Roots and Wings:
An inner work approach to intergenerational conflict

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Roots *and* wings

My journey through this writing process gave me a whole new understanding of how I have been living in the shadow of colonisation and the role of victim mentality in post-colonial societies. The biggest treasure is that I no longer see my family's culture and my individuality as opposing forces. I am learning to allow both to express themselves and coexist within me, in a space where I can honour traditions and also welcome new ideas and diversity.

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Gratitudes

This thesis is more than a written work it is a process, a journey of unfolding, guided by many visible and invisible hands. I am deeply grateful to those who have walked beside me, held me when I felt lost, and reminded me to trust my own process.

My deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Max Schupbach, my coach from the very beginning. From the very first step, you stood with me, not only as a teacher but as a companion in my process. You encouraged me to lean into my dreaming signals, to trust the wisdom of disturbances, and to keep returning to my own rhythm when I was pulled away. Your guidance and presence gave me courage to face both my edges and my gifts.For these gift, I will always remain deeply grateful.

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To the DDI Kenya and International and all my peers, I am endlessly grateful. In our seminars, group processes, and heartfelt dialogues, you mirrored back to me the many roles I carry, and gave me the courage to step more fully into them. Together, we created a field of deep democracy that allowed me to practice what I write about here.

Most of all, I am grateful to my inner coach—that quiet voice within me who whispered, “Slow down, notice, listen.” This inner companion helped me turn shame into dignity, conflict into dialogue, and scars into symbols of survival and belonging.

As I finish this work, I know it is not an ending but a continuation of our shared journey towards voices being heard, stories being honored, and cultures reclaiming their dignity.

Asanteni sana.

Entering the Space of Dialogue

This thesis is not only about me. It is about us — our histories, our voices, and the silent roles that shape how we live together. I invite you, the reader, to join me in a dialogue that is both personal and collective.

Before you begin, I encourage you to pause. Take a deep breath. Notice your body in this moment. Ask yourself: *What part of my cultural identity feels alive, confusing, or divided right now?* This thesis will not offer fixed answers, but a way of listening to those tensions.

My journey is rooted in Kenya, but it speaks to wider struggles across the Global South and beyond. Colonization did not end with independence; its traces live in our families, our languages, our spiritualities, and even in our inner lives. What fascinates me is how history does not stay in the past — it reappears inside us as roles, conflicts, and ghost voices that whisper what is “superior,” what is “inferior,” and who we are allowed to be.

Process-Oriented Psychology, developed by Arnold Mindell, gave me tools to notice these voices and unfold them — not only in outer conflict, but also in my own inner work. In this thesis, I bring together my lived experience, my family stories, and my studies in Processwork to explore what it means to reclaim cultural dignity and to step into agency.

This work is also an invitation: to notice your own inner conflicts, to listen to the ghost roles that live in your community, and to see how dialogue — both internal and external — can create freedom.

Introduction: How Processwork changed my life

For me, history is not just external. Innerwork facilitation made me aware of how different perspectives and experiences from history live inside me in the present time as roles that I can unfold and facilitate in an inner work practice. On one side, I carry the role of the resistor, who wants freedom, dignity, and self-determination. On the other side, I carry the loyalist/compliant role, the part of me that has internalized colonial attitudes, that sometimes show up in feeling small, dependent, or even ashamed of my traditions. Between these roles is a ghost role: the lingering presence of colonial power, which still whispers, *"Western ways are better."* A ghost role is a collective attitude that leaks uncontrollably through our words, movements, and actions.

The interaction between roles and ghost roles inside me constellates an internal interaction – a continuous group process. Without facilitation, this makes me suffer. Processwork facilitation awareness skills have given me a way to bring roles and ghost roles into dialogue. In this thesis, I give space to my inner coach/facilitator to show herself and her skills! The main facilitation skills that weave through my thesis are:

Unfolding a disturbance through three parallel worlds: By role-playing a specific perspective internally, I feel and frame the pain of colonization. This practice of unfolding helps me go even deeper than the subjective experience of pain, into the essence of what it is to be a proud Kenyan, and reclaim strength from my heritage. In this way, I am not only revisiting history but also reshaping how it lives in me today.

Role rotation: The fluidity to move between roles gives me an intra-perspective, not only to connect with the role I feel closest to, but also to deepen and be part of the role that I am less identified with, supporting both roles to co-exist more easily.

Edge exploration: The edge is a role that is a looming factor between the role I feel closest to and the one I don't identify with. Edge signals are things like: Cycling on an accusation to a particular role over and over in a mental loop, feeling confused, lost, or blank. Noticing such a signal already helps to get unstuck and move even slightly into a new world over my identity edge.

Invitation to join me on this journey:

To put in a space to be open for your experience of reading this thesis, find a quiet space. Get comfortable. Close your eyes. Take a few slow breaths. Let your mind arrive in your body.

1. What part of you right now feels unsettled or bothered or not quite here yet
2. Try to capture your experience in a sentence and notice any shift.
3. Write down a simple phrase that expresses where you are right now. Enjoy!

Thank you, dear reader, for joining me!

Chapter 1: An eye-opener on my parallel conflict resolution identities

As I reflect on my journey through Process Oriented Psychology, I am struck by how Deep Democracy Institute (DDI) has become a guiding light in navigating the complexity of my inner work, family dynamics, and cultural identity. The DDI approach to learning Processwork showed me ways to embrace the "edge" where discomfort resides, a place where growth and connection can unfold when we face it with openness and curiosity. I have got to know my parallel conflict identities: one part of me gets stuck on cultural hierarchy (I call this my “u” conflict style), and another part of me is loving my difficulties in ways I could not have imagined possible – over the edge of the self-perception I grew up with (I call this my “x” conflict style).

The Edge: Where My Worlds Collide

In my life, the edge is where my identity that I am accustomed to as myself (called u) meets the unknown or marginalized parts of myself (called x). For me, the tension I experience between x and u is about being my own person versus living up to the expectations rooted in my family’s traditions.

Growing up in a city far removed from my family’s cultural roots, I felt disconnected from the rich heritage my siblings grew up with. This gap created misunderstandings and judgment on both sides. In chapter 2, I show you my inner process, which helped me understand that this edge is not a wall but a bridge and an opportunity to honor both the tradition that shaped my family and the individuality that defines me.

Thesis: Inner work through Role Playing and the Power of Ghost Roles

As I began my thesis process, I explored the voices within me through role-playing - a method to bring two or more voices into a dialogue. In my case, I have three voices inside me, which exist in my family and in my African culture, and probably in many different cultures!

The first role – or voice – that comes into my inner dialogue is a “New Generation Role”. She values independence and diversity – meaning not just doing what her culture says, but following what feels right for her in her own lived experience, even as the youngest in the family. The

“Family Role” on the other hand, speaks to the importance of respecting tradition and connecting with our ancestors, and following what was instilled since olden times. Respect is not a two-way street. The younger should respect the older. The older is always right. It's men up there, and then women below.

I realized there was an unspoken "ghost role" lingering between these voices, an unacknowledged longing for mutual understanding and love. A ghost role is an active voice that is hanging on top of the interaction, but not yet discovered. Stepping into this ghost role and feeling it, I could see that both sides – the new generational role and the family role - genuinely care for each other but struggle to express it, as I show in chapter 2. This inner work showed me that the conflict wasn’t about winning or losing; it was about learning how to truly hear one another.

Discovering My Inner Ally

As I worked through these dynamics and let these characters inside me interact, I uncovered an unexpected source of comfort: my “inner sibling”. This part of me emerges in my dreams, offering reassurance and strength when things feel overwhelming.

In one dream, I found myself standing in a vast, dark forest, full of rocky paths, feeling lost and pressed by shadows on all sides. Despite an urgency to move forward, hope felt distant, and I doubted my ability to find the way. Suddenly, a bright light in the form of huge white wings appeared, calling me to take the new path, slowly and steadily. With each step I took toward the glow, the shadows receded — not vanishing entirely, but shrinking enough for me to feel a sense of direction and safety. This figure white shadow of white wings, is like an inner ally – a bridge between my awareness and non-awareness. She reminds me that I carry within myself the tools I need to face challenges. It is a warm presence, a gentle nudge forward, and a constant reminder that even in the hardest moments, I am never truly alone.

Listening and Co-Creation between Inner Roles

One of the most profound inner facilitation skills I try to practice is slowing down and listening not just to others but also to myself. Slowing down allowed me to realize that my family and I often talk past each other, more concerned with defending our positions than truly understanding. Slowing down made it easier for me to have more compassion, where both sides can feel heard and respected. Learning about Arnold Mindell’s Phases of Conflict helped me notice that the moment I slow down, and switch my role and step into the role I am having the conflict with, I get their feel and perspective, and a better understanding of the experience that comes out as a behaviour I don’t like.

In my training, I participated in many group processes. I learned about topics that I had no idea about, and this made me slowly step out of my rigid “right or wrong” mindset. Before I encountered Processwork facilitation, I felt the dynamics of what was happening emotionally, but lacked the language to articulate them. I could sense the tension but did not know how to make sense of it. I have participated in hundreds of group processes throughout my diploma training on topics as diverse as intergenerational conflicts, rural and urban divides, and different types of love. I notice it becomes a little easier to notice, catch, frame, and hold down a hotspot - a tense and electrifying moment – and facilitate dialogue between roles by giving a voice to different parts of myself.

One of the topics that changed me was a conflict that came out between being an activist versus being a Processworker. I used to think activism was meant for people who are very strong-minded and don’t leave space for others. But I realized through their activism, they are making the space a little bit better for all of us, through their strong voices. I have a more shy and quiet style as a Processworker. This group process made me realise that Process Work itself is an activism. There are many ways of being a Processworker.

I still have struggles in my family, but I no longer see my family’s culture and my individuality as opposing forces. Instead, I see the potential to create a shared space where both can coexist. It’s a space where traditions are honored, but new ideas and diversity are welcomed, blending the old and the new into something unique and meaningful. This, for me, is a high dream – the world I want to create and live in with my family, and for future generations to experience the same.

Learnings: Moving Fluidly at the Edge

My thesis inner work dialogue that I described earlier, with the roles new generation role and the family role, has shown me that this edge with my family and siblings isn’t a place to fear but a place to embrace. It’s where transformation happens, where new possibilities are born. I am learning to be fluid – when I lose my direction, I can find it again. I can honor both my roots and my wings.

I am learning to trust through experiencing many inner works, coaching sessions, and group processes, that the discomfort of the edge holds the key to connection—not just with my family but also with myself. For example, in my thesis inner work described earlier, I had a moment where I experienced meeting each other halfway. I am excited that it may be possible to create an opportunity to grow together, weaving a shared story that comes from a point of respect while embracing where we’re going.

This is the essence of my journey: not about resolving everyday conflict but about finding harmony in the process.

Inner work with your inner coach

I invite you now to experience an inner work to open your eyes to **your parallel conflict resolution identities.**

1. What is your usual conflict style? U. Put it aside.
2. Think of a conflict and notice two roles
3. Get support from your inner coach to slow down
4. Notice the two roles and play between them
5. Do you notice an edge between the two roles?
6. With that in mind, how could you use this new awareness in the situation, in the future?
7. Remembering your usual conflict style, and this new perspective from the roles and the edge, how might you use this new insight consciously in working with your own parallel identities?

Chapter 2: Coaching Myself Through Conflict

As I continue my journey as a lifelong Processwork learner, I find myself drawn deeper into the study of conflict resolution. My focus in my daily life remains on not only learning to navigate my family dynamics but also developing my skills as a deep democracy coach. One of the biggest challenges I often have in my family experience of conflict is the cycling of power hierarchies (rank dynamics) without acknowledgement or true resolution. In this chapter, I explore this cycling, the roles or perspectives involved, and how I worked through it using Processwork facilitation tools in a specific situation.

Setting the Scene: Conflict in the Family

I come from a large family, and as the youngest, my experience is vastly different from that of my older siblings. The cultural expectations placed upon me often feel misaligned with my own worldview. This disconnect has led to ongoing conflicts, particularly with my sister, where we struggle to communicate and understand each other. I will now show the roles and ghost roles that help me recognize the different voices within this conflict:

First role: New Generation Role: My perspective, shaped by modern experiences such as the digital interactions with people, freedom and independence to follow different interests when I feel like it without obligation or responsibility, and expressing my emotions without being constricted by a family and cultural belief "don't be too loud with your emotions".

Second role: Family Role: My siblings' traditional outlook, rooted in cultural hierarchy (rank) and the belief that the older sibling is always right.

Ghost Role: The unspoken belief that admitting fault is a sign of weakness.

These roles cycle in our conversations, making it difficult to reach a resolution. I realized To break the cycle, I needed to slow down and unfold the roles with greater awareness to give space to internalize the roles in play to be in the shoes of every role.

Cycling in Conflict: Recognizing the Pattern

A recent conflict I experienced was when I was not invited to my niece's birthday party. This exclusion hurt me deeply, and when I confronted my sibling about it, we fell into a familiar pattern of deflection and miscommunication. This "hurtful" experience is my x - the disturbance, and I knew I was disturbed because I noticed a tightness in my chest and a repetitive loop of "I'm being dismissed" running through my mind.. Feeling "hurt," I reflected later, was being in Phase 2 of the conflict - the fight phase, no ability to switch sides or move.

Me: "I want to talk about something that upset me—you didn't invite me to the party."

Sibling: "Oh, I didn't think it was such an important thing to you!"

Me: "You can't assume how I feel about something without asking."

Sibling: "I've always wanted the best for you. I would never intentionally hurt you".

Rather than addressing the real issue—her decision to exclude me—she shifted the conversation toward her intentions. In response, I repeated my feelings, thinking I was not escalating, but we kept circling around accountability. We were stuck. I was stuck. The core conflict remained unresolved.

At this moment, my **inner coach** intervened: **"Slow down. What's really happening here?"**

I recognized that I was engaging in the cycle again, trying to prove my feelings were valid while my sister resisted acknowledging any wrongdoing. The ghost role and the fear of admitting fault kept us stuck. Aaah! In that moment of noticing, I was already opening up to Phase 3 of the conflict - a tiny bit curious about my sister's experience.

My inner work: The Power of Slowing Down and Unfolding Roles

In my experience and my understanding, when conflict cycles, it is crucial to slow down and unfold the roles. We could not go deeper at that time. Instead of reacting emotionally with my sibling, I started to do my inner work and stepped into each perspective - moving between phases 2 and 3 with my inner coach, versus with my actual sibling

Older Generation Role: "I didn't realize I hurt you. I was just acting as I always have. I was never taught to consider things from the perspective of a younger generation."

New Generation Role (Me): "I'm not asking you to change overnight, just to be open to seeing how your actions affect me and how everything culturally is structured is a new field for me where I am still learning."

By playing these roles, I got the insight that our conflict is really about culture and tradition versus freedom of expression in a newly defined world, and not so personal. It's the influence of the world channel – the voices in the world that make you think it's your fault personally, but in a real sense may have nothing to do with you personally. The best thing about realizing that is that it brings a new perspective and liberation.

When I met my sibling again in real life, I was already a little bit changed. The shift helped my sibling and me move toward a temporary resolution. It went like this:

Me: "I want to share how I felt about the party. I felt excluded and hurt, and I want us to understand each other better."

My sibling: "I didn't realize it would hurt you. I was just acting the way I always have and following what I know. I never thought about it from your perspective."

Me /my sibling: "So we both see where the misunderstanding happened. I understand that your intentions weren't to hurt me, and you can see how it affected me. Maybe next time we can check in with each other first?"

It wasn't a perfect conclusion, but it created space for future conversations.

Lessons from My Inner Coach

As I worked through this process with my older sibling, my inner coach offered key insights:

1. **Slow Down** – Rushing to defend or prove a point keeps conflict stuck in a loop.
Slowing down allows hidden patterns to emerge.

That was useful. Just like with me and my sibling, when I slowed down and did my inner work, I found out that we are both victims of the same role structure – tradition versus a newly defined world.

2. **Unfold the Roles** – Explore both sides fully.

That was useful in being able to connect with and understand my sibling's perspective rather than reacting to it.

3. Acknowledge the Ghost Role – Notice and frame for yourself unspoken fears and beliefs

That was useful! The fear of being blamed and judged, and upsetting family, and then admitting fault and showing vulnerability are ghost roles present in my family and culture. When unspoken, these fears and beliefs made it a little bit harder to communicate with my sibling, and created a bad mood between us. I got a real breakthrough when I named and framed them. This brightened my bad mood and made me open to the possibility that my sibling and I might repair. These helped me get unstuck and bring more flow into our interactions.

4. **Temporary Resolution Can Be Enough** – Relax! Not all conflicts can be resolved in one conversation.
This was relieving advice. When working on this conflict, taking that moment and creating honesty was a crucial step forward in making a bridge for future actual conversations with my sibling in everyday life.

Conclusion: Toward a More Aware Dialogue

This experience of inner work to unfold my conflict reaffirmed that conflict is not about proving who is right. It is about uncovering deeper truths and fostering connection. Applying Processwork's facilitation awareness to an inner group process to unfold the role structure, I am learning to navigate my family dynamics with greater awareness, stepping out of stuck cycling and into meaningful dialogue.

My journey as a facilitator is just beginning, but each conflict I engage with provides an opportunity to refine my skills, both as a coach and as a human being seeking understanding.

Chapter 3: Navigating My Experience of Colonization in My Culture

In this chapter, I step into my cultural role, exploring the influence of colonization and how I have navigated through it. Colonization is always a looming presence in African identity, even though I did not live through it directly. It is present in the stories of my grandfather, in our schoolbooks, in religious practices, and in the subtle ways we think about ourselves.

As I reflect on my history as a young Kenyan woman and as a person from the Global South, I see how colonization shaped both the past and the present. I have inherited the stories of colonization, and I see how they continue to influence our everyday thinking as Kenyans.

One of the first transformations I experienced in being exposed to Processwork was realizing how much victim mentality lived within me.

Before going into the topic of this chapter, I would like to give context by describing my understanding of Processwork and its roots. Processwork is a psychological approach developed by Arnold Mindell that integrates Jungian psychology, systems theory, and quantum physics.

All his life, Arnold wanted to understand how the world works, and why humans are the way we are, how we treat each other, and how to make the world a better place for all of us.

He expanded on Carl Jung's psychology in suggesting that our dreams are not separate from waking life—they show up in body symptoms, relationships, and conflicts - the Dreambody.

Processwork is also a field approach, meaning that personal struggles cannot be separated from family dynamics, cultural history, or social structures; everything influences everything else. His deep love of physics as a physicist, Mindell developed a language to describe what happens and how things are in terms of laws of nature and the universe. We can be this and that at the same time. We live in parallel worlds that usually don't touch each other. Mindell showed how we can develop awareness to bring more connection into how we include these three experiences of tangible things, subjective polarities, and deeper momentary essences to become more whole.

Together, these influences are present in Mindell's approach to inner work and facilitation that pays attention not only to what we know as this or that identity, but also to the hidden signals in our bodies, dreams, movements, interactions and conflicts, states of mind, and the world around us.

I began to have more awareness of my shackles of inherited identities, as they show up in my constant feeling of being unable to do anything about the ready-made presumptions of our current world, imprisoned in family traditions. I now feel connected with a broader range of identities: a Global South citizen, a young woman, and a member of my family with a cultural lineage.

Processwork's edge awareness helps me to notice the experience of being held back, and cross the edge of identities that no longer serve me, into new ones. The approach to process structure, with roles and ghost roles, helps me not take everything so personally. My personal struggles—my experience of colonization's legacy of internalised victimhood and the prison of family traditions—are connected with larger cultural and historical processes that masquerade as personal faults.

In the next sections, I discuss my identities as a woman and as a Gen Z African from the perspective of ancestral practices and spirituality.

Gender Roles and the Transformation of Dowry

As a woman, I have struggled at times with attitudes toward women in my culture. For example, the traditional practice of dowry, locally known as bride price, was originally a symbolic gesture, a way of saying, *"Thank you for raising this daughter with love; I will now take care of her."* It was not meant to commodify women but to recognize and honor the relationships between families. However, in today's world, dowry often feels transactional: *"I paid for you, so I own you."*

This shift reflects not only economic changes but also the deeper impact of colonialism on cultural practices. As anthropologist Regina Smith Oboler notes, the bride wealth custom which once symbolized alliance and mutual respect between families, has become increasingly commercialized in African societies, shifting its meaning from symbolic gift-giving to property-like exchange (Oboler, 1980[1]).

This transactional shift also intersects with gender roles shaped both by indigenous traditions and colonial influence. Before colonialism, many African societies—including among the Kikuyu and Kamba—had women in positions of leadership, spiritual authority, and economic independence.[2] For example, women could act as ritual leaders, landholders, or even *female husbands* in certain cultural contexts, embodying social and economic authority. However, colonization reinforced patriarchal norms by privileging male authority in governance, law, and religion. Colonial administrators and missionaries deliberately eroded women's social status by denying them land rights, excluding them from decision-making councils, and reframing Christian marriage as the only legitimate form of union.

As historian Tabitha Kanogo explains in her work on Mau Mau-era squatter communities, colonial structures dismantled women's access to land and autonomy, embedding systems of

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[1] Regina Smith Oboler, *Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya* (Ethnology, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1980), pp. 69–88.

About the author: Oboler (1943–2017) was an American anthropologist who studied East African gender systems, kinship, and women's roles, particularly among the Nandi and other Kenyan groups.

[2] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

About the author: Ifi Amadiume (b. 1947) is a Nigerian anthropologist and poet whose groundbreaking work challenged Western assumptions about gender by showing the flexibility of precolonial African gender roles.

inequality that persist today.[3] This loss of women's agency not only reshaped family dynamics but also became internalized across generations.

Until I studied Processwork, I had not realized how deeply these dynamics lived within me. They showed up as cultural ghost roles—unspoken beliefs that whisper: *"A woman must be owned,"* or *"Elders are always right."* These voices echoed through my upbringing, sometimes silencing me or making me doubt my own authority. Yet, they often clashed with another part of me—my younger generational role that values independence, choice, and equality.

In my inner work, I began to dialogue with these conflicting roles. On one side, the voice of tradition and patriarchy insisted on obedience and ownership; on the other side, my younger voice demanded freedom and recognition. Naming and playing out these voices within myself revealed that colonization and cultural change did not just shape systems outside me—they also live inside me, as tensions I must continually navigate. It has taken me time to learn how to hold both: to honor where I come from without being trapped by it. I don't want to throw away my traditions; they carry the wisdom of my ancestors. But I cannot ignore that some of them were reshaped by colonial influence and no longer serve us in the same way. Standing between these worlds is not easy, yet it is also where I find my freedom: the space to choose what I carry forward and what I transform.

[3] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987).
About the author: Kanogo is a Kenyan historian whose scholarship explores land, gender, and resistance under colonialism in Kenya, with particular focus on women's experiences and the Mau Mau era.

Understanding the Weight of My Cultural History

Growing up, I absorbed many stories about my cultural heritage and the impact of colonization. Although I did not experience colonization firsthand, I live in its aftermath. My grandfather, who lived through colonization, carried its memories, and through his stories, I absorbed its weight. He fought as a soldier against the British invasion. Kenya has 44 tribes, each with its own language group and culture. Being from the Kamba community, his experience is layered with complexity. The Kamba have often been stereotyped in colonial history as being "loyalists" to the British; however, this label oversimplifies a much more nuanced reality[4].

The Kamba tribe played multiple roles during the struggle for independence: some were soldiers recruited sometimes voluntarily, sometimes through coercion, into the colonial army; others served as mediators, spiritual leaders, or activists aligned with anti-colonial movements[5]. This demonstrates the ambiguity and complexity of colonized societies, where resistance and compliance often coexisted in the same community or even the same family.

Historian Tabitha Kanogo emphasizes that colonial legacies did not disappear with independence but continued to shape Kenya long after 1963, influencing land rights, ethnic relations, and class divisions.[6] Her work highlights how these unresolved structures of inequality persisted into the postcolonial era, embedding themselves into everyday struggles around belonging, power, and justice

Religion and Spiritual Identity Before Christianity

One of the major influences of colonization is the introduction of Christianity, which drastically altered Kenya's spiritual landscape. Before colonial rule, different communities had their own cosmologies and ways of relating to a divine presence. In his landmark work, theologian John Mbiti describes African religions as deeply embedded in daily life, community values, and ancestral reverence (Mbiti, 1969)[7]. These traditions were not merely spiritual; they were cultural, metaphysical, and ancestral connections.

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[4] John Lonsdale, *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003).
About the author: John Lonsdale is a British historian of Africa whose work has been central in reframing Kenyan colonial history, particularly the complexities of collaboration, resistance, and identity.

[5] David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005).
About the author: David Anderson is a Kenyan-born British historian who has written extensively on Mau Mau, exploring both resistance and the dilemmas of those coerced into colonial service.

[6] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987).
About the author: Kanogo is a Kenyan historian whose research focuses on land, gender, and colonial resistance, with particular emphasis on how squatter communities navigated colonial authority.

[7] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969/1990), pp. 1–3.
About the author: John Mbiti (1931–2019) was a Kenyan theologian and philosopher, widely regarded as the father of modern African theology. His work documented African spiritual systems as rich and sophisticated, countering colonial portrayals of African religion as "primitive."

Most communities believed in a Supreme Being, a creator of life and sustainer of the universe, though called by different names: the Kikuyu called God *Ngai*, the Kamba called Him *Mulungu* or *Ngai*, the Luo *Nyasaye*, the Luhya *Were* or *Nyasaye*. This God was not a distant figure but deeply connected to daily life, fertility, rain, harvest, and protection.

Equally important were ancestors, who were seen as mediators between the living and the divine. Ancestors were not dead and gone but living among us, ensuring harmony and balance. Rituals, libations, and prayers were ways of staying in the right relationship with them[8].

Spirituality was also tied to nature: sacred groves, fig trees (*mugumo* among the Kikuyu), rivers, and mountains were meeting points of the human and spirit world. Ritual specialists such as medicine men, prophets, and diviners played a role in maintaining this balance. Religion was not a separate compartment of life; it infused farming, justice, initiation, and everyday existence. As John Mbiti reminds us:

> "Africans are notoriously religious; religion permeates into all aspects of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it."[9]

[8] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 34–39.

About the author: Laurenti Magesa (1946–2022) was a Tanzanian Catholic priest and theologian. He emphasized that African indigenous religion is not superstition but a moral and life-affirming tradition guiding ethics, community, and social justice.

[9] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 162–165.

Colonization and the Reframing of Spirituality

When missionaries and colonizers came, this world was radically disrupted. Ancestor veneration was labeled as “pagan,” sacred rituals were dismissed, and the communal sense of God was replaced with a Western framework of Christianity. This framework emphasized strict hierarchy, individual salvation, and the separation of sacred and secular life values drawn from European culture rather than African cosmologies. Religion was no longer woven seamlessly into farming, birth, justice, and kinship; instead, it was relocated into church buildings, mediated by ordained clergy, and tied to European moral codes.

Colonization reframed spirituality through its own lens, stripping away the diversity of Kenyan cosmologies and imposing a single story of faith and “the truth.” The sacred trees, rivers, and mountains that once held meaning became desacralized, while Christian liturgy and the Bible, often taught in English or other colonial languages, were elevated as the only legitimate expressions of the divine. In this way, African spirituality was not erased but delegitimized, and generations grew up believing their ancestral traditions were backward or shameful.

For me, this realization became part of my inner work of decolonization. Growing up, I had already inherited a Christian lens of spirituality, but through Processwork facilitation, I became more aware of the ghost role of colonization within me – that internalized oppressor who told me my culture was less valuable or even shameful. By slowing down and dialoguing with this ghost role, I began to see that spirituality was not lost; it had only been hidden under the colonial narrative.

This perspective allows me to hold both worlds: the Christian teachings I grew up with and the ancestral traditions that connect me to my roots. Rather than discarding one for the other, I now see my role as creating a bridge between them.

I gain access to my ancestral roots not through intellectual thoughts about them, but through catching dreaming signals. Processwork gave me awareness to enjoy and be proud of everyday flirts that catch my attention, nighttime figures in my dreams, a pain in my body, a sudden sound unfolding a dreaming signal for me, is an ancestor connection - a bridge between worlds. Working with my inner coach helps me to honor the strength and wisdom of indigenous religion while also embracing the gifts of my current spirituality. This integration, for me, is not just personal healing but a way of reclaiming cultural dignity for future generations.

I saw this play out in my own family during traditional marriage ceremonies. In my culture, the groom's family is expected to feed the bride's family as a symbolic gesture that they can take care of her. One ritual involves slaughtering a goat, pouring blood, and offering traditional brews to connect with ancestors. These are not just ceremonies; they are bridges between the living and the dead, between the past and the present. An entire cosmology is expressed through such metaphysical rituals, as captured by Kenda Mutongi in her ethnographic work on Kenyan widows and family systems (Mutongi, 2007)[10].

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[10] Kenda Mutongi, *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family, and Community in Kenya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 44–47.
About the author: Kenda Mutongi is a Kenyan historian specializing in African family life, gender, and postcolonial transformation. Her ethnographic work highlights how African traditions adapt under shifting historical and cultural pressures.

Neo-Colonialism and Internalized Oppression

With the arrival of missionaries, spirituality was redefined through a Western lens. A diverse set of indigenous practices with worship of a Supreme Being under different names, reverence for ancestors, and rituals tied to nature woven into daily life, was now looked down upon as "pagan," meaning worshipping nature versus the true God. Indigenous cosmology was replaced with Christianity - belief in one God. This shift in religious identity mirrors broader cultural transformations imposed by colonization.

The influence of colonization was not only external but also internal, which we now understand as neo-colonialism. Even after formal independence, many Africans, including myself, still struggle with internalized beliefs that Western systems, values, or aesthetics are superior to our own. This manifests in subtle ways: preferring European names over indigenous ones, valuing English over mother tongues, or even dismissing our cultural practices as "backward." These inherited attitudes are the ghost roles of colonization, internalized oppressors that shape how we see ourselves and our cultures.

In Kenya, colonization did not simply end in 1963 with independence, or *uhuru* in Swahili. It continues to shape traditions, power structures, and social expectations - collective ghost roles which are very resilient and leak into personal and cultural attitudes.

For example, the Christian church remains a dominant institution that views indigenous ways as uncouth and outdated. Education is still largely modeled on a British colonial system where our own history, ways of learning in community, and knowledge cultures are invisible. We have 44 tribes in Kenya, each with its own dialect. Language and culture are indivisible. With English as the official language, many have lost connection to our own ways of knowing and being woven into our dialect languages.

As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), colonialism was not only about political domination but also about the control of imagination and consciousness[11]. By enforcing colonial languages and knowledge systems, it replaced African oral traditions, philosophies, and cosmologies with European frameworks. This process led to what Ngũgĩ calls self-alienation, where Africans internalize the belief that their languages, stories, and spirituality are inferior. The result is a deep cultural loss and disconnection from ancestral knowledge.

[11] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), pp. 16–20.

About the author: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1938–) is a Kenyan novelist, playwright, and cultural theorist. A leading voice in African decolonial thought, his work critiques colonial education and champions African languages as vehicles of liberation.

Internalized Inferiority and the Ghost Role

In my inner work in chapter 2, I described how family conflicts revealed hidden dynamics shaped by rank and tradition. The ghost role of inferiority shows up as hesitation to honor my traditions, or shame around practices like dowry or ancestral rituals, because they were reframed as “uncivilized” under colonial influence. Yet, when I slow down and dialogue with these inner roles, I discover that beneath the shame is a longing to reconnect with cultural wisdom and dignity. This creates a cool spot in me - a moment's relief and freedom from the ugly voice of cultural criticism. I can navigate between these roles and ghost roles in direct dialogue and unfold to a deeper awareness. This means the ghost role pushed me to want to know and learn more about my culture, which helped me explore my cultural roots in this thesis. Thank you, ghost role!

Unmasking this internalized oppressor as a cultural ghost role helps me shift from a victim stance toward agency to reclaim my indigenous perspectives. It allows me to move from “what was done to us” into “what I can create now.” Through this shift, I not only reconnect with my heritage but also begin to see culture as fluid, evolving, and resilient.

Current example in the Gen Z movement in Kenya

Lately, I sense a shift in the young Kenyan community, where there is a growing determination to hold leaders accountable. We have experienced thousands of people pouring into the streets to protest against high taxation, politicians flaunting their wealth and spending tax money on luxury goods, kidnappings by police officers and killed at gunpoint, deaths in custody, bribes for votes in parliament. The protests created a huge reaction from police and the military, and many died in the process.

I view this terrible situation as a group process structure - a dynamic dialogue between polarised roles and ghost roles.

I notice a polarity with two roles:

- Young Kenyans who argue that the government continues to increase taxation without providing transparency about how the money is spent.

- The Government, which insists that taxation is necessary to pay national debts, yet continues to engage in extravagance and corruption.

Hovering above these roles is a cultural ghost role, the unspoken but powerful belief that “people in power are always right.” This ghost role sustains patterns of silence, obedience, and resignation, particularly among younger people.

From Victim Mentality to Agency

One of the things that fascinated me in my Processwork studies was recognizing how this "colonial shadow" silencing ghost role reinforces a victim mentality in my post-colonial society. Growing up, I often learned to externalize blame, attributing Kenya's struggles to outside forces rather than taking accountability for our own actions. Frantz Fanon was an Algerian psychiatrist and diplomat in Ghana who was part of the revolution for Algerian independence from France[12]. In his book The Wretched of the Earth (1963), he shows how colonialism does not end simply with the withdrawal of foreign rulers; it implants a psychology of dependency and helplessness that continues long after independence. Colonized populations often internalize the belief that progress or survival can only come from external powers, which erodes self-agency and creates cycles of disempowerment.

Yet today I also see the emergence of a counter-voice among young people. This new voice challenges both tribal division and the use of ageism as a political tool. In this context, ageism is not merely about generational difference, but a mechanism of control: leaders dismiss the youth as inexperienced or irresponsible, silencing their perspectives by invoking age and authority. This role structure reminds me of what Fanon described as the "psychological residue" of colonial power, where hierarchical structures are maintained even by post-independence governments, which I think of as ghost roles holding young people down on the edge of inner freedom.

This generational shift is deeply encouraging as it shows an entire generation in the midst of edge crossing to a freer identity with new potentials, breaking out of the internal prison of colonising ghost roles.

It reflects a movement away from inherited victimhood and toward accountability, agency, and dialogue. What excites me is that even without the explicit language of Processwork, Kenyan youth are already engaging in processes of deep democracy by challenging power, questioning assumptions, and making visible the ghost roles that have long kept them silent.

This helps me see how many critical beliefs about me as a Gen Z African woman and about my ancestral roots I have internalized.

By role-playing both the voice of the young activist and the voice of authority within myself, I realized that I carried not only frustration but also the very ghost role of compliance that silenced me and comes out as deference to authority figures even when it harms me.

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[12] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

About the author: Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) was a Martinique-born psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary. He worked in Algeria during the war of independence and later served as a diplomat for the Provisional Algerian Government. His writings on colonialism, race, and liberation—especially *The Wretched of the Earth*—are foundational in postcolonial theory and continue to influence struggles for decolonization worldwide.

Engaging in this way of processing our culture and history with fellow learners in Kenya in group processes over and over during many seminars, helped me recognize colonization not just as a historical event but as an ongoing structure that shapes power, gender, tradition, and conflict in how we navigate between two worlds.

At times, I still feel caught between the traditional Kenyan worldview, where elders are always right and social rank hierarchy dictates social roles, and the modern global perspective, which values equality, choice, and individuality. Many in my community still experience colonization as unresolved historical trauma, leading to resentment toward Western influence. But inner work and facilitation awareness tools help me be more fluid when I am stuck in the resilient grip of these ghost roles.

Instead of focusing solely on what was taken from me and my people, the group process approach gives me new agency to break the hypnosis of what was done *to* me, with the freedom to reshape my narrative of who I think I am. In other words, an identity shift.

I can honor ancestral traditions without being bound by them, and I can embrace modern perspectives without rejecting where I come from.

Personal Pivot to Life Myth My Scar as Survival and Belonging

Just as Kenya struggles with its postcolonial legacy, I, too, wrestle with the internalized ghost voices that shape my identity. Processwork places significant attention on what Arnold Mindell (1982) called the Dreambody, the idea that signals from the dreaming world of experience that we are unaware of, such as dreams, daytime fantasies, body symptoms, and even accidents, carry hidden meaning and point toward a person's deeper life myth.

For me, this came alive through the scar I carry from surviving a fire as a baby. For years, I related to the scar only through shame. It felt like a permanent reminder of misfortune, a mark that set me apart. Within my family, the years of my hospitalization also created their own silent stories: while I received medical attention, my siblings were left in the care of relatives, which introduced distance, blame, and unspoken pain into our relationships.

It was during my first coaching session that this scar transformed into something more than a wound. My facilitator, Max, asked me: "What is your favorite part of your scar?" At first, It sounded absurd—how could there be anything "favorite" about it?

But Processwork encourages slowing down and unfolding subtle signals. As I looked closer, I noticed the white part of the scar. Suddenly, an image came to me: white flowers blooming in the middle of chaos.

That moment was transformative. My scar became a symbol of survival, resilience, and belonging. It revealed itself not as a mark of brokenness but as part of my myth: I survived, and I belong. This reframe softened my relationship with my siblings, too. Where there had been blame, I could now see our shared survival as different paths shaped by the same family history.

Processwork taught me that symptoms and scars are not just pathology, but storytellers carrying ancestral and personal wisdom. This scar story reminds me that colonization is not just historical; it also shows up in the intimate ways we relate to ourselves, our bodies, and our families. Just as colonial history left marks on my culture, the fire left a mark on my skin. Yet both can be re-seen as symbols of resilience and belonging rather than only pain or shame.

Lessons from My Inner Coach

Through inner work, my inner coach has helped me hold multiple identities—colonized, modern, traditional, and empowered. With the coach's guidance, I can witness the victim, the colonizer, the activist, and the compliant self without being torn apart.

My inner coach whispers lessons:

1. **Slowing down reveals hidden truths** – ghost roles emerge when I listen deeply.
2. **Honoring both sides** – tradition and modernity are not enemies; my role is to bridge them.
3. **Recognizing privilege** – I am not powerless; I can question, shape, and evolve my identity.

Inner Work Exercise: My Decolonization Process

This inner work arose in me as I connected with my inner coach to support dialogue between the victim and colonizer within me. In this process, I found a cultural ghost role—an internalized oppressor shaped by colonial narratives and inherited beliefs.

A Practice for Readers

1. Find a quiet space. Sit comfortably, breathe, and arrive in your body.

2. Ask yourself: *What part of my cultural identity feels confusing, painful, or divided right now?* Write it down.

3. Identify the voices involved—two or three inner roles connected to this conflict.

4. Ask: *Is there a voice I've silenced because I'm scared of it? What does it want to say? What's its secret wisdom?*

5. Invite your inner coach into the dialogue. Ask: *What do I need to hear right now? How can I honor all these parts?*

6. Experiment: let the voices meet—in imagination, in role play, through drawing, or movement. Notice if they find a cool spot, a moment of peace.

This inner work came from my own journey in shifting from victimhood toward agency, reclaiming indigenous wisdom, and living with multiple identities in a more relaxed way.

Conclusion: Reframing My Cultural Identity

Colonization changed my culture, but it did not erase it. My culture continues to evolve, shaped by history, tradition, and modernity. My role is not to choose one side, but to navigate the edge where they meet.

Through this journey, I have learned that reclaiming my voice and cultural identity means embracing complexity. It means acknowledging wounds, while also seeing the beauty and resilience in ancestral knowledge. It means recognizing the ghost roles that silence us, and transforming them into opportunities for dialogue.

Above all, it means using group process structure awareness and relationship work with my inner world and outer society. This helps to make visible the victim tendency that has long been invisible and embrace it with a new attitude. For example, from begging shame to confidently asking for help.

What I love about this approach is that healing and transformation can happen not just for me as a separate person. I am indivisible from the community I belong to, so we all benefit. We come as a package.

Processwork readings and seminars that influenced me along the way

Mindell, A. (1992). *The Leader as Martial Artist: An Introduction to Deep Democracy.* HarperCollins.

Mindell, A. (2000). *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity.* Lao Tse Press.

Schupbach, M. (2014). "Deep Democracy: An Awareness Paradigm for Conflict Resolution." *Worldwork Journal.*

Tutu, D. (1999). *No Future Without Forgiveness.* (connects well to reconciliation themes).

DDI Regular Seminars, Nairobi 2022-2023, facilitated by Drs Ellen and Max Schupbach

DDI Annual Facilitation Intensive Training 2022-2024 ;

- October 2022 Amsterdam: One Flat World
- October 2023 Nairobi: Birthing out Future: Our Nature, Our Ancestors, Our Youth
- October 2024 Granada: All of Us in All This Together

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- Kanogo, T. (2005). *African womanhood in colonial Kenya, 1900–1950*. Ohio University Press.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann.
- Mindell, A. (1982). *Dreambody: The body's role in revealing the self*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mindell, A. (1992). *The leader as martial artist: Techniques and strategies for revealing conflict and creating community*. HarperSanFrancisco.

- Mindell, A. (1995). *Sitting in the fire: Large group transformation using conflict and diversity*. Lao Tse Press.

- Mindell, A. (2000). *The deep democracy of open forums: Practical steps to conflict prevention and resolution for the family, workplace, and world*. Hampton Roads Publishing.

- Mutongi, K. (2007). *Worries of the heart: Widows, family, and community in Kenya*. University of Chicago Press.

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.

- Oboler, R. S. (1980). Is the bridewealth custom an obstacle to women's economic independence in Kenya? *Ethnology*, 19(2), 191–205.

- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.

Annotated Bibliography

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
Fanon's work is central in postcolonial studies, analyzing how colonization implants psychological dependency and cycles of disempowerment even after independence. His concept of internalized oppression informs my thesis exploration of "ghost roles" of colonization. I draw on Fanon to frame how Kenyan Gen Z struggles with inherited victimhood while moving toward agency.

Kanogo, T. (2005). *African womanhood in colonial Kenya, 1900–1950*. Ohio University Press.
Kanogo examines how colonialism reshaped gender roles, land rights, and women's autonomy in Kenya. Her research illustrates the erosion of women's agency through legal and cultural systems imposed by the British. This provides historical grounding for my reflections on dowry, patriarchy, and women's diminished authority as cultural ghost roles in my inner work.

Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann.
Mbiti describes African spirituality as holistic, ancestral, and integrated into everyday life. His analysis highlights how religion permeates farming, justice, and kinship, rather than existing in isolated institutions. I use his work to contextualize how colonial Christianity reframed spirituality, creating a ghost role of inferiority that continues to shape my cultural identity.

Mindell, A. (1982). *Dreambody: The body's role in revealing the self*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Mindell introduces the concept of the "Dreambody," showing how body symptoms, dreams, and signals connect to unconscious processes. This book underpins my exploration of my scar as both a personal and cultural symbol of survival and belonging. His framework supports my integration of dreams and body experiences as doorways to life myth.

Mindell, A. (1995). *Sitting in the fire: Large group transformation using conflict and diversity*. Lao Tse Press.
This book develops the practice of working with large groups and diversity using Processwork facilitation. Mindell emphasizes "hot spots" of conflict as opportunities for transformation. I reference this when analyzing Kenyan youth protests as group processes that reveal ghost roles of silence and authority, bridging my personal conflicts with wider social struggles.

Mindell, A. (2000). *The deep democracy of open forums: Practical steps to conflict prevention and resolution for the family, workplace, and world*. Hampton Roads Publishing.
Mindell expands Processwork facilitation into everyday conflict, emphasizing inclusion of marginalized voices. This directly informs my thesis method of inner work with family conflicts, where slowing down and unfolding roles creates temporary but transformative resolutions. His principle of "deep democracy" resonates with my journey toward reclaiming agency.

Mutongi, K. (2007). *Worries of the heart: Widows, family, and community in Kenya*. University of Chicago Press.
Mutongi explores the intersections of gender, kinship, and economic survival in postcolonial Kenya. Her ethnography demonstrates how rituals and traditions adapt under modern pressures. I use her insights on rituals, particularly marriage practices, to show how ancestral cosmologies survive colonial disruption and reappear as dreaming signals in my inner work.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.
Ngũgĩ critiques colonial language systems as tools of cultural domination and self-alienation. His argument that colonization reshaped imagination and identity resonates with my exploration of internalized oppression as a ghost role. I use Ngũgĩ's framework to link the loss of indigenous languages and cosmologies with my own journey of cultural reclamation.

Oboler, R. S. (1980). Is the bridewealth custom an obstacle to women's economic independence in Kenya? *Ethnology*, 19(2), 191–205.
Oboler analyzes how the meaning of dowry (bridewealth) has shifted from symbolic alliance to transactional exchange. Her anthropological study shows how this shift impacts women's autonomy. I draw from her analysis to frame dowry as a cultural ghost role that creates shame but also an opportunity to reclaim its original purpose of alliance.