Christian Religious Education that's compulsory in primary school. And you know, in boarding school, you have to list a church that you go to when you're getting in. You fill a form and they ask if you're Christian or Muslim and whether if you're Christian, if you're Catholic, Protestant, or Seventh Day Adventist. There's certain times for them meeting in school. So we used to have church on Thursday after classes, on Saturday night, and on Sunday morning. I had started my catechism classes but I never did my exam so I wasn't baptized. So when I went to high school when the catechism classes were made available to us, I went for the classes and in 2019 I got baptized.

I remember there was a time when we didn't go to church like at my home. We didn't go to church for like 6 months and one day my dad just woke up and he was like, No, we cannot continue like this. Tomorrow is Sunday. Everyone is waking up early. We will go to church together. But at some point, I did ask myself was I being forced to go. But I don't think it was forcing, it was just reminding us we didn't go to church.

As a Christian I would say there is a distinction between being a church-goer and having a relationship with Jesus, a relationship with God, a personal relationship. You can go to church and not have a relationship with God and you can have a relationship with God and not go to church. It's more about my relationship with God. I love God. I feel like my thing with religion is all about faith. Believing in God gives me hope for tomorrow. I choose to believe that you live, you die, and then you are born to eternal life. It gives me something to hope for in the future, you know, after life.

So I remember there was a time when I had a few questions for my dad who has been raised a Catholic. I shared my concerns with him and I felt like I should take a step back and evaluate whether I wanted to continue going to that church and he was OK with it. Right now, I feel like church has become more of a business. It's like commercial and having churches is like having a job. And so my dad was saying some churches are not following the genuine teachings of the Bible and they are following the other side which is dark and you find yourself associating with things that are not right and being brain-washed. So that's why he wanted me to be careful and I did sit and evaluate everything and I found myself just staying in my faith and focusing on my relationship with God and the Bible. There are these Catholic books that have some of the doctrines in them and I found one and was able to get the answers to most of the questions that I had on why you do this and why you do that. It all goes back to faith. I do have my moments of confusion.

Everyone feels that we have to go to church to be able to feel good or that they are connected to God but for me I feel like I need that, how do I say it, like support from fellow Christians where we just sit and fellowship together. During the week I'm just carried away by everything that's going on so I don't even have time to meditate on the word and everything so I feel like church is usually just good for me to go and learn a few things.

I love learning about the Bible and knowing more. Like I have an aunt of mine who goes to a certain Bible study and so every time she goes she has to tell me something that was taught. So for me, I feel like when I go to church I have such an amazing week, even though it's going to be the worst week, it's still going to be good because I just had that reminder that everything is going to be OK because God is on top of things.

So this past Sunday the reading was about Lazarus and rising from the dead and the priest was emphasizing that usually the resurrection was the main point of the story. But the main point is what Lazarus did with his life afterwards. That was what was important, how you live your life, how you live with other people. And my aunt had another take from this story. So my Aunt's take was when Jesus got to the tomb he could have easily moved the stone himself but he didn't. He told the people there to move the stone and then he did the work the people could not do. So she told me that's also what God expects from us. We have to do our part and let him do the rest. And that's another thing that I like about teachings. Everyone usually picks up something different." (1/23/2023; 3/27/2023)

Ancestral Spirits

"In some cultures people believe in ancestral spirits so my aunt highlighted that for me. Some things happen, like ancestral spirits disturb people and she was giving me an example of one of her brothers-in-law. Before their dad died, the brother-in-law owed the dad money. And the dad was like even when I die you still have to pay the money I lent you. Unfortunately, the dad died and the guy still owed the dad money. So he forgot about it. He didn't think much of the words that the dad had uttered. And so, randomly, his first-born son started getting sick, like really really sick and they would go to the hospital. They would go to the doctors. So, I think I've told you about the naming system where the first-born son is named after the grandfather on the male side. So this son was named after that grandfather. My aunt told me that if the ancestral spirit is not pleased, he would not directly attack the dad, he would attack whoever is named after him, in this case his son. So they went to the doctors for a long long time and they would not find anything wrong with the child but he was sick and he was dying.

And so one day someone mentioned to the woman something about the whole system of beliefs about ancestors and she went back and asked her husband if there was anything he might have promised his dad that he's going to do and he never did. So they figured it out that he owed the dad money. So the woman sought out help, like the elders, and they told her, yes, that could be a reason and so she told her husband that they had to do something to appease his father so that he stops and the son can be Ok and not be on the road to death. And so they did it. It normally starts with like an animal sacrifice or something of this sort and then they found someone who is an older person who is named after the grandfather and the man went to that person named after the grandfather and he says dad, here's the money I owed you. And immediately after that like the child was OK. He bounced back to full health.

And so my aunt is telling me this and this is someone she knows. I don't know how I feel about it and that's not the first time I've heard of something like that. Why would someone who's dead hold that much power over the living? Why would this grandfather want to harm his son's son? That's one aspect of the culture that I can tell you for sure that I am not comfortable with. It's called a curse and it can happen in so many situations. Like if your parent tells you something like, before I die buy me a sweater because I've raised you and I've given you an education. If the parent dies without that thing being resolved then it's believed that bad things happen. So it's a really disturbing part about our culture. So if you're correcting your child or telling them you want something from them, you have to say in English, It's not a curse. Otherwise it is believed that it's going to come back to whoever you told it to, especially the words of a parent or grandparent. It's disturbing to me in the fact that I've heard of two cases of that happening and the people involved swear that's what it was. I don't understand how it is possible." (01/16/2023)

Dowry

"Did I talk to you about the dowry giving ceremony? So there is a time when, I think he is my uncle, and he was going to marry this lady. It was the first dowry ceremony and I was with my grandmother and my mom and we didn't stay for long. The first part of it where they were begging to get in the homestead. So this is what happens. You carry like baskets and goats and you sing to the owners of the house so they will let you in. So you sing at the gate and my grandmother was the one leading the songs and then when they let you in the gate you sing at the door of the house. You have to sing and give them something else like money or something for you to get in. And they can say no until they are satisfied and then when you get in the house where it's about negotiation. This whole time it's only the spokesperson of the man and the spokesperson of the girl that are present. The girl is not allowed to come out. She is not allowed to be seen by the man until they come to a conclusion. It's the man reassuring the girl that they are going to take care of her and he is going to give her everything she needs. You pay basically things like farm products, animals, and money. So after all of that the girl is given to the man and they feed each other from a calabash and that like finishes the whole ceremony. That's the first ceremony.

So after that one is when you have the other ceremony where the man has to prove he knows the girl. So if I'm the bride, I'll find my friends who are around my height and body size and then we'll wear *shukas* and cover ourselves and the man will have to guess which is his bride. If he chooses the wrong one, he has to pay and guess again. And if he chooses wrong again he has to pay until he gets his bride right. I have seen two of those ones and in one the bride had an agreement with the man. At a certain moment I am going to do something so he will know it is me and this is the movement I will make.

At first, to be honest, I judged that part of my culture. I was like, so does this mean that you're selling the bride to the man? And I remember we had a very heated conversation with my sisters, my mom, and my aunt (my mom's sister) because my sister was like she doesn't want drama like that during her wedding. So my aunt was explaining to my sister how it is. If you leave that part of it and don't do those things, your first years of marriage are OK. And then they get their first baby and it dies and then like misfortunes after misfortunes and it's all because you didn't do the dowry ceremony. You didn't ask for the girl's hand in marriage correctly. You didn't follow all the practices and steps.

My sister and I were very skeptical and we were like this is a very outdated culture that needs to just be forgotten because it's basically you just selling the girl, selling a girl to a man, and that's why they feel like they own you because they have basically paid for you. And so after a while, personally it didn't stop there, I talked to my mom and another aunt (my dad's younger sister) because she knows a lot about culture. She said it's just basically a way to show respect. I asked how do you know what to pay and she told me there are some factors to be considered. For example, a girl who has reached university and a girl who has reached high school, they are not going to pay the same. The parents of a girl who has reached university are going to demand more for *Mischana wetu anasoma.* But to be honest when my aunt explained to me a little bit more and I started understanding it is culture, I was like OK, if it has to be done, it's going to be done. And I realize there is another part where it's supposed to be appreciation. You appreciate the man for what he has given.

So there's this song, *Sura Yako,* by the group Sauti Sol and the video itself is a group of people coming to give dowry to the dowry to the girl, a celebration of the dowry tradition, praising the girl and saying I will take care of her. The most famous line of this song, *umekalia*

chapati, was controversial here. So it means like the woman is the one in control of the man and he has accepted that. It means you're strict on someone in slang. She has been able to tame him. Like she has made him flat and humble and he's like bowing to her. In the song, it's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. But normally when you say *umekaliwa chapati,* it's like a funny way of saying someone is strict on you. It's basically giving her respect, like she has all of him. At the time it was popular it's the part of the song that many people liked and many married couples agreeing. It was so funny to people because it's like irony because traditionally the man is the head of the family, the decision maker but these days many of them have been *umekaliwa chapati* and the women are the ones running things and making decisions." (9/16/2022; 4/5/2023)

Boarding School/Education

"First of all, here, going to boarding school is very normal. From the movies I have seen is that in America boarding schools are not a common thing, like when you've been a bad child you're sent to boarding school. But here, all the good high schools are boarding schools. I have a love-hate relationship with boarding school. My biggest issue was just being there and not knowing what was going on at home, not given access to a lot of things, no phones, no TV but you are with your friends 24/7. You don't get bored. It does give you more time to study because you know, at home it can be a bit tough. And for some boarding school was an escape. Like when we are leaving school for breaks some girls are genuinely excited to leave but some are not. In as much as we were happy, we had to be careful not to hurt someone's feelings because of those who were like not excited. You know over here at school you get every meal and some of them, they are not getting every meal at home. And like here when you're not feeling well you can go to the nurse but at home you can't.

The key thing about boarding school is like independence. So I was really used to my mom doing a lot of things for me like washing my clothes and preparing things for me but you know in school you are doing everything for yourself, washing your own clothes, and like you are cleaning certain areas for yourself. And you can't choose people you are in the same room with. It's random selection and you know, you just learn to accommodate others. To be honest, the Student Council puts people in rooms and you would find they put their friends in their cubes. You know you may not want to be on fourth floor and climb stairs but they put you where they want. It's really like the government. You can't really change anything. You know, you tell the administration about the favoritism going on but at the end of the day they are not going to do much. I think I have learned to adapt and like you just go with the flow.

And also it's definitely a place where you can teach yourself to be your own person. You know at home you have a safety net with your parents. Your mom will say, let me not see you with that person again and so you are in the control of your parents. But at boarding school you have to make your own decisions and you have to make the right ones. It teaches you to be your own person, to do what you believe in, to do what is right.

Another thing we struggle with in boarding school is the food. There are some used to fancier meals and here you are all one. There is no fanciness. You have to take what is given. And here there are fee-payers and non-fee payers so you know, there can't be any, "I come from here and this is how I want to be treated." No, boarding school makes you all be treated the same and you get to see different lives of people. I really do appreciate going to boarding school. It really opens your eyes to many things. To someone who has better than me they might think my situation is bad but when I have seen someone who has had less growing up, it really opens your eyes to so many things. Like I remember when one classmate would tell me she'll wake up and

she'll go to the river to get water and she does her laundry and she has younger sisters and she does their laundry too. You know, I just don't expect things like this to happen at this modern time. So we are used to tap water and not everyone has that.

And when we come back from holiday, me and my friends, some friends of ours who maybe are living the same life I am, we'd be talking about TikTok trends and something we saw on the internet and you have to be sensitive to and know that someone next to you doesn't have internet in the house, doesn't have wi-fi. They would have loved to participate in those things and you can get bummed out, acknowledging that you have something that someone else doesn't have. And, you know how some things excite people like I have friends who say when I finish *Form 4* I will get my own phone and they are feeling so happy but for someone else this is not a big deal because they have had a phone for such a long time. I thank God for seeing this because even if you don't have much it makes you appreciate what you have.

So here in Kenya we have two major exams. In *Class 8* you do your *KCPE* and this determines which high school you are going to. So we have levels of high schools and the levels are based on how the whole school does on the *KCPE* exam so like national schools only pick students who perform 400 and above in the *KCPE*. So some months before your exam you choose like a certain number of schools at each level that you want to go to and then when results are out the schools will pick the students they want based on their performance. Nobody looks at your grades; they just look at how you perform on that one exam. And that's why it's very controversial because you could be a great performer but during your *KCPE* you just don't perform at your expectations and it's done.

Now for high school when you get to *Form 4* you do the one exam, the *KCSE*, and the grade that you get determines the course you can do in university. But let me explain our course

of study first. You have technicals. Like in our school, the technicals were computer, agriculture, business, music, French and German. So in *Form 1* you do three of these, you choose between business and agriculture, music, French or German, and then you have computer. And then in *Form 2* is when you're required to drop all the other technicals and remain with one. I remained with music. The main subjects are maths, English, Kiswahili, chemistry, biology, physics, geography, history and *CRE.* And then you have to choose so that you have eight subjects and the eight subjects are the ones that are examined at the end of your high school. By the time you sit for your *KCSE* you have to have eight subjects. If it was up to me I would have done music and a language. I'm very, I like languages. So I would have probably taken music and French instead of computer. Honestly, I wish they had that option. It definitely is kind of like pushing you in a tight space.

So back to the *KCSE*, we have these things to get into university called cluster points. Every course of study has certain cluster points that you have to get to do that course and every university has different cluster points and the better the university, the higher the cluster points. So cluster points for medicine can be from 40 and above, engineering is like medicine, business is like 30-35. The cluster points have nothing to do with the grades you made all along in school. It's just the grades you get on the *KCSE*. It's really not very fair. And this exam has so much pressure and anxiety around it. You know, I've seen some people be the best performers in school and then they get a B+ or a B on the exam. It ends up messing a lot of people up. It's like basically putting your eggs in one basket. And there's no way out. It's very hard here to change from one course to another. (5/30/2022; 12/2/22; 2/27/2023; 4/30/2023; 6/27/2023)

Challenges Women Face

So there's a lunch thing for graduates of my boarding school, a young alumni mentorship kind of thing. One of the speakers was called Irene Kendi (a loved one) and she gave us her life story of how she came up from a small village in *Meru* and didn't have a lot. Her mom had 4 girls and finally her dad left her because she was not giving him boys. It was in those times where it was like you have to have a boy child to be considered wealthy. But for Kendi, when she was born her dad accepted her and called her Kendi which means loved.

So her mom had a small stand for selling potatoes and tomatoes and those kinds of things and Kendi would go to school and come back home and sell things in the market because she was a good business woman. So she sold those until she was able to meet with big people, big people that came with a big car. They want many tomatoes, many whatever. Eventually she found herself borrowing from the farmers and she'll be like let me get a sack of tomatoes, sell it, and then I will pay you back when I get the money. And that's what she did and how she was able to pay for her school fees.

She studied teaching and she introduced the system in university where if the President of the student organization is male, the vice has to be female. She told us she's the one who fought for those policies. She started campaigning for politicians. She told us those stories and words of encouragement but she was also telling us how hard it is to deal with the guys, like the men, because the girls are not the majority and she's had to develop thick skin. She has to talk, she has to be listened to and that can be tough. First of all, they're older than her. They're more successful. They've achieved way more in life. They've gotten to where they want to get and for her, she's still on the journey. She talked about the difficulties like men always get the big post and then the woman will get something like secretary. And she was also talking about the

way, you know, as a girl it's easier for you to get taken advantage of, especially when you're dealing with powerful men, they will try their best to take advantage of you. They will give you ultimatums. If you want this, you have to give me this. You just have to stand your ground. Sometimes it's impossible for women to win because if you don't succeed, you will be talked about and when you succeed, they will say, oh, she slept her way to the top. We know she's sleeping with him. And she was like you need to be conscious. You need to accept that this will happen but you have to fight against it.

And so I met a guy at that mentor thing that has a half-way house and rehabilitation centers and is the chairman of all rehabilitation centers in Kenya. I talked to him about doing an internship like. I was looking forward to learning from him. As I said, it's an environment of people that have been in the field for so long. It was going to be such a good learning opportunity and I was really looking forward to it.

So the whole first time I was there, when I think about it, he made inappropriate comments. I waited for him for quite a while. He said he was hungry so instead of coming to his business he said let's go to the restaurant, a spot right near the office. When we were heading there it was very hot and when we were talking he was like, it's really hot today. Yeah, it's hot like you. And I ignored it. I was like it's just men being men and then he tried touching my hand. When we finally got there he asked me about my ring and the conversation was just so sexual and I felt negative vibes. I explained to him that I don't have a boyfriend and I'm not in the head right now where I feel like I need one. Like just letting him know that I'm not interested in anyone that way and I was not comfortable with that discussion and how he behaved himself. And he was apologetic and sorry for making me feel uncomfortable. He was like it's so commendable how you are, how you handle yourself, how you spoke up for yourself.

But I really wanted this and since we had talked about it at the end, I was like maybe it will be different.

So the last time I went there, I wasn't very comfortable. I met his daughter. And after I spent time with her he said to come often and if I was allowed to sleep over, he'd be happy to see to that. She's like 12 and he said you have strong values. You'd be a great example to my daughter. So he was talking about me and his daughter going for a certain show so I canceled on him. I feel like I could learn a lot from that environment but I don't want to put myself in an uncomfortable situation. And then when I talk to my friends, they're like that's the world right now and that's how most men in power behave themselves. So when I went back to school after break I was supposed to go discuss my schedule and how we can work around it. But it's just such a red flag. I don't think I want to go back.

It's so crushing to me because I think this would have been something so nice. It would have been such a great learning experience. But this guy and his friend, they just made it impossible. He made something so pure and accessible, something you don't want anymore. S I'm just thinking of all the other girls he had access to because he goes to mentoring events. It's so wrong on so many levels and so disappointing and so frustrating. Just thinking about it makes my head hot. It's not your dedication that pushes you to the front. It's what you're giving to the person in charge. It changes everything.

Let me give you a certain joke. It's a joke that goes on but it's not really a joke because it has some truth. So right now people are on long holiday and people who go to public universities, this is the period when they do their *attachment.* So, for example, you are doing your attachment in certain offices and so memes are going around like, your girlfriend went to work for her *attachment* with *TECNO* and within the first month she has a new iPhone. And it's

so common for girls to go to an *attachment* and then start a relationship with their boss or like their superiors in the office and then it's a "you give me, I give you" kind of situation. Recently, I was talking with my friend and we were like this is so sad, we usually call them men in power, that they just have to get something from you, even when you're working. It's like everywhere. So you're telling me that no matter how much hard work I put into it, I'll not get something that I want because someone is getting it in another way. Honestly, another problem is that some people have made it bad because they've shown these men that if you don't give him what he wants, someone else is willing. The only thing we can do is just hope we meet better people." (3/13/23; 4/30/2023; 6/16/2023)

Social Expectations for Women

"Where my mom is from they typically don't wear trousers. It's more about the way she was raised, a cultural thing. My mom started wearing trousers in 2012. She used to wear dresses. And I remember this time she asked my aunt, she said do you guys go talk to your dad while wearing trousers? It wasn't a judgmental thing. It didn't come from a judgmental point of view. It came from a shocked point of view because where she comes from they didn't do that. When they went in front of their dad they used to have to dress extremely decently, not only in front of their dad but all the men, like elders. Even if you're wearing a tightish skirt you have to tie a *leso* around you. And they definitely didn't go to church in trousers.

It kind of reminds me of this book, *Blossoms of the Savannah,* the way they were expected to not do something in front of a man. Oh, let me not even go as far as fiction. You see the situation in Iran right now where the girl was killed because she didn't wear her hijab the way she was supposed to, according to whatever standards that expect her to dress because you're going to arouse a man.

But, back to my mom, when she and dad went out, she wore dresses and skirts for the longest time. I remember the first time she wore trousers. It was December and it was Christmas. There's an aunt of mine. They're almost the same size. She had an extra pair of jeans and so they all pressured mom into wearing them. I was actually so happy, happy for me because when we go places together she is always the one in her big skirt. Now she has stepped out of that comfort zone. I think she liked it and she was like, you know, this is something a lot of people are doing now days but there are still some places she can't go wearing trousers. You know, there are some things that are just rooted! It's more of a respecting thing. But now things are more chill. Her dad passed on and when she goes there she wears trousers because it's not really a big deal. But the thing is, she did not wear trousers but she did not stop us from wearing trousers and she would dress us in them. I think maybe just so we can fit in. It's not only her because there's this sister of hers who has a girl and my mom and another sister bought that girl her first trousers and they didn't even ask can we buy her trousers.

The thing that can make you get judged here, that make my aunts get judged, is just the fact that they are not married and the fact that some of them don't have children. By 30 you are supposed to be married and have children and have a husband. There's an aunt of mine who has one child and she still goes through the most because they're usually like, you can't have one child only. You're supposed to have like three, you know, or four. But I think she's very comfortable with that one child of hers and she's very happy.

And then there's my sister who doesn't really know if she wants to have children. And that's also OK. It's her life. If that's what makes her happy, go for it. You shouldn't be pressured. You don't know the circumstances of the person. You don't know if that person is able to have a child, not going to be able to pay the school fees and all that. So for me, I think

everyone should be allowed to make their own decisions. If I want to have no children, that's OK. If I want to have five children that's OK. If I want to have my first child at 30 or at 24, that's OK.

I have heard friends who have grown up trying to change the narrative from what it was before, of what it used to be when it came to a woman's place in the house and in society, in general. We know we can work for our own money. We don't have to depend on anyone. You know, the way it used to be, it doesn't have to be that way anymore. We can go out and fend for ourselves. But to some people you get to a certain age and you're a woman and you don't have a child, that's when they start pushing you. Oh, my goodness! Get married!" (10/13/2022; 9/16/22; 10/13/22)

Experiences in the Macro Spaces of Social Media and COVID

Social Media

"The generation of our parents didn't grow up with social media the way we are growing up with it. Social media brings in the aspect of like intercultural. You learn more about other people than they did because they were living according to how people here live, like how it has been. But for us, we are learning new things. We are seeing how western people are living, all sorts of people, so it's more of everything. But for them it's just how they've been taught.

Whenever our parents are giving us those stories about being beaten in school, like they go home and say they've been beaten and then their mom would say why were you beaten and she'll beat them again. And even my aunties said you couldn't be beaten and then go home and say you are beaten because you're going to be beaten more. And sometimes your mom would even have the audacity to take you to school to beat you together with the teacher. And we would hear this and be like, what? Sometimes I feel like our parents exaggerate some of their

stories. And I see all of these jokes on the Internet of the way they had to walk to school. They crossed mountains and rivers and animals and everything and sometimes we think they are joking. And then, like on TikTok when I saw people from Western countries saying their parents also give them like crazy stories of going to school and things, I'm like what do you mean? We thought that it was only African parents but I've realized that we have a lot of universal experiences. We just experience them differently but we almost all go through the same thing.

TikTok is like a platform that has been used a lot here. So you see a lot of videos and I remember this one where someone was doing a street interview and they were talking about Africa and they asked a bunch of teenagers who were probably in high school and they asked them to tell him something about Africa. One boy was so serious when he said they don't have water. I was like, oh, my goodness! You know I heard those people saying or in people's comments, have you ever seen a lion? Have you ever had a zebra inside your house? Some people actually think like that. It's so sad. It's really important to educate yourself.

These days I go to this page on Instagram, Nairobi Gossip Club. It just usually has an update of everything going on in mostly the country but they also do it for things that are happening around the world, things to do with celebrities or with situations around the country. We usually find the lingo that's used in the country here.

I have very mixed feelings about everything social media. Like right now our generation, we have access to so much. And mostly I talk about Tik Tok and Instagram because that is what everyone is into right now, and YouTube. I feel like everyone watches YouTube. There are great parts, like learning how to braid your hair. You find classes on statistics and like school stuff which is great.

But there's also like the negatives that people pick up and I'm going to speak from what I know. When I look at the negative aspect of social media, I look at celebrities more because I feel that they are the ones who feel the impact because of what in Kenya are called "keyboard warriors." Those are the ones that you see on Twitter that slander people, like they're trolls. So celebrities are the ones who go through bullying and everything.

And also, posting yourself on internet is making yourself vulnerable to people's opinions because people are not going to holdback on saying what they feel like saying, especially because they're not someone you can see in the moment. So it's a pretty toxic place. Like you go on TikTok, and start off and do so well. People are praising you and all that and then all of a sudden, it's just hate. You go to their comments and one is like, why is she doing her hair like that? Or like she's just showing off. And I see a lot of young people on there that are developing mental health issues and everything just because of things like that or things to do with body image. You go on there and you see people with, I'll call them perfect bodies in the sense of standards that people have created like a very flat stomach, a certain skin color, and all that.

A lot of people lighten their skin. It's evident when someone has done it, especially if they do it with cheap products, the wrong products. So there is this socialite, she's called Vera Sidika, and she used to be dark skinned. She was beautiful and then after sometime she started doing those procedures to lighten her skin and she became very popular and it became a trend of girls to use skin lightening products. I remember in school we had this girl, she was a school captain, very beautiful, dark skin and she started using this stuff on her skin and I felt so bad because first of all this is someone who is obviously going through insecurities and all that. I feel like these products shouldn't even be available for anyone under the age of 18. They build this narrative on social media that this is the type of skin men like. And when someone like

Vera says that it works, they're going to follow. That's definitely the bad part but it's a mixed bag.

And the same goes for body type. One of the things I used to hate about myself was my collarbone. My collarbone is so visible. I used to hate it. And then the other day we were talking with my cousin and I told her and she was like the same until we came to grow up and we see all over the internet the models being complemented for your very visible collarbone. So, I just thought that was interesting that I used to hate it and now it's something that people love. I think the reason I've remembered this is because for the last few days I've had like three people tell me how skinny I am, like Oh,my goodness! You've lost so much weight and so I told my mom and she was like you know what, a neighbor told me the same thing. And I was like why is everybody saying that? This same day I walked out and another neighbor saw me and they are like, are you okay? And I'm like yeah, why? Because *umekonda.* So I have just remembered how growing thinner is associated with problems over here. When you become big, people are like *unaenda vizuri* which is like things are going well but when you're thin people are like what's the problem, what's happening? She must be eating way less because she has a problem.

There's also something personal about social media. You know, there's What's App where someone has given you like an update of how their day was and everything. It was in this time when we were struggling a lot at home and I remember going on that and I would watch the status of my friends and you know some of them were enjoying life. Some were in Paris, so many amazing places and I would just sit there and I was like, what am I doing wrong? Why am I going through these, like all this stuff, like we do not know if we are going to eat, we do not know what we are going to do in the morning and someone is enjoying their time in France and posting all the food and my friends are going out together. When someone asks me to go out,

I'm like I really can't. So I see them going on these outings and I would think I used to do that and here I am now and it was really sad and really getting to me. Like a week ago is when I started thinking that and I was like I should really stop. Don't go there. It doesn't help my case. It just makes me feel worse so I was like for my own sake, my own sanity, I'll just wait for this storm to pass and when I'm good I can go on there and be genuinely happy for someone and think you know, one day I'll go to France.

But there are the good things, you know, to learn a lot about so many things in the world. I remember when the whole thing with Iran was going on I followed the UN on Instagram and it will show me things that are going on to update me because I won't sit down to watch the news which is great but it's 50-50. I wouldn't argue that it is more harmful than good or more good than harmful, I think it just is. It is what it is." (12/15/2022; 5/26/23; 1/10/23;1/16/2023; 5/26/2023)

COVID

"When my sister was in C*lass Four* my parents took her to boarding school and she got like very detached when she went to boarding school. She would go to school for the term and we would only see her on visiting day and every time she would just cry. I felt so bad for her. That's when we didn't talk much anymore. She came home and she was very quiet, very anti-social. She wanted to keep to herself and we didn't develop a relationship. She just wanted her own space and for the whole four years in primary school she was like that. And in high school too but from around *Form Three and Four* she started becoming a bit more open and when she finished high school like we began connecting. We started becoming more comfortable around each other. And then COVID happened so we were in the house together a lot and we started bonding over a certain TV show. It's called *Big Brother Nigeria* and it's a reality show. It runs

for 24 hours and they eliminate people. So we started watching it together and we supported the same contestants. We would just sit there and watch it the whole day because we had nothing to do. That is where we learned how to talk to each other. Once that started we started bonding more and we just started talking about everything. Now the most random thing, she would tell me something about her friends and I'd tell her something about my friends and now I'd say we have formed a pretty good relationship. It was our chance to get to know each other and know we can actually interact and for her to realize that I'm not just the annoying little sister.

My main challenge during COVID was my family. So when you're in boarding school, you only come home for the holiday. But when we stayed home during COVID we got to see the raw image of everything that goes on when we are not here because, you know, parents can be good to each other for like two weeks when you're at home. Since we are here for so long we can't pretend. We can't pretend for that long. We got to see the good side of their relationship and the ugly side. It was when dad got into drinking a lot and when he was in and out of the hospital and everything. He was going to work because he's a government employee. He was called essential services but of course the environment wasn't the same. The pressure was a lot more and when COVID started off, we were in *Nyeri* so when the lockdown was declared we couldn't come to Nairobi for like 3 weeks and he was alone. Maybe he was lonely and all that because when you're alone you have a lot more time to just think about anything. And that's when he started drinking a lot. But remember he was already drinking a bit too much. He just became more of an addict. I had never seen that. I had never seen him coming home staggering drunk and everything so 2020 is when I got to see that. It was very traumatizing for me. He used to drink but it wasn't as bad. Actually, it wasn't bad at all because he would drink once in a

while and on weekends but not that kind of drunk. But now is when it started becoming a concern.

And my parents, obviously their marriage wasn't just smooth all through but they never showed us the bad side. Whenever they had an argument, they'd go to their room and they'd handle it and we'd never even know. I can say for sure my first 16 years my parents never argued in front of me. And now they started arguing in front of us and I'm worried. And I didn't get to interact with my friends. I don't know whether I'm a social person or an anti-social person. It takes a tiny bit for me to warm up to people but when I do I'm very talkative. So I think during COVID, because of staying in so much and just being on my own all the time and not even talking to people because sometimes I'd just sit. I'd not get into What's App. I would not answer people's calls or texts. I was talking to certain close friends but not all of them. And sometimes I wouldn't have the energy to answer those few friends. I felt really drained. I was very sad and it just seemed pointless trying to get back on my feet and everything, trying to let people in. I feel like that affected my interaction with people. We were home for 10 months.

Then when I went back to school I didn't know how to associate with my friends the way I used to. And I had so many emotions and I didn't have an outlet. I didn't know how to let go. I have the capacity to deal with my issues and his issues. I sent him a long text explaining that. It's not that I don't care anymore. It's not that I don't feel bad. But awhile ago I felt so bad. I was like my mom and my dad are leaving each other. My dad is in and out of the hospital so I might get up and get a bad phone call at school. That gave me the most stress and in the middle of that my grades started going down and that added to the stress. These are the times when I had honestly given up. When you are focusing on the negative in everything. I didn't have the tools to turn that around and when my grades started going down, I was just like there's no way I

can salvage this now. I went on antidepressants and I'm not sure that was the best option for me because they were making me a zombie. I wasn't feeling much. It got to a point where I didn't care. I'd sleep throughout.

I feel like, honestly, that time period, it has taught me a lot cause honestly, I pulled myself up. He would stop drinking for a few weeks and then go back. Stop drinking for three months and then go back. Like someone you love, they become another person and it's hard to adjust. But now, one thing I definitely would not see myself going back there. I have detached myself from the situation. I've come to accept that I can't control it. I've come to separate my life from my parent's life. At the end of the day, if that's the path he has chosen, well, I'm in the early stages of my life and if I let his issues get to me again it's going to break me. I know I don't was like so down and I called my aunt and I cried so hard. My aunt made it clear to me that I am the one looking out for me and I was like, you know, that makes sense. And I woke up feeling so much better. This is my life. I'm building my life. He already has his life and a family and all that. It's my turn to make mine and make my decisions. Honestly, I'm good.

When people were talking about their COVID experience at home and how this and that happened, I can't chip in to those stories because my stories were not good ones. They were not something I would want to put out there. I felt that they would not get it, would not understand my situation. I was still at that point that I had not accepted that Dad was an addict. I still thought that just talking to him and telling him that you're hurting us and you're hurting yourself would bring him back. I was struggling to accept that my dad was not the way he was. Honestly, when he wasn't drinking, he is such a wonderful man. Like he is so good and my dad and I have been close forever. We would go somewhere on weekends or we would just hang together and he was nice. He's this person who helps everyone.

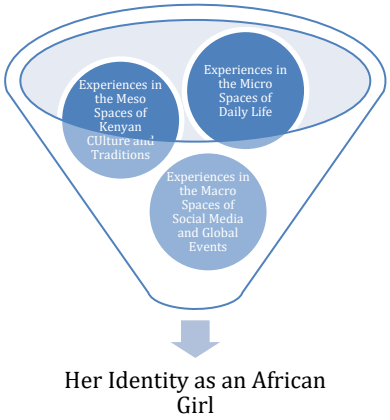
But in 2020 he would never pick anyone's calls. Never. Ever. Never. He was self-isolating and I feel that's where I picked that up from. I came to realize I started doing the same thing without even realizing it. I felt so bad. I just couldn't force myself to pick a call when I was not OK and at the same time, I wasn't prepared to share that I wasn't OK. It really did change a lot 'cause I was like we would talk for a while and then I'd feel like my social battery had been drained. I'd interact for a little bit and then I'd be like I don't want to be here. I just want to be alone. The thing is I got very comfortable being alone. I realized I can be by myself. So I'd just shut down and stop interacting. I wanted "me time" all the time. But this time that he is in rehab I feel like I understand, like I get that he needs help and it doesn't make me sad that he's in rehab. It makes me happy. It gives me hope that he is seeking help." (9/23/22; 10/6/2022; 2/11/23)

Summary – Addressing Research Question #1

As an ordinary girl from Outer Space whose life experiences have traditionally been overlooked and marginalized, Furaha has spoken and told *herstories* (see Figure 3). *Herstories* arise from unique moments, choices, and experiences which together give rise to her identity as an African girl, offering a new narrative that refutes the colonial myths, mistakes, and stereotypes that have misrepresented her on the global stage for years. But the analysis of *herstories* is the subject of the next chapter. What is fundamental here are the stories that we generated and how we generated them, addressing the first Research Question that asks: What *herstories* of the life experiences of one Kenyan girl are generated as Furaha and I collaborate in a decolonial spirit of "withness" to relearn a new narrative of the Kenyan girl?

Figure 3

Herstories Generated



Although we did not include every story generated as previously explained, those stories included here are the *herstories* of an "ordinary" girl with "ordinary" experiences. They are small, "ripple" stories flavored with cultural customs and beliefs from which an image of this African/Kenyan emerges. Equally important is *how* we generated these stories, using decolonial and African Feminist principles within a Storyworlding approach. By collaborating face-to-face for almost 75 hours, Furaha and I prioritize the *process* of storying as well as the story itself which is integral not only to the participatory methodology of Storyworlding but also to the praxis of decoloniality. Storying in a spirit of *withness* embodies decolonial principles that negate the traditional power structure of the researcher over the researched as seen in western scholarship. Further, from an African Feminisms viewpoint, using Furaha's own words confirms her position as a knowledge-maker within her unique cultural context.

The heuristic organization of *herstories* is also germane to this decolonial/African Feminisms driven research. Situating Furaha's experiences in micro, meso, and macro spaces locates her identity development within her specific cultural environment, integral to a relational understanding of the world in which there are multiple realities and different ways of knowing and doing, significant tenets of both decolonial and African Feminisms theories. However, while respecting our differences, it is also essential to recognize our commonalities to develop

relationships with others on the planet. Viewing Furaha's experiences from a spatial landscape affords the opportunity to do both.

Experiences in the micro spaces of daily living open the door to seeing ourselves in those same spaces, embracing the commonalities of going to school, being excited about school field trips, and for some of us, languishing in a "princess" moment. Within the meso spaces, Furaha's experiences enable us to appreciate that Christmas doesn't have to be about Santa and a tree surrounded by presents and to understand the benefits of boarding school, an atypical institution in the United States. Experiences in the macro spaces not only confirm our commonalities as we all struggled during COVID but also make clear our interconnectedness with others on the planet through the various social media platforms. Within these spaces a new sense of humanness comes forth that begins shattering the web of coloniality that traps the Kenyan girl. We continue to shatter that web in the next chapter as Furaha and I together explore the personal characteristics as seen in *herstories* that shape her identity and open the door to unlearning the colonial narrative of the African girl and relearning a new narrative.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings

Overview

As we were looking out over the lush savannah grasses and iconic flat-topped acacia trees of the Lewa Wilderness Conservancy in northern Kenya in October 2023, our safari guide pointed out the "cocktail" of animals within view - elephants, rhinos, antelopes, and zebra - and how they were harmoniously grazing together and connecting with nature and the land. I instantly thought of Furaha's *herstories*, a "cocktail" of stories, that combine to learn a new narrative of the African girl, a narrative that seeks the same harmony and balance of the bush through transnational relationships and connections. I also considered the inherent power that the predator species have over the peaceful grazers, reflecting how researchers have a similar inherent power over those they research. Although I had submitted the first draft of this dissertation just before traveling, viewing this landscape confirmed for me that analyzing *herstories* collaboratively helped break down the power structure of researcher over the researched.

Furaha and I started our collaborative analysis at the end of June 2023 when we decided that the *herstories* we had generated certainly completed her identity as a Kenyan girl. We spent the next few weeks discussing what characteristics she exhibited through her experiences and how this new narrative of what an African girl was like unlearned the colonial narrative. What follows are those discussions between the two of us and just as we generated *herstories* in a spirit of *withness*, we analyzed these stories in that same spirit as a Storyworlding/decolonial praxis.

Collaborative Analysis Addressing Research Question #2

In this section of the collaborative analysis, we discuss Research Question #2 which asks: What characteristics of one Kenyan girl emerge from the *herstories* of her life experiences? We have organized this analysis within the spatial framework of her life experiences in the Micro, Meso, and Macro spaces.

Herstories in the Micro Spaces

CBB: So as an African girl in Kenya, what have we learned about you from your experiences at the Micro level, those experiences that were uniquely your own?

Furaha: So, for example, learning to drive. I am ambitious. I like to learn new things and get more knowledge in fields that are, you know, not necessarily, what am I trying to say?

CBB: Like areas that maybe not everyone has experience in?

Furaha: Yes! I find it exciting to push my limits, to see what I can do, because like in learning to drive, I said I expected the car to be an automatic which is thought to be easier. And then I find it is a manual and I have to reset my mind and be like, okay. People say manual cars are for men. I don't know why. A lot of ladies are said to drive automatics and then men get to drive manual cars.

CBB: How do you feel when you hear that ladies should drive automatics?

Furaha: It's very confusing to me because I don't understand the argument. It makes no sense because we are all capable of learning. I was able to do it within the first day. Yes, it requires more concentration and everything but it's not something that only a man can do. It's like trying to dim down a woman. Like, you know, that requires a lot of strength and a lot of concentration. What do you mean? I can also have a high level of concentration. It's not like for men only. Anyone can do it with the lessons and ambition.

CBB: Okay, so let's talk about the dog bite and the ear piercing. Do you remember the chart I did for my class about your second ear piercing and talked about you resisting social norms, being yourself, doing what you want to do. Do you see the episode with the dog bite being somewhat similar to the ear piercing in that you were resisting a bit?

Furaha: Well, it (the dog bite) certainly showed that I am strong because, you know, I went through the whole day with this dog bite and it also made me realize that you should put your health first. But I honestly don't understand your question about it being similar.

CBB: Did you see yourself resisting, like when the woman that scared the dog off said to you, you need to go home and have that looked at and you turned around like you were going home but you didn't go home. To me, this shows that at that young age you were resisting social norms a little bit, making your own decisions. No, I'm not going to go home because that field trip is something I want to do and then when you and your classmates didn't tell the teacher. Am I reading something into this?

Furaha: Honestly, no, I don't think you are because I think it's pretty similar when you think about it because, as you said in both of them, I was going against what people think I should be doing. The lady was like, go home, get that checked out. And I was like, well, you know, it's not that serious. And at that time I didn't know it had dug into my flesh like that. But it wasn't painful and I was like this is something I can manage. I can just take care of it later. And I told you the time I wanted to get another piercing and my mom was like no, not in my house, and I was like, well, I don't feel like there's anything wrong with a second piercing on my ear. And it's not about rebellion. It's just something that I want to do and at the end of the day, it's not hurting anyone. So I'm going to do it. I think this is the similarity in that in both of them I am going in the opposite direction of what people think I should be going or think I should be doing.

CBB: So, was it more about being you and making your own decisions or resisting?

Furaha: Well, it was just about doing what I want to do and what I feel is right for me, doing what I felt I wanted to do at the moment.

CBB: Like when you got the admission papers to go to boarding school from the school office, took them home, and asked your parents to sign them?

Furaha: Yes! Exactly. It was what I really, really wanted to do at the moment.

CBB: So, when I did that chart several months ago, even though we talked about it, I see now that although you may have been resisting, and it looks like resisting from the outside, you weren't doing it as an act of resistance, you were just making your own decision.

Furaha: Yes! I really wanted to go for that trip and I can handle this so I'll go. And I really want this piercing so I'll get it. And, you know what, it's (the piercing) really not that serious. It's not that I'm getting it to symbolize anything because that's a problem with a lot of things to do with jewelry and tattoos and piercings and the problem with African parents is that they think it symbolizes something. Like, oh, wow! You've got a tattoo. You've joined the Illuminati. You worship the devil. It doesn't have to be like that.

CBB: So let's turn to your love for music. What do we know about you or what have you learned about yourself from your love for music?

Furaha: It's helped me know that I am artistic in some way. I used to think art has to be something physical that you can see like drawing, painting, playing a sport or something. But when I started getting more and more into music, I realized that music is an art by itself. And so it's really made me happy to realize that there's something that I'm talented in. You know if you have a sport, you learn this sport and become talented and it becomes your thing. You get kind of like a niche. So it really made me happy to know I had a talent, an artistic side.

CBB: So you said earlier it allowed you to be yourself in front of a lot of people, to be a different Furaha than you were. Do you see any similarities between this and the ear piercing and the dog bite?

Furaha: Well, singing was like finding myself and finding my own voice and expressing myself and I think that's a good tie to the dog bite and ear piercing. It's not for the same issues but it's a connection, you know, because in all three I was finding my place, finding my voice, and expressing it, not just staying there and doing nothing. And, it was another example of me making my own decisions. A lot of parents here don't really see the point of music as like a subject. So when we were choosing our subjects to take at school, a lot of us worried about when you have to inform your parents. We have what we call clinics and the parents come in and discuss with your teachers about your performance and everything. And so everyone told the music teacher when my parents come, please rave about me so they will see how talented in music I am to convince them to allow me to take music.

CBB: So, I keep going back to my chart in October when I had down resisting. Then and now you have said resisting was OK but I feel like I was putting words in your mouth.

Furaha: Not really because I don't see any problem with resisting. I don't think of resisting as bad but it doesn't have to be the only thing. I am just seeing the whole picture. Like the ear piercing, it is something that makes me happy. It is something that makes me pretty. I didn't do it to resist but in the end, when you look back at it, it was resisting, in the sense of not conforming to the norms or rules of society.

CBB: It's like resisting is just the single side of the story, exactly what we are trying to counter here in our study. A perfect example of why everyone needs to see the whole picture, as you just said.

Furaha: Exactly!

CBB: So, I can't leave what I'm calling your micro experiences without mentioning that time when you were a flower girl. I was most taken when you said, "It was a princess moment." I just have to think that the dominant discourse that sees the African girl as a victim has never pictured the African girl as a princess! What can you say about this? What did we learn about you from this statement?

Furaha: Honestly, I don't think anyone has ever pictured us a princess. Hmmm….I want to talk about this in broad terms first. What people don't know is that here (in Kenya) a lot of times the girl is a princess. Like in the dowry ceremony, everything is revolving around her and she is the princess of the moment and also in the marriage ceremony.

CBB: So, growing up did you have other princess moments?

Furaha: Well, even if it wasn't an "aha" moment, my dad would always carry me like on his shoulders like if I didn't feel like walking or if we are walking in a dirty place and I'm wearing my good shoes or my good clothes. To me that counts as a princess moment because he was making me happy, making me comfortable. And you know I was obsessed with having birthdays as a kid and my parents always made sure that it was special. All the attention is on you. When you're cutting the cake, you cut it with your best friend and they get to eat it first. So at that moment everyone wants to be your friend. And the first time we were allowed to wear heels at Christmas. So, yes, I think there are a lot of princess moments.

CBB: What did we learn about you through these princess moments?

Furaha: Well, I think these moments are just like any other girl out there. You think that these things are only personal to you, to your community but actually it's all over. I was watching something on Netflix and they were talking about how every culture has milestone moments to

celebrate people, like the Quinceanero for Latino girls and Sweet Sixteen in the US. So, I'm just like a normal girl from anywhere cause we've all had these things. We all had princess moments.

Herstories in the Meso Spaces

CBB: So let's move on to what we have learned about you through your experiences at the Meso level. Why don't you start with boarding school?

Furaha: Well, I have become more independent from going to boarding school. When you stay home and everything, it can be a bit hard to be independent like if my mom is doing my laundry all the time then I don't need to learn how to do that. If my mom is cooking all the time, I don't need to do tha**t.** But when I go to boarding school, I have duties in school. We have to clean the environment. We have to clean our dorms. I have to do my laundry. And it taught me to deal with challenges. Like you're in a new place, meeting new people. It's very rare to go to boarding school with a classmate from primary school. And, remember, when you go there you are cut off from the rest of the world because they don't allow cell phones. So many of the challenges were social challenges, like going from being the best in your (primary) school and then adjusting to the brilliance of everyone in boarding school. You come here dealing with people who were also the best in school and it's like some kind of ongoing battle of superiority and trying to stay afloat and not lose your confidence which it was so easy to do. And dealing with new systems because in primary school you have ABCD choices on tests and now you are just writing down what's on your mind. You become very adaptable as you learn different systems and interact with different people.

CBB: What about going to Nyeri and your Christmas traditions and your Aunties? Can we group those together as to what we have learned about you?

Furaha: I think we can. Like visiting Nyeri goes with my love for family and appreciation of the extended family unit, like my Aunties. I really am someone who feels that this is something so precious and should be preserved. It's about being intentional with spending time with people that you love. I love family time and all of our traditions. And, I'm also appreciative of just nature and calmness. In Nairobi, it's very go, go, go, everywhere is just in a hurry. And in Nyeri, the air is different. It's fresh and clean. It's so Zen and peaceful. I used to think that I wanted to live in the city where there is activity, activity, activity but as I'm growing up, I'm starting to realize that it's also nice to go home to somewhere that is quiet and peaceful. In Nyeri it's all about nature and about loving family time.

CBB: What do you think speaking three languages says about not only you personally but about Kenya as a country because it's not just you, right, that can speak three languages?

Furaha: Yes. I think the least you can speak in Kenya is two languages, like English and Swahili, or Swahili and your *mother tongue* or your *mother tongue* and English. I think this speaks to cultural awareness. Like there is more than one culture here and many languages so you have to be aware and open-minded and when you're in a group, pick a common language that everyone can understand which goes hand-in-hand with adaptability. And it also leads to like intellectual curiosity. You want to know more. Like I would love to learn another child's language, like Spanish. That is something I really want to get into.

CBB: OK. We have talked about how you have changed your thinking about the cultural tradition of dowry and also how you are still questioning the cultural belief in ancestral spirits. What do you want us to learn about you as a Kenyan girl and your cultural traditions and beliefs?

Furaha: Well, I have flexibility in my beliefs. You know there are some people out there that have rigid thinking. Like the whole marriage at a young age thing. They think that's just what it

is and what it has to be. But it's not like that for me. I want to say that I'm flexible in my beliefs and I don't just follow blindly. I have my questions and I ask my questions. I have my questions about the whole ancestral spirits and I did not agree with it. I'm the one who chooses whether I want to follow. If it's not something that will bring good, I'd rather put it aside. If it's not a belief that is going to bring good to me or to other people, I choose not to associate myself with that. Like with the whole circumcision thing. Right now people know that it does more harm than good and so a lot of communities have done away with it. You have to learn. You have to learn new and better things to go forward.

CBB: So does this tie in to what we know about you as it relates to your religious beliefs?

Furaha: Yes. I would also say some of the same things. Like for me, I feel like it's very wrong to just blindly follow a religion or a church without having your own personal relationship with God and without having your limits. It's more about my relationship with God. I love God. And like I've said before, I feel like my thing with religion is all about faith. Believing in God gives me hope for tomorrow because I believe that you live, you die, and then you are born to eternal life. So, religion gives me something to hope for in the future.

CBB: Then is it fair to summarize that you are a person of faith who loves God which, in turn, makes you a hopeful person?

Furaha: Yes, definitely!

CBB: Finally, summarize what we have learned about you based on family roles and relationships and social expectations for women.

Furaha: Well, for example, you know I have respect for my culture. I'm not going to dismiss it completely but I'm also not going to follow things that I don't agree with. I'm someone who respects culture and looks at the impact that it brings to my life and the lives of people around

me, like respecting my elders. I shouldn't be seated when someone older than me is standing. And I'm going to follow that when it comes to some gender rule. The other day I told you that I can't just pick up an ax like my male cousins do so I'll just accept that one and leave it to them. But also when it comes to social expectations for women, some of them can be really tiring and challenging and some of them can hinder you from pursuing what you want, like pursuing your aspirations. Like when they say a woman should stay home and someone feels like education and a career is important for them. Like me, I think education is important so you can have some sort of freedom for yourself because if you put all of your eggs in one basket you have no way out and that sometimes leads to being stuck somewhere where you don't want to be. What I'm saying is that you have to be resilient and resourceful and do your own thinking and I think I am those things and do my own thinking.

Herstories in the Macro Spaces

CBB: Let's complete your construction, so to speak, as a Kenyan girl and what we have learned about you by talking about COVID and social media, two phenomena that have shaped and are still shaping others around the world.

Furaha: Well, I've already talked my love of family and when COVID happened my sister and I were in the house together a lot and we started bonding and learned how to talk to each other. We just started talking about everything and finally started developing a relationship. But COVID was a challenge and where I learned more about me. You know I told you that it was when dad got into drinking a lot and when he was in and out of the hospital and everything and I had never seen that. And now my parents started arguing in front of us and I'm worried. And I didn't get to interact with my friends and sometimes I'd just sit. I felt just drained and I was sad and it all just seemed pointless. Then when I went back to school I didn't know how to talk with

my friends like before I used to. And I was so emotional and stressed about my dad and my grades went down and I told you before that I went on antidepressants. I just didn't care. I feel like, honestly, that time period, it has taught me a lot cause honestly, I pulled myself up. I learned that I can't control everything and that I have to separate my life from my parents' life.

CBB: As you were talking, I kept thinking about some of the things you have mentioned before like resilience and being strong and I see those things coming together here. Like many of your experiences showed your strength and resilience and those characteristics are what got you through a very bad time in your life.

Furaha: Yes! I guess I had never even thought about that before but you're definitely right.

CBB: OK. So, what about social media? When I go back through the transcripts there is hardly a conversation in which you don't mention social media like YouTube and TikTok

Furaha: Yes. I think social media is an interesting mixture of both the positive and the negative. I don't post a whole lot but I do use apps such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok regularly. A lot less than I did before I discovered the impact it has when you dedicate an unhealthy amount of time to it. That said I do genuinely believe that you can learn and gain so much from social media. I've learned a number of things from YouTube tutorials in particular, one major one major one being braiding my own hair which to me is a great accomplishment and saves a lot for me. Social media is also a great way to unwind and take your mind off of things, an amazing way to meet new people and socialize. These great experiences can hook you on your screen for hours on end and therefore requires discipline which is something I have been trying to get better at. By managing my time on there and not letting myself get carried away I get good practice. On the other hand it is a place that can get toxic. I've seen people who put themselves out there experience endless bullying, both those with large followings and close friends with less

followers. As a compassionate person, this hurts me to see people being mean to others and completely disregarding other people's feelings all while cowardly doing it behind a screen. In a world where everyone is trying their best, kindness is the least we can show each other.

CBB: Well, what you have said is so interesting to me because throughout all of our conversations you have talked a lot about your love of learning and here it is again, in social media. It's one thing I love about you - you never miss a chance to learn something new and you are always looking for new opportunities to learn.

Collaborative Analysis Addressing Research Questions #3 and #4

In this second section of our collaborative analysis, we speak to Research Questions #3 and #4: What is the new narrative of the African girl that is relearned from the characteristics that emerge from *herstories* of her life experiences? How does this new narrative unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl?

CBB: Let's begin here with talking about what it means to be a victim. We've seen previously in this study that the stereotypes and negative images that are prevalent in international development discourse equate girlhood in Africa with a state of being poor, undeveloped, malnourished, illiterate with little hope of success, and lacking the tools to negotiate for themselves resulting in a vulnerable, victimized girl. I think just looking at the above table that summarizes the characteristics you have exhibited through your stories of your life experiences totally shatters any notion of you as a victim and you have said multiple times you are not a damsel in distress. So talk about that.

Furaha: Well, I think that is a pretty good summary of the fact that I'm not a victim. You know, the thing is most Kenyan girls are actually, you know, equipped with knowledge about the world. They're diverse because of the conditions we live in. You know, going to school in different

places from where they live and doing all that. Most of them are culturally aware. For example, those living in like Nairobi or Mombasa, you realize you are not just one tribe. There's multiples and so you learn to live with all kinds of people. And the whole thing of I'm learning, learning new things, because we are living in different times. And you know, as far as tradition goes, there's what right traditionally but not socially acceptable and so you have to understand and know the line between what is traditional and needs to be left behind and what is socially acceptable and what you need to move forward with.

CBB: So, you know, you've said if a girl fetches water from the river they don't look at themselves as a victim and you don't either. It's just her normal. But someone here in the United States might look at your friend who's carrying wood and getting water from the river to drink, they might look at her as a victim and think we must help her because she has to do all of these things that we don't do. Talk about that.

Furaha: Well, my friend that carries water she absolutely does not look at herself as a victim and I do not look at her as a victim. Remember, I told you my mom's place is the same. They fetch water and they bring it home. And there's nothing sad about it. It's just a different way of life.

CBB: A different way of knowing, living, thinking, and doing?

Furaha: Exactly! This is what she has been brought up knowing. It's her normal. I think when you're not used to something, you try to understand it and if you don't have the right information you are quick to interpret it the way you want and draw the wrong conclusions. That's what I think happens with this whole victimization thing. Just because they are used to a different way of life and they see something different, something that doesn't make sense to them or something

they wouldn't be able to do, they're quick to say this is sad or this person needs help, that kind of thing and that's not the case.

CBB: So, you're saying here, I think, what is part of decolonizing one's mind, getting rid of the victim thing, is not just realizing that you aren't a victim from all of your experiences but also realizing that we need to respect other people's ways of knowing, thinking, and doing?

Furaha: Yes! Absolutely!

CBB: You know there's another aspect to the victimization thing and that is wanting to impose their own values on you because they think their ways are superior and seeing themselves as the savior, like what happened when Kenya was colonized which is the basis for what's happening today. Can you comment on that?

Furaha: Well, you know all of these stereotypes, including this victim thing, it's not something that I really paid much attention to and it's not something that I aimed to change and it wasn't something that was actually talked about in like institutions. I mean like how they portray African girls and African children to get money. I knew they existed but I didn't know how much people have been doing it. And I never thought about it as a form of colonialism. So first of all, I want to say it's like finding a solution for something that is not a problem. It's just someone's way of life, you know. For example, if I were to come there, you know we don't have cheese that much here but I feel like a lot of American dishes have cheese and if I come and tell you that you shouldn't put cheese on your pizza or pineapples, you know there's a whole debate about pineapples don't belong on a pizza, so if I tell you no that's not the way you're supposed to do it, like I'm imposing. I want to change something that is not a problem. There is just no point in trying to find solutions for something that is not a problem.

CBB: It's all about respecting other people's ways of knowing, thinking, and doing! But another thing that has struck me as I review all of our conversations is not the differences between us and our cultures but the similarities, the commonalities that we share as girls and women. I think if we look at commonalities it becomes harder to see another person as a victim..The one example that I keep going back to is when you were talking about Christmas traditions. I really had goosebumps as I felt your excitement as you anticipated wearing new clothes at Christmas and all the activities around cooking the family meal because I can remember my own excitement on Christmas morning, anticipating what Santa brought, the presents under the tree, and looking forward to a meal with aunts and uncles and cousins. It's the same excitement, the same joy. Wouldn't it be fun to get all the nine-year-old girls in the world together and see what they have in common?

Furaha: Yes! You know, there are comments that I see under YouTube videos, like when somebody shares an experience and so many comments are like we are all just living the same lives all over the world. I'll give you an example. People who have siblings, when we were young, there was this habit of fighting over the TV. So, if someone has the remote someone else will go stand in front of the decoder and cover it and the remote doesn't work. And I see in comments that someone in the US did that and I'm like, how is that even possible that we are all living the same life? There are so many things that people think this just happened in our household only and it happens all over the world. There are so many tiny tiny things that are similar.

And, well, I don't know if this example makes sense but like in the sector of marriage, every girl wants to feel special during that wedding. Mainly the focus is on the woman and there's this joke that goes around that weddings are just for the woman. And with the western

weddings that I see there is the whole aspect of the groom standing at the front, waiting for the bride and her entrance is special. And we have the whole thing of being walked down the aisle by your parent and them giving your hand to the person you are marrying and all that. It all has similar vibes.

CBB: And you know, let's talk about today. You were just as excited about seeing the Barbie movie as people here were.

Furaha: I think westerners would find that strange because they don't know we've grown up with Barbie too! And Disney and Nickelodeon and all those things. Another thing we have some of the same things that excited us as kids that they have. For example, the clowns that we have. A funny person will come and do tricks for you. They'll do funny dances and then they'll paint their faces and everything. They just have different names and different costumes but what they're trying to do is the same.

CBB: And another thing is field trips. Everyone here looks forward to field trips.

Furaha: Yes! We were so excited to leave school and that aspect of being with your friends and exploring and discovering.

CBB: And learning to drive. That's really a big thing here for a teenager to get their driver's license. Your excitement with learning to drive. I mean, I just think there are so many similarities that if everybody could see this, that we are all one people, the gap between us will close.

Furaha: That gap would be so tiny because as I said, it feels like we all go through the same things. Our parents used to tell us I had to walk miles to school and pass animals. And you've told me your parents used to say we had to walk to school through blizzards. Same stories, just minor differences!

CBB: And think about COVID. COVID affected everyone. You were not immune from COVID. Maybe you had a different experience but you were still affected. And everybody's exposed to social media.

Furaha: Exactly! Like you know, even as a young girl, I'll go to social media. And I see people over there on social media saying I want to move to LA. I'm going to be a star. Or moving to New York. And I'm so excited and everything. It's the same aspect here. When someone grows up, they finish high school. They live in upcountry and after school they're like, I'm going to Nairobi and I'm going to find a job and do this and this. You know, the expectations are the same.

CBB: So between your experiences that definitely show you are far from being a victim, the idea of respecting different ways of knowing, thinking, and doing, and realizing that we are all similar, I definitely think we have a formula that disrupts the western notion of African girls as vulnerable victims that speaks to the final research question.

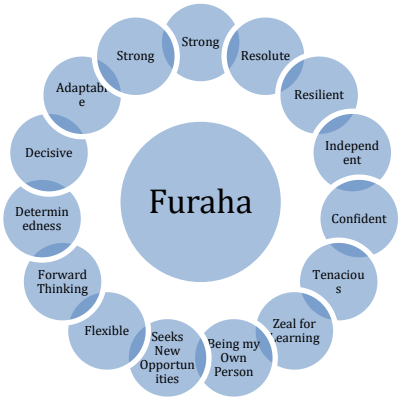
Furaha: Wow! We do and it's so amazing to put all of this together like you have done.

Summary of Our Collaborations

The characteristics that define Furaha prompted the design of Figure 4. As a simple visual summary, it offers a cursory, clear view of various traits that combine to form Furaha's identity, the sense of who she is as a person that leads to unlearning the colonial narrative of the African girl and relearning a new narrative. However, just as Furaha's experiences overlap and cross the heuristically-created analytical categories as mentioned in Chapter Four, the characteristics that form her identity intersect in multiple experiences, demanding more than a straightforward table.

Figure 4

Characteristics that Define Furaha



From an early age Furaha made her own decisions as she continued on her way to school after being bitten by a stray dog in order to go on the much-anticipated field trip. She desperately wanted to go to boarding school in Form 7 and despite repeated turn downs from her father, she audaciously entered the head teacher's office, requested enrollment forms, and placed them on the table for her father to sign when he came home. In high school choosing music as one of her technicals instead of one of the more "academic" choices was a decision she made in spite of the fact that some considered music students to be undisciplined and music to be a waste of time. In turn, through music and performing by herself onstage, she became confident in her ability to succeed at whatever she chose. Additionally, four years ago Furaha started catechism classes and made her own choice to be baptized in the Catholic Church. Her decision to get a second ear piercing was made on the spot, even knowing how her mother felt about second piercings. These experiences characterize Furaha as independent, decisive, confident, and a person seeking autonomy and wanting to be her own person.

Furaha's enthusiasm for learning new things and learning in general bubbled out when she talked about learning songs in other languages in primary school and learning new languages

in general. Recently she began driving lessons, excited for the opportunities and freedoms that being able to drive offered, especially in a culture dependent on public transportation. Living in a generation addicted to social media, Furaha frequently visits various platforms to discover new worlds, see how other people live, keep up on current events, and even learn how to braid her own hair. Intertwined with this love for learning is her forward thinking, being open to new possibilities and not limiting future options.

This zeal for learning spills over in her thirst to know more about the Bible and to have a strong relationship with God which intersects with not only her respect for the opinions of others but also her confidence to offer a different opinion. When one of her aunties returned from Bible study, together they discussed the Lazarus story, each with their own point of view. This leads to those African aunties who, following centuries old cultural tradition, believe that child raising is communal and play a huge role in Furaha's life. She turns to her Aunties for advice, exhibiting a willingness to listen and shows flexibility as she has come to understand and approve of the traditional but sometimes controversial dowry ceremony after conversations with her aunties convinced her that dowry is not just paying for the bride but is also a way to show respect for the bride and her family. However, Furaha is still questioning the cultural belief in ancestral spirits despite many of her aunties' stories to prove their existence, again exhibiting her autonomy and confidence in her own beliefs.

She attributes her flexibility and adaptability to her experiences with speaking three languages as well as attending boarding school. In a country where almost everyone speaks three languages, many times she found herself in situations where she had to switch from using one language to another, particularly at home where her family speaks Kikuyu, Swahili, or English, perhaps using all three in the same conversation, depending on the topic they are

discussing. In boarding school the same flexibility and adaptability were necessary to survive when living with other Kenyan girls from various ethnic backgrounds with different ways of knowing and doing. The boarding school experiences also instilled in her a greater sense of independence as she not only became responsible for doing chores that her mother had previously done for her, such as washing her own clothes, but she was also in charge of her own life, making daily decisions without being bolstered by her parents.

Living in a society where gender roles are clearly defined, Furaha stands up for her convictions and speaks out to challenge iniquities in her own life. When she and her girl cousins are annoyed that the boys seem to have less work assigned to them, together they go to their mothers in search of a solution. Because Furaha is also accommodating and respectful, they come to a mutual agreement, an agreement that ultimately shows that the grass is not always greener on the other side! Similarly, while she expresses a strong love for her nuclear family and her extended family, Furaha envisions a world where men and women share family decision-making which is not always the case in her culture. Through her African aunties who are single, married with children, married with one child, and unmarried, Furaha understands the challenges of living in a traditional society where many believe that all women should be married and have multiple children. She respects her aunts' choices as well as the societal expectations for women but in another display of autonomy, acknowledges that she will make her own decisions about marriage and children.

The manner in which Furaha has dealt with the challenges she has faced reveals a strong, resolute person who takes charge of her own life, changing what she can and accepting what she cannot control. When confronted with a man who made suggestive remarks to her in an interview for an internship/volunteer position, she didn't succumb to his desires in order to get

the position that she desperately wanted but chose to move on and look for another opportunity. In finding herself boxed in to a business curriculum at university because of an educational system that assigns you to a course of study based solely on your scores in the National Examination, Furaha has been seeking new opportunities which include applying for and getting a passport (without her parent's knowledge) in anticipation of seeking a health-related career training program in the United States that relates to her long-time dream of studying medicine. Perhaps her biggest challenge of all was COVID, a time when she found herself isolated and when her dad began drinking heavily. However, she exhibited resoluteness, tenacity, and resilience in pulling herself out of her depression and displayed determinedness as she sought to understand not only her dad's addiction but also the reality that she is not responsible for nor can she control what he chooses to do, a process that has taken over two years.

This, then, is the essence of Furaha. Not vulnerable, not a victim but a complex African girl who has her own autonomy and agency as she chooses to be her own person and make her own decisions. She is confident and independent while showing resoluteness and resilience when faced with challenges. Her zeal for learning combines with being a forward thinker who is both flexible and adaptable. She loves her family, values the relationships with her Aunties, and has a strong relationship with God. This is a relearned narrative of the African girl, the other side of the story, that unlearns the colonial narrative of the African girl as a destitute victim of her environment whose only hope is a western savior. The old narrative was created by colonial myths and stereotypes. This new narrative has emerged from the real-life experiences of an "ordinary" African girl whose own voice was used to tell *herstories.* As stated from the beginning, we do not offer *herstories* as representative of the experiences of all African girls or

all Kenyan girls but we do offer them as real stories, real stories to unlearn the myths and stereotypes.

Concluding Thoughts

When I first met Furaha in person in late May 2022 and we sat with a group of her girlfriends in the food court inside one of Nairobi's many malls, we laughed at the kaleidoscope of myths and stereotypes that converge into the colonial narrative of the African girl. It was laughable until it wasn't because this is what many westerners believe. Advertising campaigns and websites of international development organizations as well as news reports and social media have created the African girl as a homogenous group that is poor and malnourished with limited access to schooling and little hope of success, awaiting rescue by a western savior. Under this desperate umbrella of destitution, African girls are married by age 14, pregnant by age 15, at risk for sexually transmitted diseases, spend long hours collecting water and firewood, use bird feathers as menstrual pads, and suffer unspeakable violence while being plagued by patriarchy and harmful cultural practices. As a result of this portrayal of African girls in such miserable conditions, it is understandable, although not acceptable, that they are asked if they ride lions to school, if they have drinking water, do they live in a hut in the desert or in the forest, or does their hut have electricity. These are the myths and stereotypes that this research has sought to shatter.

As Furaha acknowledged previously, she does not deny that there aren't African girls who suffer from poverty and have limited access to schooling or who are married at age 14 and pregnant by age 15 because, of course, there are African girls in such situations, just as they are girls all over the world living in dire circumstances. But the purpose of this research is to present another narrative, a "relearned" narrative based on the life experiences of an "ordinary" African

girl, in this case an "ordinary" Kenyan girl, and told using her own voice to unlearn the colonial narrative and relearn a new narrative based on realities, not myths and stereotypes.

Through Furaha's *herstories* of her life experiences, an African girl emerges who is far from a "damsel in distress" waiting for a western savior. Certainly not vulnerable and certainly not a victim but a complex African girl who has her own autonomy and agency as she chooses to be her own person and make her own decisions. As a second-year university student, Furaha doesn't suffer from a dearth of education and not only was she not married at age 14, she still is unmarried and has never been pregnant. She hasn't been plagued by harmful cultural practices, experienced the oppression of patriarchy, nor endured unspeakable violence. She doesn't live in the desert, the forest, or in a hut but in an apartment in Nairobi with electricity, water, the internet, and a television. What she is, however, is confident and independent, showing resoluteness and resilience when faced with challenges and exhibiting adaptability and flexibility when the situation arises. Her zeal for learning combines with being a forward thinker who is open to new possibilities and opportunities. She speaks three languages, loves her family, values the relationships with her Aunties, and has a strong relationship with God. While valuing and respecting her culture, she questions traditional social roles for men and women and acknowledges that some traditions are not socially acceptable and need to be left behind. As she notes in our analysis, she and her friends are diverse, culturally aware and equipped with knowledge about the world.

Such is the relearned narrative of the African girl based on the life experiences of an "ordinary" Kenyan girl, a representative of girls from Outer Space whose voices have been marginalized, silenced, and misrepresented on the global stage through colonial discourses. Arriving at this point has spanned almost two years, two safaris to Kenya, and the already-

documented Zoom conversations. After much planning and repeated packing and unpacking of ideas and theories, the journey began by framing this study using the non-western centric theories of Decoloniality and African Feminisms in accord with Audre Lorde's admonition that the master's tools would not bring down the master's house. Decoloniality represents an epistemological change from western-centered philosophy with its belief in universal knowledge and truth and offers a relational epistemology that acknowledges multiple truths and ways of knowing and doing that lead to new understandings of diverse human beings. As both a theory and praxis, decoloniality not only speaks directly to the colonial narrative of the African girl but also is a continuous process that seeks transnational connections, relationships, and understandings. African Feminisms interweave with decoloniality to further disrupt western-centered thinking, seeking transformation of the stereotypical image of African women that has been defined by colonialism. Moreover, African Feminisms affirm the voice of the African girl as being central in the research process and offer the promise that her knowledge making is relevant and owned by her.

Once these theories were firmly in place, it remained to find a methodology not steeped in western praxis and I turned to Storyworlding, an emerging feminist, future-oriented approach in alignment with both decolonial and African Feminisms principles. This approach foregrounds the stories of ordinary women in their localized context, generated through caring collaborations that challenge the traditional power structure of scholarly research. In addition, these stories are meant to do more than reflect life experiences by creating spaces that lead to new and deeper understandings of ourselves and each other.

Guided by the following Research Questions,

- What *herstories* of the life experiences of one Kenyan girl are generated as Furaha and I collaborate in a decolonial spirit of "withness" to relearn a new narrative of the Kenyan girl?
- What characteristics of one Kenyan girl emerge from the *herstories* of her life experiences?
- What is the new narrative of the African girl that is relearned from the characteristics that emerge from *herstories* of her life experiences?
- How does this new narrative unlearn the colonial narrative of the African girl?

Furaha and I collaborated in an atmosphere of caring and Storyworlding *withness* to not only generate her stories but also to analyze them. Through *herstories* a new narrative of the African girl has been forged that make cracks and fissures in the web of coloniality that has shrouded the African girl and silenced her voice on the global stage.

While this journey is at an end, there is much more to do to chip away at the colonialism that remains yet today. With theory and praxis intertwined in decoloniality, African Feminisms, and Storyworlding, this research, as a process, is but one step in erasing myths and stereotypes about the African girl and seeking new transnational understandings, relationships and connections. However, before taking those steps it is time to step back and reflect on where we have been, what happened along the way, where we are now and what future implications are for scholars, research, and me personally. Chapter Six provides that opportunity.

Chapter 6: Reflections and Implications

When writing on my dissertation stalled, binging on reruns of the television series, *New Amsterdam,* not only relieved scholarly and personal stress but also gave me the impetus to keep going. As the newly-installed medical director of New Amsterdam hospital, Max was passionate about making a difference in the lives of his patients. Every day, in his high-spirited and sympathetic manner, he greeted doctors and patients alike with the question, how can I help? Although my research began with a passion to present a new narrative about the African girl as presented in colonial discourse, by the time my research was complete and I began writing, that passion had grown from *just* wanting to challenge the myths and stereotypes of the African girl to envelope something more – a desire to encourage others to seek out new transnational connections and to forge new relationships. It was then that I fully grasped the principle of theory as praxis and praxis as theory as a never-ending circle, the principle integral to both decoloniality and Storyworlding that had guided this research from the beginning. Thus, waking up each morning and thinking about Max's question and contemplating how this research can encourage and help others to form transnational connections was my inspiration to keep going.

Reflections

Stories Omitted

As previously mentioned, it was impossible to include all of Furaha's *herstories* about her life experiences. Together we made the choice of which stories to include and which not to include. Because patriarchy as a system of domination and gender oppression are salient concerns in Storyworlding, decoloniality, and African Feminisms, I feel compelled to explain why these subjects were not addressed in this study. We did not choose to omit stories about patriarchy and gender oppression because there were no stories to omit. When I broached the

subject of patriarchy, Furaha was quick to tell me she didn't really understand what the word meant but if it meant that the dad is the head of the household, that is something everyone learns in Class One. In Furaha's family, as in many of her friends' families, most women do not work outside of the home so leaving decision-making to the father who is the main breadwinner is totally normal. She did note that in her family there is some shared decision-making according to the topic being discussed. Her mom generally makes household decisions and her dad makes the decisions on how money will be spent. Although she and her friends would like to change that narrative to one in which man and wife share equally in all-decision making, the idea of the man making most of the decisions is not viewed as something harsh or repressive. It just is.

Similarly, while Furaha is quite aware of and has seen first-hand the power that men exert over women, particularly in the area of employment opportunities, when I asked if she thought this was gender oppression, she asked what oppression meant. After hearing my simple explanation as something harsh, brutal, and repressive, she considered for a while before replying that she didn't regard the power that men have over women as gender oppression and she certainly had never felt oppressed but rather perceived it as one of the challenges women face in Kenya. This is not to deny that patriarchy and oppression are not intertwined or that oppression doesn't exist on its own but in her case, she is does not feel oppressed in a home where her father makes most of the rules nor is she oppressed by a system where men exert their power – challenged, yes; oppressed, no.

Our Relationship

At the outset of this project, it was just that, a project that would culminate over 50 hours of coursework. I had no idea how transformational my research would become because of the strong bond that now connects Furaha and me as a result of the 75 hours spent together on Zoom

and in person. Could we have completed this research with fewer conversation? Certainly! Would we have the special relationship that we have today if we had fewer conversations? Certainly not! Those hours provided insights and understandings and evoked feelings that can only come over time. My heart was full when we were speaking about our connection and Furaha said:

> I love that we have formed our own little circle to share our personal experiences and ideas and thoughts and and when we talk about something that really hits home for me or for my close friends, I share our thoughts with them so it kinda gives this whole community vibe for me which I like.

During our many exchanges, we laughed together and cried together. She infused me with hope and vitality with her sharp mind and compassionate nature. It was particularly gratifying to see *herstories* become real in October 2023 as we stood outside her home in Nairobi and she and her mother pointed out where the stray dog had bitten her and the alternate route to school that Furaha had taken to deceive the kind lady who had stopped to help her into thinking she was returning home. When we watched our friend's young son laugh uproariously as he maneuvered his bumper car at a Nairobi amusement park, Furaha twirled around, pointing out all the rides and exclaiming excitedly it was just like Rock City, the site of the school trip she dared not miss just because of that dog bite. Watching her tell her parents I had invited her to attend my graduation and seeing their proud smiles confirmed everything she had told me about growing up surrounded by a loving family.

I saw myself in *herstories* and felt her excitement at Christmas waiting to wear her new clothes just as I had anticipated opening the colorfully-wrapped presents under our brightly-lit tree. I shared her "princess moment" when remembering how I felt putting on my first pair of

"high heels." And when she proudly said how her dad had put her on his shoulders so she wouldn't get her shoes dirty, I saw my dad holding me, as a nine-year-old, on top of a ladder in a high school gymnasium to cut down a basketball net following a tournament victory by the team he coached. I sympathized with her experiences during COVID when I, too, felt isolated and unable to spend time with friends.

The more we talked the more I realized that while we live in different cultures, we are all connected by similar experiences, feelings, hopes, and dreams. It was this realization that was most surprising to me as I had never considered that a black, nineteen-year-old girl from Kenya and a white, seventy-seven-year-old American woman would have so much in common. I began to understand and see myself differently, not just as a person in my own little world of family and friends but as a person with responsibilities in the wider world and connections with all human beings. It was this realization that further ignited my passion to encourage others to form transnational relationships such as I have formed, respecting differences, embracing commonalities, and seeking new understandings to bring peace, harmony, beauty and balance into our world.

Learning and Personal Growth

While making these connections and coming to these new realizations, Furaha and I were constantly learning and growing. At the beginning of our study, Furaha knew that there were stereotypes about Africans from her encounters on social media and her interactions with international visitors at her school; however, she wasn't aware of how pervasive they were. She told me it wasn't something that she really paid a lot of attention to and definitely not something that she had ever thought about changing. "And I didn't know how they present African girls and African children to get money or any of those stereotypes." Colonialism was only a word to her.

But now she knows and understands why *herstories* are significant. Through our conversations and because of what she considers the challenging questions that I asked her, she has had to stop and think about things, improving her critical thinking skills and causing her to *chemsha bongo* or boil her brain.

Additionally, our dialogues have caused us both to reflect on matters about which we had preconceived notions. For example, she and her sister both harbored negative views about dowry as they saw it as a custom that should be discontinued because, for them, it implied that the bride was being sold to the groom. When we began discussing cultural traditions and I wanted to know more about dowry, Furaha called on her mom, aunties, and her grandmother for more information. They offered new perspectives that altered her thinking when she understood the broader intent of dowry to show respect for and honor the family of the bride. Upon understanding this, I began questioning our engagement ring tradition in which the man spends a large sum of money for a ring to adorn his fiancee's finger but has no value to the family. The power of observing something from another perspective to reach new understandings is invaluable in recognizing multiple realities and realizing that there is no singular truth in this world.

At various stages of this journey together, Furaha and I have discussed becoming less judgmental. Furaha notes that more and more she is realizing that we all have different circumstances and we all come from different places. "You don't really know why someone does something until you sit down with them and even then, you have no right to judge because you have not been through what someone else has." To illustrate this point, she turned to a Biblical quote from Jesus when he points out that if you are seeing the speck in your brother's eye, you are not seeing the log in your own eye. For me, I was particularly moved and humbled

by our conversation about her mom not wearing trousers "for the longest time" out of respect for gendered cultural traditions in which women wore dresses or skirts. However, her mom never judged others who wore trousers and allowed Furaha and her sister to wear jeans which Furaha assumed was because she wanted them to "fit in." Her mom even purchased jeans for one of her nieces whose mother didn't wear pants.

The process of becoming less judgmental partners with acknowledging one's privilege. From the beginning, I admired Joy for recognizing her privilege as a girl growing up in Nairobi, being able to attend a private boarding school, and having her own cell phone. She was mindful of other classmates and careful not to talk about things like the movies she watched over the holiday when she was with those who didn't have the same advantages. When I reflect on being less judgmental and acknowledging my privilege, the minutiae of everyday life comes to mind. I think how fortunate I am to have a dishwasher, a washing machine and a clothes dryer and wonder why I am complaining that I hate to remove the clean dishes from the dishwasher or fold the clean clothes. And complaining that our morning newspaper isn't in our mailbox when we get up? Perhaps our delivery person has to take his child to school first or maybe his wife is sick. Shouldn't we all try to seek greater understandings with others and not make snap judgements? When the bank teller asked me if I rode a buggy through the desert looking for lions when we went to Africa, I took that as an opportunity to tell her about the different physical landscapes in Africa and what it is like to go on safari. I would not have taken the time to educate her two years ago as I would have had no use for her "ignorance." Now I realize that she isn't ignorant but lacks understandings so crucial for the global world we live in today.

When we were recapping how we have changed, Furaha's words were inspirational.

> "You know what makes me so happy? Honestly, that our conversations have made you change your way of looking at things and turned them into positive things. It makes me so happy. It's the same way that when I talk to certain people, I start acknowledging my privileges and that's what you're doing. You acknowledge you want to know more about my culture. And your privilege, you're thankful for it, and you find better ways to express yourself. It's not bad to be frustrated because sometimes I'm not in the mood to do dishes and it's completely OK whether you have a dishwasher or you're washing with your hands or you're fetching water from the river. It can get frustrating for everybody but it's good to just be grateful for everything you have.

Growth as a Researcher and Research Itself

In addition to the personal growth that I have just described, I have also grown as a researcher. In one of our first Zoom meetings, when I was so focused on asking those open-ended questions that we had learned about when studying qualitative research methods, I asked Furaha to tell me about growing up in her family. She was quiet for a while before saying she really didn't understand the question. Fortunately, I quickly realized that "open-ended" did have limits and I narrowed my question. Through the lesson learned from this incident and my developing relationship with Furaha, I became more adept at asking appropriate questions that evolved into deeper conversations. Because Furaha was such an intelligent and inquisitive subject, she inspired me to dig deeper and try to get the most from our conversations.

At the outset of my research when I was drawn to decoloniality, I understood it as theory-as-praxis and praxis-as-theory and immediately connected it to the journey to decolonize my mind that I unknowingly started nine years ago when I saw how white lodge managers in Tanzania disrespected the Tanzanian staff. In hind sight, I recognized that as I had thrown

myself into learning about the language, the history, and the literature and enveloped new international friendships, some of which have resulted in deeply satisfying relationships, I had been practicing decoloniality. I was aware that this research to relearn a new narrative of the African girl was not *just* framed by decoloniality but *was* decoloniality with its purpose to make cracks in the web of coloniality that surrounded African girls. I realized that Storyworlding with Furaha to generate *herstories* was also the very praxis of decoloniality as our collaborations broke down traditional power structures between the researcher and researched. As I have alluded to previously, it was through those hours of conversations about her ordinary life experiences that an extraordinary relationship germinated and grew, steeped in acknowledging that there is no one truth in this world and respecting that there are multiple realities. I grew to realize this is what decoloniality is about. It is not only relearning the colonial narrative of the African girl but also creating understandings and connections that cross the globe. What I didn't realize until just recently is that this is what research is about – research that transcends the knowledge gained and leads to new relationships that restore balance, beauty, and harmony in a broken world.

Implications

From a Scholarly Standpoint

After reading my research proposal a year ago, one African history professor who is from Kenya commented: "This is great work. It promises to make a huge contribution in the scholarly arena." Because "huge contribution" is not specifically defined, I offer my thoughts on what this means. From a scholarly standpoint, this research is significant as there are few, if any, studies that use the voice of an African girl and let her speak for herself. While the knowledge generated is valuable as it advances a new narrative of the Kenyan girl, equally valuable is the

way the knowledge was generated – through collaborative conversations between researcher and the researched - and the way it was presented – through her own words. To this end, I encourage more scholars to break free from long-held research traditions and turn to those in Outer Space as sources of knowledge. Look at them and listen to them. Let them tell their own stories. Moreover, I urge scholars to also seek new understandings, relationships, and connections with others that go beyond the mere knowledge gained because that is what can truly make a difference. Now is the time to shatter the boundaries that have defined scholarly research in the past and seek new paths that lead not just to new knowledge but to new understandings as well.

From an African Feminist Standpoint

By incorporating tenets of the feminist methodology of Storyworlding and using principles of African Feminisms, this research makes others aware that women are human beings with specific concerns that deserve respect. In addition, it draws attention to the power that women have as they engage together in a spirit of *withness* to seek justice and open new possibilities for "being" in this world. For me, as a woman, I particularly appreciate the feminist viewpoint that we should not exclude emotion from our research. This project began out of love for the African girl, was carried out in a loving spirit, and its influence will carry on beyond page 192 because of the loving relationship that developed during the search for new knowledge. It is important to remember that emotion does not equate to a lack of reason and to treat it as such is rooted in the western definition of what is knowledge and what isn't.

From a Professional/Personal Standpoint

Perhaps it is presumptuous to think this study can bring large-scale change in the colonial discourse put forth by international development organizations. However, one of my recent research projects for a race and racism seminar was a critique of the website of a non-profit

organization whose work in Kenya is to change lives by keeping "some of the world's most vulnerable children" in school. The website is fraught with colonial tropes and pictures of children to elicit pity and appeal to those wanting to play western savior through their donations. In the critique, I suggest that the website be redesigned using representatives from the local community, including the children impacted, and allow them to have input in how they want to be presented and in what pictures they would like to use. In concurring with this idea, Furaha spoke about how she would like to be portrayed within the relearned narrative of the African girl, focusing less on emphasizing her neediness and instead featuring,

> What do you call it? My zeal for education. You know, talk more about how excited I am to learn and how I would love the opportunity to learn. Then talk about what I would like to pursue. In short, present myself as a knowledgeable person and that I want to get more education. Also, less focus on like I'm studying in a class that doesn't have good facilities. I would like to be seen talking about how better facilities could help me, what I want to gain in my education, how I've seen other people go through the same program that excelled and how I'm looking forward to doing the same. Don't focus on the needy part and focus more on why do I want to get this education, like show my potential. And the challenges that I am going through, not from a sense of I'm physically struggling or I'm dying but from a sense of just letting them know there is a monetary challenge. I think that's valid. This is where you can express a need without trying to make it a thing to pity. If there's no money, there's no money. That's a fact. Bring some positivity in it. You have some challenges but if those challenges could be overcome, then the opportunities are endless.

It remains to be seen if this research can totally crack the web of coloniality in international discourse but perhaps by calling attention to the issue and offering alternative solutions, the findings can be used to make cracks and fissures. But to that end, I hope to present the findings at appropriate conferences, beginning with a presentation in March at the 10th annual Indiana University International Conference on Africa, "Africa Our Future." Further, I plan to seek opportunities to publish my work in a synthesized paper. Finally, I intend to take a deep dive into the international development waters and meet with the Executive Director of the organization whose website I critiqued to talk through my findings with her.

Personally, I have been so inspired by the relationship and connections that Furaha and I share that I will continue doing what I have been doing in the long journey to decolonizing my mind such as reading, becoming more fluent in Swahili, and looking for volunteer opportunities. As the co-partner of a small safari company in Kenya, I will continue to encourage clients to interact with their guides and the local staff to reach new understandings and make new connections. It delighted me to watch those who traveled to Kenya with us in October enjoy getting to know the locals and asking about their culture and their families. One of the safari-goers was so inspired that he has begun to learn Swahili.

Thus ends our collaborations on this research project but there still remains much to do as we have discussed. We have created a new narrative of the African girl but what do we *do* with it? As a decolonial work that emphasizes praxis, this research isn't just about putting ideas to paper, it is also about putting ideas to work and in putting those ideas to work, it becomes possible to bring peace and harmony to our world. Seek out those in Outer Space and heed their words:

Look at Me! Listen to Me!

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Appendix A

Indiana University IRB Approval for Pilot Project in Kenya

APPROVAL LETTER

To: Samuelson, Beth

Protocol #: 13885

Protocol Title: Look at Me! Listen to Me! Decolonizing Western Myths about the "African" girl through Narratives of Kenyan Schoolgirls **Type of Submission**: Initial

Level of Review: Expedited

Approval Date: Wednesday, May 11th 2022

Expiration Date: no date provided

*If Expiration Date = "No date provided," this research does not require annual renewal; thus there is no expiration date.

IRB-IUB approved the above-referenced submission. Conduct of this study is subject to the IU HRPP Policies, as applicable. **Additional Notes:**

This research is approved under the following expedited categories:

-Category 6 -Category 7

Documents approved with this submission:

Attachments

Assent Form

Assent Form

Assent Form

Recruitment Materials Recruitment Materials Recruitment Materials

Data Collection Instrument Recruitment Materials

InformedConsentStatement InformedConsentStatement

InformedConsentStatement

assent for Ol' Malaika girls.docx

assent for private home.docx

Assent for Starehe.docx

Parental Consent Letter Starehe.docx

Consent letter for Parents in Private Home.docx Parental Consent for Ol'Malaika.docx Attachment A.docx

Attachment B .docx ParentalconsentStarehe.docx ParentalconsentOl'Malaika.docx Parentalconsentprivatehome.docx

You should retain a copy of this letter and all associated approved study documents in your research records.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact the HRPP via email at irb@iu.edu or via phone at (317) 274-8289.

United States International University of Africa Approval to do Research

United States International University-Africa

REF: USIU-A/IRB/181-2022 22nd April, 2022

TO: CHANNA BETH BUTCHER

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: LOOK AT ME – LISTEN TO ME DECOLONIZING WESTERN MYTHS ABOUT THE AFRICAN GIRL THROUGH NARRATIVES OF KENYAN SCHOOLGIRLS

This is to inform you that ***IRB*** has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is **USIU-A/IRB/181-2022**. The approval period is from ***20th April 2022*** to ***20th April 2023.***

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used
ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by ***IRB***.
iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to ***IRB*** within 72 hours of notification
iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to ***IRB*** within 72 hours
v. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
vi. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to ***IRB***

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely

Juliana M. Namada, Ph.D.

Appendix B

Ref No: **832495**

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Date of Issue: **23/May/2022**

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Ms.. Channa Beth Butcher of Indiana University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi, Narok on the topic: Look at Me-Listen to Me: Decolonizing Western Myths About the African Girl through Narratives of Kenyan Schoolgirls for the period ending : 23/May/2023.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/22/17325**

832495

Applicant Identification Number

Director General NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY &

INNOVATION Verification QR Code

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Appendix C

ZOOM Conversations/In-person meetings

Date	Length of Time	Date	Length of Time	Date	Length of Time
9/15/23	15:17	1/4/23	1:08:02	5/12/23	51:43
9/16/23	57:52	1/10/23	1:05:53	5/19/23	37:25
9/17/23	50:17	1/16/23	1:18:27	5/20/23	43:13
9/23/22	55:20	1/21/23	45:04	5/26/23	1:15:14
9/30/23	55:11	1/23/23	1:29:19	6/4/23	42:52
10/1/22	23:51	1/28/23	28:56	6/16/23	1:21:23
10/6/22	1:07:28	2/1/23	34:53	6/27/23	39:07
10/8/22	16:38	2/4/23	31:04	6/28/23	1:06:20
10/13/22	55:24	2/5/23	1:10:08	6/29/23	1:14:36
10/24/22	1:02:39	2/11/23	1:20:12	7/6/23	46:35
10/26/22	1:10:02	2/18/23	1:02:27	7/8/23	1:52:36
11/5/22	1:05:14	2/27/23	1:26:23	7/15/23	56:45
11/11/22	25:34	3/5/23	35:05	7/17/23	1:04:01
11/16/22	56:29	3/15/23	1:10:14	7/23/23	51:24
11/23/22	1:01:42	3/26/23	21:36	7/28/23	1:14:31
12/2/22	1:11:46	3/27/23	1:29:33	8/1/23	1:10:11
12/11/22	41:07	4/5/23	1:04:29	8/8/23	1:15:24
12/15/22	1:05:48	4/11/23	1:12:50	8/10/23	57:54
12//17/22	10:00	4/21/23	1:20:29	8/24/23	1:36:06
12/18/22	54:30	4/30/23	1:59:49	9/1/23	1:20:34
12/22/22	1:03:36	5/2/23	56:28	**62 Zooms**	**61 hrs/39 min**

Met 5/30/22 for 7 hours, 5/31/22 for 6 hours. **Grand total: 74 hours/39 minutes**
Vacationed together in Kenya from 10/4/23 - 10/8/23 (Hours not counted in total)

Appendix D

Meanings/Themes/Topics in *Herstories*

STORY	DATE	SUBJECT	MEANINGS/THEMES/TOPICS
2nd Ear piercing (Action)	10/13/22 11/5/22 5/26/23	Getting a 2nd piercing	Extended family/traditional culture Women support group/offer advice Unafraid to give opinion
			Cultural assumptions about 2nd ear piercing (Similar to here) 1 piercing is OK
			Town culture
			Resistance to norms Respect for elders Be herself
			Signs of traditional culture
			Resistance to norms
			Open-minded vs. narrow-minded
Mom wearing jeans (Action)	10/13/22 11/5/22 5/26/23	Mom wears jeans for 1st time; buys jeans for another child; allows her girls to wear jeans	Mom Gives in to pressure?; still respects elders/follows cultural traditions; doesn't judge others; doesn't put her opinion on others; stepping out of comfort zone
			Yielding to pressure Aunties Offer advice; pressure mom; Women support
Dad (Relationships)	9/16/22 10/6/22 (What's App) 10/13/22 12/15/23	Talking to dad about drinking problem thru What's App; worsened during COVID; g'ma wants mom to stay with dad; sending sister to	Dad Refuses to acknowledge problem; her intervention; how it has changed her Regrets boarding school decision Dad makes decisions Dad as authority figure

	2/1/23 2/18/23 3/5/23	boarding school; afraid to tell dad about dog bite; where dad sits ;	Fear earlier; not now
			Unafraid to speak up; takes things in own hand
Joy growing up (Relationships)	9/16/22 9/23/22 10/6/22 10/13/22 12/5/22 3/27/23 5/2/23 5/28/23	How she was raised; view of self; responsibilities in house/between girls/boys; wanting to go to boarding school; societal roles	Raised to be on her own; “woke” Independent; extended family vs. small family; relationship between her/parents (not discuss sex, p’s relationship); taking reins in own hands
		What is a Kenyan girl	Age-based
		Social expectations	Push to marry
Joy’s text to me about Dad in What’s App	2/1/23 2/11/23 2/14/23	Valentine’s Day tradition of bringing candy home	Dad respecting family; family traditions
Classes/school (Institutions)	9/30/22 10/6/22 11/5/22 3/1/23 10/24/22 11/23/22 12/2/22 3/27/23 2/11/23 2/18/23 2/27/23	Classes canceled; professors just don’t show up; group work; stress of college life; HS curriculum; students have no money CBC;being beaten	No respect for students; remanants of colonialism? Similar to ideas here on group work; not sending transcripts; puts you in a tight space; similar to here Cluster points; seating arrangements; what boarding school teachers you
Cultural Week at University (Traditions, culture)	11/5/22		Similar to Spirit Week here; Celebrating different cultures

Found out roommate was pregnant	11/5/22	Pregnancy, birth control, abortion	Get info from social media, taboo subject to discuss with parents;males not want to take charge (not use condoms)
Social life (Relationships)	9/16/22 9/23/22 10/6/22 10/13/22 3/13/23	Being an introvert; What she likes to do with friends; fear of the unknown; making new friends; ideal friend; male/female relationships; effect of COVID; going to mentorship program	Similarities with here;not facing things alone..others have same issues; doesn't liike large groups of people
Family life (Relationships)	10/6/22 12/2/22 2/5/23 2/11/23 4/30/23	Different from social life; more extroverted; first born; punishment at home; responsibilites between girls/boys	Gender roles
Social Media TV	9/23/22 10/6/22 11/5/22 12/15/22 12/18/23 12/22/22 1/4/23 1/10/23 1/16/23 2/11/23 3/27/23 4/5/23 5/12/23 5/26/23 7/28/23 8/1/23	On-line personality different from in person personality; conversations about language;made her and her sister closer; how it has changed ideas on patriarchy ; Barbie movie; body image	Influence of social media; get advice from social media; similarity to here; big part of life today;how it makes her feel personally;birth control; learning new things;good vs. bad; body image, bullying; Barbie movie
COVID (Global Event)	9/23/22 10/6/22 2/11/23	DIfficult to interact after being cooped up; difficulty of being at home after being in boarding school, changing family dynamics; taking anti-depressant; went into a	Effect of COVID - same everywhere; did not have coping mechanisms

		shell; became closer with sister and Aunties	
Languages, proverbs (Traditions, culture)	9/16/23 9/23/22 9/30/22 10/6/22 12/15/22 12/18/22 2/5/23	Barrier to making friends; used Swahili to tell mom about dog bite; folk songs teach you a lot of languages;in up country, talk Kikuyu that Joy doesn't understand; Internet and surprise of others about multiplelanguages	Importance of language in Kenya; loves knowing other languages; biggest challenge growing up; felt left out when playing with cousins; pride in speaking at least 3 languages; use different lang in different situations
Challenges Money/personal Faced by women	9/16/23 10/6/22 3/30/23	Not enough money for bus fare	Relates to dad's drinking problem
Auntie(s) (Relationships)	9/16/22 9/23/22 10/6/22 10/13/22 10/24/23 11/5/23 5/2/23 5/20/23	Called Auntie about Dad; advice on ear piercing; support mom wearing jeans; discussing dowry; love/hate relationship; relationships with husbands	Female support A child is whole community's child Aunties speak out/become more open Aunties get judged
Applying to Berea College (Action)	9/30/22	Started application form with help of a former teacher	Taking initiative; responsible for herself
Story of being a flower girl (picture of her in white dress) (Traditions, culture)	9/30/22 5/26/23	Clothes, Getting fitted for dress; wedding itself; going to school next day; princess moment; walking down aisle with a boy	Wedding traditions, boy/girl relationships; public affection; feelings of being special similar to here
Christmas traditions (Traditions, Culture)	9/23/22 9/30/22 11/23/22 12/20/22 5/20/23	Excitement at getting new clothes; tradition of matchy, matchy; male/female/kid roles onChristmas Day; special pictures; slaughtering/eating goat; house clothes vs. stay home clothes;Christmas tree	Goosebumps from feeling her excitement; similarity; valuing traditions; if someone has too much of 1 thing,they give the rest away

Primary school graduation (Traditions, culture)	9/30/22	Graduation ceremony, songs, clothes worn;her mom wrote a song	Valuing tradition Importance of music in her life
Being beaten in school (Action, Institutions)	9/30/22	Punishment for not getting performance perfect	Challenges/punishment/encouragement…different way of looking at punishment
Field trip/dog bite/Scout uniform (Action)	9/30/22 3/5/23 5/12/23 5/26/23	Excitement of field trip; used clothes to soften blow of telling parents about dog bite	Ignoring adult advice; feeling her excitement; making own decisions; Similarity with field trips here and not wanting to tell parents; dad as authority figure Better relationship with mom
Going to up country (Traditions, culture, Relationships)	9/16/22	Differences between urban/rural; helping cousins;	Respect for grandma Extended family traditions More traditional in rural areas; respect parent's feelings; challenges of visiting Suck it up
Naming system (Traditions, culture)	1/16/23 4/21/23		
Dowry (traditions, culture)	9/16/22 1/16/23 2/5/23 4/5/23	What goes on in ceremony;Sura Yao	Not being judgmental about tradition
Social expectations Having children Women getting ahead Demands by men	9/16/22 1/4/23 3/13/23 3/27/23 3/30/23	Discussions between Joy/sister/aunties	Non-judgmental; resisting social expectations; mentorship program; women getting ahead; women's roles
Maureen (sister) (Relationships)	9/16/22 9/23/22 10/13/22	More quiet; introverted; doesn't know if want children, got a smiley;relationship with Joy; going to boarding school	Quietly resists social expectations Relationship between sisters Repercussions of going to boarding school
Men (Relationships, Culture)	9/16/22 9/23/22 3//27/23	Leave wives; don't take responsibility for kids Sit in corner; mind own	Men don't take charge; don't step up Patriarchy ? when men aren't even

	4/5/23 4/30/23 5/19/23	business; MIA for 15 years;power; internship	around Men in power; taking advantage;
Traditional games played as kids (Traditions, relationships)	9/23/22 11/23/22	Boys/girls played together; shaking mangoes from tree; cousins selling them	
Privilege (Relationships)	5/31/22 9/23/22	Recognizes privilege of growing up in Nairobi	Accepts her privilege while in US people refuse to see privilege
Family structure in general; patriarchy (Relationships, societal roles)	9/23/22 12/15/22 3/5/23 4/5/23	In rural areas Ps work far away, g'ma care for kids; men/women relationships	Extended family; dad makes decisions
Definition of girl	10/24/22	Based on age	Identity
Scouts/ Girl guides (Actions)	10/24/22	Activities, clothes, service;visiting children's homes/homes for elderly	Traditions/similar to US; taking initiative
Treatment of elderly (Culture)	10/24/22	Few homes for elderly	Respect for elderly
Love of music	10/24/22	Competitions, singing solos	Identity; influence of Auntie, language; world of possibilities; traditions
Learning to drive; braiding hair; driving a tuk tuk	12/2/22 1/16/23 5/20/23	Driving lessons, driving a manual	Opening new doors, new possibilities;step out of comfort zone
Friendship (Relationships)	12/2/22	Cliques; bullying; backstabbing	You are who you walk with
Treatment by gov't. workers	11/23/22	Rude	Same as here; going to replace driver's license
Mentorship and role models; advice; women's rights	3/27/23	Oprah,Ben Carson, people around you	What is success? Resilience; hard for women girls to get ahead;resistance; Wababas;making connections

Religion Ancestral spirits (Traditions, culture)	1/16/23 1/23/23 3/27/23	Lazarus Story Bride price Choosing her own church	There is no one truth;dead have power over living; belief inGod gives hope; faith (see one TikTok where they talk about religion) Religion in school; ancestral spirits and missionaries
Tribalism (Culture)	2/4/23 2/5/23	Stereotypes/intermarriage; modernity	Less tribalism today than before
Body Image (Social expectations)	1/16/23	light-skinned/beauty standards	
Analysis conversations	6/27/23 6/28/23 7/8/23 7/17/23 7/29/23 8/1/23 8/8/23 8/10/23		

Appendix E

Sample Data Analysis

Artifactual Analysis of Body Adornments

A Second Ear Piercing

One Short Story from Joy's Life Experiences

Guess what I did?

Using a lens of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) which recognizes that people are part of multiple activity systems and it is within these systems that that cut across space and time where people form their repertoires of practice (Guiterrez, 2017), I am analyzing Body Adornments as Cultural Artifacts to focus on Joy's Second Ear Piercing which the two of us discussed in a Zoom meeting on October 13, 2022 as part of our research on her life experiences as a Kenyan girl. I chose this particular data set and artifact for two reasons: 1) Joy was so very excited about the second piercing, and 2) The data generated was rich with cultural details. While this second ear piercing may not have value outside Joy's world, in her everyday life it represents and symbolizes something that matters. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) use the terms *object* and *artifact* interchangeably but further refine the notion of an artifact. Appropriating those characteristics for the context of this analysis, an artifact is something that has physical features that make it distinct, is worn, embodies Joy and her experiences, and is valued by Joy. In addition, Lemke (2000) notes that the material characteristics of an object also function as a way to interpret meaning that belongs to a process in a different time scale than the time scale of the actual event or in this case, getting a second ear piercing. Saldaña (2016) adds that besides being

just things, artifacts also act as a stimulus for actions, reactions, and interactions. This concept of process aligns nicely with CHAT which looks across multiple time frames of people's lives, stressing that history is fundamental to understanding what gives meaning to their life (Guiterrez et al., 2017). Thus, this second ear piercing becomes more than a static object and also represents a process that links body adornment artifacts with historical cultural traditions, events, dialogues, and people, a process that is integral to make meaning in Joy's life experiences.

The Process

Cultural Traditions, Events, Dialogues, People and Body Adornments Linking to Joy's Second Ear Piercing

The Artifacts

In analyzing body adornments as artifacts, I will use Saldaña's (2018) concepts of manifest actions or actions that are apparent and observable and latent actions or those which are hidden or inferred in the Data Excerpt, using gerunds to transform the object from a thing to that which it is used for. With this approach, it becomes possible to assess the symbolic meanings of body adornments as seen in Joy's life experiences in relation to what they do, not just what they are.

Body Adornments in the Process Linking to Joy's Second Ear Piercing

Artifact	Manifest Action	Latent Action	Data Excerpt
Mom's Trousers	Refusing to wear trousers	Following cultural traditions	Where my mom is from they typically didn't wear trousers. My mom used to wear dresses and skirts and that was it. Where they came from they didn't wear trousers. They definitely didn't wear trousers to church. They didn't go in front of elders and when they were in front of their dad they had to dress differently and not only in front of their dad but all of the men. Even if you were wearing a tightish skirt you had to tie a leso around yourself. And even when she was going out with my dad, she wore dresses.

		Questioning aunts' cultural traditions	And I remember there was a time she was talking to my aunts and she said you go to talk to your dad wearing trousers, you go in front of your dad wearing trousers?
	Wearing trousers	Yielding to modern cultural pressure	I remember the first time my mom ever wore trousers. It was Christmas and they were going out and that's when she wore jeans. There is an aunt of mine who they are almost the same size and she had an extra pair of jeans and so I think we all pressured her into wearing them and she said, you know, I think this is something a lot of people are doing these days.
		Retaining cultural traditions	But still there are some places she still has to wear dresses. You know, like to church. Some things are just rooted.

Auntie's Tatoo/Shaved Head	Exhibiting tatoo/shaved head	Resisting cultural traditions	There is this aunt who shaved her head around and had hair only here (pointing to the top of her head) and she has a butterfly tatoo here (pointing above left breast). This one auntie of hers was all up in her business telling her it was a demonic thing.
Sister's Nose/lip piercing	Desiring to get a piercing	Resisting cultural traditions	And so, my sister asked her I am thinking of getting a piercing and I don't know if I want to do my nose or my tongue or where.
		Realizing parental opinion	And my mom was there and she said if you get a nose piercing don't step into her house.
	Getting new piercing	Resisting parental opinion	So, I thought my sister never went with that but then I found out she went to another place to pierce. And she got this thing, it's called a smiley. It's right here (her mouth is open and she is pointing to gum above front teeth) and there is a small ring

			right here so when you smile it is visible.
		Respecting parental opinion	So she doesn't wear it when she is around my mom

Joy's Second Ear Piercing

Joy's Second Ear Piercing	Walking in Nairobi town	Pressuring by street vendors as cultural tradition	I was in town and it was so weird. You know, here, one thing is when you are walking in town people are literally…they will grab you and throw you into a van or a matatu. They will grab you and pull you into some random shop. So, this one was just following me. And he's like, Come. We'll do your eyebrows. You know we have manicures and pedicures. We can give you

			a piercing or whatever. And, the norm is to ignore them and they will go away. And I just kept walking.
	Thinking about what Auntie said	Valuing role/advice of Auntie	I had talked to my aunt about it (another piercing) this past weekend and I really wanted to do it. And I didn't know if I should go for it or not and she said just go for it if it is something you really want.
	Turning around	Deciding to be me	So, when I reached a bit further I thought maybe I should just ask about the price so I went back. The moment I just turned he came and grabbed my hand and I got them.
	Recognizing the significance	Resisting parental opinion	It is a huge thing. My mother doesn't like them (second piercings)

Appendix F

To Be Me

Twas a time I remember,
Mum wore trousers, I remember,
When going out one December.
Surrender! Surrender!

Shaved her head, this Auntie of mine,
Her butterfly tattoo so fine.
The demon, said other Auntie of mine.

It's not for you!
It's not for me!

Sister asks, nose or tongue?
Just to be me.
Mum says, no, not you!

So I asked my Auntie,
Should I go for it?
Second ear piercing,
Second ear piercing,
Above the first,
Above the first.
Is that what you want?
Then go for it.

Shall I or not?
Shall I or not?

It's quite a huge deal for me,
Will mum be mad at me?
I just want to be me, you see,
To be me, To be me.

Appendix G

Swahili Words and Phrases

Attachment - Similar to an internship in US colleges; field-based practical training where a student works for a company for a minimum of eight weeks to get real-life experiences for the course the student is pursuing.

Blossoms of the Savannah - Authored by Henry R. ole Kulet, this novel is required reading in many secondary schools in Kenya. It is the story of two sisters approaching womanhood, torn between modernity and cultural tradition and forefronts the issues of female circumcision, polygamy, early marriage, and patriarchy.

Chapati - Traditional Kenyan flatbread made with flour, oil, and water.

Class - Name for elementary school grade levels, i.e., *Class 1* is Grade 1 in the US.

Form - Name for high school grade levels, i.e., *Form 1* is Freshman year in the US.

Kachumbari - An uncooked mixture of tomato, onion, peppers, and spices, served cold and served as an accompaniment to many meals; particularly tasty with chapati.

Kamba - Refers to one of the more than 40 ethnic groups in Kenya as well as their language.

KCPE - Kenya Comprehensive Primary Examination given to all students at the end of Class 8 that determines which secondary school the student is eligible to attend.

KCSE - Kenya Comprehensive Secondary Exam given to all students at the end of Form 4 that determines which universities the student is eligible to attend and which course of studies the student may follow.

Kikuyu - Refers to one of the more than 40 ethnic groups in Kenya as well as their language.

Kitambo - A long time ago.

Lakini maisha ni yako - But it's your life.

Luo - Refers to one of the more than 40 ethnic groups in Kenya as well as their language.

Meru - Refers to one of the more than 40 ethnic groups in Kenya as well as their language.

Mother Tongue - The language spoken by one's ethnic group and the language spoken in homes.

Msichana wetu anasoma - Our daughter has studied.
Nyeri - Home area of Furaha's paternal grandparents.

PP 2 - Pre-primary 2; the educational level before entering Class 1.

Pilau - Rice cooked with vegetables and spices.

Shamba - Farm or garden plot on which vegetables are grown.

Swahili - Most widely-spoken language in East Africa; national language of Kenya.

Umekonda - You have lost weight.

CURRICULUM VITAE

CHANNA BETH BUTCHER

Objective

As an older, non-traditional student, I decided to pursue a higher degree in Education with no specific career goals in mind but with a personal goal to not only encourage schoolgirls in Kenya to follow their dreams but also to support their efforts. This support may include setting up a non-profit organization for Kenyan schoolgirls, organizing girl empowerment programs at the local level, supporting a Nairobi-based home for teenage unwed mothers, and setting up a library for elementary students at Waluka Primary School in western Kenya.

Educational Career Experience

1968-1970 – English teacher – Eastern High School, Bloomfield, IN
1970-1971 – Home Economics teacher - Cardinal Ritter High School, Indianapolis, IN
1987-2000 – US History/Spanish teacher – Martinsville High School, Martinsville, IN

Education

1964-1968 – Butler University, Indianapolis, IN – BA in History
1985-1987 – Indiana University, Bloomington, IN – MS in Language Education with Spanish minor
2020-May 2024 – Indiana University, Bloomington, IN –EdD in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education, School of Education

Volunteer Experience

- Served as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteer in Morgan County, IN to advocate for children who have been removed from their homes due to neglect or abuse
- Read to a kindergarten class at Templeton Elementary, Bloomington, IN for an hour each week accompanied by my certified Therapy Dog that I trained for this purpose
- Volunteered as academic tutor for the Butler University Athletic Department, Indianapolis, IN
- Appointed to serve as Board member of KILEO (Kilimanjaro Education Outreach), a non-profit organization based in Bloomington, IN to support educational projects in East Africa. I was instrumental in securing textbooks, a 10,000 gallon water tank for storing drinking water, and a computer for Waluka Primary School, Western Province, Kenya as well as obtaining a

$7,000 anonymous donation to replace 10 pit latrines at the school to meet international WHO standards.

- Assisted at African Language Festivals hosted by the African Language Department, Indiana University
- Set up a small safari company in Nairobi, Kenya and currently act as Co-director of the company. In this capacity, I have designed the website and arrange safaris for clients, including all planning and booking of accommodations and activities. Additionally, I organized a collaborative effort with a Nairobi girls' boarding school to offer a complimentary safari to Nairobi National Park every term for the girl achieving the highest grade in each form.