NARRATING THE NATION: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POST-COLONIAL FEMALE SELF AND IDENTITY BY SELECTED KENYAN WOMEN WRITERS

by

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The work contained in this thesis was completed by the author at the University of KwaZulu-Natal from January 2021 to July 2023. It is the author's original work except where due reference is made to other writing. The work will not, and has not been submitted for any award to any other university for any diploma or any degree, except to the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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Date: July 2023

DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR

As the Candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this thesis entitled:

Narrating The Nation: Conceptualization of Post-Colonial Female Self and Identity by Selected Kenyan Women Writers

Signature ……[redacted]……..……

Professor Sheik Ayub

Date……July 2023…….

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the two pillars of my life: The Almighty God, my mom and son; Dear Lord, thank for the strength and guidance in every day of my life, Mom, thank you for raising me in the ways of the Lord; thank you for your constant prayers and support and by showing me that, with hard work and resilience, anything is possible.

Son; let this be a sign to you that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!

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I give God the glory for sustaining me through this journey, I would not have made it on my own; Ebenezer.

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myself in particular. May God hold you gently in His hands, so you age gracefully, my pillars of strength.

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ABSTRACT

This research study sought to explore the development of the female self and national identity in selected Kenyan women's writings. The study examined the interrogation of the numerous female identities that are the concern of postcolonial Kenya. It focused on patriarchy, gender, ethnicity, and violence as forces that interfere with women's sense of selfhood, belonging to, and claiming the nation. The investigation conducted was qualitative. The methodology employed involved a meticulous examination and scrutiny of the texts of Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed*: *A Memoir* (2006), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986), Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1998). The close reading examined the explicit significance of textual materials and their structural characteristics to determine how they achieve coherence. The study employed gynocriticism, feminist theory, and postcolonial literary discourses to examine the evolution of female selfhood and national identity within patriarchal and contemporary societies. Analysis also involved the female autobiographical voice within the context of postcolonial Kenya, which serves as a means of articulating individual agency through language. The results of this study demonstrated how patriarchy affects the female self, and women writers aim to empower women through self-consciousness. The autobiographical voice enables the woman to explore her identity and define herself, and it reveals not only the interests of those who produce autobiographies but also the concerns of those who read them. The study also found that there is an essential nexus between the female self, politics, activism, women in the public realm, and women's rights. Another finding was that the autobiographical voice is the central cohesive device in the narratives, and it echoes all other voices in society and women have a sense of collective identity, which sometimes becomes a source of strength and transformation. The conclusions drawn were that the social position of women is a concern for Kenyan women authors. The story, the characters, and the point of view influence the concept of women's empowerment. In a culture that confines and restricts women, the capacity for women to direct their own lives is essential.

Keywords: female self, female identity, women writers, patriarchy, women autobiography

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

This study is an examination of Kenyan women writers and their representation of the Kenyan female self and identity. It interrogates written prose by a sample of emergent and established female Kenyan writers. The study considers the following works: Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986), Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1998).

It critically interrogates these selected works to examine how they conceptualize Kenyan female identity. These writers, through their writing, try to define what it means to be a female in Kenyan society. The selected writers are considered the most influential Kenyan female authors due to their pioneering works in post-colonial literature and their politically conscious writings that present the world with a view of colonial experience from the perspective of the colonized. The writers also demonstrate a great sensitivity to place, character, and event that blends into a composite unity.

Kenya, like most other African nations, faces the challenge of re-inventing a sense of identity for posterity (Akoth, 2011). The selected writers seem to emphasize the concern for nature as one unifying and defining attribute essential for creating a shared understanding of a nation and lived experience (Magu, 2014). The study proposes that it is crucial for women in Kenya to understand the importance of shared identity, especially at a time when the nation is seemingly

facing issues of disunity resulting from multiple identities based on factors other than gender, sexual orientation, religion, or class (Dieter, 2019). Moreover, it is possible to transform the multiple identities into a unifying element in a manner that fosters unity in diversity.

In addition, the study sought to establish how the various writers give or deny a voice to the female characters. It did this by exploring the extent to which writers suggest that the nation limits or allows female self-expression and fulfillment of their potential as women and as Kenyan citizens from the late 20th century to date. Women's writings acquire preference in this study as the representation and expression of the female self in post-colonial Kenya.

Ogola (2011) upholds women's writings as best placed to interrogate the female self because the writers "[are] female. [They] understand better what a woman is because [they] have grown up being [women. They] don't know much about men, so [they] can't write as much about them as [they] could with women" (cited in Gitaa, 2008 x). Thus, the project of women's writings, just like feminists', is to reconceptualize female selfhood. The literary representation of women in the selected works depicts them struggling to find space to exercise the "self" in their lives. In this study, "self" refers to self-identity, self-definition, and self-assertion.

The female self is used in this study to designate women's need to be independent and to become self-conscious in their effort to realize both their selfhood and nationhood in the socio-cultural and socio-political spheres. The study discusses the background against which the concept of the female self acquires relevance or irrelevance in writings by select Kenyan women.

Furthermore, self-identity is constructed through the images and meanings assigned to the 'self' and the 'other' in women's writings. The selected writings challenge the patriarchal tradition that delineates women as the other, and the writers use their writings in turn to re-image the place

of women in contemporary Kenya. Initiating dialogue, they point at the patriarchal conceptualization of woman as the 'other' and make reconceptualization of woman as the 'self' possible.

This study looked at the interconnectedness of the female self and national culture, examining the insights that women writers bring to the literary table of literature and outlines the writers' contribution to both the conceptualization and reconceptualization of the female identity. By so doing, Kenyan women produce meaning within the dialectic representation of a woman's personality in the country where she lives.

Kenyan women writers have assumed agency roles in both personal and national issues. In this case, the writers look at how African women could reposition themselves in society to enhance restructuring and women's empowerment. The selected writers include strong female protagonists who are, in some cases, the narrators of the story and who embody the essential, newfangled role of women as instigators of change. The selected novels carry a distinctly feminist message, with the empowerment of women and nature as their agents.

The study examined the differing social positions of women in the pre- and post-colonial periods and took account of considerations about the role of women in modern Kenyan society. The study represents Kenyan women as people who have the capabilities to organize their time for maximum efficiency; they can think and plan for the long term; and they can use support in the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-enhancement.

Lionnet (1989), in *Autobiographical Voices*, observes that women's voices are "always present everywhere but rarely heard, let alone recorded; women's voices have not been a dominant mode of expression or a legitimate and acceptable alternative." By constructing the self through

narration, the story of the female self enters into a dominant mode of expression whereby the concept of knowing the female depends on how the self is constructed as a relative reality that is comprehensible.

The selected writers use their work to enhance women's empowerment through instigating change in the representation of the female self and identity. The shift is based on the reaffirmation of indigenous history, tradition, and culture, which could have only been done by confronting colonial discourse and subverting the dominant image of Kenya. Ashcroft et al. (2002, p. 59) state that a post-colonial writer is essentially an "ethnographer whose cultural location 'creates' two audiences and faces two directions, wishing to reconstitute experience through an act of writing that uses the tools of one culture and society [those of the colonizer] and yet seeks to remain faithful to the experience of another [that of the colonized]."

Additionally, the selected works offer a cross-sectional view of Kenya's cultural pluralism. Narratives, especially the novels, present these writers with a space to reimagine Africa's history, which they believe has been repressed by colonialism. Their writings are very much part of Kenya's history and the theorizing of its political economy. This study asserts that their writings are not just laying claims to the terrain of culture, but they also radically, in the words of the Palestinian philosopher, Edward Said, 'revised visions of the past trending towards a post-colonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and re-deployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speakers protest as part of a general movement of resistance to the colonialist' (1994, p. 256).

With close analysis of the selected texts, the study posits that narrative acts as an agent of history because it provides the space for people to challenge or rethink notions of national identities

(Thing'o, 2009). The present study uses histories and the ways in which they are deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya. The selected writings challenge the patriarchal tradition that delineates women as the other, and the writers use their writings in turn to re-image the place of women in contemporary Kenya.

This study emanates from the need to contribute to critical studies that trace the contemporary contour of literary writing across Africa in light of the call for appreciations of diversity within African identity discourses, especially in the context of looking at merging nature and culture as a tool for creating a national identity. Evidence has shown that Kenya is one of the most multicultural and multiracial countries in Africa (Magu, 2014).

The study proceeds from the conviction that Kenya's written tradition, using English as a language of literary creativity, has been grown by the efforts of feminist female writers who come from different cultural backgrounds, which in turn reflects the socio-cultural composition of Kenyan societies. The writers selected for this study have taken up the burden of representing women as they struggle to negotiate for identity in postcolonial Kenya. This is done by exploring the extent to which writers are suggesting that the nation limits or allows female self-expression and fulfilment of their potential as women and as Kenyan citizens.

Women's writings acquire preference in this study as the residence of the female self. The literary representation of women depicts them struggling to find space so as to exercise themselves in their lives. Self-identity is constructed through the images and meanings assigned to the 'self' and the 'other' in women's writings. By so doing, they produce meaning within the dialectic representation of a woman's personality in the country where she lives. Kenyan women writers have assumed agency roles in both personal and national issues.

The selected writers for this study attempt to explore, express, and think about women's conditions in the post-colonial Kenyan era. The study proposes that the selected women writers are successful in transferring their senses, emotions, experiences, and issues because they write about their self-identities.

1.2 Problem statement

Throughout the twentieth century, female authors from various regions of the globe have established a unique and noteworthy presence within the literary world. The writers have expressed their opinions with great fervor and brought to light significant concerns regarding the portrayal of women in literature. Nevertheless, women encounter challenges in establishing a sense of self and developing a national identity as a result of various structural impediments and antiquated gender-based preconceptions. The disparity arises from the societal pressure on women to compromise their personal beliefs in order to achieve success in patriarchal environments.

The prevailing societal belief is that women are not well-suited for participation in the political and economic spheres. Frequently, such incidents result in a dissonance between an individual's social and personal identities. The understanding of the evolution of self in Kenyan women, as influenced by their nation, requires an investigation into how their self and identity are conceptualized in relation to their country. This is crucial in comprehending how the self is shaped and projected through various engagements in national events. Examining this phenomenon would facilitate comprehension of how women navigate the development of their individual identities in conjunction with their national identities in the context of patriarchal systems, ethnic backgrounds, and experiences of violence, all of which contribute to the formation of female selfhood and national identity.

The research endeavored to examine the manner in which modern literature authored by women redefines the concept of the Kenyan nation in conjunction with the diverse identities that women adopt as well as the functions they fulfill at the personal, domestic, societal, and national levels. The study delved into the conceptualization of female self and identity as presented in the written works of Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Marjorie Oludhe, and Muthoni Likimani. The research challenges the subordination of women within the African patriarchal society and suggests that women effectively convey their personal identities, emotions, experiences, and concerns through their writing.

1.3 Formulation of the self and woman's' identity

The search for identity has always been a key issue facing mankind in its striving for significance and meaning. However, the African understanding of self is in crisis, having been assailed from a number of directions. Rightly, the 2004 female Kenyan Nobel Peace Laureate, Wangari Maathai, an environmental activist and writer, orates that if Africa is to build for the future, it must first face its past. Books written to display Africa's traumatic colonial history enumerate many of the problems faced by its people today that stem from that past. These books tell of Africa's loss of identity under its transatlantic slavery, its colonial occupiers, and the disintegration of societal hierarchies that had developed over centuries. Kenya, like the rest of Africa, still faces the effects of colonization.

Moreover, colonization left the African continent physically and psychologically devastated and scarred. At that point, their identity reinvention would be the most difficult element to regain. This gives right to Frantz Fanon, who forecasted the apocalyptic strategy of the colonizers against Africans' identity in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "Violence in the colonies does

not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs, and to destroy their culture without giving them ours" (1990, p. 7). This does not mean that Africans lose their struggle to regain their identity but rather strive against any form of subjugation, discrimination, racism, or mental slavery.

The emerging theme in African female writing is the representation or redefinition of female identity. The concept of identity has many meanings. According to Gubar and Gilbert (2004), identity is the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness. This is painted against the backdrop of various societal schisms that seek to maintain the status quo of the enslaved female in the continent's literature.

In this light, early works by pioneers portrayed female characters as obedient, subjugated, and submissive. However, with the coming of age of the group of female writers that Magu (2014) describes as literary foremothers, the resilience, inner beauty, radiating grace and energy, and faithfulness of the African woman started to be projected. Women then started their revolution. Sotunsa notes that:

> The unfavorable portrayal of women by African male writers ignited a literary outburst which culminated in female writers attempt to counter the impaired picture of African womanhood by reversing the roles of women in African fiction written by men. African female writers began to present female protagonists who are pitted against all odds yet emerge liberated and determined to exist with or without the man. (Sotunsa, 2008, p. 83-84)

Some female writers stood on their feet and drove the ‘boat’ of their identity back to reasonable representations. Kauffmann argues that "identity is a permanent system of enclosure and integration of sense, whose basic model is wholeness." Therefore, the concepts of female self and identity are the pertinent aspects of this study, which will be studied in depth.

The concept of the self is an important study in the exploration of the representation of African women’s identity. The study of self-esteem and self-concept are important topics when looking at the position of African women in post-colonial Africa. This is because self-attributes such as self-esteem, self-concepts, and racial identity have been studied more than any other topic in African literature. In fact, popular literature would implicate challenges with self and identity formation as the root of many problems in African women (Patterson, 2004).

Self-definition has been essential to African women’s survival. By advancing black women’s empowerment through self-definition, these safe spaces help black women resist the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside black civil society but within African institutions" (Collins, 2000, p. 98, 101). Self-definitions are the ways in which black women define themselves through their own perceptions and not the perceptions of society.

Self-concept involves beliefs and knowledge about the self. The conceptualization of the self mostly depends on culture and socialization. Cultures can be categorized as collectives where people have an independent view of themselves. On the other hand, socialization is a life course that involves the internalization of cultural expectations, a process through which people, in this case Kenyan women, learn the expectations of society and learn to participate in group life. It helps to absorb one’s culture—customs, habits, laws, practices, and means of expression. Hence, it forms the basis for identity (how one defines oneself).

In a study on black women's identity, Collins (1990, 1986) argued via her theoretical framework of black feminist thought (BFT) that black women's experiences and identities are inextricably linked; their socialization must be understood through the system(s) in which they are situated. More specifically, black women's socialization is gendered and racialized (Brown, Blackmon, Rosnick, Griffin-Fennell, & White-Johnson, 2017).

The woman's identity formation process(es) include the negotiation of multiple marginalized and intersecting identities within their respective collegiate environments (Porter, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). This study therefore proposes that socialization, the process of reconstructing a positive identity in African women, involves a process of re-orientation of people and ideas that leads to total rejection of patriarchy. This form of socialization as a process of liberation has been emphasized in the selected texts as it results in the empowerment of women and the community.

Women's selfhood refers to women's overall perceptions of their individuality, egocentricism, abilities, behaviour, and personality (Maina, 2006). In addressing the question of selfhood, there is a need to review various perceptions of the female self, with the first reference being made to the patriarchal order. According to Rivkin and Ryan (2004), patriarchal notions silence women's voices, distort their lives, and treat that which concerns them as peripheral, such that "to be a woman... [is] in some respect is not to exist at all" (p. 765).

With the patriarchal repression that has consigned women's agency in Kenya to the periphery of social life, there is a need to recognize and accord women's voices and to present their lives and experiences objectively. In their search for identity, women express essential accounts of their experiences, especially the ones that have had a brunt on the most instantaneous and

enduring areas of their lives as women and citizens. Their aim is to question ideas and attitudes that put them at the margins of the mainstream, forcing them to rethink their identity.

Gilbert and Gubar (2004) observe that "for all literary artists, of course, self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative 'I AM' cannot be uttered if the 'I' does not know what it is. But for the female artist, the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between her and herself" (p. 812). The need for women's realization of themselves is underscored as a project aimed at making women capable of perceiving their personalities so that they can assert their own self-identity. Only then can they say, 'I AM', as a particular category of people with a right to be who they are and to put up a challenge to be allowed their rightful social space in Kenya. The use of the pronoun 'I' is an important discursive leap towards autonomy.

Identity may be thought of as an adaptation to a social context (Baumeister and Maraven, 1996). In this study, identity focuses on the self-ascribed definitions that include social roles, reputation, values, and possibilities. Social identity may include one's self-concept in relation to gender, sexual orientation, age, and ethnic and racial identity. The process of identity formation begins at birth and continues throughout life. Young girls understanding of themselves, ethnicity, and race is mainly derived from the family and community in the process of socialization (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

As children's social and cognitive development progresses, they move from understanding and describing themselves based on individual external characteristics to increasingly emphasizing more internal, multi-dimensional, and situational factors. African children develop an

understanding of racial categories and the broad cultural attributions and biases associated with gender, race, and ethnicity (Dell, 'Angelo, Spencer, Swanso, Herpalani, and Spencer, 2002).

As the girls grow into youth and later into women, identity formation is emphasized. At first glance, African women, especially those in rural areas encroached on by patriarchy, come to the realization that they are shaped to be laborers and the producers of children. They are not respected as real people but are more like the property of men. All they have to do is be good housewives and make sure to please their husbands at all times. For this reason, women tend to lose their own identity while being defined by the status or position of their husbands.

There are constant struggles between gender, identity, commoditization, and class. Among the men and women in many African tribes that still exist today, there are gendered divergences that will always remain intact unless the culture and the way in which they are taught to treat each other are challenged. The issue of conceptualization of the female self and identity is very topical, and we cannot overemphasize its relevance, especially for African women. The invasion and the so-called subsequent scramble for Africa by the West were somehow intended to boost Africa economically or socially, but subsequently, there were so many negative and dire consequences as a result of the colonization.

Furthermore, women suffered more—a double oppression from colonization and also from the patriarchal African tradition. Ashcroft et al. argue that patriarchy and colonialism are characterized by similar modes of domination over those they render subordinate (2007, p. 93). Feminist critics bring forth the concept of double colonization, which was the result of women's subjugation in colonial societies "both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women" in male-dominated cultures (ibid., p. 95).

During the process of decolonization, postcolonial subjects attempt not only to free their lands but also to free their cultures. Once independence is regained, the process of postcolonialism begins. What is left of the original cultural identity of the native people then starts to be explored, and the newly acquired identity starts to be analyzed. This subject of the quest for identity and the attempt to figure out the value of the new identity is deeply explored in postcolonial literature.

According to Sikweyiya et al. (2020), patriarchal beliefs have resulted in the unfair treatment of women across Africa. Individuals are confronted with various forms of abuse, including sexual, physical, mental, and verbal. Oppression refers to the act of subjecting an individual or a group of individuals to a severe or brutal form of control. Despite the widespread occurrence of this significant tragedy throughout Africa, there are only a limited number of women who have successfully diverged from traditional norms and established independent livelihoods. However, this pursuit of autonomy has often resulted in the loss of familial ties.

In instances where a woman chooses to deviate from customary practices, she may face ostracism from both her kin and the wider community. In general, the experiences that these women endure are exceedingly distressing as they impede the development of their sense of self. There are constant struggles between gender, identity, commoditization, and class. Among the men and women in many African tribes that still exist today, there are divergences that will always remain intact because of the culture and the way in which they are taught to treat each other.

In a study by Porter (2017), she revised her original *Model of Identity Development in Black Undergraduate Women* (MIDBUW; Porter, 2013) by asserting that interactions are in fact constant and influence identity across one's experiences. The model assumes that black women's identities were inextricably linked and could not be discussed singularly (Collins, 1990); that

social interactions within respective environments influenced how and what identities were developed; and finally, that black women must develop (or be in the process of developing) a multiple consciousness (King, 1988) through which to engage and interact with others and their environment.

In an attempt to narrate the nation using selected Kenyan women writers and the conceptualization of self and identity, this study represents being a woman as a gift. Hence, Kenyan women need to be kind to themselves as they go through the progression and formation of their identity. The selected texts epitomize women who get to know themselves and make choices about who they want to be, as there are so many differences among women and one cannot be all. But one spectacular self with self-esteem and awareness of the expectations of nature and community.

Furthermore, the women writers see leadership as the idea of "challenging the process" (see Northouse, 2007, p. 188). As Northouse succinctly summarized:

> Challenging the process means being willing to change the status quo and step into the unknown. It includes being willing to innovate, grow, and improve. Exemplary leaders are like pioneers: they want to experiment and try new things. They are willing to take risks, which makes them think better. (Northouse, 2007, p. 188)

Hence, this study, through the analysis of the selected texts, proposes women writers as enlightened individuals who know what is happening to other women; hence, through the writing of the selected novels, they are taking possession of the present. They serve as a bridge, allowing other women, through reading the texts, to confront their pasts and return to the present, which is part of self-identification, hence enabling a new life in the future.

Identity development is the process of maturing into a distinct version of yourself and your unique qualities. This study is pegged to the notion that women's writings, though viewed as peripheral as far as nationhood is concerned, often narrate issues related to both selfhood and nationhood. The central concern of this study is to investigate the centrality of women in national issues by evaluating women's writings. Evaluating how the specific experiences that affect women as women and as postcolonial Kenyan citizens help women realize their divergent identities

This is in recognition of women as the 'other' voices, unheard voices whose selfhood in the nation has inadequately been voiced in national matters (Wanjala, 2013). The female writer's perspective aims at according self to the female through re-conceptualization, hence the feminist theoretical approach that enhances an understanding of women as self without objectifying women as the other or portraying them as the same as men. The concern here is to interrogate how women writers view fellow women in their own narratives as they find meaning in their own experiences in the nation.

The authors are perceived as articulating the female characters' relationship to the environment in which they perform nationhood and calling for the need to analyze the ways in which women's narratives deconstruct or reinforce existing perceptions of the female self.

1.4 Scope of the study

The quest for identity is a very prominent theme in postcolonial studies and literature. African female writers have, over years, made profound contributions to the development of society and the expansion of the literary tenet through their writings. Not only have the works of these female writers dealt with very pertinent issues of society, they have equally contributed immensely to the widening of the literary canon, especially with their addition of a new strand of literature since the appearance of female authored works in mainstream literature.

These African women seek, fight and find a place to express their view to their counterparts in rural and urban areas. They attempt to reconstruct identity or to reinvent a new one through their writing. They defend their stance and then clear way to others to do so. Among these African pioneers to clear a path in their own country for women's right is Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Marjorie Oludhe and Muthoni Likimani whose selected literature texts will be used in this study. The study will particularly explore how the selected women writers reconstruct Kenyan women's image in their writing through the utilization of political changes and events within which the texts are set, the authors attempt to empower women in the Kenyan society.

The scope of this study lies in three domains: selfhood, female identity, and the selected writings of Kenyan female writers. The literature reviewed in this study aims at identifying the gap in knowledge on female identity that this study sets out to fill. The study will look at what constitutes selfhood, women identity and how Kenyan women's responses to male dominance through their writings. It will look at the various ways post-colonial Kenyan women have responded to male supremacy, according to the objective opportunities available under each particular variant of patriarchy. Such responses range from eager collaboration, whereby women act as devout guardians of patriarchal mores and values, to different levels of passive and active resistance.

The study's primary concern is to look at how women represent themselves in society through the selected literature by educating their audience about issues that affect them. But also, they try to ensure that their teachings go beyond teaching, perhaps converting the women to empower themselves in the process of finding their identities amidst the different perspectives renowned by society.

Recognizing new women's writings, this study views writing as the site of a complex negotiation of self and national identity in Kenya. The study will look at identity in postcolonial theory and explain how it relates to individuals seeking refuge from the advent of the 'other'. Thus, identity involves a 'desire' to preserve the national heritage. Consequently, the individuals' "nationalism may be due to the relatively stronger desire to define their cultural identity" (Talib, 2002, p. 21).

Bringing gender into the analysis of racial and ethnic exclusion is pertinent to reversing the tendency of much of this literature to adopt a one-dimensional focus. At the same time, incorporating into the analysis of gender oppression the complex intersections between the major exclusionary mechanisms are promoted by postcolonial feminists as critical to making feminism relevant to women of marginalized, colonized, and otherwise oppressed categories.

A close look into post-colonial literature indicates that some scholars postulate that each author speaks his own voice and must be conceived from that perspective (Asma, 2015), but this study puts forth that the selected writers for this study do not write only to express their own feelings of domination and subversion. They also express the realities of their own gender and societies through a depiction of their realities. That is why a discussion of the works of the selected postcolonial female writers would be of great importance in understanding postcolonialism in general and the quest for identity depicted by postcolonial literature in particular. In this case, the selected female writers, Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Muthoni Likimani, and Marjorie Oludhe, are famous Kenyan writers coming from a postcolonial background.

The investigation in this study involved a close reading and methodological analysis of both primary and secondary texts. Fredrick Jameson's (2002, p. 1) prescription of a political interpretation of 'literature as a socially symbolic act' will be particularly useful, though it will not

be applied in absolute terms partly because the study is also concerned with issues of styles of writing.

The investigation also involved a strong historicizing element: a careful examination of the historical and sociopolitical context of production of the selected primary texts as well as the biographical background of the authors and their overt ideological persuasion, particularly on issues of selfhood and female identity in Kenyan women's writing. The critical theories used in this study, feminist and postcolonial theory, interrogate women's experiences in feminist and postcolonial circles. The highlight is women's experiences and the marginal space allocated to them.

1.5 Research Problems and Objectives: Key Questions to be asked

1.5.1 Objectives

a) To examine selected Kenyan female writers' conceptualization of the female self.

b) To analyse representations of women's subjectivity and its effects on the female self and national identity in post-colonial Kenya.

c) To interrogate women writer's perspective on the effect of socio-political surroundings on the development of female identity.

1.5.2 Questions

a) How do Kenyan female writers conceptualize the female self?

b) How are the representations of women's subjectivity manifest, and what effect do these have on the female self and national identity in post-colonial Kenya?

c) What is the female writer's perspective on the effect of socio-political surroundings on the development of female identity?

1.6 Research Methods / Approach to Study

In selecting the methodology for this study, the researcher was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2013) observation that methodology refers to the framework within which the study is conducted and that it consists of theories and practices for how they will go about conducting the research.

This study is qualitative and desktop-based. The essence of qualitative research is that it is not interested in numerical representation but rather in the deepening of understanding of a given problem. The objective is to produce in-depth information in order to understand the various dimensions of the problem under investigation (Queiros, Faria, & Almeria, 2017). It relies on a close reading and textual analysis of Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986), Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1998).

The study obtains its data by questioning the literal meaning of the selected texts and by studying their formal properties, asking how they achieve their unity of construction. According to Lloyd Brown, "the women writers of Africa are the other voices, unheard voices rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and predictably male-oriented studies in this field" (1981, p. 3). The implication is that women writers have to lay claim to personal narrative through the narration of women's stories, whereby women are portrayed as the oppressed gender category.

The female writer's aim is to create their own and their female characters' spheres of conceived existence. They, therefore, remove themselves as well as their female protagonists from the marginalized position to which the dominant patriarchal society has relegated them. Women writers and their writings provide space to interrogate how the voices of female writers affect

female construction and how necessary changes in perception, construction, and application of theory can be accommodated through narration.

In this study, the writings under study bear the voice of the African woman, which is socially constructed with regard to the African woman's experience. The selected texts for this study articulate national agency and identity in relation to the changing roles of women in Kenya. Besides close reading, textual reading will be used to offer a critical appreciation of the texts and to interrogate the connotations of the language used explicitly and implicitly in the selected texts.

The study also uses autobiography with a close look at the parallels and differences among the selected authors' ways of describing similar issues: issues of the female self, nationhood, and national identity. The study assumes that autobiographies from post-colonial Kenya can be a major gateway into personal and communal experiences as depicted through individual authors' stories. In this case, the complex trajectory of the Kenyan nation and the different historical mutations it has gone through can be apprehended through self-written works and politically committed individuals such as those examined in this study.

Literary aspects of analysis include characterization, themes, style, and setting. Themes are examined in the context of women, their post-colonial opinions, and their responses to nationalism. Setting, for instance, home, workplace, urban, and countryside, will be analyzed to ascertain the extent to which the environment and situations surrounding female characters influence female actions and choices. Characterization will be analyzed through a close look at the writers' interaction and ideological expression of self and national identity. Elements of style are analyzed to assess the language used in the narration of the selected texts in the creation of reality and fiction.

With respect to narrative techniques, the study will use a combination of theoretical approaches within the expanding field of narratology, conducting a detailed and systematic

analysis of the themes of selfhood, female identity, and Kenyan women's writing in the selected text.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation / Thesis

This study consists of eight chapters. Chapter one consists of a brief introduction to the study, which includes the background and problem statement, objectives and key questions, methodology, scope, and delimitations of this study.

Chapter two gives an overview of previous studies related to selfhood and female identity, national identity, and writings by Kenyan female writers. The literature reviewed in this chapter is aimed at identifying the knowledge gap that this study sets out to fill.

Chapter three addresses the theories that are employed to analyse women's national agency and identity in post-colonial Kenya. Gynocticism, together with post-colonial eco-critical theory, will be used to give a post-colonial feminist representation of the themes analysed in the selected texts.

Chapter four deals with the environment and how it affects the development of the female self in Kenya. The chapter will explore Wangari Maathai's Memoir *Unbowed* (2016). It will look at how Maathai uses her autobiography to discuss issues of environment and women's empowerment and conceptualize post-colonial Kenyan women's identities and female selves.

Chapter five deals with the conceptualization and reconceptualization of the female self as examined in patriarchal and contemporary societies in Likimani's *Passbook Number F47527* (1998) and *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005).

Chapter six explores the problematization of the questions of the female self and national identity. It also addresses womanhood and new findings about the interactions of ethnicity,

sexuality, gender, and racial class in women's lives. The text studied in this chapter is Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012).

Chapter seven investigates how the critical unconscious self can be affirmed as part of the existing nation, as portrayed in Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986).

Chapter eight presents the summary, findings, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a thematic literature review on female selfhood, female identity, and the writings of post-colonial Kenyan female writers represented in the works of Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Muthoni Likimani, and Marjorie Oludhe. The selected writers will be analyzed in terms of how they conceptualized Kenyan women's identity and why they represented the female self the way they did before and after independence.

The chapter interrogates the representations of women's subjectivity and the effect they have on the female self and national identity in post-colonial Kenya. The review reflects on what it means to be a Kenyan woman as well as identifies the gap in knowledge on female and national identity within a Kenyan context.

The central themes of the study, including the transformation of women and what could be termed characters debunking of the expectations placed before them, may be viewed as feminist since the selected writers focus on the resistance of women against a system that Carol Boyce-Davies (1994, p. 28), in a different context, refers to as the 'objectification of women in society, literature, art, and culture'. In fact, Boyce-Davies's definition of feminism is particularly pertinent to the argument of the present study, as she defines feminism as 'a politics of possible transformation that resists the objectification of women' (p. 28). Yet, Tuula Gordon's definition of feminism is perhaps more valuable in the context of this study, for she describes feminism as 'a politics of transformation, as a way of finding a voice' (p. 36).

In essence, the definitions are the same, but the addendum in Gordon's definition transforms the second part of the definition from a negative into a positive, from defense into re-appropriation and action. As Gordon astutely adds, 'Feminism is concerned with redefining the world on the basis of the location and experiences of women, noting their oppression and subordination' (p. 37) [own emphasis]. Gordon's proposition prompts the researcher to think about the women in the selected writings as possible initiators of a new worldview or as reconstructors of their own worlds. The women certainly endeavor to reconstruct their own lives even though they are often 'obliged to use the same ingredients' (p. 35); but the redefinition of the world, as suggested, may well be a hypothetical ideal canvassing support from the feminist perspective alone.

The female self is used in this study to designate women's need to be independent, to become self-conscious, and even to be (re)conceptualized in their effort to realize both their selfhood and nationhood in the socio-cultural and socio-political spheres. Re-conceptualize means changing certain opinions; in this case, changing the perception of women and "others" on the position of women in society. Women's selfhood in this study refers to women's overall perceptions of their individuality, egocentricism, abilities, behavior, and personality (Magu, 2014). The study discusses the background against which the concept of the female self acquires relevance or irrelevance in selected Kenyan women's writings.

In the interrogation of these key themes: selfhood, female identity, and the writings of post-colonial Kenyan female writers, some questions arise: What are the strategies of women's domination embedded in the post-colonial Kenyan community? What are the strategies of women's resistance present in contemporary postcolonial literature and critiques? And what sort of resistance do the selected writers bring forth in their respective writings? In an attempt to

investigate such questions as comprehensively as possible, this chapter aims to look at discourses of domination and then at counter-strategies of resistance put in place by the selected post-colonial Kenyan women to achieve a sense of self and identity.

This study recognizes that there is a dearth of studies concerning the articulation of female identity and self, particularly regarding contemporary women's writings in Kenya. The study, therefore, explores the works of these selected women writers that aim to establish a sense of female identity.

2.2 Conceptualisation of the female self and identity in post-colonial Kenya

Topics of female identity and selfhood in modern women's writing have gained a lot of attention in feminist literature. Among the many unexpected and improbable challenges of being an African woman, the issues of selfhood and subjectivity have been pivotal to feminist studies from the very onset of the field's development. The topic is pivotal to questions about personal identity, the body, sociality, and agency that feminism must address. Simone de Beauvoir's provocative declaration, 'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (cited in Anderson, Ellen, Willett, and Meyers, 2020, p. 1), signals the central importance of the self for feminism.

According to Bergoffen and Burke (2020), to be the 'other' is to be a non-subject, a non-agent—in short, a mere thing. The aspect of women being positioned as the other in post-colonial Kenya acquires relevance in this study. The study posits that women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated or even outright denied by law, customary practice, and cultural stereotypes. Throughout history, women have been identified either as inferior versions of men or as their direct opposite, characterized through their perceived differences from men; in both cases,

women have been denigrated on the basis of these views (Ebila, 2015; Amaefula, 2021). There are notions that men's writings still dominate literary productions.

This conception prompts Ogundipe-Leslie (2002) to ask, 'Are African women voiceless, or do we fail to look for voices where we may find them, in the sites and forms in which these voices exist? (p. 139). Many male writers overlook this question, claiming that women seek attention for themselves. Conversely, the patrimonial relationship that the government of Kenya had with its female citizens required silence and humility in the face of oppression, not challenges and protests (Ebila, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Mellor, 1996; Griffin, 2016).

This study therefore exposes the contradiction that exists between the way the state perceives itself in a genetically gendered imagination that includes women and how, at the same time, it excludes and silences women from participating actively in challenging how society is governed.

Black women scholars have asserted that their experiences are markedly different from those of black males (see Collins, 2000; Houston, 2000). For Houston (2000), ‘Black women experience selfhood in the context of blackness; they do not experience their gender and ethnic identities as separate ‘parts’ of who they are’ (p. 11). Hence, the double edge of racism and sexism, commonly called ‘gendered racism’ (i.e., racism that is colored by gender), has been particularly detrimental to black women working and learning in academia.

Muchiri, in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya*, starts with the contentious view that 'there are no studies on the female autobiographical voice in independent Kenya despite its significance as a narrative strategy’ (p. 4). Year? Grounding her argument on the premise that 'female selfhood’ can be understood by recognizing 'the historically generated differences between men and women," Muchiri's conclusion that ‘a female autobiographical voice

echoes all other voices in society' is a very important aspect that this study wishes to interrogate further (2010, p. 157).

This study also proposes that the scarcity of women's written and published autobiographies should not be perceived as the absence of life narratives or of African women in post-colonial Kenya but should be related to the conditioned position of women due to patriarchal beliefs. The study suggests that women's voices in the search and expression of their self-identity in the nation need to come from women's writings, especially those that are feminist.

The study proposes further, that women's autobiographies interpret life experiences as historical milestones creatively composed through reconstructing memories (Indangasi 1993; Marcus 1994; Muchiri Women's 2010). The study argues that the autobiographical process involves a search into the past by the self to reveal the present to a personal or external audience (Abbs 1974; Bloom 2011; Omuteche 2004; Muchiri 2010) in order to inscribe oneself in history and protect oneself from the "destructiveness of age" (Abbs 16).

The autobiographical tendency of inviting the reader to share the most intimate and embarrassing experiences of the author that relate to our own lives has an appeal to truth, albeit subjective, which incites us to reflect on ourselves (Conway 2004; Muchiri Women's 2010). Therefore, selected women's autobiographies will be studied as a political act that gives agency to diverse agendas such as environmental conservation, women's participation in politics, and the complexities of negotiating the private roles of wifehood and motherhood, among many other subjectivities, for women in public space(s).

Additionally, women's selfhood refers to women's overall perceptions of their individuality, egocentrism, abilities, behavior, and personality (see Proulx, Todorov, Taylor, and de Sousa, 2016). In this study, "self" refers to self-identity, self-definition, and self-assertion.

These are aspects that are tied to the numerous identities that women assume in the nation, each of which is tied to social, economic, and political structures in the nation.

The nation, on the other hand, is a real, imagined, and idealistic geographical space occupied by people who live collectively as a society. The identity of an individual becomes manifest in the role(s) that a person plays in respect to a particular position, which enables her or him to realize self-definition.

Thus, the development of the concept of the self in women enables them to point out who they are to themselves and to others, even though the self keeps changing depending on situational influences. This is because views of oneself are gained through direct experience with the environment and also from references made to oneself by other people. Consequently, the core of an identity becomes the labeling of the self as inhabiting a role and incorporating that role into the self-meaning and expectations associated with the role and its presentation.

2.3 Writing the female self in socio-cultural and socio-political spheres

In addressing the question of selfhood, there is a need to review various perceptions of the female self-prevalent in patriarchal societies. Patriarchy conceptualizes 'self' as the male and "other' as the female (Were, 2017; Thwaites, 2013). This casting of the woman as the man's other overlooks women's selfhood and agency.

Women's identity as self or other is a debate that is current in Kenya today, where gender trouble is prevalent. The predicament of the woman as the 'other' is underscored by Ruthven, who posits that reference to women as the 'other' has harmful results because 'if woman is conceived of as a supplement to man, she becomes the receptacle either of what he doesn't want (weakness) or what he cannot have..." (Ogola, 2005, p. 41-42).

This proposition highlights a feminist critical outlook that attempts to figure out the conceptualization of selfhood through binary oppositions of male/female and self/other. Feminists' views of women capture images of the self-versus-other binary opposition that constitutes a patriarchal order through gender power relations.

In feminist circles, one cannot (re)conceptualize oneself without thinking of the other since the woman is viewed in relation to the man and vice versa. The traditional notion of masculinity, especially in the African context, is an identity that has been repeatedly related to attitudes of aggression and violence while punishing others for being insufficiently bold. With the depiction of gender characteristics in such light, the definition of 'man' is wrong—not merely wrong but actively harmful.

The basic idea of masculinity comprises a comprehension of males' social position with respect to social privilege and then an understanding of the result of that position. Butler (1990) argues that gender is a social construction, and she specifically used a performance lens to further explicate this process. Assuming that identity is not stable, identities (i.e., gender, class, race, and sexuality) are accomplished through the stylized repetition of acts. Warren explained that such identity labels 'are constructed on the basis of arbitrary characteristics (e.g., sex on the basis of reproductive organs rather than hair color or height) and have been so repeated through time as to make them seem like natural constructs' (Warren, 2001, p. 95).

Although individuals perform gender in nuanced ways, certain sanctions and proscriptions influence gender performances that socially construct gender categories based on difference. Warren (2001) sequentially states, '[t]he very fact that race or gender is an identifiable marker of difference while simultaneously containing variation on those markers suggests that identities are

socially constructed' (p. 96). Based on gender role expectations, gender stereotypes construct gender in consistent and predictable ways.

A common gender role stereotype, for instance, is that boys are more autonomous than girls. Therefore, girls and women are viewed in the sense of the 'other.' This study bases its premise on the assumption that Kenyan women struggle to achieve selfhood and identity in post-colonial Kenya. In other words, they struggle to make themselves visible within the male-dominated social and political power structure that governs gender power relations in the patriarchal order.

The study argues that Kenyan women writers employ Kenya's postcolonial social changes as an alternative to explore the influences they have on constructing individual women's identities in a changing postcolonial society. The study asserts that the search for empowerment becomes relevant in the interrogation of the historical conception of the self, which makes the idea of the self and identity intelligible without concealing the difference between women and men.

This study proposes that in appropriating female selfhood, the category of the self becomes important in the reconceptualization of the female self since the implications of gender in regard to self and others consciously beget the female gendered self through narration. Elam (1994) observes that:

> To [historicize] is first to discover the woman where there had only been men, to see [the] woman in history, and recognize a fundamental experience which unites women, the experience of being 'the other'…. Such a reading obviously is no longer wholly within the discourse which produces history as man's truth, no longer accepts that history has only to do with men … for where once history revealed the truth of man's identity as a finite being, revealed man's fate, now history reveals

> the truth of women's lives, the fate of being a woman, of being 'the Other'. The closed circle of recognition is still inscribed, for all women are women in the same way, and this discovery of identity is predicated on whole series of exclusions…. (p.37)

The implication here is that women's writings express women's self-definition and assertion of their identity as human beings while at the same time pointing out the fate women have suffered under patriarchy.

Ogundipe-Lesie (1994) argues that "women are shackled by their own negative self-image by continuous internalization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy" (36). This internalization makes the typical African woman react with fear, adopting dependency complexes and attitudes to please the "patriarch," where more self-assertive actions are needed.

Patriarchy, therefore, implies male rule and privilege and entails female subordination. Jewkes et al. (2015) argue that in any given cultural context, male and female behavior patterns are fixed by norms, and anyone who tries to break the rules can meet with serious problems in a community in which the ruling group produces images and conceptions of the others to legitimize the status quo.

In simple terms, patriarchy ensures that it is the male who is in control, and therefore, in such societies, women are expected to venture only into territories that men endorse, as is the case in many African novels; hence, the female self and identity are repressed. Despite the subjective space accorded to women in the postcolonial Kenyan nation, this study proposes and expresses their collective will as Kenyan citizens.

Through narrative discourse, the selected Kenyan female writers' stories, in the words of Krysinski (1995), 'reveals the self [evolving] around such structures as consciousness, identity confessions, self-revelation, quest for identity..." (p. 121). The terms consciousness, self-

revelation, and quest for identity gain relevance in the women's writings discussed in this study, and their detailed exposition is aimed at examining female identity issues.

The dominance of one group over the others is an example of how society as a whole operates through a power play. In order to infuse oppression at all levels while denying those in the subjugated position a voice, this dominance asserts itself and permeates through layers of class, caste, race, sex, and gender, among others (Wanjala, 2012).

Postcolonialism refers to subalternity as a position shared predominantly by decolonized peoples of Africa who occupy the lowest strata of society, but Spivak (1993, p. 65) clarifies that "simply by being postcolonial or a member of an ethnic minority, we are not ‘subaltern.’ That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space." To be situated in subalternity is to be buffered by individuality, unaware of one’s place in relation to the collective, and disconnected from resources that could otherwise be gained through membership in a union strengthened by communication and solidarity.

Thus, heterogeneity and marginalization both contribute to what Spivak asserts is the most crucial aspect of subalternity: a lack of voice. The subaltern becomes the invisible being who is unable to articulate its identity amidst the lacunae resulting from hegemonic silencing and their subsequent marginalization.

The dilemma of the gendered subaltern is of the utmost concern, as the group’s struggle may consist of layers of oppressed states vis-à-vis gender, class, and caste, resulting in multiple levels of marginalization. This condition of the gendered subaltern can also be compared to that of the Other, who is always defined by the existence of man as he assimilates such a social group through patriarchal dominance (Ahmed, 2018).

However, as a form of protest against contemporary patriarchal hegemony, various scholars have taken up the representation of such concerns, and literature has included such issues. Wanjala (2012) has examined women's identity in Marjorie Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986). His focus is on 'how the gendered subaltern has been presented in Kenyan literature' (p. 1). Wanjala illustrates how the work presents the figure of the gendered subaltern in Kenya. The subaltern in' this analysis refers to women as a social group excluded from the Kenyan nation.

Gayatri Spivak (1994) maintains that 'the subaltern has no history and cannot speak; the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow' (p. 32). This study examines how women are presented as a group outside the hegemonic male power structure. The study argues that many different societies in Kenya have treated women as the 'other', 'colonized', and 'deprived' time and again; hence, women have suffered because of the politics of oppression and repression. Of late, the concept of gendered subaltern has been of much consequence, which implies that women have been doubly subalternized, first on the basis of nationality and then on the basis of gender.

The study also interrogates how women's writings provide a flexible environment within which the subaltern can be accommodated as essential members of society or nation. The study asserts that in their search for identity, women express essential accounts of their experiences, especially the ones that have a brunt on the most immediate and enduring areas of their lives as women and citizens. This study, therefore, proceeded on the premise that women struggle to achieve selfhood and identity to make themselves visible within the social and political power structure that governs gender power relations in the patriarchal order.

Wasamba (2000) castigates the patriarchal order, which supports the subjectivity of women. He says, ‘Patriarchal ideology... exaggerates biological differences between men and

women to ensure that men always have the dominant roles while women contend with subordinate ones' (p. 17–18).

This argument underscores the need for women to transcend patriarchal gendered perspectives, which perpetuate female subjectivity and exclusion from national issues. Throughout history, various forms of violence have manifested themselves in society as a consequence of certain sectors' or groups' dominance over others. In this context, gender-based violence is one of the key social mechanisms for perpetuating the subordination of women since male hegemony power, considered the generic patrimony of men (Amorós, 1990), is based on social control over women. Therefore, violations of women's human rights are directly or indirectly related to the gender system and to mainstream cultural values.

The violation of women's rights and gender-based violence are not new problems; they arise out of attitudes that, until very recently, were socially acceptable and, since they were generally limited to the sphere of private life, were little known. Gender-based violence is defined as violence that reflects the existing asymmetry in the power relations between men and women and that perpetuates the subordination and devaluation of the female as opposed to the male.

This violence exists within the framework of the patriarchy as a symbolic system that engenders an array of day-to-day practices that deny women their rights and reproduce the existing imbalance and inequity between the sexes. The difference between this kind of violence and other forms of aggression and coercion lies in the fact that, in this case, the risk factor or source of vulnerability is the mere fact of being a woman.

This study, through the analysis of the selected texts, will look at the extent to which gender violence has affected women's identities and their representation of selfhood. Gender-based violence will be discussed as one of the effects brought forth by patriarchy and how the selected

women writers, through their female characters, have rose above gender-based violence and are represented not as victims but as victors who work to save other women from the same experiences by instigating women's empowerment initiatives and raising awareness that boost women's self-representation.

One of the vital concerns in assessing whether gender matters in Kenyan society is in the household. If we observe the roles of man and woman carefully, we can see that household roles are divided along much clearer gender lines. The household is a basic unit of our society where individuals both cooperate and compete for resources. Moreover, it is a primary place where individuals confront and reproduce social norms, values, power, and privilege. It is actually a space where gender identities are shaped and participated in, which further helps in creating new norms.

Thus, gender matters in the household in a major way. Researchers have come up with many arguments on why men are in the dominant position whereas women are in the subordinate position. For instance, Hilary Lips (2015) refers to social-cultural theories:

> [it] focus on how women's and men's behavior is shaped by the way power is distributed in the broader culture. These theories posit that, because so many cultures assign higher status and power to men, behavior associated with masculinity tends to be powerful behavior and feminine behavior tends to be powerless behavior. (Lips p.5)

Hooks' writing about patriarchy, black men, and black women has informed much of the understanding of gender-based oppression contained in this study. She gives the following definition of patriarchy:

> Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females,

> and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (Hooks, 2013, p. 1)

This study privileges an understanding of patriarchy as a discourse that operates at a psychic level among both men and women. This is important to the exploration of internalization, feeling, and emotion contained here. Hook's interpretation of patriarchy speaks to this study's understanding that patriarchy is a smokescreen for dominance and subordination within society through its imposition of normative scripts of masculinity and femininity that negatively impact women's constructions of selfhood (Schalkwyk, 2018). In this sense, the operation of patriarchy assists all systems of oppression within society. Of particular interest to this study is the way in which patriarchy assists the operation of oppression against women in post-colonial Kenya.

The selected writers for this study deconstruct women's subjectivity, although through struggle they elevate their female characters through the formation of identity beyond the societal gender roles assigned to women. The study is of the view that a woman, if in an empowerment and transforming space, should internalize the ideology and viewpoint that she is as important as her male counterparts and hence should not radicalize her voice as immaterial.

Feminist discussion of the self provides a critique of the role played by views of otherness in the lives of women in African literature, as portrayed in the 'mother Africa' trope. Florence Stratton (1994) highlights the trope's deep rootedness in male literary convention that enhances female subjectivity. She says:

> The embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman, one of the most enabling tropes of 'postcolonial' male domination as well as of colonialism; the portrayal of women as passive and voiceless, images that serve to rationalize and therefore perpetuate

> inequality between the sexes and the romanticization and idealization of motherhood, as a means of masking women's subordination in society (p. 172).

Stratton paints the picture of an African woman in bondage who needs to be liberated. This is the kind of liberation that the selected writers bestow on their female characters. In traditional African society, women are assigned the role of biological reproduction for the nation. Thus, motherhood in patriarchal ideology is merely an institution, a role that women are expected to perform in their passivity and voicelessness. However, there is a need for women to experience motherhood as a role that calls for skill and knowledge so that they can nurture their children to become distinguished members of the nation.

The women's writings selected for this study condemn patriarchy. An investigation of the development of the female self in this thesis sets out to criticize patriarchal, gendered perspectives that undermine women. For instance, this study, through the analysis of the selected texts, looked at how the writers refrain from perpetuating otherness in the texts by subscribing to gender roles to contest the authority that traditions use to subjugate women by rejecting the existing social codes that subdue women as the other.

Through this process, the writers' process constructs equitable social relations. Leslie points out that women are not merely biological beings; 'contrary to what [most people] think, [a woman] is more than a biological aperture' (p. 5). The selected female writers aim to submerge the biological aspects of women that fail to foster female selfhood. By so doing, the woman's self-perspective has been brought on board to address women's identity with regard to the performance of nationhood and thereby consign agency to women.

Magu (2014) asserts that, as far as selfhood and female identity are concerned, Kenyan women writers have articulated women's search for self-identity in an environment characterized by transition and new socio-political realities that relegate female self-identity as unimportant. Among these writers are Carolyne Adalla in *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* (1993), Marjorie Macgoye in *Chira* (1997), *Coming to Birth* (1986), and *The Present Moment* (1997), and Muthoni Likimani in *Passbook Number F.47927* (1998), *What Does a Man Want?* (1974), and *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005). In her work, Magu (2014) argues that women artists mediate between the self and the other as women struggle to express their individuality.

This is not different from the struggles of Kenyan women writers, as seen in the struggle that Maathai (2006) had to contend with. Maathai's education and exposure to a seemingly western society had emboldened her to participate in the socio-political life of Kenyans to get a fair deal for Kenyan women, but perhaps what she did not anticipate was the resistance that she would meet with the political elites and even her husband, as they may have viewed her efforts as activism to bring the female gender into equality with the men.

This was clearly interpreted in the cultural context of Africa (Marcelin, 2012), which frowns on personal autonomy for female selfhood. This study applies the same approach as Magu's study; however, it builds on the development of the female self and national identity in selected Kenyan women's writings by looking at how the selected texts can be analyzed in response to the contemporary post-colonial feminist approach to selfhood and female identity.

The study proceeds to explore strategies that women employ for their individual emancipation within a society dominated by patriarchal dictates. The study does this by focusing on marriage and motherhood and how women interrogate the construction of these institutions.

The work then explores other key elements pertinent to women's emancipation used in the selected writings, namely, Christianity, education, rural/urban dynamics, and traditional practices.

Finally, friendship is discussed as a site that enables women to transcend social structures imposed on them by society as they seek the female self and identity. In this study, a feminist perspective is sought from Kenyan women's writings published in the post-colonial period. The selected women writers provide the site for the search of the female selves as represented in literary discourse, while analyses of women's writings facilitate dialogue on and shape critical thinking with regard to women.

Cixous (1988) in *The Laugh of Medusa* affirms the femininity of what women write when she points out that there is a relationship between women's writing and women's bodies: 'more body, hence more writing' (p. 353). That is to say, women's writings become the source of whatever imagery they may want to paint about themselves. The female body, therefore, ceases to be the center for the search for the female self-identity since it is fostered through women's writings. David Lodge (1972) echoes Cixous' views on the femininity of women's writings. He observes that 'a woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best, it is most feminine' (p. 311).

Self-exploration refers to the writers' examination of their lives or parts of them. The four selected writers do so by taking a journey to the past and inviting the reader to travel with them to the present. Self-discovery for these writers occurs as they perceive themselves in a better light in view of what their lives have been like. These writers take a survey of their lives by looking back at themselves from the present, and it is only after reminiscing about their past that they make a disclosure of what they have discovered to the readers through the autobiographical voice.

Marleine Marcelin (2012), in her work titled *"The Woman in the Mirror,"* describes female identity development in a cross-cultural context as a process of formation that is critical to the way the female individual sees and defines herself and what she bases her sense of self upon. She argues that womanhood is an ever-changing concept that is constantly defined by society and culture, a biological fact that has created various implications for women globally, especially in Africa.

This evolving effort to reconcile the dissimilarities of identity reflected through culture, sexuality, and gender roles makes it an important task for a woman to undergo the process of identity formation. Therefore, the woman needs to appreciate her individual self. This study will review selfhood as the quality that constitutes one's individuality—the state of having an individual identity.

Self is an individual person as the object of its own reflective consciousness. Since self is a reference by a subject to the same subject, this reference is necessarily subjective. The sense of having a self or selfhood should, however, not be confused with subjectivity itself but rather as a state of having a distinct identity, or being an individual distinct from others, individuality, a fully developed self, and one's personality.

The search for independence becomes relevant in the interrogation of the narrative conception of the self, which makes the idea of the self and identity intelligible without concealing the difference between women and men and without shielding the self from socio-cultural and socio-political relations. This is necessary because a woman is "not only excluded from culture (whose emblem might well be the pen) but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2004, p. 814).

As a result, this study comes to the conclusion that the pen's representation of denied autonomy is a tool for enhancing that search for identity in women. This implies that the woman is viewed within a prototype of both 'self' and 'other' in the expression of personal autonomy, and hence the woman's search for self-identity mediates between the self and the other.

2.4 Invisibility of Women in African Literary Canon

If the significance of women in the African oral tradition cannot be contested, why are they absent from the African literary canon? Why is it that the field of African literature is dominated by male writers such as Achebe, Ngugi, and Wole Soyinka? Nnaemeka (1994) posits that as the change was made from oral to written literature, new requirements for rhetorical mastery appeared. The elements that legitimated centrality changed from those based upon sex and age to those anchored in the knowledge of the colonizers' languages—English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese (p. 139).

Apart from the colonizers' languages, the ideals of Victorian colonial education became an additional hindrance for African women writers. The politics of publishing further complicated matters for African women writers. Grace Ogot, in an interview with Bernth Lindfors (1979), records that politicized publishing houses during the colonial era failed sufficiently to encourage or nurture creative writers:

> As far as book publishing was concerned, the East African Literature Bureau was ready to publish anything written in the mother tongue languages. They could also publish material in English, but at that time they did not encourage creative writing at all. I remember taking some of my short stories to the Manager, including the one which was later published in Black Orpheus. They really couldn't understand how a Christian woman could write such stories, involved with sacrifices,

traditional medicines and all, instead of writing about Salvation and Christianity (Lindfors, 1979, p. 58-59).

Studies abound on the phallic nature of African literature, that is, how male writers and literary critics have dominated the African literary space and have relegated women to the background in the male-authored African novels. In response to this proclivity, many female African novelists have exposed the patriarchal nature of African society in their novels. African female novelists have responded to this literary tendency, which they found disturbing, in two significant ways. Some, who can be categorized as "radical feminists," have, as their category implies, been radical in their response to the African male novelists' portrayal of women. These writers have demonized and bestialized male characters in their novels.

The other set of African female novelists, who can be described as womanists or liberal feminists, have responded by empowering women in their novels. They do this by either subverting the norm in African society by assigning the role of the breadwinner of the family to the women or by at least endowing them with psychological depth and economic independence. This set of writers provides the main plank of this study. The study examined how the selected writers have empowered female characters by representing a liberated female self and identity.

The twenty-first century African writers of prose fiction have produced works that thematize various socio-political issues as they affect African societies and the people that reside in them. Most of these works, however, are written by women who, unlike the generation of female writers before them, are no longer shy but vocal in their struggles to front the battle of women against the world of patriarchy.

Indeed, in most of the African novels written by women since the dawn of the twenty-first century, one or two feminist punches have been aimed at the jaws of patriarchy. Ogundipe-Leslie

(1994) argues that in most African societies, gender supremacy was taken for granted and "women's work was viewed as subordinate and unimportant, with men wondering what makes them [women] tired at the end of the day" (34). As she further observes, men do not wish to abandon patriarchy because "male dominance is advantageous" to them. Consequently, she suggests that "man has to be thrown off a woman's back" (p. 36). According to Udumukwu (2007):

> There is a sharp contrast between the real woman in postcolonial Africa. Far from being the source of comfort and rest (the sweet mother as she is perceived in popular imagination), the "good" woman in sub-Saharan Africa happens to be that woman who suffers the effects of oppression, and neglect; and who must maintain a silence and passivity in order to remain good. Silence and passivity are two principal features of the good woman. In the media presentation of images from troubled regions of Africa, for instance, it is this "good" woman who bears the wicked children of war and disaster. Apart from being passive and silent in the face of radical change, she is also the embodiment of culture and tradition. The important issue, however, is that her passivity and docility have turned out to be potent fodder for her objectification by patriarchy. In other words, she is good because she naturally fits into the mound shaped for her by patriarchy (Udumukwu, 2007, p.3).

When Chukukere (1995) makes the claim that male writers frequently create ideal female characters who act within the constraints of their traditional roles as wives and mothers, Ogundipe-Leslie and Udumukwu concur. This suggests that the social values that enslave the typical African woman are so strong that the respect and love a woman earns is oftentimes relative to the degree to which she is able to adapt to her stereotypical roles. As a consequence of the male-dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive—they are treated like

objects that do not have the right to talk back when being spoken to, therefore aligning with the popular myths of female subordination (Kumah, 2000:6).

In this regard, Kolawole (1997) accuses most male writers in the early phase of African literature of encouraging the marginalization of women. In her view, female characters are made marginal to the plot of the fiction, while only a few emerge as powerful and laudable protagonists. Ama Ata Aidoo (1991) also canvassed the ongoing problems faced by African woman writers at the Second African Writers' Conference, held in Stockholm in 1986. In her paper, entitled *"To be an African Woman Writer—An Overview and a Detail*", she deplores exclusionary practices and the lack of serious attention from both African and non-African male critics:

> In March of 1985, Professor Dieter Riemenschneider came to Harare to give a lecture on some regional approach to African literature. The lecture lasted at least two hours. In all that time, Professor Riemenschneider did not find it possible to mention a single African woman writer. When this was pointed out to him later, he said he was sorry, but it had been 'so natural.' I could have died. It had been natural to forget that quite a bit of modern African literature was produced by women? Why should it be natural' to forget that some African women had been writing and publishing for as long as some African men writers? (Aidoo, 1991, p. 159).

Aidoo noted that critical material on women writers has appeared rarely, either in special topic books or in so-called "special issues" of a few critical journals, for example, the fifteenth volume of African Literature Today on women in African literature, published in 1987. However, this academic scholarship, according to Aidoo, is 'often absent-minded at best, and at worst, full of veiled ridicule and resentment.

When commentary on African women in literature is none of the above, it is certain to be disorganized (or rather unorganized) and choked full of condescension.' (p.165). Aidoo argues that as writers, African women have the right to be treated as equals and to expect that "critics try harder to give [their] work some of their best in time and attention, as well as the full weight of their intelligence, just like they do for the work of their male counterparts."

African women writers have struggled to gain literary attention and admission to the literary canon. Stratton observed that Bernth Lindfors' (1991, p. 131–143) '*The Famous Authors*' *Reputation Test: An Update* to 1986 (the statistics in order to establish a writer's canonical status) and '*The Teaching of African Literatures in Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon*' (the frequency with which Anglophone African universities included an author in their curricula in 1986) reveals an all-male canon (p. 41–55). Achebe, Ngugi, and Soyinka occupy the top three positions, while the next seven are occupied by Ayi Kwei Armah, John Pepper Clark, Okot p'Bitek, Christopher Okigbo, Pete Abrahams, Alex La Guma, and Dennis Brutus. Stratton noted that Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head occupy the fifteenth and eighteenth positions, respectively, and thus come close to obtaining canonical status (1994, p. 2).

In Charlotte Bruner's critical opinion, African women writers are practicing their craft under challenging circumstances. In her preface to *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa* (1983), she notes that:

> [t]he African woman writing fiction today has to be somehow exceptional. Despite vast differences in traditions and beliefs among African societies, any female writer must have defied prevailing tradition if she speaks out as an individual and as a woman. In order to reach an international audience directly, she often has had to cross linguistic barriers. She may well have confronted the dictates of societies in

> which the perpetuation of a tradition submerges the contribution of the innovator, in which the subservience of the individual to the community is reinforced by group sanctions. In such societies, the accepted role of any artist is to commemorate custom, in words, in song, and in the selection of the details that validate the accepted ethics of that society. Generally, then, the perpetuator is preferred to the creator. To be outstanding is to court rejection. (Bruner, 1983, p. vii)

The work of African women writers in this study demonstrates that they are not perpetuators but rather creators. Their work strives to create a more egalitarian culture and challenges the narrow-minded and patriarchal ethics of their respective societies. Despite being under scrutinized by readers and academic scholars, African women novelists' writings are numerous, inventively eclectic, and insightful.

This study examines, through a series of close readings and careful contextualization, the work of a cluster of African women writers who have emerged in post-colonial Kenya. In the work of writers such as Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Marjorie Oludhe, and Muthoni Likimani, there is a clear and robust attempt to complicate or subvert the tradition of male writing in which female characters are often relegated to the margins of the culture and confined to the domestic, private sphere. The selected writers have, since their emergence on the literary scene, attempted to rewrite the traditional stories in a way that reflects female involvement in the making of human society in a bid to balance the literary societal status quo and gun down patriarchy.

2.5 Development of the female self and national identity in Kenyans' women's writings

The peak of an important tradition of literature by Kenyan women writers has strongly marked the literary landscape of the country, even if with delayed recognition compared to the attention given to the literary works by male writers (Cherop, 2016). The selected Kenyan women

writers' have investigated themes related to Kenya's tradition and current events, and they have been particularly concerned with issues hardly ever handled in the Kenyan literary scene before their contribution.

The impact of women writers' literature is recent: female authors of African origin have begun to assert themselves since the end of the 1960s, since previously a series of historical and sociological causes limited their opportunities to take up a literary career (Chukukere 1995 and Jones 1987). As writing originates from education, in particular African literature written in European languages, it is worth highlighting the fact that women in Kenya have not been provided with the same educational opportunities given to their male counterparts.

African family systems, social and patriarchal values and beliefs, as well as financial resources and time at women's disposal, strongly impeded women's access to formal education, and university education in particular. As a matter of fact, women traditionally had less free time than men to devote to occupations like writing since they had to manage the burdensome tasks linked to childbearing, the care of their children and men, cooking, gardening, and farm work. An additional obstacle was the social status conferred on the African writer, who was considered the spokesperson of his people, a kind of "prophet", and his commitment gave him a public role. Such a public position was barely accorded to women in African societies, and thus their status as writers was underrated.

In addition to Kenyan women writers' scarce presence in the largely male-authored world of literature, women and issues of particular interest to women, such as selfhood and identity, have often, though not always, been misrepresented or even neglected in men's works. A commonly emphasized issue is the incapacity of male writers to effectively convey the emotions and perspectives of female characters through their female protagonists. Furthermore, female

characters depicted in literary works by male authors have frequently been portrayed in a simplistic manner, lacking the full range of psychological depth and instead being reduced to predetermined archetypes.

On the one hand, there is the idealization of the African woman, depicted as an eternal nurturer, a mother symbolizing Mother Africa and fecundity, or a docile wife devoted to her husband and the home, ready to sacrifice her needs for the family's well-being. On the other hand, female characters are depicted as sensual and provocative lovers, even as prostitutes or morally corrupt women in the urban city. These are images of silent women who were not the agents of their destinies and identities but observers who passively followed the script written for them. As Florence Stratton claims:

> Whether she [the female character] is elevated to the status of a goddess or reduced to the level of a prostitute, the designation is degrading, for he [the male writer] does the naming, whereas her experience as a woman is trivialized and distorted. Metaphorically, she is of the highest importance; practically she is nothing. She has no autonomy, no status as a character, for her person and her story are shaped to meet the requirements of his vision. (Stratton 1994, p.10)

Between the 1960s and the 1970s, which correspond to the golden age of Kenyan literature, only a small number of women writers' fiction works made their appearance in the Kenyan literary community and were published. Kenyan literature by women writers began in particular in 1966 with the publication of Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land*, the first novel by a Kenyan woman writer to arouse foreign interest.

Works and novels by women writers in Kenya have been an attempt to go beyond literature by male authors reducing female characters to stereotypes, and, to a greater extent, they have acted

as a weapon to challenge male authority and "re-inscribe women into authorship and citizenship' (Kurtz 1998, p. 146). Women's writing in Kenya represents women's criticism of a number of discriminating forces stemming from customary traditions, colonial, and then postcolonial practices, and it thus can be regarded as a form of contestation and resistance. Kenyan women's life stories, both private and socio-historical, gain new depth by being depicted and retold from a new and more authentic perspective.

Women's writing in Kenya, which saw the light of day only in recent times, assigns to itself the function of bringing out the history of women and their experiences through the centuries. This 'other' side of the story reveals information about Kenyan women who were silenced by the master narratives that focused on the canonized racial and sexual superiors '. Only through such information can we see the role played by women in colonization and in the post-colonial era.

History is, in a way, a matter of perspectives and perspectives in turn are matters of values and politics. But precisely because of the fractures in the mirror of the history, we are able to recover its fragment, seeking for those that are lost and thus to recover the previously omitted or excluded from received accounts of historical events. (Solcke 272)

In women's history, the movement of feminism disturbed social equilibrium by advocating equal rights for women. This movement, as well as that of postcolonialism, had an impact on Kenyan soil as well as on Africa as a whole. As Eldred Durosimi Jones (1987) points out, in wider terms referring to the African female writer, her commitment is to rectify misrepresentations and misconceptions about women in exactly the same way as the African writer's role in the 1950s was that of adjusting the European writer's misleading depictions about African people (Jones, 1987).

Women's writing and commitment in the world of literature have marked their hesitant entry into the public realm in order to highlight gender discrimination and give the female point of view on women's issues. As a matter of fact, women writers can genuinely deal with gender in Kenya by drawing attention to the more controversial issues like identity, sexuality, and difference and discussing them from an unbiased and critical point of view.

With regard to Kenyan women's writings, Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe (2000) in *The Companion to African Literatures* refer to Waciuma and Likimani as some of the earliest female writers in Kenya, giving a short profile of each of them and citing their creative works and what each contains. These scholars' work, being a compilation of brief profiles of African writers and various subjects in African literature, is not broad enough to delve into the form of the works they talk about. The current study recognizes Maathai, Ogot, Marjorie, and Likimani as some of the pioneer female autobiographers in Kenya and goes further to examine the narrative voice in their autobiographies in relation to the conceptualization of the female self and identity.

2.6 Nationalism and Kenyan Women Writers

The women's writings selected for this study characterize a desire to transform women's exclusion from nationalism to acceptance through feminist (re)construction. Feminism as a fictional project aims at enabling women writers to find their own voices, and their writings form the basis of intervention in the literary world to facilitate (re)construction. Since their writings reflect a desire to change women's exclusion into acceptance, the restoration of women's voices is possible.

According to this research, female Kenyan writers such as Ogot, Maathai, Likimani, and Macgoye have been marginalized in academic studies, interviews, and projects focused on Kenyan

women's literature, despite their significant dedication to their respective communities as evidenced in their literary works. Kuria (2003) states that Kenyan women's writings, in fact, reveal a deep understanding of their adoptive society, their willingness to be integrated, and their particular concern for the most vulnerable members of their society, especially women.

The "microhistories" Macgoye presents in her novels, being both the life experiences of native-born protagonists or European characters living in Kenya, try to communicate the different perspectives from which the history of a country can be recounted without surrendering to bias or a unique point of view. At the same time, they are a means through which the writer can communicate and make the reader ponder issues of particular interest to her society. Women's narratives in this study are viewed as vehicles for the imaginary construction of new nations in which the female self plays a formative role. Bhabha observes that:

> Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation - or narration might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from these traditions…that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea. (Bhabha, 1990, p.1)

It is the contention of this study that women's writings narrate both the nation and the self as they consciously champion the female self and nationhood. However, there could be a contradiction between the language of those who write about the nation and the lives of those who live in it. This contradiction is what Bhabha (1990) characterizes as:

> …an ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation. It is an ambivalence that emerges from the growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the origins of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the

cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality. (Bhabha, 1990, p.1)

Nevertheless, the dynamism involved in the development of the female self and national identity remains ready to absorb the varied and ambivalent women's narrative discourses that (re)formulate the nation. According to the research's thesis, women's narratives specifically influenced by ideas of selfhood and nationhood in women's writings delve into the process of female self-identity formation. Thus, one cannot afford to ignore women's voice in the narrative of the nation because women's writings sharply underscore the female self-perspective on national issues. Therefore, this study attempts to highlight Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Muthoni Likimani, and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's contributions to the literary world of Kenya.

In the novels under analysis, the reader contemporaneously witnesses the fashioning of the main and minor characters' identities in their search for self-definition and a sense of belonging, the troubled evolution of Kenyan society, its complex transition from being a British colony to being a self-governed country, and the experiences of white settlers and persecuted Jews, which are portrayed in inhumane terms.

The rationale behind selecting the literary works *Passbook Number F47927* (1998), *Unbowed* (2006), *Days of Days of My Life* (2012), *Coming to Birth* (1986), and *The Present Moment* (1997) is based on the portrayal of their female protagonists as archetypes of the native Kenyan woman who confronts challenges in her pursuit of personal growth and liberation within a patriarchal society undergoing a shift from customary to contemporary ways of life. These characters navigate the complexities of identity formation from both an individual and societal perspective.

Ogola (2005) upholds women's writings as best placed to interrogate the female self because the writers "[are] female. They understand better what a woman is because they have grown up being women. They don't know much about men, so [they] can't write as much about them as [they] could with women" (cited in Gitaa 2008, x). Thus, the project of women's writings, just like feminists', is to reconceptualize female selfhood.

Conceptualizations of Kenyan women's self and identity are important aspects of this study, as the study will interrogate the selected texts and review a conglomerated sense of female self and identity in Kenya. Atsango (2006), in *The Journey Motif in Flora Nwapa's Efuru* and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*," lays the groundwork for her analysis by noting that Ogola is a woman writer who makes her debut in the literary world that has been a male domain to create awareness about the injustice and oppression that attend women and also champions the development of women's redefinition and reconstruction in the social order. Atsango also gives emphasis to Ogola as a woman writing about herself in an ambivalent relationship to the nation.

The present study wishes to further investigate how gendered roles for women within the home and the family unit are part of national discourse. In addition, the study establishes how sexual category influences women's (re)construction of the female self and national identity in Ogola's novel, *The River and the Source* (1994), among five other selected texts. Maina (2008) observes that the writer provides a situation where the reader works to unravel the realities that a woman writer posits in her works. This is in an attempt to render literary production credible to contemporary readers and critics. Maina's focus is on the social vision portrayed from a woman's perspective in Rebecca Njau's novels *Ripples in the Pool* and *The Sacred Seed*.

This study intends to move beyond Maina's study by interrogating varied contemporary women's writings in Kenya from the late 20th century to date. Furthermore, this study will

perpetuate discussion on the social vision defining women in matters related to their lives in the nation. The female writers who are part of the present study locate the social vision in the context of female writings that are concerned with restoring agency to women.

The study highlights women writers as significant in a discussion of the dialectic between the development of the female self and nationhood and thereby provides new insights through "new visions and new voices' (Moi, 2002, p. 85). This study wishes to find out what notions the selected Kenyan women writers bring to bear on themselves and national ideologies. Maina (2008), in a critique of women's writings, observes that the writers provide a situation where the reader works to unravel the realities that a woman posits in her works concerning self and female identity formation. She claims this is an attempt to render literary production credible to contemporary readers and critics.

The study relies on feminist articulations to help us capture the contestation between patriarchal dominance and women's agency as presented in the selected writings. The female writers who are part of the present study locate the social vision in the context of female writings that are concerned with restoring agency to women. The study argues that, through the utilization of political changes and events, women writers demonstrate the capacity of African women and Kenyan women in particular to break from the fetters of social-cultural structures to achieve self-realization as free agents. The commonality of history in the selected six texts in this study is very vital in discussing the nature and contribution of women-authored autobiographies in the context of Kenyan communities.

Lionnet (1989), in *Autobiographical Voices*, observes that women's voices are 'always present everywhere but rarely heard, let alone recorded; women's voices have not been a dominant mode of expression or legitimate and acceptable alternative... (xi). By constructing the self through

narration, the story of the female self enters into a dominant mode of expression whereby the concept of knowing the female depends on how the self is constructed as a relative reality that is comprehensible. This depends on feelings of individuality that are understood through the binary opposition of 'I' and 'not I."

The answer to the question 'Who am I?' is mainly sought in the genre of autobiography since it is regarded as the meta-genre for various modes of self-description. The present study will not only look at selected autobiographies written by Kenyan female writers and their conceptualization of self, but it will also go ahead to interrogate how the nation and its cultures hinder or support women's voices, both literary and in the social, economic, and political arenas.

Chinweizu (2013), in his study, argues that literature and politics influence each other, and African writers, especially women, cannot avoid commitment to their societies at the time of their writing. Mboya (2003) claims that Maggoye, in her text *Coming to Birth* (1986), 'relegates history to the background, which in turn gives her space to focus on and develop Paulina's story' (p. 35). However, the study asserts that the stories of Kenyan women, inclusive of the ones selected for this study, and the country's history interweave and that they develop alongside each other. The study notes the critical link between women and the nation in their search for and expression of their self-identity. While all four selected female writers' comment on female identity formation, [their] characters' creation is interwoven and effected by the overarching colonial rule the authors depict, its effects, and its aftereffects.

This study acknowledges the complex dynamic between the various forms that oppression takes in the selected texts, while it will focus specifically on female oppression and identity formation to reveal how colonialism (seen to heighten patriarchal gender dynamics that were in place prior to and after colonial rule in Kenya) plays out on the female body and mind. Identifying

the limitations of women in Kenya in engaging in nationalism is necessary to incorporate the lived experiences of both women in feminism and the nation. Hence, rewriting, reinventing, and reclaiming women's place in the nation is considered in this study to be relevant to the link between female and national identity.

Molara Leslie-Ogundipe (1993), in her article "*African Women, Culture, and Another Development,"* identifies six mountains on the backs of African women and identifies men as the fifth among these mountains. She calls upon African women to dismiss men out of their lives for being 'steeped in his centuries-old attitude of patriarchy, which he does not wish to abandon because male dominance is advantageous to him' (p. 113).

Molara's position is interesting for the reading analysis of the selected texts for this study. Ogot's text as she narrates a subversion of patriarchal social structures to project her agency as well as other women's while, in the end, retaining her domestic relations with men. Rather than do away with the men, Ogot advocates for a contestation of the patriarchal structures that permit male dominance. She does not advocate for Molara's radical stance against men; rather, she works on bringing feminine perspectives to issues that have usually been interpreted through male dominance.

This aspect is very important in the present study as it aims to identify the limitations of women in engaging in nationalism. The study sees it as very necessary to incorporate the lived experiences of women into feminism and nationalism. Boehmer (2005) points out that 'women's life narratives have been regarded as subsidiary to defining national myths' (p. 255). The implication is that women as a category and their writings have been disregarded on national issues. This is despite the notion that women's writings 'explore the intricate interconnection of

personal lives with the nation's official history. They demonstrate how women occupy intersecting spaces' (Boehmer, p. 255).

However, nationalism has been a predominantly male project, contrary to the fact that women participate in the fight for freedom. The selected text for this study, Likimani's *Passbook Number F.47927*, highlights female participation in Kenya's liberation struggle and hence distinguishes women freedom fighters as nationalists. The concern that this study takes up is the construction of meaning with respect to women and nationalism in Kenya in the twenty-first century.

Recognizing feminism as a fighting tool to restore and reaffirm women's identity and inherent right to participate in national matters, this study envisions women's progressive engagement in nation-building. Furthermore, it underlines women's participation in the self-determination of the nation in the midst of specific dilemmas that Kenyan women face due to exclusionary nationalism.

Waithaka's (2005) *The Unbroken Spirit* addresses violence against women as a national ill that interferes with women's realizations of selfhood. The protagonist, Regina, is traumatized by a rape incident as judicial justice is denied her since the 'culprit' and his father, who is a prominent judge, ensure that the case is unheard. Waithaka attempts to write the female self, thereby giving the women a narrative that is bound up with questions of self and nation.

The constructive function she enlists in narrating the female self and nationhood makes this novel (re)formulate and reflect sexual violence against women. This research confirms previous and current studies on the relationship between man and woman. If feminism has truly freed women from discrimination, does this mean that patriarchal society still controls the newly attained equality because it was born out of a reaction to the male stereotype? Lorber (1994) wrote,

"The continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be the subordinates of men as a group" (p. 35).

Lorber believed that women must keep a subordinate role in society to protect the male status as the dominant group and adds, "Gender inequality— the devaluation of 'women' and the social domination of "men"—has social functions and a social history" (p. 35). It would seem, then, that women's equality is still based on and gauged by the male standard. Femi Ojo-Ade, in her study, points out:

> It is only natural that the female African writer should depict the travails of female characters. The creator exhibits deep empathy for heroine who to a large extend, is a mouthpiece for the personal notions of life, a sister in suffering. Autobiography feeds fiction. The original coalesces with the double woman weeps with woman; for the life of a woman is filled with women's (Ojo-Ade, n/d, p.1)

The above observation is quite applicable to the present study. The selected texts for this study reveal that women writers are concerned with Kenyan women's issues in Kenya, a society organized according to male world views and disquiets. The treatment of issues involving women reveals a commitment to the task of women's empowerment through creating arenas for women's voices as they reconstruct the representation of women's identity.

The Treatment of the Theme of Women's Identity and Self-Definition in the Fictional Works of Mariama Ba, Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, and Okeng'o Matiang'i focuses on the subjects of identity and self-definition in African women's writings. The study demonstrates that African female writers are deeply committed to negotiating their identity and self-definition in the face of pre-existing patriarchal African cultures.

Matiang'i's interrogation into the issues of identity and self-definition is relevant to the present study because the autobiographical voice is essentially a mode through which the female writer seeks to identify and define herself. Nina Bosniová (2011), in her study *Transgressive Black Female Selfhood,* states that autobiography revolves around two issues: the self and the truth. In agreement with this, Kenneth Mostern (1999) describes autobiography as having two main "distributive axes": subjectivity and preferentiality (1999, p. 28). The former refers to 'the position of the speaking subject [...] which narrates the autobiographical text," and the latter points to the "question of whether autobiography is to be understood as representing, or as non-representational with regard to, a real world external to the text' (1999, p. 28).

This study focused solely on subjectivity and tried to demonstrate in what ways the selected autobiographies written by Kenyan female authors occupy a distinct position when it comes to their treatment of selfhood. Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira* (2008) focuses on women's quests for self and national identity in post-colonial Kenya. Githiora's narrative offers insights into the female self's national moments. She highlights the causes and effects of that period, which influence the predicament of the female self in a turbulent state in the grip of inter-ethnic tensions.

Githiora narrates the story of a woman trapped in a dilemma who has to survive in the interval between herself and the nation. According to the current study, the quest for and representation of a woman's self and identity is a crucial one that frequently depends on the time and situation in which she finds herself.

This research investigated the impact of space and time on the self-concept and identity of a group of women through a comprehensive analysis of written works authored by Kenyan women. These works provide accounts of Kenya's post-colonial history. It argues that women writer's endeavor to recreate the image of women as they see them. They view the contribution

of women as significant to society and seek to challenge historical, cultural, and mythic barriers in a bid to represent them properly.

2.7 Representations of Women's Subjectivity and its Effect on the Female Self and National Identity in Postcolonial Kenya

In recent years, postcolonial literary studies have engaged in investigations devoted to the analysis and comprehension of how colonizers have conceptualized, assessed, and described previously colonized cultures. The objective is to comprehend the structures and functions of what is conventionally termed 'colonial discourse', i.e., the ways of thinking and speaking about the colonized world.

In order to deal with and relate to their colonies in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean, the dominant, imperialist European world developed the concepts and languages of such discourse. In short, the world is gauged under the dominator's eyes. Colonial discourse, as a concept, comprises the unequal relationship of power that had its heyday in the 19th-century imperial order. It was expressed both in descriptive genres such as exploration narratives, travel writings, colonial administrators' memoirs, and so forth, as well as in fictional genres.

The common ground in these descriptions is a perspective of superior power, real or imagined, from which the observer gazes at the other's culture. From this authoritative, privileged viewpoint, observers (or colonizers) legitimated their descriptions as indisputable and absolute truths. Colonial discourse can thus be considered an expression of the encounter between two highly different thoughts or cultures, for instance, western culture and the culture of the community under description or designation.

This is an encounter between realities that existed at a certain moment in the colonized world and the preconceived images projected by invaders. The concept of colonial discourse will

be used in this section of the chapter to investigate how women's writings are conveyed in post-colonial Kenya, and women's position as the 'other' in the political history of Kenya will also be looked at. In order to free itself from the legacy of English colonialism, Eastern Africa has tried to delineate its own identity through culture, in particular literature. Intellectuals and writers have played a pivotal role in the process of cultural decolonization and the making of new nations, which, deprived of their past and independence, had to regain integrity and shape their identity.

Culture, literature, and poetry have been regarded as revolutionary weapons and ideological tools through which African people could finally raise their voices and define themselves. Little (2008) consecutively states within a text that reality has been decoded to the level of words. The reader must therefore see these words as signs, and by stringing them together, he can amplify them to produce a picture of the reality under discussion. The Stanford Encyclopedia lists three broad reasons for historical representation:

> The idea of learning some of the facts about human circumstance in the past; the idea of providing a narrative that provides human understanding of how a sequence of historical actions and events hangs together and "makes sense" to us; and the idea of providing a causal account of the occurrence of some historical event of interest. (Little, 2008, part1)

Thus, as Ngwaba (1936) makes clear in his essay "*The English Novel and the African Novel in English",* African literature has represented an exercise of cultural rehabilitation and of critical self-examination. This study uses the selected women's writing as a tool for historical representation of Kenyan women's identity in relation to national identity.

Muchugu Kiiru (2004), *Kenyan Literature*: *A Call for Discourse*, says that the treatment of the literature as part of African literature appears to arise out of a perception that Africa is a cultural

entity, the "metaphysical landscape." Thiong'o (1986), in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* mentions that Kenyan literature is a geographical entity that has gone through some similar historical experiences. (Some of these perceptions must have given rise to the Organization of African Unity and the African Union.)

Conferences, notably the African Writers' Conference held at Makerere University in 1962, have taken place to define the nature and discuss the role of African literature. The conferences have not agreed on its definition. Writers like Wangari Maathai depict Kenya's colonial experiences, especially the question of violence. Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) depicts colonial Kenya, specifically during the state of emergency period.

Likimani captures the stories of the African returnees from the Second World War who confronted the colonial regime and its African traitors over the issue of land ownership and agitated for decolonization. Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012) depicts historical events in colonial Kenya as it tells the stories of the Mau Mau group and its achievements towards independence and the betrayal of the Kenyan people by the elites who took over from the colonialists.

Though they have underscored the continental quality of the literature by exploring the African 'metaphysical landscape' and, implicitly or explicitly, reflecting an African consciousness, the Africa-metaphysical-landscape syndrome received a boost when two conferences, held in 1974 and 1980, agreed on the need to place the study of African literature at the center of the country's secondary school literature syllabus.

In the course of time, relatively consistent and fairly prevalent has been the perception, as well as the study, of Kenyan literature as part of a continental heritage. Women's crucial involvement in the struggle for national independence has been mainly unnoticed, as have the life stories and experiences of ordinary women, as affirmed by the Kenyan writer Margaret Ogola:

> I wanted to tell the story of women because it is rarely ever told. Women are busy as mothers, keeping houses and with children so they do not have time to tell their own stories. […] When you listen to people talk about their mothers, then you realize that these are the unsung heroines that make things move. […] Women have a story to be told and they have an angle from which only a woman can tell the story (Ogola, 1986 p. 3)

Jacqueline Bardolph (1991) in her article *The Literature of Kenya* articulates that the tales of Grace Ogot though firmly rooted in traditional culture, are not merely a revival of past forms nor collections of items seen from the detached stance of the scholar. She has numerous texts, *Land Without Thunder*, *The Other Woman* and the novel, *The Promised Land*, she weaves new and old material, fear and mystery, curses and witches and modern settings and predicament in a naturally continuous pattern.

Jacqueline goes on to state that Grace Ogot sticks too often to the same formula- an African vein of popular romance or "gothic" situations; but in her best short stories, fantastic tales effectively springing out of a contemporary setting, she has the born story-teller's art of blending emotion and fear, and sarcastic social commentary (1991, p. 65).

Peter Ngangi Nguli's (2013), *Grace Ogot Took the African Story to the World* an article in the Standard Digital (Wednesday, Sep 11th 2013) held a view that Grace Ogot took up the pen and told the world the most gripping stories that hooked many a reader. He says, "She is no doubt a woman who has powerfully influenced East Africa's literary narrative (p.14)." Subsequently, Tom Odhiambo (2001) points out that:

> The several female protagonists in the text, representing different historical periods in Kenya's history, symbolically articulate a kind of womanhood in the

> contemporary Kenya that projects its own social agency and identity. In the process, these characters' rewrite the persona that has been allocated to women in postcolonial Kenya's national story…Ogola's text seeks to project Kenyan women as capable of not only telling their stories but also claiming their rightful place and identity in the broader national life. (Odhiambo, 2001, p.235)

Molara Ogundipe (2002) claims that a female writer should be committed to the realities and status of the Third World. This may cause a bit of disagreement in opinion, but it remains a fact that writers should pay attention to issues with nationalism, democracy, racism, corruption, and the general rot of society due to colonization. According to Molara Ogundipe, a writer should be politically conscious, offering readers' perspectives on and perceptions of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism as they affect and shape our lives and historical destinies.

While the lack of visibility may be blamed on women's disinterest in politics, patriarchy is largely to blame for sidelining women and frustrating their efforts to acquire leadership positions. Catalyst (2007a) argues that because women have been marginalized regarding leadership positions in the past, they are currently underrepresented in leadership positions. For example, Klenke (1996) argues in her book *Women and Leadership* that it was not until the 1980s that women leaders reached a critical mass and began to gain visibility.

Magu (2014) argues that the development of self is an important index in the process of identity formation, and politics and public office are certainly one of the ways of developing self and identity because they give women a voice. Therefore, this study explores the journey of selected women in acquiring positions in public spaces and how this affects their development of self and national identity.

While the accuracy of figures and statistics on women in politics and public office in Kenya is outside the confines of this study, the fact to be emphasized is that women are yet to achieve equality with men when reference is made to access to these offices as well as educational opportunities. Accordingly, Slaughter points out that "urban space is conceived as fostering comprehension. The city serves as a fertile ground for the growth of new images because it disrupts traditional social patterns. The city becomes a site where women create some measure of personal empowerment that has often dictated people's lives and political developments" (Slaughter, 2004).

This argument can be interpreted as an individual's understanding of political developments. According to Carroll's (2001) review, the novel *Coming to Birth* (1986) is a complex work that highlights the challenges of navigating a patriarchal society and the impact of historical events on individuals such as Paulina.

Carroll's argument is relevant to the study since her concern is with how women overcome patriarchal structures that limit their self-empowerment. This study, therefore, uses her argument to explore patriarchal structures and ways through which women liberate themselves by exploring spheres that traditionally restricted their efforts. It does this by looking at the concept of empowerment closely.

The study questioned whether women's empowerment only means consideration and improved statistics for working women. Hence, she proposes that perceiving independent careers as a form of women's empowerment is a very narrow framework to look through. Unless safety and gender-neutral behavior are part of the holistic and collective consciousness and effort, the so-called empowerment collapses in its secluded existence.

The study claims that empowerment is a state of mind for a woman because she is living in a society where every DNA is coded with a sense of equality and respect for her. So, the question

remains: is development possible without equal gender empowerment? The study, through the analysis of the selected texts, attempted to answer this question, particularly by looking at how female selfhood and identity are represented. It builds on the topic of gender empowerment by looking at how Maathai, Ogot, Likimani, and Oludhe reject representing themselves and their female characters as nothing more than fallen women and instead offer their readers a revolutionary perspective on the female position in post-colonial Kenya.

According to Maleki and Navidi (2011), most African writers have found in the art of writing novels a perfect medium to portray the chances and cultural differences between the colonizers and the colonized. By doing so, they brought "their oral and rustic tradition to a point of culmination and fruition in a universally accessible form" (Maleki; Navidi, 2011, p. 11).

On the other hand, this movement was not seen lightly by the European writers, who saw these writers and people as being "semi-literate marginalized blacks". The colonizers held only their points of view and values as true and imposed them on the colonized. Achebe tries to prove the idea that Africans have their own culture, values, society, and history. He says:

> The writer's duty is to explore in depth the human conditions; African people must know how to value their heritage, understand their history, and possess a strong ethical code that condemns injustice and corruption wherever they occur. In African case, therefore, novel and history are the same – the novel is history, it is a record of the history as Africans have seen and lived it. (Achebe, Apud Maleki; Navidi, 2011, p. 12)

According to Maleki and Navidi (2011),

> their literary existence is also, to large extent, their own and worth mentioning. One can freely learn and adopt a language like English, but not the tradition. Thus,

> African heroes and characters are representatives of their own land, people, culture and tradition and each individual is a paradigm of the society. (Maleki; Navidi, 2011, p. 12)

The study traces the evolution of the autobiography in Kenya to demonstrate the circumstances in which the female autobiography has emerged and developed in the country. The Kenyan autobiography is a fairly recent development, but the genre has grown as more Kenyans find it necessary to narrate the stories of their lives. In the autobiography, writers expand on life to show how people have become what they are at a given moment in an ongoing process of reflection. Defining autobiography, French theorist Philippe Lejeune (1989) articulates, "We call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his [sic] own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality" (p. 1).

This definition points to the autobiography as being not just a mere record of the incidents of a person's life but as a form that reflects a holistic picture of the author's character and soul. This picture distinguishes fictional narratives from the intimate and self-revealing nature of the autobiography because the latter aims at presenting the author's life as actually lived through time. This study looked at how Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* (2016), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), and Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) brought out the issues of Kenyan female self and identity. The autobiographies will be used to discuss how the history of Kenya is intertwined with that of the selected writers and how this affects the construction of the nation and women's identities.

Ochieng's (2005) *In Place of Biography in Kenvan History: 1904–2005* evaluates the relevance and contribution of selected Kenyan biographies and autobiographies to Kenyan history.

He points out the challenges faced by the historian in deciding whether to treat autobiographies as authentic sources of history, noting that while some autobiographies may be objective, the genre is prone to distortions and deliberate omissions. He says that 'the aim of the auto-biographer is to influence history in his [sic] favor" (p. 101), which often leads to subjectivity, but he encourages the writing of autobiographies since they contribute greatly to historical knowledge.

His study focuses on autobiographies by Kenyan men such as Ngugi. Harry Thuku. J. V. Kariuki, Mboya, Oginga Odinga, and Bildad Kaggia, whose works he views as rich in historical knowledge, He views autobiography as a source of history but focuses only on male autobiographies, yet there were also female autobiographies published during the period he discusses.

We study the female autobiographical voice to evaluate the relevance of the female autobiography in independent Kenya. It is against this background that this review is premised on looking at this journey and how they have, through their writings, represented themselves in terms of sociocultural and political positioning in society and have also been able to have a voice in a patriarchal society.

To this end, the experiences and works of four distinguished Kenyan female writers will be examined. The works of Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Muthoni Likimani, and Marjorie Oludhe will be interrogated to see how they conceptualize Kenyan women's identity before and after independence through their writing, fiction, and non-fiction by trying to define what it means to be a Kenyan woman.

In *Autobiography in Education*, Peter Abbs views the nature and origins of autobiography as a backward search into time with the intent to discover the true self. Abbs' view on the nature of autobiography calls for the critic to engage memory, as it plays an important role in recalling

the events narrated in the autobiography. The view also emphasizes the narrator's life as the subject of narration, implying that the writer is the subject narrator. It is the individual telling a life story.

The study attempted to examine the selected writers' life stories in relation to how they make attempts to circumvent the oppressive aspects of tradition and, in the process, project their agency and that of Kenyan women. Feminist narratology is an important aspect of narratology that could destruct narrative and explain some ambiguities in male writings and the multiplicities of meanings and interpretations of texts ascribed to them.

This is an aspect of narratology that could help to correct patriarchal stereotypes and ethnocentric views in narrative works (Bal, 1985, p. 12), particularly in autobiographical works and in other fictional works. It is therefore pertinent to demonstrate how narratology helps in the understanding of female self and identity in the selected Kenyan women in the post-colonial female writings.

The study combined previous research on women and some practical and critical expressions about this research to delineate genderization (the deliberate and inveterate marginalization of Kenyan women because of patriarchy) in Kenyan culture, which propels masculinity in Kenya. Conversely, masculinity is a plural, not singular, zone with internal complexities and contradictions.

Being an interdisciplinary field, it interrogates the relationship that exists between hegemonic and subordinate masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, a "culturally idealized form of masculine character" (Connell, 1990, p. 83), arising out of social approval, is associated with power and shuns or represses subordinate masculinity. During the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, male dominance enhanced characteristics like rationality, muscular potency and vigor, individuality, competence, marital prowess, and male comradeship. All these traits

enhanced masculinity to become multifaceted rather than restricting it to the sole exercise of raw power.

Although throughout history, males have been repressing their subordinate masculinity, especially when they were unwilling to adhere to and resist hegemonic ones, but the concept of masculinity redefined itself in the twentieth century, going far beyond the level of archetypal ideals and emerging distinctively in the practical realm. What was subordinate earlier started penetrating into the mainstream, if not hegemonic (Connel, 2005). This was because of the realization that sex and gender are separate entities. The hegemonic association of masculinity amplified its relationship with femininity and female power. Highlighting this blurring of boundaries between masculinity and femininity, Connell, Raewyn, and James, redefine gender as:

> Gender is neither sex organs nor sex acts, but the socially constructed ideal of what is means to be a woman or man. Gender exists outside of us in our culture, but also resides inside of us, and our everyday activities provide opportunities for expressing, and perhaps transforming, the meaning of gender. (Connell, et al., 2005, p.829)

Focusing upon its relevance in Kenya, it can be said that hegemonic masculinity had a complex subsistence in Kenya during the colonial period. Imperialism, at that time, constructed its conception regarding hegemonic masculinity as "effeminate" colonial other. Conversely, the colonized subject configured masculinity in such a way that it evaded the ingression of femininity into its realm. To further explain the conception of masculinity and how it affects women's self-identity, it is pertinent to note that most contemporary societies and cultures in Kenya are male-dominated in many areas. These societies and cultures go further to create belief systems,

economic exploitation of Kenyan women, and other forms of injustice that limit the place of women in literature and society.

Consequently, this study calls for the need for women's empowerment and re-conceptualization of the female self and identity in order to make some meaningful contributions from the Kenyan woman when cultural trends are reversed. The selected texts help in the understanding of the position of Kenyan women in order to underscore the nexus of life experiences in areas of social relevance for women and in the development of contemporary Kenyan and African society.

In *Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture, and Literature in West Africa,* Newell (1997) observes that "gender images and ideologies constantly shift to account for their changing status. This has led to the emergence of new perspectives that interrogate, reformulate, and analyze inherited popular codes" (Stephanie Newell, 1997). Newell looks at the impact of social changes on society and how society, in turn, responds to the changes. Newell's argument looks at how images are rewritten in literature by pointing out that gender images are not static as they change with time. Her argument offers a rich site for this research in examining how gender images are constructed and reconstructed in society to cater for changing times, particularly in our present text under study. This information is particularly useful in the discussion of chapters three and four.

On the stereotypical depiction of female characters in literary texts, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1987), in an essay entitled "*The Female Writer and Her Commitment,"* points out that an "African woman writer has three responsibilities, namely, to tell about being a woman, to describe reality from a woman's point of view, and lastly, to be a third-world woman" (Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, 1987).

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie believes that by telling women's experiences from a personal point of view, a true reflection of women's experiences will be handled and addressed in relation to issues that women grapple with within society. In this case, the responsibilities mentioned above help the female writer rectify the distorted image of African women as depicted in some literary works. Ogundipe's views are useful in this study as they will help me understand how Macgoye has departed from stereotypical portrayals of women by creating complex and multidimensional characters in Kenyan society.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed selfhood and identity within the sociocultural context in which Kenyan female writers wrote. The chapter delved into the history and culture of Kenya by tracing the etymology of the country itself and the role of the colonial powers in sharpening the lives of Kenyans, especially how it affects female Kenyans.

The chapter highlights the cultural conflicts between Western and African societies, particularly in the context of power dynamics between genders. It explores the dominance of men in political elites and the increasing significance of women in the socio-political sphere. The chapter aimed to serve a specific purpose in this study which includes the female self-discourse and the subversion of patriarchy in favor of restoring women's selfhood by giving voice to the female self.

Thus, the quest of women writers' points to the need to place women in the historical context of the nation since, in the patriarchal order, men hardly make reference to women in decision-making because they are not treated as respectful members of society.

The chapter concludes that the selected female writers used stories, fictional and non-fictional, to negotiate and consolidate their identity in Kenyan society and promote their selfhood by presenting

themselves as not just knowledgeable but also asserting their selfhood and identity as part of the evolving sociocultural order in Kenya.

The literature reviewed in this section reveals that substantive studies have been done on Kenyan women's writings. However, there is a dearth of studies with respect to the articulation of the female self and national identity, particularly with regard to contemporary women's writings in Kenya. The study of selected women writers is aimed at filling this knowledge gap using women's collective responsibility to salvage the female self.

CHAPTER THREE

GYNOCRITICISM AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore how selected women writers reconstruct Kenyan women's identities in their writings. Put differently, the study sought to critically examine the concepts of female selfhood and female identity and how the selected novels used for this study reconstruct these identities in the context of postcolonial and patriarchal Kenyan society.

To achieve these aims, the first chapter of the study sets the scene by introducing the general conceptual background and the concepts of female identity. The second chapter reviewed extant literature around the major themes of the study, including female selfhood and identity, representation, and transformation of women in postcolonial Kenyan female writers—in the works of Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Muthoni Likimani, and Majorie Oludhe. That chapter also identified the knowledge gap related to these themes that this study sets out to fill.

The current chapter presents the theoretical perspectives employed in the analysis of this study. The two theories used in the study are Gynocriticism and postcolonial theory. The two theories are conceptualized as being intricately linked in their feminist critical approach and relevant for understanding women's oppression.

Gynocriticism is conceptualized as an attempt to reconstruct the identity of female writers, which has been lost due to patriarchy and the presentation of literary fields as male-dominated fields. Postcolonial theory explicates the attempt by colonizers to subjugate the *subaltern*, which in the case of this study includes the women whose identity and selfhood have been subjugated because of male dominance.

This chapter first explicates these two theories. After that, the chapter attempts to show the link between these two theories and how they are applied in this study to interrogate how the selected novels reconstruct female identity in the context of Kenyan postcolonial society.

3.2 Gynocriticism as a Feminist Critical Theory

As alluded to by Eagleton (2013, p. 8), in the mid-1970s, feminist criticism among Anglo-Americans was primarily concerned with women's writings. The era saw the evolution of a tradition of women literary writers and the exploration of women's culture. The various feminist writings of the time reflected the patriarchal and male-dominated society that had overshadowed female writings and the entire female identity as active participants in the literary world.

As Nouri & Fatameh (2015, p. 1) clearly expressed, "Gynocriticism is the study of women writers historically as a distinct literary tradition." Elaine Showalter (1997) also devoted herself to the writing approach of the time and coined the term Gynocriticism" to explore the history of women literary writers and how their experiences and writings had been misrepresented, ignored, or subjugated by the male-dominated literary traditions. Generally, Gynocriticism explores issues of female selfhood and identity in an attempt to reinvent literary theories and methodologies grounded in the female experience.

In her gynocritic endeavor, Showalter discovered in her female authors and characters an understanding of identity, an essential endeavor that would result in a coherent identity and a realization of female selfhood and autonomy (see Eagleton, 2013, p. 9). In her study, *Toward a Feminist Poetics*, Showalter sought to construct a framework or model for the analysis of the literature of female writers.

Showalter aimed to reject the idea that men's literary models and theories were inevitable by providing an alternative model to literary criticism that centered on the historical development of women's literary works. Put differently, Gynocriticism refers to a criticism that constructs a female framework for analyzing women's literature to develop new models based on the study of female experience rather than to adapt male models and theories.

Showalter's conceptualization of Gynocriticism as a woman-centric approach to literary analysis stems from her analysis of female literary traditions. Showalter (1997, p. 27) asserts that, over the years, the female literary tradition has passed through three evolutionary phases. The first phase, described as "feminine," involves the imitation of the modes of the dominant male tradition and the internalization of artistic and social values.

In other words, the female literary tradition in this phase was constructed of images and values of the idealized feminine. That was done from a patriarchal, oppressive perspective and through practices that sought to identify the woman as "other." Showalter (1997, p. 216) describes this phase type as *woman as a reader*. It is said to involve women being just consumers of male-produced literature in such a way that the "hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its textual codes. In this phase, women's audience in literature is exploited and manipulated, and women are seen as mere signs in famous literary works, including films and literary writings.

The second phase is termed the 'feminist phase' of the 'phase of protest during the 20th century, when women in American society won the right to vote. The literary tradition of this phase experienced enormous protest against patriarchal or male-dominant standards, ideologies, and values and persistently called for autonomy for women. Showalter (1997, p. 216) also described this type or phase in feminist criticism as a *woman as a writer* and is concerned with women taking

the stage as "producers of textual meanings [and literary works], with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women". Women can then recognize their separate identities and write in a manner that expresses their collective identity and the dynamics of women's creativity.

Although Showalter herself classified feminist criticism into two distinct varieties: women as readers and *women as writers,* as expressed above, some other authors have extended Showalter's classification to comprise the third phase. The third stage is termed "self-discovery" or the 'female phase.' This most recent development is the "female" criticism, where a female identity is sought free from masculine definitions and oppositions. The recognition of a distinct female canon and the "female reader's" development is a fundamental aspect of Gynocriticism (see Nouri & AzizMohammadi 2015, p. 3). In other words, this phase is described as a period when female writers began developing self-awareness and seeing themselves as independent literary writers and theorists.

According to Elaine Showalter (1979), Gynocriticism studies not only the female as a gender status but also the female's "internalized consciousness" (cited in Nouri & AzizMohammadi 2015, p. It intends to uncover the female subculture and expose female models as essential and equal considerations for literary analysis. The field of gynocriticism is focused on the identification of unique subject matters in literature authored by women, as well as the exploration of a female literary tradition and the demonstration of a distinct feminine mode of experience, or "subjectivity," in the realms of thought, values, and perception of oneself and the external world.

Furthermore, Showalter (1979) identifies four main models that address the nature of women’s writing. They include the biological model, the linguistic model, the psychoanalytic model, and the cultural model. The biological model emphasizes how the female body marks itself

in a text by providing a host of literary images along with a personal, intimate tone. This biological model could be recognized in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006). Her work challenges the established patriarchal systems and highlights the importance of feminine values, such as empathy and compassion, in creating sustainable solutions for environmental and community issues.

The linguistic model addresses the need for a female discourse to investigate the differences between women's and men's language. This model asserts that women create and write in a language peculiar to their gender and addresses how this female language can be used in their writings. The psychoanalytic model analyzes the female psyche and demonstrates how such an analysis affects the writing process, emphasizing the flux and fluidity of female writing instead of male writing's rigidity and structure. The last of Showalter's models, the cultural model, investigates how society shapes women's goals, responses, and points of view.

One significant aspect of Gynocriticism is examining the female struggle for identity and the social construct of gender. On this aspect, Elaine Showalter opines that gynocritics study the female as a gender status and the internalized consciousness associated with the female (1979). Thus, Gynocriticism seeks to uncover this subculture, and the general recognition of a distinct female canon then constitutes the intent of Gynocriticism. It seeks to recognize the female identity as distinct and free from masculine definitions and oppositions.

This concept of women's identity is vividly captured in Wangari Maathai's book *Unbowed.* The book discusses the status and role of women in terms of empowerment positions in a challenging traditional social context. It further examines traditional practices and cultural beliefs that bar Kenyan women's liberation and progress and the way in which Maathai has reconstructed a new narrative for the representation of women's self and identity using her own life story filled

with successful achievements and the many challenges that she faced while suppressing patriarchal conventions.

Furthermore, again stressing the Freudian psychoanalytic conception of the female as inherently suffering from envy of men, thereby developing feelings of inadequacy, injustice, and intellectual inferiority, Gynocriticism seeks to counter such narratives to establish a female consciousness and uncover any prejudice that has concealed the female literary tradition to the point of attempting to imitate the masculine.

Gynocriticism, therefore, seeks to identify what is distinctively feminine in subject matters in literary writings, ranging from theories to methodologies to the attributes of characters in literature. Eagleton (2013, p. 9) describes the gynocritic paradigm as involving a sequential manner in which "the character and reader can unite in an exploration of what it means to be female" in a manner that they collaborate to assert a "collective identity" as women when the reader can gain satisfaction in knowing that her experiences, hopes, and a writer's narrative confirm expectations.

Eagleton (2013, p. 9) thus clarifies the intent of Gynocriticism as seeking to "uncover the female subculture as well as expose female models as important and equal consideration for literary analysis." In other words, Gynocriticism concerns itself with "identifying what is distinctively feminine in subject matters in literature written by female writers and uncovering in literary history a female tradition as well as showing that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or subjectivity."

This distinctive feminine mode of experience or subjectivity is one of the aims of Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986). In the text, she attempts to rectify the way male authors portray women as people stripped bare of all that makes them central and relevant in the traditional African

socio-political domain. In her books, she gives women characters' central roles to offer insights into understanding women's struggles and experiences.

The underlying assumption in this respect is that aside from the biological attributes associated with being a woman, there is a gendered categorization of women in terms of their thinking, valuing, and perceiving the outer world. This thinking approach may likely conflict with some other traditional ontological and epistemological approaches to gender in literature. A gynocritical study focuses on feminist literature written explicitly by female writers, including the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology, and the history and development of the female literary tradition (Nouri & Aziz Mohammadi 2015, p. 2).

Gynocriticism was developed as a direct critique of the theoretical perspectives and techniques of post-structuralism, an approach that denies viewing the world through pre-established and socially constructed structures. Post-structuralism rejects the idea that underlying structures influence elements of human cultures and relationships, as opposed to structuralism. Post-structuralism would therefore deny the existence of underlying structures that oppress women or suppress women's writings as essential and equal models for literary analysis.

For instance, Showalter herself described gynocritic endeavors as essentially political and polemical, with solid opposition to Marxist social criticism. It is also experimental, as it focuses on destabilizing the already male-oriented literary world. Showalter (1979, p. 217) asserted that studying stereotypes of women as male criticism labels, together with the limited role women played in literary history, "we are not learning what women have felt and experienced but only what men have thought women should be."

Therefore, in its practical endeavor, Gynocriticism needs to consciously voice out resistance to patriarchy and patriarchal ideologies. According to her, such a mode of critique has

a tendency "to naturalize women's victimization" by constantly making the topic an inevitable and obsessive topic of discussion. This resistance to patriarchal ideologies is well captured in Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1985). Patriarchal and colonial oppression appear to be the predominant themes, thereby necessitating the analysis of issues of victimhood and oppression as being associated with notions of identity and self. Likimani's writings apparently aim at subverting the structures of oppression that infringe on one's sense of identity.

Moreover, following the Marxist tradition, gynecology's endeavor is aimed at women's emancipation. It is said to begin when women begin to realize their oppression and consciously decide to free themselves from the oppressive forces. This aspect of emancipation and empowerment could be seen in Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2005). Throughout the narrative, she remains an advocate for female empowerment and seeks an end to traditions that do not respect the dignity of women. Also, the assumption here is that female experiences are unique and somewhat distinct.

Therefore, Gynocriticism should aim to reconstruct the past in order to rediscover the trends of how male-dominant traditions have since obscured female work, rather than asking whether such unique experiences exist. As Showalter thinks, such an endeavor should "ask how the literature of women would be different and special" (Ibid.). Showalter explicitly believes that in the 1840s, men obscured, replaced, ironized, and subverted the feminist content of literature as a national characteristic of English literature. One can only discover this unique content by reading the literature of those times between the lines and the missed possibilities of the text.

In her description of how to discover women's unique writings that have been obscured over time, Showalter wrote:

> As we recreate the chain of writers in this tradition, the patterns of influence and response from one generation to the next, we can also begin to challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history and its enshrined canons of achievement. Because we have studied women writers in isolation, we have never grasped the connections between them. When we go beyond Austen, the Brontes and Eliot, say, to look at a hundred and fifty or more of their sister novelists, we can see patterns and phases in the evolution of a female tradition that corresponds to the developmental phases of any subcultural art (1979, p.217).

The view above points to the necessity of contextualizing any analysis concerning identity since identity is a culturally relevant concept. Identity is also a non-static concept; hence, the need to reinvent the current conceptualization of female identity in postcolonial feminist writings.

3.3 Gynocriticism and Gynesis: Distinct but Interconnected Feminist Criticisms

It is crucial to consider the various feminist criticisms available, which are 'similar but distinct in terms of not only disciplinary but also geographic boundaries. The term 'gynesis' is closely related to Gynocriticism, though they both can also take parallel views relating to feminist criticism. The two terms are both neologisms.

Showalter's coinage of Gynocriticism in 1979 was a practical response to the exploitation of women in American society, and her perspective is also very contextual. Gynocriticism was initially coined to mean the literary history of women's writings (Friedman, 1996, p. 33). However, the term later expanded to encompass all methodologies and all readings of women's writings in all disciplines beyond literature.

In other geographic contexts, feminist criticism as a paradigm takes a distinct and somewhat contrasting approach and perspective from Showalter's. For instance, the French writer

Alice Jardine's usage of the term 'gynesis,' which first appeared in her 1982 essay titled "*Genesis Diacritics,*" is so much related to Gynocriticism, though somewhat distinct in views. Jardine expressed the concept of genesis as involving:

> ... a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives' own 'nonknowledge,' what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves I almost always a 'space' of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as feminine, as a woman. (Jardine, 1982, p. 58)

Furthermore, relating it to more national contextual factors, Jardine explains the genesis as:

> … the putting into discourse of 'woman' as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking (Jardine, Genesis: configurations of Woman and the modernity, 1985, p. 15).

Showalter herself has also used the term gynesis to describe feminist poststructuralist readings of the feminine. Nevertheless, Showalter's usage of genesis is an adaptation of Alice Jardine's neologism. However, Jardine's usage of genesis does not mean a type of feminist critical practice, but rather, as Friedman puts it, Jardine's genesis is to show "the centrality of gender (specifically, the feminine) in poststructuralism's critique of humanism through the "re-conceptualization of that which has been the master narratives' own 'nonknowledge" (See Friedman, 1996, p. 33).

More importantly, we need to note the somewhat distinct but similar ontological and epistemological manner in which both the Anglo-American and French feminists look at what

'women,' 'woman," "feminine," or "female' entails. The application of Gynocriticism in this study will also consider the political and social context of Kenya. It is crucial to put into perspective the influence of society and culture on women's identities. For Anglo-American feminists, the central focus is on 'women.' It points to the natural, biological entities that, at this historical epoch, are seeking to revolutionize their identity based on shared experience and needs.

On the other hand, the French perspective of 'Gynocriticism' is based on 'woman," who, as Jardine points out, is not a person but a 'writing effect. One significant point to look at in the two views is that gender differences produced by societal influence rather than biological attributes are a crucial subject matter in structuring literary discourse. In the French tradition, the feminine, as asserted by Eagleton (2013, p. 10), does not mean the traditions of women's writings but a writing mode that unsettles fixed meanings.

This is distinct from the Anglo-American usage and understanding of the feminine. According to Anglo-American traditions, "feminine' usually refers to the socio-cultural gendered understanding that patriarchy enforces and regards as appropriate or even natural behaviour for women. Eagleton (2013, p. 10) has confirmed that gynesis "gives no particular emphasis to female authors and characters, but instead, most of the literary writings it considers feminine are written by men. Though refuted by gynesis, gynocritics believe in the author's control over finding her unique voice in writing.

Moreover, gynesis, according to Eagleton (2013), "contains a troubling potential for anti-feminism." At a gynocritic age when women are striving to discover their potential and a sense of identity and history and to assert the credibility of their distinct experiences, genesis tends to discredit this endeavour as illusory, and this is in line with the poststructuralist view of feminism, which viewed feminist criticism as a misconceived project. Eagleton (2013) puts this succinctly

this way: "Just at the moment when women are discovering a sense of identity, history, and the credibility of their experience, gynesis tells them that it is illusory and that their extensive work on the woman author, the female tradition, and images of women is at best an interesting cul-de-sac."

Beyond the distinctive approach that Gynocriticism and gynesis take to feminist criticism, Susan Friedman, in her article *"Beyond" Gynocriticism and Genesis: The Geographics of Identity and the Future of Feminist Criticism*, writes that the evolution of poststructuralism in American society has tended to reveal the interconnectedness between the two perspectives (Friedman, 1996). According to her, "whether distinct or intermingling, Gynocriticism and gynesis have shared an emphasis on sexual difference and a privileging of gender as a constituent of identity" (Friedman 1996, p. 14). She further compares the two perspectives as follows:

> For Gynocriticism, the existence of patriarchy, however changing and historically inflected, serves as the founding justification for treating women writers of different times and places as part of a common tradition based on gender. For genesis, the linguistic inscriptions of masculine and feminine Indeed, language's dependence on gendered binaries underlies various feminist unravelling's of master narratives and discourses (Ibid.).

Essentially, one crucial point to note in both perspectives is their foregrounding gender as a basis of differences, even though Friedman would think that this foregrounding has also produced a certain blindness that is not aligned with current advances in theories of identity and subjectivity in current fields. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the changing nature of times and cultural context has rendered specific theories inapplicable in certain contexts while applicable in others. The point here is that the application of gynocritic theory as feminist criticism in this study will intentionally seek to contextualize the story in the context of Kenya.

This study is an examination of Kenyan women writers and their representation of Kenyan female identity. It seeks to interrogate the literary works of female Kenyan writers, including Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986), *The Present Moment* (1997), and Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1998), to uncover how they construct Kenyan women's identity. In other words, what do these works say about what it means to be a female in Kenyan society? And especially in the context of postcolonial Kenya.

Furthermore, as described above, this study seeks to adopt a constructivist approach, bearing in mind the multidimensionality and multiplicity of experiences. Women's experiences and the way they are expressed in American or French society are more likely to be different from the experiences of women in African contexts, including how they express these experiences. This speaks to how geography and social context shape people's experiences and, to a large extent, their identity. Friedman puts this dynamic succinctly:

> Instead of the individualistic telos of developmental models, the new geographies figure identity as a historically embedded site, a positionality, a location, a standpoint, a terrain, an intersection (even an intersection), a crossroads of multiply situated knowledge. It articulates not the organic unfolding of identity but rather the mapping of territories and boundaries, the dialectical terrains of inside and outside, center and margin, and the spaces of dynamic encounter: the "contact zone," the "middle ground," and the borderlands (Friedman, 1996, p. 15).

In a gynocritic theoretical application, this study asserts the importance of Kenyan women's shared identity, especially when the nation is seemingly facing issues of disunity resulting from

multiple identities. This was the primary endeavour of the initial point of Gynocriticism: helping women discover and express their shared identity.

The study explicitly proposes that it is possible to transform multiple identities into a unifying element that breeds unity in diversity. Furthermore, building upon Friedman's previous discourse on the developmental aspect of women's identity, the objective of this study is to examine the progression of female selfhood and identity within the chosen literary works and establish a cohesive, collective, communal, or integrated notion of female identity. This is done with the recognition that the many years and experiences of patriarchy and other forms of women's subjugation have a high tendency to interfere with, or to an extent, suppress, women's sense of selfhood.

Thus, applying the theoretical perspective to the analysis of the novels selected will show how the female writers reveal women's struggle to negotiate their identities in a postcolonial Kenyan setting. As Friedman puts it, "It is politically imperative that the discourses of Gynocriticism and gynesis continue as long as women writers and the issue of the feminine are marginalized or trivialized," even in this postcolonial era (1996, p. 30).

Gynocriticism offers a literary framework that prioritizes the study and interpretation of women's writing, yet it does not provide an adequate structure that criticizes the context within which women's writing operates. This study will fill this gap by using postcolonial theory, which provides a critical lens through which to examine contemporary global power structures, challenge dominant discourses, and re-imagine new possibilities for justice and equality in the world.

3.4 Postcolonial Theory

In this discussion, postcolonialism is viewed both from a theoretical perspective and as a revolutionary ideological movement in response to colonization. Postcolonial studies attempt to

underscore the cultural and economic exploitation of a particular group of people, the colonized, marginalized, or natives (Wilkens, 2017).

Postcolonialism can be looked at from two perspectives. In the first perspective, postcolonialism describes a particular historical period characterized by the end of the subjugation of the former colonies by the western powers. The word 'post,' designating after colonialism in the second perspective, postcolonialism, as a theoretical perspective, explores the (sustained) impacts of colonization on the former colonies and their people. These impacts are both psychological, physical, and material.

However, it is crucial to note that the prefix 'post' has been debated. This is because the word seems to portray that colonialism has ended. However, it has not actually ended, as the impacts are still highly felt. In another sense, it is debated whether the prefix never implies that colonialism has ended. However, as Elam avers (2019), postcolonial theory is concerned with "the lingering forms of colonial authority after the formal end of the [European] Empire." Therefore, postcolonialism is an attempt to narrate the effects of the colonial era while attempting to construct and re-imagine a world after colonialism.

Postcolonial theory emerged in the United States and United Kingdom academies in the 1980s as part of a more significant wave of new and politicized fields of humanistic inquiry, most notably feminism and critical race theory. The theory is generally constituted as having emerged from a deeply rooted indebtedness to anti-colonial thoughts from South Asia and Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. Postcolonialism looks at problematized divisions between people and race by exploring the concept of negation and the impacts and legacies of imperialism and racism on former colonies and slaves. Put differently, post-colonialism is an ideological response to colonial thoughts and the after-effects of colonization (Elam, J. 2019).

Loomba's study, *"Colonialism/Postcolonialism,"* offers an in-depth overview of postcolonial theory, a framework that seeks to understand and critique the social, political, and economic legacies of colonialism in modern-day societies (Loomba, 1998). The author discusses the emergence of postcolonial theory as a response to the dominant Eurocentric narrative that characterized the historical era of colonialism.

This narrative celebrated the supposed superiority of the colonizing nations and denigrated the colonized peoples and their cultures. Loomba argues that postcolonial theory seeks to subvert this narrative by highlighting the lived experiences of the colonized peoples and their struggles to resist and overcome the effects of colonization. She describes how postcolonial theory draws upon a range of scholarly disciplines, including literature, anthropology, history, and political science, to excavate and analyze the complexities of the colonial encounter and its aftermath.

From a constructivist perspective, post-colonialism is applied to better understand the way of life or the effects of colonization from the point of view of the colonized rather than the colonizers. Most postcolonial theorists are from formerly colonized countries and seem to better understand the effects from an insider perspective.

Thus, the theory is linked to various revolutionary scholars like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatrick Spivak, Homi Bhabha, etc. On a deeper level, postcolonialism is said to examine the power relationship, be it social or political, that still sustains itself after colonialism's demise. As Burney (2012) explains, this continuous relationship tends to result in both positive and negative consequences. Thus, the author describes the postcolonial theoretical perspective as resulting in "reverse colonialism."

In recent times, post-colonialism has found its way into scholarship, as scholars have adopted it as a theory to explain issues regarding the effects of colonizers on the former colonized

and the need for total decolonization. In other words, post-colonialism can be said to have emerged as an intellectual movement consolidating and developing around the ideas of Edward K. Said's Orientalism, Homi K. Bhabha's Hybridity, and Gayatri C. Spivak's Subalternity (Bhambra, 2014). These works explicate the experiences of the colonized people in post-colonial societies, one of which is African society in general and most countries in Africa in particular.

Before colonialism, many African communities operated on the kinship system. The kinship system formed the basis of the ownership and operation of factors of production such as land, livestock, and labor and was operated on grounds of kinship, mutual respect, and community rather than individualistic accumulation. In detailing the precolonial era in the context of Kenya, Ndege (2009) avers that ‘’there existed little difference in wealth possession. Classes, if they existed, were largely incipient. Reciprocity and the egalitarian ideal ensured that individuals never slid into abject poverty.”

In post-colonial Kenya, ethnic boundaries between communities were fluid. (Ndege, 2009, p. 3) observes that [the Kenyan] society was more static in nature, and colonialism only gave a new meaning and direction to society’s inherent dynamism. Colonialism also gave rise to classism and other forms of division and inequality in various African societies. Though colonialism has ceased in all African societies today, the lingering effects of the colonial era still inform many of our experiences today.

One of the lingering effects of colonialism, besides the ones mentioned earlier, is the eruption of African traditions and cultures in favor of Eurocentric traditions. The colonialists emphasized that African cultures and traditions were barbaric and something to get rid of. (Ndege, 2009, p. 7) comments that the Euro-Christian capitalist tradition and work ethic inculcated individualism and an acquisitive culture. In the case of Kenya, the colonialists' economic and social

traditions established structures and historical forces that almost totally influenced and replaced the identity of the traditional Kenyan society, including its education.

The colonial practices had also inculcated a stratified society that was recognized along racial, class, ethnic, and gender lines. Put differently, colonialism planted a system of dominance, exploitation, and subjugation that existed beyond the colonizers and the colonized. The lingering effect of colonialism today informs various scholarly and activist movements and debates (within an umbrella term, postcolonialism) that seek to explore and, to an extent, remediate the harmful rudiments of colonialism in African societies today.

Furthermore, referring particularly to Kenyan society post-independence (or post-colonial era), Ndege describes some effects of colonialism with these comments:

> Income inequality and poverty have become more prevalent since independence. Colonialism had its own share in the country's inequality and poverty as it promoted rural-urban, regional and class differences in development. As a consequence, the contradictions that characterized colonial Kenya have been accentuated. These include contradictions in the social relations of production between the international and domestic bourgeoisie, between the peasantries and the bourgeoisie, and between capital and labour. Like the colonial state, the post-colonial state has had to cope with these series of contradictions. The local bourgeoisie habitually resort to high level corruption to accumulate wealth and power. They also invoke racial and ethnic sentiments to stay in power. (Ndege, 2009, p. 11)

As a system characterized by domination, cultural imposition, and exploitation, colonialism still persists in the present day, albeit in different institutional forms (Butt, 2013, p. 2).

According to Ndege (2009, p. 7), attempts to establish general theories of colonialism are difficult, much like the difficulties involved with systematizing liberation ideologies like feminism. This challenge is also rooted in the experience of pluralism by those who have experienced oppression. Oppression in postcolonial society takes shape not only in terms of ethnic pluralities but mainly in terms of gender pluralism. The experience of patriarchy has become a very entrenched rudiment of colonialism in post-colonial societies. In a deeply patriarchal society, oppressed women tend to lose themselves, either unconsciously or consciously shaped by society.

The book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* discusses key themes in postcolonial theory, such as the concept of hybridity, the role of language in shaping colonial power relations, the politics of identity and representation, and the challenge of decolonizing knowledge and institutional structures (Loomba, 1998). Loomba also examines the intersectionality of different oppressions, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, and how they operate in the context of postcolonial societies.

The literary representation of women in many post-colonial literary writings used for this study depicts women as agents who constantly strive to find their [lost] selves in such a pluralist and patriarchal society like Kenya. Self-identity is constructed through the images and meanings assigned to the 'self' and the 'other' in women's writings. By so doing, the postcolonial writings produce meaning within the dialectic representation of a woman's personality in the country where she lives.

The text used for this study also depicts women in post-colonial Kenya as constantly attempting to break out of the chains of patriarchy and voice out their concerns, as well as express the need for realization of their self-identity. Similarly, post-colonial Kenyan women writers have assumed agency roles in both personal and national issues. Post-colonial feminist writings have

shown the extent to which patriarchy and the rudiments of colonialism have led to false and destructive representations of the female self, even after Kenya's independence.

Post-colonial writings are aimed at giving back that agentic role to women. They seek to confront the colonial discourse that has for so long subverted women in Kenya as a result of patriarchy and colonialism. As stipulated by Ashcroft et al., a post-colonial writer is essentially an "ethnographer whose cultural location ’creates’ two audiences and faces two directions, wishing to reconstitute experience through an act of writing that uses the tools of one culture and society [those of the colonizer] and yet seeks to remain faithful to the experience of another [that of the colonized]" (2002, p. 59).

One of the primary contributions of postcolonial theory, according to Loomba (1998), is its ability to offer a critical lens through which to examine contemporary global power structures and the persistence of neocolonialism in the postcolonial era. She argues that postcolonial theory recognizes the enduring legacies of colonialism and the ongoing struggle of formerly colonized peoples to articulate alternative visions of the future. Loomba concludes that postcolonial theory provides a powerful tool for challenging dominant discourses and re-imagining new possibilities for justice and equality in the world.

As already stated, many post-colonial writings in the former colonies seek to transform colonial experiences. However, as mentioned above by Ashcroft et al. (2002), the writers are using the colonizers' tools to tell the colonizers' stories. Moreover, many of the post-colonial writers were trained in Europe and in the traditions and languages of the colonizers (the Europeans). Thus, it becomes pertinent to analyze the extent to which their writings have been able to conceptualize the gender identity of women in post-colonial Kenya.

3.5 Post-Colonial Representation of Women

Post-colonialism is an ideological response to colonial thoughts and the after-effects of colonization. The term should not be mistaken for describing a system that surfaced after the end of colonialism. In this sense, post-colonialism can be viewed as more of an ideology than a system. Post-colonialism is applied to better understand the way of life or the effects of colonization from the point of view of the colonized rather than the colonizers. On a deeper level, post-colonialism is said to examine the power relationship, be it social or political, that is still sustained after the demise of colonialism. This continuous relationship, as Burney (2012) explains, tends to result in both positive and negative consequences.

For instance, due to continuous relations, the presence of the former colonized in the territory of the former colonizers, e.g., Indians in Great Britain, has bred racial discrimination, conflict, racism, and so on, resulting in what the author describes as "reverse colonialism" (Burney, 2012, p.1). In recent times, post-colonialism has found its way into academia, as scholars have adopted it as a theory and a lens to explain and analyse issues regarding the effects of colonizers on the former colonized, as well as the need for total decolonization.

According to Wilkens (2017), post-colonialism is an academic approach that initially focused on the social, cultural, and economic consequences of European colonialization from the 18th century through the 20th century. Studies have debated whether the prefix "post" in post-colonialism makes any difference (Elam, 2019, p. 1). This is because the influence of colonialism, or now neo-colonialism, is still felt between the former colonial powers and their former colonized colonies. For example, many African countries like Kenya still follow the colonizers' "way of life," developmental values, and practices even after the end of colonization.

For instance, the primary texts in this study explore how many Kenyan women, like in most African countries, are still struggling to achieve self-empowerment and self-betterment in both politics and academia, mainly because of male chauvinism. The main tenet of post-colonialism describes the influence that colonialism still has on the culture, politics, and economy of former colonies. Research has established, however, that since the 1970s, post-colonialism has developed into a multiplicity of ideas and concepts, informing academic scholarship and social activism through a focus on post-colonial practices and conditions in different African contexts like land use, afforestation and deforestation, cultures and beliefs, education, and politics (Wilkens, 2017).

Scholars have reiterated the diverse ways colonialism has left a legacy in the former colonies, including a continuous expectation of their new leaders to meet certain standards (Bulhan, 2015). The author of this study also mentions that the former colonized (especially Africans) are left with feelings of disappointment and despair because of the legacies (social, economic, and political) of European domination.

Moreover, it is also necessary that studies analyse the way formerly colonized people acquire knowledge, understand their history, or define themselves in a manner that still reflects the views and influences of the colonizers. This implies that our leaders—this time—are continuing the dominating practices of colonization in our African nations. Colonialism also reflects itself in our societies through patriarchal structures of domination, which still recognize the superiority of certain groups of people, in this case, men over women. Colonialism then breeds gender inequality and women's oppression, which is one of the tenets that post-colonial theory seeks to unpack and challenge.

This study argues that colonization has affected and is still affecting the colonized, both humans and non-humans, and the entire environment of Kenya. As a result of this colonization, the relationship between colonized humans and non-humans suffers from this impact. However, women—particularly African women—who, like African men, have also experienced oppression at the hands of the British colonizer, feel the effects much more keenly. In the same manner as the British colonizers, African men have also acted as oppressors of women. The result is that the women now experience two forms of oppression—external oppression and internal oppression—and have become doubly colonized.

The study at hand finds relevance in the application of postcolonial theory, which centers on the ramifications of Western domination and exploitation of colonized individuals and their surroundings. As such, the chosen literary works have been influenced by postcolonial ideology. They were written when most African countries, in this case Kenya, had gained independence and were experiencing environmental and gender injustices as an effect of a post-colonial, African patriarchal society.

As stated earlier, post-colonial theory generally represents an ideological response to colonist thought as it arose as a consequence of the work of diaspora scholars from the Middle East and South Asia and, for the most part, refers to the colonized locations and their imperial discourses. Post-colonial identity defines decolonized people as people who have been able to break free from the forces of colonialism to form a new identity—a postcolonial identity—that enables interaction across diverse cultural, gender, and social identities.

Post-colonial theory addresses the ills of colonialism, in this case, the inequalities of gender, deforestation, and the improper use of natural resources. It stands resolute in its support of rebellion and change in the political, cultural, and social life of the colonized people, not just to

bridge the distance between the center and the margins but to also bring knowledge of and from the margins to the centre (Parasher, 2016). It calls for "justice and seeks to speak to the social and psychological sufferings, exploitation, violence, and enslavement done to the powerless victims of colonization around the world" (Parsons and Harding, 2011, p. 2).

It does this by challenging the hegemony and dominant perception imposed by traditional African cultures and seeking to emancipate and change the position of the marginalized and the subordinate (Parsons and Harding, 2011). Maathai's literary works are not only an act of enlightenment on the issues of the environmental conversation, but they are also an account of a soul-searching journey and an assessment of the repercussions of the loss of resources, particularly the loss of traditional African culture at the hands of European colonization.

In his study, *Environmentalism and Post-colonialism*, Nixon (2006) argues that women as colonized individuals have repeatedly been naturalized as objects of heritage to be owned, preserved, or patronized rather than subjects of their own land and legacies. This argument is in line with the situation of women in post-colonial Kenya, where they have been subjected to ill-treatment as their position in the family was to work on the land and provide for their family, but at no point did they have the right to own the land. This study argues that it is important to bring together postcolonial and environmental issues so that continuing colonialist attitudes of social and environmental dominance can be challenged.

In summary, colonialism can be said to be the conquest and control of other people's land and goods for the benefit of a foreign state. Loomba contends that "colonialism did not take the same style or process in most parts of the world. However, it succeeded in locating the original inhabitants of the place and the newcomers in the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history (Loomba, 1998, p. 6). This illustrated that colonialism had much to do with the

political power enforced on the native people. It changed the people's way of life, just like it changed the vicinity of the country, both inside and outside.

Colonialism can therefore be said to leave the colonized in a state of need, which has dire effects both on the people and their environment. These effects can have a permanent influence on people and how they see their surroundings. Such influence has caused Africans to forget their spiritual and traditional values and embark on new ways of life that look like new norms (Hawthorne, 2009).

Both Merchant (1992) and Plant (1989) concur that colonial power reduces, feminizes, and naturalizes a post-colonized society in its entirety, including male and female humans and non-humans. When colonial powers rule over both humans and non-humans, the resulting ecosphere becomes political. The political nature of the ecosphere then determines the relationship between humans and non-humans, between men and women, and between women and nature.

Post-colonial theory will also be applied in this study to analyse the representations of women's subjectivity and how this affects the female self, identity, and national identity in post-colonial Kenyan society. Post-colonial theory and Gynocriticism are interrelated in the analysis of the women's literary writings in this study. The link between these two theories as used in this study will be explained in the discussion that follows.

3.6 Post Colonialism and Gynocriticism as Interlinking Perspectives

In this study, both postcolonial theory and Gynocriticism are conceptualized and employed from feminist critical and constructivist perspectives. It is, therefore, worthy of showing the interconnectedness between postcolonial and feminist perspectives. The interlink is established because both theories aim at liberating the oppressed from the wounds of oppression.

Postcolonial literary theory is rooted in the historical narrative of oppressed people in formerly colonized nations. Colonialists saw the colonized people as subjects, reflecting the 'we' and 'other' relationship. Therefore, postcolonial literary theory is deemed a suitable lens for analyzing "the female self-portrayal in the postcolonial nation through women's writings" (see Muthari, 2001, p. 35).

Applying a postcolonial feminist perspective in this study seeks to reflect and conceptualize how women are positioned and defined in the postcolonial nation in 'the self' and 'the other' manners. Just as the gynocritic perspective is used to reflect on the female experiences of re-negotiating their new identity in Kenya's changing socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political context, the relationship between the two perspectives is still legitimate, and there is urgency in exploring how women's contributions are still swept under the carpet. As Friedman asserts, "the patriarchal formations have continued material reality." For her, "the material conditions that led to the rise of Gynocriticism and genesis still exist (1996, p. 29).

This is the reason for the urgency of the pedagogical and scholarly projects that seek to voice the legitimacy of women's identities. Furthermore, as Friedman also alluded, literary writings, histories, and theories still exist where women's contributions as producers of knowledge and culture remain unacknowledged (Ibid.). Thus, feminism in this respect remains under constant threat of erasure. It is, therefore, imperative that the discourse of feminism continue as long as women's contributions are still pushed to the margin (Ibid.).

Postcolonialism is also expressed as a revolutionary ideological movement or activism that seeks to offer a decolonial alternative to the situations of the former colonized. It is a way of healing the wounds caused by the marginalization of the subaltern that comes with colonialism. As Wilkens (2017) posits, post-colonialism describes the influence that colonialism still has on the

former colonies' culture, politics, and economy. Research has, however, established that since the 1970s, post-colonialism has developed into a multiplicity of ideas and concepts informing academic scholarship and social activism through a focus on postcolonial practices and conditions in different African contexts like land use, afforestation, and deforestation, cultures and beliefs, education, and politics.

As articulated by Bhambra (2014, p. 115), "postcolonialism emerged as a consequence of the work of diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia and, for the most part, refers back to those locations and their imperial interlocutors (Europe and the West). Like Gynocriticism, the decoloniality effort of postcolonial works seeks not to point out the significance of the colonized culture that has long been obscured, subdued, and disregarded as non-existent.

Thus, postcolonialism and feminism seem to be on a similar trajectory. The only exception is that postcolonialism is generic. At the same time, Gynocriticism is specifically geared towards women literary writers as people whose voice, experience, and contributions have long been subdued in the literary arena. Gynocritics believe that men may try to write about women's bodies and experiences, but that only women, who are the custodians of their experiences, can write about and interpret those experiences. It is from this perspective that feminism is criticized for taking an essentialist view of women.

Postcolonialism emerged from diasporic scholars from South America and, for the most part, as Bhambra (2014) states, refers back to those locations and their imperial interlocutors—again, primarily to Europe, although addressing a much longer time frame. Bhambra (2014) asserts explicitly that postcolonial and decolonial arguments and efforts have been most successful in challenging the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from the colonial masters.

Post-colonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak have drawn attention to the dangers of wrongly assuming that post-colonial movements and motives are simply a matter of giving voices to the subaltern (oppressed). However, post-colonial writings need to recognize that the essential subjectivity of the oppressed (in this case, the women) has been and still is "constrained by the discourses within which they were constructed as subaltern" (cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007, p. 87). When combined with gynocritic perspectives, this study then seeks to analyse the evolution of the emancipation of the female: the voice, identity, and self through female literary writings.

The concern thus is how to locate female voices and identities in the context of a post-colonial nation such as Kenya, where, as a continuity of colonial tendencies, women continue to be essentialized as non-assertive subjects and women's literary writings have constantly struggled to shine against the forces of patriarchy and subjugation. Besides, it is also necessary that studies analyse the way formerly colonized people acquire knowledge, understand their history, or define themselves in a manner that still reflects the colonizers' views and influences.

The present study endeavors to achieve this objective by revisiting historical events to uncover how the cultural significance and contributions of formerly colonized societies were suppressed under the guise of a superior Western culture. In the same perspective, this study seeks to show how women's contributions have been obscured due to the dominance of patriarchy, which saw men as the only relevant contributors to knowledge, culture, and history. When this is done, one can also realize that colonialism still reflects itself in our societies through patriarchal structures of dominance, which still recognize the superiority of particular groups of people, in this case, men over women.

Colonialism then breeds gender inequality and women's oppression, which is one of the tenets that postcolonial theory seeks to unpack and challenge. Postcolonial theory is applicable in this study, as the study focuses on reinventing and reasserting how women's identity and sense of selfhood had been subjugated in the literary writings of the colonial era. As stated earlier, postcolonial theory generally represents an ideological response to colonist thought as it arose as a consequence of diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia and, for the most part, refers back to the colonized locations and their imperial discourse.

Postcolonial identity defines decolonized people as people who have been able to break free from the forces of colonialism to form a new identity—postcolonial identity—that can interact across diverse cultural, gender, and social identities. The postcolonial theory addresses the ills of colonialism—in this case, inequalities of gender, deforestation, and improper use of natural resources. It stands resolutely in support of rebellion and change in the colonized people's political, cultural, and social life, not just to bridge the distance between the centre and the margins but also to bring knowledge of and from the margins to the centre (Parasher, 2016).

As a critical theory, postcolonialism is a call for justice. It seeks to speak to the social and psychological suffering, exploitation, violence, and enslavement done to women due to patriarchy and colonization. It challenges the hegemony and dominant perception imposed by male-dominated cultures, views, and perspectives of women as incapable of producing intellectually stimulating works.

3.7 Post Colonialism in Feminist Critical Perspective

Postcolonial feminist theory exerts pressure on mainstream postcolonial theory in its constant iteration of the necessity to consider gender issues. Postcolonialism and feminism have come to share a tense relationship as some feminist critics point out that postcolonial theory is a

male-centered field that has excluded the concerns of women and exploited them. Postcolonial feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of obliterating the role of women in the struggle for independence but also of misrepresenting them in nationalist discourses.

Postcolonial feminist scholars have critiqued, expanded, and shaped mainstream postcolonial theory by gendering it. This is done, as Tyagi (2014, p. 50) puts it, by exerting pressure on mainstream postcolonial theory in its constant iteration of the necessity to consider gender issues. Gendering postcolonial theory means that feminist concerns, or issues that concern women's identity and rights, are brought to the fore as equally significant. For instance, in order to disrupt the immense portrayal of women as objects of domination, postcolonial female scholars have produced a distinct and complicated analysis of different ways in which women, and in the case of this study, women's literary writings, have been obscured, as well as the need to bring women's experiences and contributions to the fore in the literary world.

This is the endeavour that the gynocritic scholar Elaine Showalter sought to promote. This patriarchal tendency was quite significantly felt in African societies. In patriarchal African society, women were seen as domestic symbols whose contributions were not worth accounting for. It is also possible that in literary writings, women's experiences and identities were also subjugated.

However, as enlightened individuals, feminist postcolonial scholars, both fictional and non-fictional, have portrayed women as having the powers to take part in many arenas like politics, management, and many more conspicuous career positions (see Mathaai, 2007; Ogot, 2012; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007). Their literary writings have contributed enormously to shaping the field of literature.

From a postcolonial perspective, this study examines two significant struggles that define postcolonial feminist criticism. Firstly, the study examines selected Kenyan female writers'

conceptualizations of the female self. Secondly, it analyses representations of women's subjectivity and their effects on the female self and national identity in postcolonial Kenya. As the study's analysis cuts across the intersection of multiple identities of gender and race, the goal is to investigate Kenyan women's social, historical, and cultural contexts while voicing their concerns.

Researchers are increasingly using postcolonial and contemporary critical theories to investigate issues with narrative and the development of the individual self and identity (e.g., Kruger, 2011; Magu, 2014; Muthari, 2001). These writers have demonstrated the urgency to (re) conceptualize the female self and identity in the context of postcolonial Kenya in a manner that shows the relationship between the women's self-identity and national identity and as a necessary condition to [(re)] "integrate women into the realm of the nation" (Magu, 2014, p. 46).

By way of the solution of reinventing the identity of women, the study aspires towards "a representation that attempts to insert them back into their historical and cultural context" (Tyagi, 2014, p. 46). Issues of race, class, religion, and other identities are intertwined in constructing identity (Friedman, 1996).

As Barry (2009) opines, "separating such properties is likely to create a one-sided view of the female. Moreover, as I reiterated in the first chapter of this study, female self-identity is constructed through the images and meanings assigned to the 'self' and the 'other' in women's writings in such a manner that the writings represent women in the dialectic representation of women's personalities in the country where she lives. Sangeeta Ray argued that postcolonial studies must not ignore gender in their analysis of nationalism. She (Sangeeta Ray) is of the view that nationalism is always a gendered discourse (cited in Friedman, 1996, p. 30).

In her writings, Carter believes that "women are represented in a very negative light with less-than-ideal roles that neither please nor glorify them" (cited in Nouri & Fatameh, 2015). Carter

Wolf wrote in the context of the US during the 1980s. The aim of her writing was to encourage women to revolt against male oppression by fighting for gender equality. Her radical-libertarian feminist approach renders a strong critique of the patriarchal roles that have been placed on women throughout time. Radical-libertarian feminists wanted there to no longer be restraints on women's right to choose. Angela Carter revolved her tales around these radical-libertarian goals.

3.8 Locational Feminist Criticism in The Context of Kenya

As already stated in this chapter, the concepts of gender and feminism have socio-cultural and socio-political contextual meanings and, to an extent, applications. These variations in contexts were evident in Alice Jardine's usage of genesis in the context of France, which somewhat contradicted how Ellaine Showalter contextualized Gynocriticism in the United States. Thus, in using Gynocriticism in this study, the researcher takes into consideration the "fluidity,' relational, and situational geography of identity and applies it appropriately to the situation of Kenyan women.

In calling for Gynocriticism and gynesis to be adapted to the geographies of interdisciplinary identity studies (Friedman 1996, p. 31), Friedman implored the terms to be used or applied in a more self-conscious manner that considers this locational feminist criticism instead of a fixed form of gynocritical analysis. In applying Gynocriticism in this study, the researcher bears in mind the politics of gender and identity in post-colonial Kenya at this given moment and how various feminist writers have attempted to voice out the need for women's emancipation. As stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (2007), "postcolonial literary and cultural production in particular has demonstrated the insistent reality of local agency, an agency that can address simple dualistic approaches to the local and

The fluidity and relational nature of feminism and identity are also considered in applying postcolonial theory in this study. One of the studies aims is to interrogate how selfhood and women's identity are conceptualized in postcolonial Kenya. It is based on the belief that space and time are critical factors in shaping identity, and as far as selfhood and female identity are concerned, women's search for self-identity is characterized by the conditions of the changing socio-political realities that define female self-identity. These various changes are reflected in the selected novels used for this study.

Moreover, the quest for identity in postcolonial literary works usually revolves around issues that seek to forge and build identity. The literary works chosen for this study are very striking examples of postcolonial literary works that examine issues of the subaltern's struggle and quest for identity as women. This is done in a post-colonial Kenyan context and seeks to explore issues of otherness, displacement, dislocation, and other issues that tend to sweep women's voices and identities under the carpet.

The selected works thus far for this study represent women as people who struggle to negotiate their individual or group identities in a postcolonial Kenyan setting or in the context of Kenya as a nation. In applying post-colonial and gynocritic perspectives, the analysis in this study therefore aims to explore this quest for identity and how the selected novels represent it.

3.9 Conclusion

Whether in the literary world or elsewhere, the emancipatory endeavor of bringing about women's liberation remains a continual process. This chapter has discussed two theories, Gynocriticism and postcolonialism, and how they both applied, both as individual theoretical lenses and as interlinking perspectives, to the aims of this study.

Gynocriticism explains the need and the process of reinventing the validity of female literary tradition and depicting a feminine mode of experience and subjectivity in thinking and perceiving the self and the world. The chapter explains how Gynocriticism will be applied in analyzing how the selected women's writings aim to (re)articulate the female self-concerning their everyday lived realities and how the conceptualization is articulated in postcolonial Kenya.

Postcolonial theory, the second perspective applied in this study, is explained as articulating colonialism's effects on the formerly colonized people. Colonialism and patriarchy are described as intricately connected in their practices of women's subjugation. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) have argued that patriarchy and colonialism are characterized by similar modes of domination over those they render subordinate. Postcolonialism's goal as an activist endeavor and as a theoretical lens is to give back the voice to the oppressed, particularly women.

As discussed, postcolonial theory and Gynocriticism are applied in this study from a feminist perspective to examine the conceptualization of female selfhood and identity in postcolonial Kenya. Finally, Gynocriticism and postcolonial theory are discussed as interlinking perspectives that critically appreciate the selected works in this study. These selected works borrow extensively from postcolonial and gynocritic feminist criticism to articulate issues of women's selfhood and identity in relation to national identity in Kenya.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEMALE SELF AND IDENTITY IN POST-COLONIAL KENYA: AN ANALYSIS OF *UNBOWED: A MEMOIR* (2006)

4.1. Introduction

In post-colonial Kenyan society, many communities still have patriarchal social systems in which women are condemned to low social status. Traditional practices and cultural beliefs are some of the factors that hinder women from achieving their potential and becoming socially, politically, and economically independent.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze how Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* (2006) represents post-colonial Kenyan women's self and identity. The discussion in the chapter unlocks the status and role of women in terms of empowerment positions in a challenging traditional social context.

The chapter examines the traditional practices and cultural beliefs that bar Kenyan women's liberation and progress and the way in which Maathai has reconstructed a new narrative space for the representation of women, self, and identity using her own life story filled with successful achievements and the many challenges that she faced while suppressing patriarchal conventions. In her narration, she mentions female characters and incidents that bring out women as subjects and not objects of the narration, thereby challenging society's gender stereotypes.

The following sections of this chapter will critically look at the life of Wangari Maathai as portrayed in her memoir, *Unbowed* (2006), in the process of fighting for women's empowerment and for environmental conservation. The chapter will begin with a synopsis of the text and then proceed to discuss the themes of Kenyan politics, education, and cultural and traditional practices

as the three key issues in the text that affect Maathai's philosophy of women's self and identity in conjunction with national identity. It will look at how Maathai's actions as an African female activist constructed her as a gynocritic and how she achieved her goals and philosophy of making the lives of Kenyan women fulfilling and purposeful through the Green Belt Movement.

4.2 Synopsis

Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* (2006) is a powerful tale of one woman's life. Maathai's simple and straightforward style is entirely in character with the story she had to tell. *Unbowed* tells the story of how a girl from the Central Highlands of Kenya became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in East and Central Africa and head a university department in Kenya, despite the many challenges she went through. It illustrates Maathai's numerous run-ins with the brutally repressive Kenyan government and how she came to see planting trees as a way to empower local communities and incite people to determine their own future.

The book *Unbowed* (2006), which is available from Knopf Publishers in New York, offers an energizing determination to be undefeated, which is the power of perseverance and the influence of principled, passionate people to change their countries and inspire the world. Maathai dedicates this book to her parents and children (Waweru, Wanjira, and Muta), who represent many other women facing different challenges in their lives. She wishes for all people to protect what they have and to stand up strongly to voice what they believe in.

It explains how a triple yoke of oppression binds black women, providing an opportunity to discuss the contradictions surrounding the perceptions, locations, and identities of women in post-colonial African politics. It identifies how, before colonization and even post-colonization, each component of their existence as women—their sex, their color, and their class—combined to negate their right to social, political, and environmental inequality. It explores how, within a racist

and sexist system, women were not only oppressed in relation to men but also in relation to each other (Presbey, 2013).

Unbowed (2006) explores Maathai's beginning, her birth, family relationships, and culture, and re-defines her position as a woman who was in charge of defining herself because she wouldn't allow society to define her. She celebrates her life by writing her story. She includes the challenges as lessons for readers, especially girls and women, whom she sees herself mentoring to better themselves. She also tells the story of how she triumphs over the odds of political, social, and cultural stereotypes to celebrate her victory. In this way, her autobiography becomes a powerful reflective tool of self-identification that recounts personal experiences and offers lessons to readers about the importance of being in control and aware of what is happening in their environment and their lives.

Unbowed represents Wangari Maathai as an incredibly charismatic, humble person possessed of a supernatural luminosity of spirit, the winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize (Ebila, 2015). Maathai recounts her extraordinary life as a political activist, feminist, and environmentalist in post-colonial Kenya. She recounts how difficult it was to be a woman, but more excruciatingly, an educated and divorced woman with three children who is passionate about conserving the environment in African society. She discusses how the exploitation of women and nature was constructed through social, cultural, religious, and economic practices that did not take women's perspectives into consideration. She discusses how gendered nationalism (which glorifies the role and place of women in the construction of nations) enables a litany of male leaders of post-colonial nation states like Kenya to silence the voices of women politicians by urging them to, for example, behave like 'proper women'.

Maathai's autobiography illustrates how socio-cultural and patriarchal ideologies shape the social construction of womanhood in African politics. These ideologies construct the ideal African woman as docile, discouraging her from questioning male authority. The patriarchal paradigm is founded on cultural convictions that accord greater importance to male progeny as compared to their female counterparts. The cultivation and dissemination of a cultural framework that upholds male hegemony and sustains the belief that women ought to assume a subservient position with respect to themselves and matters pertaining to the development of their country.

Maathai's autobiography becomes a lens that can be used to view and question the social construction of womanhood versus manhood and the influence of gender power relations on women's participation in the politics of post-colonial nation states in Africa. It provides a thorough explanation of how Maathai's Green Belt Movement helped Kenyan women achieve their empowerment through environmental and civic education. In retrospect, it combines the study of the post-colonial Kenyan environment with that of the people and reveals the relationship between literature and the environment.

4.3 Empowerment of Women and Environmental Conservation

Women's empowerment, women's education, and women's equality are all worthy goals. But what exactly do these aspects mean in an East African context? This chapter looks at the issues of women's empowerment through the philosophy of Wangari Maathai. The study looked at Gynocriticism as a theory of lived African women's experiences that attempts to articulate and analyze the treatment and value of women in modern Kenya.

The study concurs with Emery (2000) that even though gender is usually not investigated to a large extent with research in indigenous knowledge, there is an increased recognition that the gender division of labor results in differentiated knowledge of natural resources (Emery, 2000). It

will look at how Maathai worked with the marginalized women of Kenya to restore their own and national identities through replenishing their environment as they purposely sought to better their lives.

Women theorists have addressed the concept of empowerment prior to Maathai's contribution to the field; this study would therefore survey a few of these beneficial studies. This study opposes the idea of empowerment within a western capitalist context. Lewis argues that state-engineered "transformation" based on neo-liberal development patterns often uses the expressions "gender equality" and "women's empowerment" in ways that are "superficial and complacent" (Desiree, 2008, p. 83).

In other words, they use these popular phrases in ways that do not ask for justice but only ‘power within the status quo’, presuming that women's only aspirations are to gain men's privileges for themselves (p. 84). She in fact recommends simply dropping empowerment talk because of the way it has failed to promote and transform "situations and conditions that may lie beyond existing class and gender models of material achievement and public success" (Desiree, 2008).

On the other hand, Ibrahim and Alkire have constructed a table of different connotations of the term "empowerment" from a survey of development literature (2007, p. 380–381). They found great commonalities among the different descriptions of empowerment, with the majority focusing on developing insight into social and structural inhibitors of a flourishing lifestyle. Thus, individuals can change their perspectives and actions and join in community with others to change their contexts and more easily achieve self-identity. This study found an emphasis on empowerment acting as a counter to existing inhibitors, described concisely by Allen (1998, p. 34) as "the capacity of an agent to act in spite of, or in response to, the power wielded over her by

others". The term empowerment can therefore be said to be a subject that raises different connotations in African countries and global society.

The following sections of this chapter will look at how Wangari's *Unbowed* (2006) illustrates how women in post-colonial Kenya, through their involvement in the GBM, managed to navigate their way through patriarchal African tradition and Kenyan politics to obtain an education that enabled them to overcome the many challenges they were facing in achieving their self- and national-empowerment.

4.4 Cultural Traditions and the Effects to Women Self and National Identity

Unbowed (2006) presents Maathai as a highly traveled female gender and environmental activist with a lot of lived local and international experiences. However, the text explicitly states that despite being a highly assimilated and Westernized woman, she was very appreciative of her cultural heritage and expressed great joy and pride in her nationality and culture.

This is especially the case in the chapter's beginnings, as she recounts the creational myths of her people, the Kikuyu, and appropriates significant space in the descriptions of Kikuyu traditions and customs, such as Mount Kenya, which served as a prominent feature in the landscape of the central highlands where the Kikuyu lived.

Kikuyus considered the mountain to be God's home, and it served as a reminder of Ngai's presence and provision. Maathai states, "Everything good came from it: abundant rains, rivers, streams, and clean drinking water. Whether they were praying, burying their dead, or performing sacrifices, Kikuyus faced Mount Kenya, and when they built their houses, they made sure the doors looked towards it." (p.106).

She also spoke favorably about polygamy, family structures, traditions, land ownership agreements, normative accords, and the peer pressure of the traditional Kenyan homesteads in the

chapter "Cultivations". She expressed regret that the heart and soul of local cultures had almost vanished, and she revisited—and in a sense tried to revitalize—the cultural means of signification such as Kikuyu words and names (p. 32), rituals (which are both 'beautiful and practical' (p. 4), myths, and history: "Sadly, these good beliefs and traditions that helped the community to stay in peace with each other and also with nature have now died away. They were dying even as I was born," Maathai states sadly (p. 5).

With regards to this disappearance of local beliefs and traditions, she indirectly held missionaries responsible as they preached a new gospel, contrary to the people's way of life. Unbowed also highlights how Maathai not only criticized the missionaries for altering the culture of informational transmission, but she also pointed to the fact that the missionaries encouraged local people to destroy cultural artifacts such as musical instruments, which were culturally significant in local ceremonies and installation rituals. Maathai says:

> When European missionaries came to the central highlands at the end of the nineteenth century, they taught the local people that God did not dwell on Mount Kenya, but rather in heaven, a place above the clouds. The proper place to worship him was in a church on Sundays, a concept that was foreign to Kikuyus. Nevertheless, many people accepted the missionaries' worldview, and within two generations they lost respect for their own beliefs and traditions. (Maathai, 2006, p.5-6)

Maathai noted how people were encouraged to reject their cultural heritage and cultural means of identification, self-representation, and their language. Even their African names were rejected. With regards to self-representation, Maathai argues that recognition is quintessential to the development of a democratic culture and the establishment of equality. Maathai also draws

attention to the fact that the missionaries changed her and her friends' names from African to Catholic ones. Subsequently, by calling attention to the fact that she takes back her own name after returning to Kenya, she rekindles an important aspect of her cultural affiliation and identity: "When I returned to Kenya, I was Wangari Muta. That was what I should always have been" (p. 196).

Unbowed (2006) highlights how the introduction of westernized practices also had negative effects on the people's farming practices. For instance, hallowed landscapes lost their sacredness and were exploited as the local people became insensitive to the destruction, accepting it as a sign of progress (p. 6). Here, once again, we see that the disruption of local cultures leads to negative environmental effects, something that Maathai is very conscious of throughout *Unbowed*.

In addressing the pre-colonial culturally enforced protection of the immensely important indigenous fig tree, Maathai illustrates the environmental role of culture in passing on tacit knowledge. She paints a picture of a culture that "understood" and appreciated nature and acknowledged a mutual relationship of dependence: "[...] without conscious or deliberate effort, these cultural and spiritual practices contributed to the conservation of biodiversity—both human and non-human life" (p. 46).

Like many other parts of the world, the problem of gender discrimination in Kenya is deeply engraved in the culture and practices of the society. Culture, as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary*, can be denoted as the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.

Kenya comprises more than 42 tribes, or ethnic communities. All these tribes have their own unique ways of living, but clearly shared among all of them is the culture of patriarchy. The existence of patriarchy in most Kenyan communities has been used over the years to justify and maintain the status quo rather than address the problem of gender inequality. The proponents of

gender discrimination have found this a reason to say, "This is how things have always been" (Magu, 2014).

There is no clear indication of commitment by either the government or its institutions to promote gender equality. On the contrary, it is more resounding in Kenya, where various cultural overtones condemn change and anyone who challenges existing structures. The Swahili saying, "Mwancha Mila ni Mtumwa" (Whoever forsakes culture is a slave), clearly illustrates this and is shared among almost all the communities in Kenya. (Toroitich, 2004, p.1). *Unbowed* (2006) explores this status of women, especially in the Kikuyu community of Kenya.

Maathai recounts how her father left her, her mother, and her siblings at their home in Nyeri to seek a better job and life. The men had opportunities to venture out of their homes for a better life, but the women had to remain at home and toil on the land to provide for their children. She narrates how she had to work on the farm with her mother while her younger brothers went to school because it was her duty as a girl to work alongside her mother and learn her duties as a traditional African woman.

In almost every Kenyan community, women are seen as inferior and are always ranked among children. Little wonder then that when women vied for elective posts in the 2002 general elections, their opponents condemned them, saying, "Who wants to be led by a child?" (AWC Feature Service, 2003) The right of Kenyan women to participate in politics, leadership, and the governance of their country has been elusive in Kenya, despite its claim to be a democratic nation. Democracy and good governance are founded upon the basic tenet of the participation of all the people, irrespective of their sex, religion, ethnicity, or any other distinction.

Unbowed (2006) explains how the practice of democracy is not the case in Kenya, as the participation of women in politics, both as aspirants and voters, has for a long time been regarded

as a privilege rather than a right. Hence, Maathai claims in her memoir that until both the male and female populations are well represented in parliament and other key decision-making institutions, there cannot be any reasonable measure of democracy, human rights, empowerment, or even development. In Kenya, however, the weight and importance of women's participation in the governance of their country have been shrugged off.

Many women who sought political positions, like Wangari Maathai, Grace Ogot, Marjorie Oludhe, and Muthoni Likimani Grace, have been seen as rebels attempting to break the traditional and cultural norm. They have been met with fierce hostility and rejection from men and women, who are proponents of discrimination against the women seeking positions (Echel and Onyango, 2018).

The belief that women are by nature weak and that their main responsibilities are childbearing and homemaking has made it harder for women to participate freely in nation-building arenas. This might explain why women's representation in parliament, which constitutes their right, has been below ten percent since Kenya's independence in 1963. This scenario shows the importance and need for empowerment for Kenyan women. It is one of the reasons that feminists like Wangari Maathai have fought for human rights and empowerment through activism.

Over the years, women activists and feminists have continued to wage war against oppressive cultural practices in Kenya. *Unbowed* (2006) explains why and how women activists like Wangari Maathai put their lives on the line when they decided to work with women to ensure that they understood what it meant to be empowered within a democratic society. She used the Green Belt Movement as a teaching and learning forum both for environmental and civil education, with her major focus on guiding women's insights into social and structural inhibitors of positive transformation.

This encouraged the women to change their perspectives and actions and to work together to change their context to achieve their well-being (Scout, 2013). According to *Unbowed* (2006), Maathai was a practical visionary for change rather than the egotistical opportunist that some men and women who did not support the empowerment of women had characterized her as (Hunt, 2014). She seized the opportunity to lead as the chairperson of the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK) with a vision to consolidate the activities of the Green Belt Movement. This proved to be an empowering forum where women participated in the planting of trees, replenishing their livelihoods and the environment.

She was at the forefront of women's struggles against traditional bondages for sustainable livelihoods by mobilizing thousands of rural women in tree-planting mega-projects. In addition, the GBM leaders also stressed holistic strategies for sustainable food production and environmental preservation. They implemented similar strategies in community groups, and the GBM worked toward empowering communities by developing an attitude of personal responsibility.

That long-term, deep, and widespread change comes at a cost to the individual is something Maathai knows through personal experience. Schaeffer-Duffy (2007) comments, "Failure and obstacles define her journey", as she bears imprisonment, violent attacks, and divorce during the pursuit of her goals for environmental conservation and the empowerment of women, but these experiences do not derail her because "adversity can clarify and strengthen commitment".

In Maathai's own words to the women, especially those languishing in poverty in the rural Nyeri community where she was born and raised, "A stumble is only one step in the long path we walk, and dwelling on it only postpones the completion of our journey" (2006, p. 162). Maathai's experience bears relevance when empowerment happens in the context of resistance (Allen 1998,

p. 34). Maathai's character as being resilient and persistent in her cause and values is pertinent; her example encouraged many women to have the courage to see the imposed patriarchal culture as an inhibitor towards their empowerment. They chose to stand up for what they believed in and to participate in the restoration of their environment and in their self-betterment practices through the Green Belt Movement.

Unbowed (2006) explores Maathai's spirit of political resilience and ecological concern; it therefore offers this study an activist-based framework for holistic and egalitarian eco-spiritual value. This value impels both women and men to create a safe and sacred space where co-existence between humanity and nature is highly treasured. For Maathai, there is symbolism associated with planting a tree: it symbolizes posterity, which is closely related to a very big part of her life philosophy and constitutes values such as respect for basic human rights, justice, equality, equity, non-violence, caring, and integrity.

Maathai argues in Chapter 6 of her memoir, Foresters without Diplomas," that the trees provided sustainability, clean water, and hindered erosion of topsoil. She explains that the trees made it possible for families to grow crops and, in this way, get varied food and nourishment, thus enabling a safe environment for coexistence for both humans and non-humans alike. She encouraged women to use their local knowledge of and expertise in planting to become "Foresters without diplomas," a rebuke to the belief that environmental conservation could only be handled by educated male government employees. *Unbowed* (2006) explains how Maathai encouraged the women to use their feminine sense and their connection to the earth to plant the trees, instilling in them the belief of self-empowerment, one of the core values of GBM.

On December 12th, 1992, Independence Day, when Kenyans celebrated their independence from the British, the then president, Daniel Arap Moi, gave a speech at Uhuru Park.

He condemned the Law Society of Kenya and the National Churches of Kenya for perceived criticisms of the government and singled Maathai out for opposing the proposed construction of a complex on the same grounds he was standing on.

Moi suggested that if Maathai was to be a "proper woman" in the African tradition, she should have respected men and been quiet (p. 196). He even went to the extent of asking the 'proper women' in the crowd, those from the leadership of Mandeleo Ya Wanawake
(Maathai's former colleagues from the National Council of Women, which was a beneficiary of the ruling party and in opposition to Maathai's activism work), to 'tame' her and stop her from embarrassing the women fraternity, reminding the women of their traditional position in society (p. 196). This leads to the question: Who is a proper African woman? Who or what really defines a proper woman?

Within Kenyan politics, there were many social expectations that defined the behaviors of "proper African women," and Maathai states quite a few in her autobiography. *Unbowed* (2006) explains that a proper woman in the African tradition has always been imagined within the context of the family; she is expected to accept marriage and have children because marriage is assumed to be the primary end goal (p. 105).

A "proper woman" puts the family's interests before her own personal interests. A proper African woman therefore aspires to be a wife and a mother. Maathai had succeeded in being a mother but was considered to have failed in being a wife. She was a divorced woman. A proper African woman does not divorce, or if she divorces, she does not stand for a position of leadership because she knows that she will be seen as a bad example (p. 158). Also, a proper African woman was not concerned with fights or activism intended to save trees and the environment; rather, she was supposed to be concerned about her family and children (p. 191).

If she were to be concerned about trees, it would be in terms of firewood, which she needs to provide fuel for her kitchen, or timber and logs to fence her compound. To Moi, a proper woman in the African tradition was a woman who did not talk back at men, as silence is expected in African culture and is interpreted to mean respect. However, *Unbowed* (2006) elucidates how Maathai did not allow this talk about how to behave like a proper African woman to deter her from her passion; rather, her focus was on teaching other women the importance of recognizing themselves as individual human beings with the capacity to make their own decisions. She states:

> At one point it became clear I was being turned into a sacrificial lamb. Anybody who had a grudge against modern, educated, and independent women was being given an opportunity to spit on me. I decided to hold my head high, put my shoulders back, and suffer with dignity: I would give every woman and girl reasons to be proud and never regret being educated, successful, and talented. "What I have, I told myself", is something to celebrate and not to ridicule or dishonor (p.146).

Maathai's words above show post-colonial thought in relation to self-identity and the realization of a modern woman when she says that self-definition is one tool that is essential to women's empowerment. Maathai challenged the patriarchal colonial ethos in postcolonial Kenya by encouraging women to define who they are first before allowing society to define them for them. Self-definition involves developing consciousness, an important pre-requisite for successful self-empowerment.

Maathai had developed that consciousness and seen her achievements as something worth celebrating and not hiding. She was a successful, talented, and educated African woman, though not seen as such a big achievement to be proud of and celebrated from the African perspective and especially by her male counterparts. She was knowledgeable enough to realize that restrictive and,

at most times, negative social attitudes towards women were constructed with the intention of subordination.

Maathai articulates a gender perspective where women's knowledge, experiences, and perceptions are given validity and are foregrounded when analyzing and presenting issues. Gender equality and equity are not only fundamental issues of human rights and social justice but are just as essential to the functioning of the environment as well (see Chiuri et al., 1992; and Toroitich, 2004).

Writing about her experience as the wife of a politician when she was still married to Maathai, Wangari observed that men used their wives' 'Africanness' as boosters for their political aspirations. In fact, she says, men "wanted to project their 'Africanness' through their wives both at home and in society. Women are described as carriers and promoters of culture. Yet men are also carriers of culture. Why, in these instances, couldn't they express it?" (p.110-112).

Maathai does not accept the unfair practice of loading the responsibilities of good behaviour on women only when it is men who benefit in the end. She questions why women should be viewed as promoters of culture and not men, therefore urging women to just not follow the expected norm. By explicitly denouncing the culture that has been imposed upon women through the colonial period, Maathai encourages Kenyan women to utilize their voices and indigenous knowledge to shift away from the ideals that led to the conquest and destruction of land and native people groups.

Unbowed (2006) shows how Maathai defined herself and her decision to be proud of who she was (p. 146). She saw herself as a role model to African girls and women, and in that role, she saw the urgent need to be bold and not cower when faced with negative patriarchal attitudes and challenges. The idea that a 'proper' African woman should not speak up was not only a creation

of colonialism; it had also been institutionalized within Kenyan society by virtue of their patriarchal inheritance from African traditions. The silencing of oppositional views is equivalent to the othering during colonized times that patriarchal societies have done to women.

A 'proper African woman' is imagined to be a supporting wife or mother of the household who answers to a loving husband or father, who is usually the head of the household. A proper African woman therefore aspires to be a wife and a mother, not a political activist. Maathai and other women who engaged in postcolonial formal politics individually and collectively became silenced and vulnerable to attacks from government machinery; however, they remained strong and resilient (Ebila, 2015; Maathai, 2006). Their persistence has encouraged more women to venture into politics, adult education, and many other prominent positions.

4.5 Kenyan Politics

Contemporary Kenyan society is a product of its colonial past. Because colonialism is a contextual tapestry and an overarching theme in *Unbowed*, this section will look at how Maathai deals with the diverse aspects of colonialism in Kenya throughout her memoir. The advent of colonialism in the late nineteenth century altered Kenya by inflicting economic, cultural, and environmental destruction. The transition from subsistence food production by indigenous people to settler-owned plantation wage labour reshaped the manner in which the Kikuyu (and many other tribal people groups in Africa) lived out their days and provided sustenance for their families.

Additionally, environmental degradation as a consequence of land mismanagement and abuse generated further problems for indigenous people. Colonial rule left Kenya with the legacy of a patriarchal state, a system that Kenyan male political leader adopted at independence (Oyewumi, 1997). Consequently, African systems continue to represent systems that prioritize and uphold male privilege. Not surprisingly, Gynocriticism is also characterized by African women's

resistance to African male political leaders, who have attempted to respond to western hegemony by further limiting and exploiting women.

For instance, *Unbowed* (2006) indicates that women in Kenya constitute the majority of people living in rural areas and represent the highest number of people working on land for subsistence livelihood. Still, their rights to access and ownership of their land are not like those of their male counterparts (p. 236). Howard, in his study, comments:

> Over much of the world, it is mainly women who are wild plant gatherers, and managers, home gardeners and plant domesticators, herbalist and healers, as well as seed custodians. In several regions and cultures, women are also principal farmers and informal plant breeders, particularly of indigenous crops (Howard, 2003 p.7).

Similarly, when it comes to access, ownership, and use of land and other kinds of property, women have been put aside. Their property rights are grossly violated, ignoring their roles as providers of food and builders of the economy.

According to the Kenya Land Alliance, there are laws that deny women equality with men in their right to own property, borrow money, and enter into contracts. In treating equal persons unequally, the current laws reinforce existing conditions and promote the existing inequality in African society, which is contrary to the stipulations of the country's constitution (Gender Aspects of Land Reform, Volume 4, 2002).

Gynocriticism in Africa is characterized by women's struggles for increased participation in the nascent democratic structures. This is exemplified in Unbowed (2006). Moreover, it concurs with Morna (1992) that democracy is crucial to the sustainability of the environment because

government policies require the inclusion of the people affected by them, especially women, in decision-making, implementation, and policing.

In a nation like Kenya, it is simple for people to discount the contributions made by women during both the colonial and post-colonial periods and associate the struggle for independence with male actors. As a consequence, Maathai's cause for environmental justice and women's liberation was soundly sacrilegious and subversive to the hetero-normative thought patterns of male hegemony.

> In 1997, I had written to the minister of environmental and natural resources to protest the deforestation of Ngong and South Western Mau forests, as well as Karura Forest. Then, in the summer of 1988, I learned of an example of land-grabbing so blatant and extensive that I knew that this would be a fight we could not afford to lose. The government was taking land in Karura Forest to the north of Nairobi and giving it to its political allies for executive offices and private houses (p.185).

To the members of parliament who had questioned her reaction against their corrupt nature of public land-grabbing and the cutting down of the trees, Maathai responded that, "in spite of what the members of parliament might think, my being a woman was irrelevant" (p. 192). By and large, this shows that some men have not accepted the fact that women need to have equal opportunities to participate in public affairs, and yet, they still disregard women and fail to take notice of their concerns.

As a result, this study can confidently claim that the patriarchal nature of Kenyan African culture is the leading cause of women's suffering by virtue of discrimination. Maathai further explains this predisposition by referring to the inherent culture of land ownership in Kenya. In the country, people depend heavily on their land and its natural resources. The men, who are entitled

to land ownership, can quickly make enemies out of someone who has taken land that belongs to them. It was this very history and attitude that made it easy on the ear in the 1990s for agents of government to stir up supporters in the Rift Valley to lash out against "other" tribes occupying "their" land (p. 237).

Unbowed (2006) reveals how Maathai opposed the government's plan to build a skyscraper (a 60-story building) in Uhuru Park, the very heart of Nairobi. Maathai and members of the public who were familiar with the park's favourable location and recreational amenities found it ironic that the construction of a building within the park was deemed significant in commemorating Kenya's independence. This was due to the fact that the park, along with other public lands such as the Karura Forest, had been subjected to land grabbing and utilized for construction purposes. Maathai furiously stated:

> Uhuru Park is famous for its lawns, pathways, and a boating lake, an environment for recreation, gatherings, quiet walks, and fresh air. Maathai's autobiography recounts how she took up this protest against the construction as one of her projects in the struggle to save the environment. (Unbowed, 2006)

She argued that the construction posed adverse environmental consequences, infringed on ordinary citizens' free park space, and was a costly proposal. Maathai understood that Uhuru Park, like other parks, presented a space for people, regardless of their gender and social status, to reconnect with nature. This is very important in solving environmental issues, as by seeing and using the facility, they would experience and understand its importance to society and the desire to protect it. She claims:

> Uhuru Park provided everyone, whether young or old, rich or poor, with some respite in a city that was growing rapidly, as sprawling housing estates and

> commercial buildings took over land that was previously grassland or forest. Nairobi was no longer the ‘Green City in the sun’ I had walked in over twenty years before (p.184).

She involved local and international media and wrote letters to government officials as well as international agencies around the world on the need to preserve the park and its natural enclave over 34 hectares of land that would be destroyed if the building went up (p. 185). She noted, "My work to protect Uhuru Park had raised my profile as an advocate not only for the environment but also for human rights" (p. 203). Clearly, the link between women’s empowerment and environmental conservation has been shown in this move.

In addition, post-colonial eco-criticism has been portrayed as *Unbowed* (2006), which enlightens the relationship between humans and non-humans and how human actions affect the existence of both. *Unbowed* (2006), in the chapter titled "Fighting for Freedom", explains the incidences surrounding Maathai’s fight against the construction of the skyscraper and the issues concerning Kenya’s politics and decision-making at the time. During the session in parliament, to the cheers of a packed house, one Member of Parliament told the house that because she had supposedly repudiated her husband in public, she could not be taken seriously and that her behaviour had damaged his respect for all women.

He accused her of incitement and warned the Green Belt Movement members to tread carefully. He concluded by saying, "I don’t see the sense at all in that bunch of divorcees coming to criticize such a complex matter." (p. 191-192). This statement described the contempt the men had for Maathai. Her status as a divorced woman made matters worse, as ‘her fascination" to take care of her husband and her household was proof enough that she was not fit to do anything profitable, let alone raise her voice on matters of state.

Journalists from some of the leading American and British newspapers, including the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and the United Kingdom's Independent, reported on her struggle against the massive project (p. 202). This helped raise awareness amongst environmentalists and pro-democracy campaigners in Europe and North America. Many of them were hearing Africans, under the leadership of an African female activist, raise their voices to defend their own environment and its green spaces for the first time.

Foreign investors and donor governments began questioning the wisdom of spending such a vast amount of money on a building of dubious usefulness in a country that was already struggling with domestic and international debts and with so many people living in poverty, with no basic needs such as education being met (p. 203). After years of national and international pressure, the government could not ignore these voices and heeded them. Indeed, "on January 29th, 1990, the government announced that its plans for the development project had changed" (p. 203-204).

This victory was not for Maathai only, but for the women and men around the country who could be heard if they raised their concerns and expressed what they believed was right, not only for themselves but also for future generations to come. This incident, just like many others discussed in this study, shows that environmentalism and politics, though they may appear different, are in fact intimately connected, as most environmental movements are deeply political, as seen in the case of the GBM. The study concludes that environmental concerns often stem from political issues and lead to political activism directed towards serving the public, with a focus on alleviating conflict and creating peace.

Unbowed (2006) emphasizes Maathai's character as being persistent in her cause. She remained determined even when she did not receive any positive results from the government.

Instead, male-dominated members of parliament and President Moi proclaimed that she had ‘bugs in her head’ (Ebila, 2015; Maathai, 2006; Melton and Dater, 2008).

However, the president’s sentiments did not stop her from pursuing her mandate of stopping the construction and teaching women-at-large the importance of boldly standing up to protect what they had and what they believed in. She felt strongly that people needed to understand and know that the government was not the only culprit. Citizens played a part in the problems that the communities experienced, too. By not standing up for what they strongly believed in and demanding that the government provide it, they could not expect change to happen. Also, people did not protect what they themselves had (p. 174). *Unbowed* (2006) emphasizes the importance of taking personal and societal responsibility as well as refusing to let victimization pacify one's emotions and undermine one's resolve.

Drawing from her non-coercive approaches to activism, Maathai wrote more letters to various people in positions of power, including the managing director of the Kenya Times, inquiring about the proposed construction, filed law suits with the High Court, appealed to Nairobi residents to speak out, and penned grievances to the Minister and the press about concerns about building a complex in a public park (Maathai 2006; Michaelson, 1994). Other recipients of her letters included the Office of the President, the Director of the National Museum of Kenya, the Executive Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Ministry of Public Works.

This showed Maathai’s determination and benevolence in her philosophy of saving the environment. *Unbowed* (2006) also points out Maathai’s philosophy of not retracting when faced with a stumbling block during the course of an action (p. 162); thus, to the women who followed

her example, it was encouragement to remain confident, assertive, and tenacious in working towards personal empowerment and liberation.

The Kenyan parliament revealed Maathai's behaviour as a national emergency and as a divorced woman, which complicated her fight to save the Uhuru Garden, as shown in the book "Fighting for Freedom." This was to be discussed in a parliamentary session. Most parliamentarians (predominantly men) took to the podium and tarnished the Green Belt Movement as a "bogus organization" (p. 191).

Maathai endured verbal abuse, criticism, and false accusations for inciting the people against the government and its lucrative plan for its people. She faced defamation in the local press and the denigration of GBM. To all of which she responded impassively: "I wasn't going to take those slanders lying down. As I read the newspaper headlines, "MPs Condemn Prof Maathai" and "Prof Maathai Under Fire in Parliament," I knew that this was just what I needed to stake my ground." (p. 191).

Maathai maintained that the proposed building was not a symbol of progress but of destruction. She could not just fold her hands and watch the corrupt government of Kenya destroy the environment, just like they had done in many other parts of the country through the grabbing of national land and the cutting down of natural forests. This showed that Maathai and the GBM have also used tree planting for democratic reform in advocacy activities, bringing an end to poor governance and human rights violations such as tribal clashes and corruption, especially the illegal allocation of public land (Maathai, 2004a).

Aili Mari Tripp explains in her study that the 1990s brought new opportunities for women in Africa to engage in politics. She explains that women's extensive experiences in associations such as churches, savings clubs, community improvement associations, and NGOs helped prepare

them for political work. Tripp (2004) also notes that once they entered politics, women were fierce opponents of the corruption, patronage, and ethnic division they found in the existing political systems. She mentions both Wangari Maathai and Charity Ngilu (a Minister of Parliament who also ran in the 1997 Presidential Elections) as key Kenyan examples of this larger trend in Africa (Tripp, 2004, p. 144, p. 151–152).

In a majority of countries around the world, including Kenya, women struggle to be adequately represented in electoral politics. In *Unbowed* (2006), it is shown that in 1982, Maathai attempted to run a by-election for a seat in Parliament. At this time, there were only two female candidates in parliament (p. 159–160), and the bias against women in politics was high. In fact, the courts disqualified Maathai from running due to a technicality (the government claimed she should have re-registered to vote). Then, to add insult to injury, the University of Nairobi, which had earlier insisted that she resign in order to stand for election, refused to reinstate her when she was found ineligible to run (p. 160–163).

Many years later, she tried again to enter electoral politics. Maathai admits that she entered the November 1997 election only five weeks before Election Day and that she had little funds for her campaign. She says that she chose to run for a parliamentary seat in the Tetu constituency (which includes her birthplace), as well as campaign for the Presidency, in order to have access to dialogues with other candidates so as to encourage opposition candidates to maintain a united front against the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the ruling party.

She became one of 15 presidential candidates but was accused of being a ‘spoiler’ for the campaign of one other woman presidential candidate, Charity Ngilu, who already held a parliamentary seat. The press printed a rumour on Election Day saying that she had dropped out and endorsed another candidate. She concluded in her memoir that she had been a ‘dreamer’ to

have thought that voters could transcend the local political culture and vote for the best qualified candidates (p. 256–259).

Nevertheless, it is as the founder of the Green Belt Movement (GBM) that she has had her greatest impact. This movement has involved 100,000 women activists establishing 600 community networks, running 6,000 nurseries, and planting 30 million trees to reverse environmental damage in Kenya (p. 175).

It has helped many Kenyan women participate in Kenyan politics, not only by voting but also by taking up leadership positions in the government, thus participating in the management and leadership of the country. Maathai argues throughout the rest of her memoir that the Green Belt Movement is an answer to the scarcity and misdistribution of natural resources. Hence, the aim of the Green Belt Movement was not only to solve environmental problems but also to solve the social problems affected by the scarcity of these resources on the whole, brought about by poor governance and corruption, as discussed.

4.6. Education and Career

Unbowed (2006), in the chapters Education and the State of Emergency and American Dream, explains the incidences surrounding Maathai's going to school in detail, including her attendance in both local schools: St. Cecilia Intermediate Primary School and Loreto-Limuru High School, and international schools: Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas. It illuminates the many changes that followed Maathai's going to school and how it was a turning point for her and many more women in her community and the country as a whole. She says:

> Education, of course, creates many opportunities. In Kenya, for most people of my generation and after, a high school education or a college degree is a guaranteed ticket out of the perceived drudgery of subsistence farming or the cultivation of

> cash crops for little return. I, too, got this ticket out, but I never severed my connection to the soil (p. 58).

The reader is directed to an important day in Maathai's life when her elder brother asked his mom why Maathai didn't go to school like the rest of her brothers. Their mother paused and replied. 'There is no reason why,' even though schooling for the daughters, especially those in rural Kenya like Nyeri-Maathai's home, was extremely unusual (p. 39). Her mother's response provided the genesis for the many boundary-breaking firsts Maathai would go on to achieve as a woman in academic and public life, including becoming the first African woman and first environmentalist to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

The book highlights Maathai's constant acknowledgement of the impact of education on her life. She recalled the excitement of her first day at school. An older cousin, Jonathan, impressed her with the power and novelty of literacy when he offered to teach her how to read and write, mostly how to write her name (p. 42). It was the assurance of a good life for Maathai, as she knew that the opportunity to study was an eye-opener to many other big opportunities in her life.

Maathai, however, discovered that education is not the solution sold to children, at least not to females in their hopes for a brighter future, as there were many challenges that followed being an educated black woman. The transformation of Maathai's life from village girl to professional and global laureate is a monumental feat, even in this modern age of women's progress. It was extremely rare in the 1950s and 1960s for rural Kenyans, especially girls, to attend school, and Maathai always acknowledged her privileged position in gaining a formal education.

The chapter, "Independence: Kenya's and My Own," highlights adult education as the central vehicle for manifesting environmental, political, and social change within the context of a culturally grounded community. Adult education in a post-colonial era is central to the project

because of its role in helping people deconstruct their own lived experiences and the root causes of injustice in all its forms.

In heading and controlling the tree-planting process and the civil education seminars, her position as an educated woman was both an advantage and a disadvantage to the men and women who believed in the patriarchal nature of African tradition. The book *Unbowed* (2006) highlights that, in fact, the question of education sometimes brought division between elite and grassroots women's organizations. Maathai articulates that professional women's organizations where the majority were elite women were seen as not 'African' enough because the reality was that the majority of women weren't highly educated (p. 158).

Serious allegations were made against Maathai and the other educated few that they did not understand and care about the problems of the women in rural areas, even though they were working hand in hand with them (something the government did not like at all) (p. 158). Maathai, however, did not let the differences in education affect her relationship with the groups of women who formed the majority of her Green Belt Movement. Her approach to empowerment, by emphasizing the plight of the disenfranchised, tended to bridge the gap between the educated and the uneducated.

Her philosophy on the state of the environment encouraged many women from both the rural and urban parts of the country to work together when physically planting trees, managing the GBM programs, and/or giving funds in support of the movement and its empowerment programs. She says this:

> Education, if it means anything, should not take people away from the land, but instil in them even more respect for it, because educated people are in a position to understand what is lost. The future of the planet concerns all of us, and all of us

should do what we can to protect it. As I told the foresters, and the women, you don't need a diploma to plant a tree (p. 138).

When the GBM began, the link between environmental conservation and peace was still largely unclear. It was dedicated to combating deforestation in Kenya and subsequently became a platform for the empowerment of women and the community through civil education and environmental stewardship (Maathai, 2010).

Unbowed (2006) highlights how Maathai's environmental activism, channelled through GBM, has had a far-reaching impact and visibility since she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. Although initially the GBM's tree planting activities did not address issues of democracy and peace, it soon became clear that responsible governance of the environment was impossible without democratic space and the empowerment of women (Maathai, 2004; Maathai and Goodman, 2005).

In this regard, Maathai channelled her critiques into political opposition through grassroots organizing for a democratic society and awakening consciousness in favour of environmental politics and the needs of those who depend on farming for sustenance. Thus, Maathai's political exposure touched various areas. For example, she chaired organizations that had political dimensions, campaigned for her husband when he vied for a political office, opposed the building of a proposed six-story complex in Uhuru Park, supported the mothers of political prisoners, participated in opposition party activities, and ran for political office.

Maathai's political involvement was seen by her as an essential component of her environmental and feminist activism, rooted in the conviction that a comprehensive approach is necessary to address complex issues. Maathai notes that the people blamed the government for all their calamities and waited upon the members of parliament in their constituencies to give them a

better life, which never happened. Kenyan leaders were in support of self-serving government policies from which they continuously benefited. She notes:

> We held seminars in the communities in which the Green Belt worked, in which I encouraged women and men to identify their problems. As they spoke, I would write. Sometimes the list they generated would grow to 150 items. 'Where do you think these problems come from?' I would ask. Almost to a person they put all the blame on the government. It was partly true: The government was selling off public lands to its cronies and allowing tree farms for the timber industry to be established in national forests, and so destroying watersheds and biodiversity. In many ways, the government continued the policies of the colonial era, but made sure the benefits went only to the small elite it favoured. In turn, of course, these elite strongly supported the government and helped it stay in power (p. 173).

Education offered at the Green Belt Movement, both civil and environmental, was a significant factor in achieving the wellbeing of women and society in general. It made them see the world from a different perspective, one that they had the power to change, and, in order to reach the sky, they needed to have their roots strongly grounded, just like the trees they planted.

Through environmental and leadership education, they received a new identity, one that enabled them to indulge in social, political, and environmental change arenas, unlike in the past, where male dominance had completely excluded them. Male-biased state laws and development programs have often been observed to further the disruption of gender complementarity and legitimize the exclusion of indigenous women from political institutions (Kelkar and Nathan, 2003; Sarin, 2003).

Women learned that for them to see the change they needed, they had to stop being part of the problems in the community and be the spearheads of the solutions (p. 174). They had to take care of their lands, stop soil erosion from taking place by planting trees, and go back to planting and growing their traditional foods that provided better nutrition instead of the exotic crops that often didn't do well in their local soils. In the application of Maathai's philosophy of self-responsibility, togetherness, and unity to achieving change, positive progress was seen among the people. She notices empowerment and growth in people and the environment, especially when the women are working together for self-betterment. She says:

> Communities where the Green Belt Movement worked began to develop personal responsibility for improving their quality of life rather than waiting for the government, which wasn't very interested in the welfare of either Kenya's people or its environment, to do it. This personal responsibility became collective as communities managed their environment better. It was wonderful to see ordinary women and men speaking confidently in the meetings, in their own languages [a significant postcolonial act], and so honestly and openly (p. 174).

In addition to environmental conservation activism and women's social and economic empowerment practices, Maathai's feminism also spread to fighting for democracy for indigenous women, as political empowerment was part of the equation for freedom of pursuit.

As previously mentioned, the women whose sons had been arrested for disrupting peace and order in society came out boldly to demand their sons' release from jail. As it was part of the movement's mandate to promote democracy and respect for human rights, Maathai supported the Release Political Prisoners campaign and accompanied the women to put forward their case at the office

of the Attorney General and thereafter to go to Uhuru Park and remain in protest there until their sons were released (p. 216).

The corrupt nature of the government of Kenya and its officials is portrayed here, as many people joined the fight for the women's plight, while others, including grown men in their forties, embraced the freedom created by Maathai's campaign and found the courage to speak up:

> 'Let me tell you my story,' 'I have never spoken about this before. I've been out of prison now for ten years, and this is the first time I have told anyone that I was tortured.' Some related that they had been abused and beaten to the point where they would never be able to father children. While we listened to the men, we prayed and sang for comfort and courage (p. 219).

Unbowed (2006) states in the chapter, "Freedom Turns a Corner," that Maathai understood that she needed to educate citizens about democracy. Maathai's civil education and practices helped people understand what democracy meant to them as citizens and what they were entitled to. For instance, people, including old men, found the courage to stand up and speak out against the unfair practices of the government and its abuse of power by mistreating the very citizens they were supposed to protect (p. 217).

These occurrences point us to the massive changes that had occurred amongst the people and the country after exposure to the Green Belt Movement's civil and environmental education, which catered for empowerment and freedom of expression. It explains the selfless nature of Maathai's mission of empowering the people of Kenya in their demand for democracy, a mission that the men in the government rebuked.

Maathai courageously stood up for gender equality, a mission that has long been a muted subject in indigenous peoples' organizations as well as within organizations supporting the rights

of indigenous peoples. Desiree and León (2002) note that the muteness seems to stem from a fear that the question of women's rights could take the focus away from the struggle for collective rights and create internal division. Maathai believed in equal opportunities among people despite their gender, age, literacy level, or even where they resided.

The Nobel Prize committee recognized and appreciated Maathai's efforts and bestowed one of the world's most prestigious prizes on Wangari Maathai for planting seeds of peace and change. *Unbowed* (2006) asserts that Wangari refers to the trees planted as seeds of peace, which led to environmental, economic, and political stability, which also translates directly into conflict mitigation. At the time that Wangari Maathai received the Nobel Prize in 2004, the Green Belt Movement (GBM) had established and maintained about 6,000 tree nurseries, employed about 100,000 women, and planted 30 million trees in Kenya and other African countries (Nixon, 2006).

This is the magnitude of her accomplishments, which explains why Maathai should not be praised only as a political and gender activist but as an environmentalist whose thoughts were for her people's welfare. Maathai was able to show that environmental protection has always been a two-way street: the loss of natural resources creates war and conflict among people due to issues of survival and scarcity, but the restoration of natural resources sustains peace and security.

She worked with marginalized women to set up small organizations where they could collectively start their own tree nurseries and work together for their success. Maathai was aware that conventional conservation and natural resource management projects have often ignored and thereby marginalized the role of indigenous women by restricting their livelihood options and excluding them from decision-making (Flintan, 2003). By encouraging women to work together, she elevated their leadership capacities and encouraged participation in community peace-building and environmental restoration activities in the spirit of voluntarism (Maathai, 2010).

Maathai employed adult education as a decolonization process to foster the revitalization of indigenous culture, self-ethnic identity, women's empowerment, and participatory democracy. Unbowed (2006) claims that Maathai engaged with women more actively by ensuring that meetings were held in the local language or translated and that training materials reflected women's experiences.

Her efforts to have meetings in settings where women normally interact proved to increase their active participation. Maathai sought to end the devastation of Kenya's forests and lands caused by development and remedy the negative impact that this development had on the country's environment. She principally combined conservation efforts with projects that targeted women's immediate needs in order to free their time for conservational efforts and to make them realize the positive inter-linkage of conservation and development.

For example, Maathai tried to ensure that marginalized women and villages could access basic facilities like family planning, nutrition using traditional foods, and leadership skills to improve their status. Maathai's unique form of action-creating—a link between the women's daily lives and their personal empowerment and environmental conservation actions—contributed to drawing attention to political oppression, nationally and internationally. She served as an inspiration to many in the fight for democratic rights and especially encouraged everyone to aim for a better tomorrow.

Maathai did not only have the courage to stand up for her beliefs; she risked her life for what she believed in. When Maathai went on a hunger strike with other women in 1992 to call for the release of their sons from prison, the police beat her unconscious and took her to the hospital. This was not the first time that she had been assaulted or targeted for murder by political opponents of her beliefs and mission for a peaceful and democratic Kenya.

Seven years later, when the Movement attempted to replace trees chopped down by real estate developers who had acquired public land at Karura Forest from the corrupt government, Maathai and her group were attacked, leaving her head gashed and many of her supporters seriously injured. On some occasions, law enforcement officers simply looked the other way and did not fulfill their duties in ensuring law and order or even the safety of the country's citizens.

In October 2012, The Green Belt Movement, in partnership with New Course, was awarded another important award, the MacArthur Foundation Partnership Grant. This grant has continued Maathai's legacy as a feminist by providing training to rural women and community-based organizations that build skills that improve women's participation, influence environmental governance, strengthen climate resilience, improve natural resource management, and help establish cultures of peace and community.

The grant has ensured the continuity of Maathai's representation of women as decolonized people, as people who were and are able to liberate themselves from the forces and dominance of colonialism and patriarchal African cultures. It awards women who are at the forefront and in control of their destinies through education and career fulfilment, which serve as tools for women's empowerment in a patriarchal society.

4.7. Conclusion

The chapter was a critique of environmental conservation and the empowerment of women in Kenya, with a focused analysis of Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* (2006). It looked at culture and tradition, Kenyan politics, and education as the three main issues that affected Maathai's philosophy of the empowerment of women through environmental conservation. It also looked at how Maathai used her personal history as well as her country's story to convey her messages, both on a personal and a national level.

The chapter looked at what empowerment meant according to GBM, Maathai's philosophy, and how she worked to achieve the empowerment of women through environmental conservation strategies. Post-colonial and gynocritic theoretical perspectives served as lenses through which the analysis in the chapter was done. The literary text, Unbowed, served as the main text in the analysis of how African women's gender stereotypes have been constructed and how established social consciousness can be redeemed by giving women a sense of purpose in realizing their physical and mental capabilities through education, environmental conservation, and empowerment.

The chapter has argued that adult education, in relation to gender and environmental aspects, serves as the agent that determines the way race and gender are understood and constructed in Kenyan women and that through self-reflexivity initiatives like Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement, women can enact and impact national change.

The chapter looked at how colonialism essentialized African women, for example, by discrediting their unique tribal identities. It also looked at how Maathai challenged the patriarchal colonial ethos by starting GBM, a woman's environmental movement that provided space for unique identities in a post-colonial space.

The chapter explored how personal growth at the individual and social levels eventually led to national levels as the desire to heal the earth from corrupt government, patriarchal norms, and misuse of the land enabled natural resources to grow. In her comprehensive and detailed examination of the complex and dynamic nature of the African continent, Maathai presents the post-colonial, modern African woman as being "unbowed," as both practical and determined, and as someone who does not allow emotions to affect her judgment.

The study asserts that Maathai suggested realistic options for change and improvement, and she analyzed in her memoir the most extraordinary barriers to development in Kenya: cultural upheaval, environmental degradation, and poverty endurance, amongst others, by looking at the politics of the country occurring at the national, international, and individual levels. She deftly describes what Africans can and need to do while emphasizing responsibility and accountability for their environment and its natural resources and for themselves.

This chapter concludes that women can empower themselves through movements against oppression that do not focus specifically on their rights, their roles, or their culture. It looked at Maathai's autobiography as a powerful transformative tool for self-identification that recounts her personal experiences and offers lessons to readers about the importance of being in control.

It concludes that using Gynocriticism theory as a frame of reference can help people understand how these women experience empowerment as they take initiatives to protect the earth and themselves. The chapter looks at the gynocritic approach as instrumental in changing the view of women from being part of the problem of environmental destruction to becoming part of the solution in building national identity.

The approach emphasizes marginalized and indigenous women's environmental knowledge as pivotal to their roles as grassroots environmental activists. The idealization of women as 'born environmentalists" and the theoretical inter-linkage of environmental problems and male dominance in African culture were explored. The experiences of women, especially those in the Green Belt Movement, in their efforts to be unbowed through the process of replenishing the earth explored the opportunities awarded to empowered modern women.

CHAPTER FIVE

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE TREATMENT OF FEMALE SELF AND IDENTITY IN MUTHONI LIKIMANI'S *FIGHTING WITHOUT CEASING* (2005) AND *PASSBOOK NUMBER F.47927* (1985)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a thematic analysis of Muthoni Likimani's literary works *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1985). Reading Likimani's biography, reveals the writer's commitment to addressing identity as a focal point and it is a theme that transcends all her literary works. This study examines how the writer's pre-occupation with issues of identity becomes a lens through which she perceives issues that are prevalent in post-colonial Kenyan society. The study acknowledges Muthoni Likimani's contribution to feminist studies which identifies her as a serious writer whose works warrant literary attention.

This study conceptualizes female identity and self as being guided by the tenets of the postcolonial and feminist perspectives, specifically gynocritical literary theories. These theories are selected for their particular emphasis on the experiences of the colonized society, especially, women's gendered experiences within such society. The study essentially explores the settings, perspectives, voice and characterization used as deliberate authorial maneuvers that expose Likimani's (1985; 2005) treatment of the theme of identity.

Patriarchal and colonial oppression appear to be the predominant experiences that characterize Likimani's creative writings thereby necessitating analysis of issues of victimhood and oppression as being associated with notions of identity and self. This chapter examines the

above-mentioned elements and evaluates their impacts on the notion of self-hood and belonging in relation to Likimani's writings, which apparently aims to subvert the structures of oppression that infringe on one's sense of identity. These issues form part of feminist discourse which has recently become a critical area of discussion in African society. African women writers have come out with representation of pictures that portray women's self-definition.

These provisions by African female writers have encouraged the process of carving self-images, insight and self-analysis into women's own experiences. According to Flora Nwapa's *Women and Creative Writing in Africa (2007)*, women writers write about women because when we wake up in the morning and look into the mirror, we see women. Female writers bring into focus their femaleness/femininity in their narratives and in doing so highlight power differences between men and women. As a result, women scholars and activists have pioneered intellectual revolution built on sexual politics aimed at stamping gender and feminism into both criticism and its philosophical appendage– theory, replacing a tradition that is masculine and domineering.

The above illustrates the significant role of women's self-definition in bringing about the advocacy and expansion in development and growth in consciousness of the African female. It is therefore not surprising that many African women writers consistently try to explore issues about the ordeals of the woman in their various genres of literature. African women writers concentrate on issues associated with the ordeals of the African woman and confront those works in which women were portrayed as being conditioned to be admired romantically and be used by men (Magu, 2014).

Although awareness about improving the status of women can be found in all spheres of society, especially in literature, the political arena, and in education, the change has been slow. The

status of women in nation building remains a major concern. In order to formulate effective policies on women's issues in society, it is important to understand the challenges and obstacles faced by these women. This emphasizes the need for research on the experiences of women in post-colonial Kenya so as to have a basis for re-conceptualization of the female and national identity in post-colonial Kenya.

Many Kenyans are victims of individual and collective psychological traumas. This can be evidenced in the sampled autobiographies. Autobiographical narratives in Kenya are increasingly becoming important with consideration that many people have seen the importance of documenting their personal histories. Writers are usually inspired by the quest to document their stories in which they can accord themselves a noble self-portraiture as well as share their deep-seated search for identity. Narration therefore, allows writers to bring their cases to closure and become rejuvenated individuals.

While sharing their painful experiences, writing thus help by offering strategies to rejuvenate others. As Pennebaker (2002, p.284) posits, expressive writing enables people to 'stop what they are doing and briefly reflect on their lives….to see where they have been and where they are going without having to please anyone'. In his essay *Self-Writing*, Foucault (1997, p.208-209) shows how writing, particularly autobiography is associated with meditation and how it functions as a technique of caring for the self and of sustaining 'the art of living.' Recently, the popularity of reflective writing as therapy and as a transformative healing purpose is associated with a society immersed in a culture of self-help and emotionalism in which the therapeutic discourse has become a major code to express, shape, and guide identity and self-hood (Illouz, 2008 p.6, Gilmore, 2001).

This study explores how post-colonial Kenyan women through self-generated expressive and reflective writing have worked to find balance between strength and vulnerability, and navigate a way to private peace and public voice in problem solving and moving from hopelessness to a place of hope and stability. Kenyan female writers and their post-colonial writings such as Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A memoir* (2006), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986) and *The Present Moment* (1997, and Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1985) emphasize concerns with feminist issues; and the impact of education on both rural and urban women. With the power of writing as a weapon to advocate for change in the representation of women and national identity, they try to expose and resist difficulties arising out of suppression explained through the relationship of dominance and oppression both culturally and politically.

This chapter examines how Muthoni Likimani's life shaped the political leadership and elections landscape in Kenya through her fighting for self and national identity as depicted in her autobiography. The association of personal and national narratives serves a specific purpose in this study in the search for an "authoritative voice" to assert and legitimate one's political leadership. Lonsdale (1992) demonstrates the close connection between writing and political authority, showing how post-colonial generations have used literacy to distinguish themselves from their elders and to claim authority over traditions.

Similarly, Peterson (2006) shows how "creative" biographical writing was used to express political grievances. As such, recent African women biographies are not merely an "ideological project", as Hervé Maupeu (2013) describes them. They can also be interpreted as political acts: their authors are not only handing down historical testimony, but seeking to assert their authority over a highly controversial history of political leadership. This chapter will focus on Muthoni

Likimani's connections between her activism and politics, her public persona and political and social endeavors and how they impact the representation of her identity and self in post-colonial Kenyan society.

5.2 Muthoni Gachanja Likimani Brief Biography

Born in 1926 in Murang'a District, Muthoni Gachanja Likimani was brought up in a rather privileged family. His father was a renowned church minister in colonial Kenya. She experienced difficulties while undertaking her education during colonial times due to lack of secondary schools for girls. She was thus forced by the prevailing circumstances to teach at the Kahuhia Teachers Training College before proceeding to Britain and Israel for further studies. Upon her graduation, Muthoni became involved in broadcasting, writing, publishing and public relations. She got married to Dr Likimani but they later got divorced.

Muthoni documents her private lived experiences in *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) as a way of self-justification. She defends herself from the failed marriage by claiming that it had been severed by the philandering nature of her husband, patriarchal domination and lack of mutual communication. The same sentiments are also featured in her other publications including: *They Shall Be Chastised* (1974), *What Does a man Want*? (1974) and *Passbook Number* F. 47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya.

Muthoni Likimani used her autobiography, *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) to sign-post change in the treatment of women. She is a well-known local writer, who has decided to share her over 80 years' experience with the world of what it meant to be a village girl who was determined to make something of herself no matter the odds. In the 339-page book, Muthoni takes us on a journey through her remarkable life, a journey that is as inspiring and captivating being a teacher,

broadcaster, actress, politician, woman trail blazer in business and a renowned public speaker among others. She has always projected herself as a principled woman with unshakeable determination.

Muthoni's determination, coupled with her desire to fight discrimination based on gender and culture has seen her venture into the male dominated domains. She quit her job at Voice of Kenya (VOK) when she was discriminated against in favour of a male colleague during a promotion and started her own public relations firm called, Noni's Publicity. She later starred in the award-winning movie, The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin Dada, as the wife of the dictator in 1981.

Passbook Number F.47927 (1985) was Muthoni's own passbook. The passbook was an identity card that the colonial government required of people belonging to the ethnic groups suspected of deep involvement in Mau Mau. The ethnic groups branded as Mau Mau came mostly from the Central Province and around Mount Kenya which included, the Kikuyus on the south and west of the mountain; the Meru on the north; and the Embu on the east.

Anyone from these groups was subject to continuous suspicion and scrutiny. If one lived in the towns, particularly in Nairobi, one needed a passbook. To obtain a passbook in Nairobi one stood in a queue for hours, only to face a thorough and hostile interrogation. You had to have good reasons for wanting to remain in the city; without that, you faced repatriation to your ancestral village, a place you might never have seen. To qualify for a passbook, one had to be employed or involved in a legitimate business. A responsible person such as a district commissioner, a location chief or even a well-known loyalist must vouch for your loyalties.

As a woman, you had to be the wife of a passbook holder or must be legitimately employed. Employers were important for the help they could lend a person in obtaining a passbook. The

government required considerable information from passbook applicants: date of birth, place of birth, village and district, house number in the locations, name of village chief, present employer, other references. This on its own goes to show how repressive the traditional Kenyan society was, and how the female writers from Kenya have used their books to cry for female emancipation and participation in nation building. (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

5.3 Is Gender Yet Another Colonial Project?

In Kenya, politics and leadership are often perceived as a dangerous undertaking that is primarily associated with men and unsuitable for women (Kamau, 2010; Kassilly & Onkware, 2010; Okoiti-Omtatah, 2008). Male dominance of political systems, culture and the economy, not to mention threats of violence, educational stipulations and gender stereotyping, present significant barriers for female leaders in Kenya (Kamau, 2010; Kassilly & Onkware, 2010; Nzomo, 1997; Okoiti-Omtatah, 2008). By 2018, Africa had only two elected female heads of state, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (Liberia) and Ameenah Gurib-Fakim (Mauritius).

Other female African heads of state were only nominated or were interim presidents, or succeeded after the demise of a male head of state (Chirwa-Ndanga, 2016). Nyabola (2016) in her article *Kenya: My dress my Choice,* pleads against sexualization and generalization of politics. In the same reign, Achile Mbembe (2001) described the post colony as a masculine entity, with the phallic domination that has characterized both colonial and postcolonial politics. Mbembe reads African political life as an exhibited body, whose whole vile organs and orifices represent power: an interpretation widely circulated in African studies (2001, p.21).

But this representation of masculinity eschews its historical mechanisms. As Miescher and Lindsay (2003, p.4) note, masculinity should be seen as a statistic ornament of power, but can be

defined as ‘a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicitly and implicitly expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others’. Masculinities are plural, constructed: the institutions, contexts and actors that shape a masculine ideology should thus be historically situated. In Kenya, just as in many other African countries, the gendering of state building has its roots in colonial politics (Geiger et al 2002). With the colonization of the territory that started in the late nineteenth century, the control of women and the normalization of the significance of womanhood was an essential ingredient for British rule.

This study argues that the main barrier towards women in leadership stems from male dominance of power and the stereotype of women as less effective leaders than men (Brown 1996). In an attempt to reshape social roles into what were considered to be (colonial) “modern” norms, women’s social roles were confined to those of the “proper” housewife, who would prevent men from deviant masculine behaviors (White, 1990). Despite women’s commitment to the struggle for decolonization, the achievement of independence in 1963 did not significantly affect women’s agency (Bouilly & Rillon, 2016). On the contrary, the conservative and paternalistic spirit characteristic of colonial rule was appropriated by the new elite male politicians who dominated national politics.

Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya’s first president (1963–1978), remained silent on women’s issues (Thomas, 2003). Little changed with his successors: Moi clearly encompassed conservative policies when it came to women’s political and social rights (Stamp, p. 1991). Although women’s political representation increased under Mwai Kibaki’s and Uhuru Kenyatta’s regimes (respectively 2002- 2012 and 2012– 2022), the patriarchal structure of both Kenyan society and its politics is still firmly established (Musila, G. 2012). Politics and political leadership in Africa remain a male-dominated domain (Kassilly & Onkware, 2010). As such, more attention is needed

towards developing approaches that challenge male dominance in political roles. Moreover, underneath all this, is a paucity of literature that focuses on locating and implementing empowerment strategies for African women leaders (Nkomo & Ngambi 2009).

Certainly, there is recognition that women are absent from political leadership in Africa (Anigwe, 2014). That is why scholars such as Sara Longwe (2000) suggest that women participate at the local or grassroots level, but are less likely to be found in prominent political positions. Culture, patriarchal structures, gender roles and socialization are barriers to women's participation in political leadership (Maloiy, 2016; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009), including the socialization that girls undergo during their early years. Longwe writes; 'girls are socialized to believe that public decision-making positions should properly be occupied by men, and boys are socialized into believing that girls may legitimately be excluded' (Longwe, 2000 p.26).

Lawless and Fox (1999) had similar findings in their research on women political candidates in Kenya. They argue that socialization creates the belief that women belong in the private sphere -- that is taking care of the home, while men should perform the role of provider. Therefore, because of the delineation between the private and public sphere men tend to dominate political leadership roles. As such women who enter this domain face significant opposition (Sadie, 2005). Research in Kenya indicates that women face opposition in the form of physical violence, intimidation and verbal abuse when they attempt to access leadership positions (Kassilly & Onkware, 2010; Okumu, 2008; Okoiti-Omtatah, 2008).

Other studies also indicate that women in Kenya are not provided with adequate security measures, and thus are inordinately subjected to abuse and violence (Chamley, 2011, Magu, 2014). This violence stems from patriarchy. According to Okumu (2008, p. 83), *"patriarchal power is*

fragile and it resorts to violence to guard itself against threats." Even when a woman manages to attain a political position, she can often be marginalised (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2009). This is part of what Longwe (2000 p. 26) calls the "*dirty tricks*" to prevent women from accessing political positions. Part of this strategy involves providing inaccurate information to women candidates, and attacking the moral character of female political leaders (Longwe, 2000).

5.4 The Autobiography and Contesting Traditions

This section of the analysis will be approached through an autobiographical framework. The study examines the autobiography as a narrative of self-expression proceeding from some of the definitions of the autobiography. The study proceeds to examine Muthoni Likimani's contention of the beliefs in her society's tradition and how she expresses disquiet in her memoir. Autobiography is a book that is written down by oneself. Roy Pascal's (2015, p.2) definition situates an autobiography as a narrative that 'involves the reconstruction of the moment of life, or part of it' with an interest that is centred on the self but 'not the outside world.'

The outside world, however, according to Pascal, must of necessity appear in the autobiography so that 'it gives and takes with it, the personality and finds its peculiar shape…. (as well as) …. imposes a pattern of life, (and) constructs out of it a coherent story (2015, p.2). Pascal asserts that while the life story is concentrated with revealing the self, events outside the life of the subject narrator are indispensable in the process of constructing such a story. It is Pascal's belief that the individual narrating one's life will rely on such external events to get the story moving.

Peter Abbs (1998, p.7) *in Autobiography in Education* views autobiography as 'the backward search into time to discover the evolution of the true self', a definition that shows the autobiography as an account of past events centred on the life of the individual character. Like

Roy's, Abbs definition, it locates the main concerns of the autobiography with the life of the individual narrator. However, Abbs specifies the time-frame of autobiographies in arguing that it attempts to answer questions of the writer's identity in the present, as well as the future, much as it provides a backward search in time. He elaborates this concept of time saying:

> Autobiography is, thus, concerned with time: not the time of the clock but the time in which we live our lives, with its three tenses of the past, present and future. Autobiography, as an act of writing, perches in the present, gazing backwards into the past while poised ready for fight into the future, (Abbs, 1998, p.7).

Even though the autobiography is written in the present time when the author is still alive, the narrative is based on past experiences of the autobiographer's life while seeking to find a place in the writer's future. It thus becomes, in the words of Abbs (1998, p.7) an attempt to ask 'Who am I? How have I become who I am? What may I become in the future?' In his article *I Was Born*: *Slave Narratives, Their status as Autobiographies and as Literature,* James Olney (1984) states that:

> 'The autobiography may be understood as a re-collective/narrative act in which the writer, from a certain point in his life- the present- looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how past history has led to the present state of being' (p.47).

Olney's (2017) view shows that an autobiography is written in the present time but with the vision cast onto the past time. It is a definition that compliments Abbs's definition and establishes the role of memory in the writing of autobiography. According to Olney, the

autobiography goes back in the past time to seek an authentication for the state of an individual's present life.

Jennifer Muchiri's (2014, p.1) definition of the autobiography as 'the story or account of one's life written by oneself', supports the foregoing definitions that view the autobiography as a narrative of the self in which the individual narrator is the subject of narration. The foregoing definitions show the autobiography as a record of life story. It is an individual's own recorded biography which is the outcome of a truthful and deliberate effort to study and write the self. This study's understanding of an autobiography, therefore, is guided by the proposition that it is the story one person decides to write about oneself to account for the life that has been led, providing a justification for the nature of one's life in the process.

5.5 Autobiography in the Dynamics of Resistance and Struggle in *Fighting Without Ceasing (2005)*

The study aims to investigate the treatment of female self and identity in its multifarious projections. Identity is examined in its diverse forms through the conceptualization of Likimani's assertion of personal, gender and cultural identity. As a philosophical reflection, the autobiography affords a historical and literary method for self-representation. The autobiographer sets out to explain explicitly or implicitly, to reflect how she has related with the outer world. Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing (2005)* will be probed in an effort to establish how her interaction with people, events and circumstances shape her identity.

In this connection, gender and cultural imperatives will be investigated in the context of gynocriticism and postcolonial theoretical perspectives. Gynocritic theory is helpful in examining Likimani's concerns for experiences particular to women while the post-colonial theory helps the

study to explore the writer's perspective on the effects of colonization on the African society. These theoretical standpoints enhance the study's explication of *Fighting Without Ceasing (2005)* in relation to the theme of identity and self.

The chapter will consider pertinent characteristics of the autobiography: selectivity, subjectivity and the element of truth. The study is interested in evaluating how the autobiography modelled in the realm of struggle, tackles the over-arching theme of identity. In Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) the theme of identity offers the persona a pedestal from which her resultant interaction with events, people and circumstances is assessed in relation to herself. This is in line with Roy Pascal's (2015, p.150) suggestion in *Design and Truth in Autobiography,* that in writing the autobiography, 'some themes are established which imposes an objective'. These themes can only be filtered if the study interrogates Likimani's progressive development, and that of the autobiographical persona who is engaged in the search for completeness.

The study is also grounded on the perception that through the autobiography, the writer seeks to interrogate social, historical, cultural and even gender structures comprising the world of their experience. This involves a search for balance achieved through the analysis of how interlocking structures and institutions in post-colonial Kenya have influenced the conceptualization of the female self. Likimani's depiction of the theme of identity is derived from her perception of the world and how this world in turn affects her self-realization. As Pascal points out, this analysis is best understood by probing the balance between 'the people in this case who are Kenyan women and the country, the subjective and the objective' (2015, p.180).

In this regard the study views the autobiography not as a contemplation but as a statement about influences resulting from the interaction with the post-colonial society. There's a search for

inner understanding filtering down to the conceptualization of self-definition and identity. *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) in this case is viewed as an attempt at discovery, a search for meaning and relevance of experiences revealing the "assertive search of personal identity' (Paschal, 2015, p.184). In this endeavour, memory is pivotal to the autobiographer. It is the resource from which Likimani draws the projections.

This is what Ron Price (2022, p.2) in *Some Speculation about Autobiography* calls the imposition of 'spatial form' creatively derived from memory which provides 'the writers only reality'. No doubt then Likimani depends on her past experiences to discover not only who she is but also how she becomes what she is. In other words, she is interrogating the formation of her identity and self through time. To achieve this wholeness of identity, the events and personalities (including the self) are arranged and evaluated from memory. In this light, themes become determining factors directing the selection of events. The happenings to be included are privileged by the manner in which they illuminate the autobiographer's thematic interventions.

These events, personalities and circumstances are consequently awarded relevance from the subjective position of the autobiographer in relation to the desired contribution. With changing realities and evolving experiences, Likimani's personality and identity changes and develops. Allegiances shift as unfolding events and circumstances recast her image. The writer explores how intricate experiences affect, shape and reveal her identity. This means that the autobiographer's identity is perceived through her narrative as an intricate derivation of resonating past and present responses to situations, people and circumstances in post-colonial Kenya.

5.6 Female Circumcision and Gender Identities in Post-Colonial Kenya

As Likimani writes about female circumcision, we get to understand the writer's perspective regarding this cultural practice. This rite is among the most contested practices between traditional African beliefs and Christian missionaries and its inclusion serves to punctuate this contest. Likimani evaluates the missionaries as well as Africans attitudes towards this practice. She makes a confession of her attempt as a child, to witness a circumcision ceremony. Unfortunately, her Christian family thwarted this attempt.

Most significant in this case is the introduction of the writer's cultural and religious duality. She is implicitly suggesting that one needs adequate facts if an objective critique is to be arrived at. Her attempt is provoked by the value attached to the practice by conservative traditional Africans. Societal attitude and glorification of female circumcision could be captured by the position of honour accorded to the female circumcisers. Likimani describes them as 'well fed and highly respected' (2005, p.33). On the other hand, missionaries venomously condemn this practice as evil and heathen.

From a gendered perspective the study's interest is drawn to the significance of this part or the narrative. The study interrogates this narrative in relation to its statement regarding the identity of women in the context of cultural and postcolonial realities. The study in this endeavour first lays emphasis on the observations presented by the writer, laying claim to the fact that the image of the woman has been used to celebrate the African cultural personality. This amounts to the idealization of the woman but which paradoxically turns to reinforce her marginalization. As Mineke Schipper (1987, p.44) observes, 'the romantic nostalgia that the African writer seems to

cherish with respect to the female's traditional role is not very conducive to women's emancipation.'

In *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), Likimani emphasizes her parentage as the important aspect of her past. This past relates to the inculcation of values forming her identity. It is of worth to note that her parentage is greatly influenced by Christian values. Given this fact, her childhood is subject to conflicting values in terms of religious and cultural positions. She is protected from the influence of traditional cultural practices leading to the admission that 'as a child, I found I knew very little compared with other children who lived in the village' (Likimani, 2005, p.17). Right from the onset then, Likimani experiences a sense of alienation from the rest of the community.

This is a reflection whose significance can only be assessed in its relevance in enhancing coherence with the later personality. In this contest, such assertion can be taken as a confirmation of changing sociological imperatives participated by the encounter between cultural, religious and political values brought by Christianity, and those of the traditional African society. What Schipper (1987) criticizes is the misuse of the image of women to celebrate an African pre-colonial past at the expense of emancipation. The danger is that there is the temptation to retain the status quo and hence fail to correct situations that impact negatively on women.

In *Fighting Without Ceasing*, the patriarchal society which thrives on this imaging of women, has constructed myths that attempt to sanction traditional practices like women's circumcision. Discrimination and social ostracism are meted on those who defy these practices. An uncircumcised girl is considered as 'one without culture…. unclean and ill-mannered' and one who is bound to become barren (Likimani, 2005, p.31). The purpose of the myths is to estrange

those who evade the rites, while conformists are rewarded with praises of cultural purity. This invites the study's attention to cultural performance of marginalized gender practices.

The text in this approach explores how women are assigned cultural tags. It is the role of female writers to question these tags by enacting narratives that offer a different perspective on the representation of the female identity and self. Women writers would, as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) observes, most probably paint images of displaced positions from their own mind. To conceptualize this displacement, Molara condemns what she terms as 'another mirage, the 'pot of culture'' (p.7) as painted in the image of Lawino in Okot P'Bitek's (1966) *Song of Lawino.* As a female writer who is concerned with the portrayal of a progressive female identity and self, Likimani demonstrates how compelling women to celebrate in their own subjugation has been discredited.

Education has most importantly been depicted as one of the most effective valorizing agents (Likimani, 2005). Through the emergence of an educated generation, the value of uncircumcised girls is enhanced, as the text proceeds to celebrate changing cultural attitudes. Likimani writes, 'attitudes were changing and now these women were in demand for marriage.' The prevailing cultural structures have been overturned by the 'up-and-coming generation of professionals who are children of educated parents' (2005, p. 32). By celebrating and privileging this subversion of cultural codes and their replacement with missionary nurtured attitudes, the narrative's ascription to missionary education cannot be overlooked. This education disabuses its recipients of cultural mythification and stereotypes and thus assists in alleviating though partially, the burden of stereotypes on women.

Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) explores not only cultural but also historical facts which informed the Kenyan society in pre-colonial and post-colonial settings. The text depicts cultural conflicts between the African traditional society and the Euro-Christian values introduced by missionaries. The text describes cultural transformations with emphasis on shifting cultural positions. Christian values are used to interrogate, devalue and even dissipate certain cultural practices. In this way, the text admits cultural ambivalence and hybridity. Likimani attaches an ontological function, textual discourse in *Fighting Without Ceasing* that engages socio-cultural and religious values in relation to how they affect woman's identity, and also that of African society emerging from colonial and Christian influence.

However, as much as *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) acknowledges historical truths, the text focuses on events as they affect Likimani. Historical events, and their relevance become important as far as they bring relevance to Likimani's personal narrative. The structure of the autobiography mostly focuses on the evolving personal consciousness and are shaped by historical events and experiences. Some of these circumstances may require this study's appreciation of Likimani's background. Although she is brought up in a staunch Christian family, missionary-educated and with her father being a pioneer Anglican priest, we find her questioning emerging religious values. Emerging dominations fail to first of all understand African religious attitudes. Likimani faults missionary education for its puritan approach. This education ignores any social issues and instead insists only on dissemination of religious morals.

In writing autobiography, autobiographers seek to shape their experiences with the outer world. According to Roy Pascal (2015, p.193), the autobiographer is 'not simply uncovering facts and relationships that an outsider must necessarily be acquainted with, but presenting an order of values that is his own'. When Likimani orders values from her own subjective point of view, the

image that we get is the one that she would wish to project. This image is representative of the writer's identity and self. She appears to propose her own religious understanding shaped by her own experiences, as well as her own conscience.

She evaluates religious mysticism and emotionalism, which are used as guises for economic and ideological oppression of women. Religious inequities and exploitation of women are portrayed as a continued form of oppression. From a post-colonial perspective, the narrative makes a statement to the effect that religion has been used to erode the African personality as well as the cultural standing of the African. There is imminent relegation of the African to a receptive position in total disregard of his or her own perception.

5.7 Fighting as a Recourse for Self-realization of Women

This study explores how Likimani's book celebrates the element of fighting which is used as a tool in demanding for self-realization of women. For the study to aptly illustrate this element of fighting, this section will explore how factors that encourage domination and hegemonic discourse are nullified.

Nowhere else has the struggle for self-realization played out as in marriage. Under patriarchal structuration, marriage signifies, on the side of the woman, a loss of independence and identity. Material dependence strategically places women under the yoke of patriarchal provision, and in turn demands from her submission and subservience. As Muthoni Likimani states 'here was a woman who had everything; surrounded by servants, cooks and gardeners.' Nevertheless, she chose to walk out on a man, 'who had reached the apex of his profession' (p.89).

Fighting Without Ceasing (2005) appears to imply that there was gender imbalance. There was, as it appears, the husband's provision of material and status needs which he used to justify his

dominance over the wife. In this context then, this imbalance precipitates the fact that a corrective remedy must be administered in the devaluation of this patriarchal perception. The bond, which in this case is the lustre of material provision, must be severed. The woman must seek to contest her own identity that rejects societal conventions.

This is an attempt to rise beyond tripartite repressions presented in terms of gender and class. She must engage these social constructions if her quest for identity is to be achieved. Patriarchal snobbery and masculine authority have to be subverted. Likimani must engage social constructs if her quest for identity is to be realized for there exists institutional reinforcement of patriarchal ideals. One of those institutions encouraging patriarchy is unsurprisingly missionary education that fosters values promoting subservience. Women are only taught home economics, puritan religious values and social etiquette. As Likimani laments, this education never taught her, 'what to expect on the other side of the 'fence'' (2005, p. 95).

Likimani critiques the missionary enterprise for its failure to adopt a comprehensive approach. Emphasis was placed on the spiritual and religious at the expense of social, political and economic needs. In its confrontational approach to the traditional African way of life, Christianity ignored and even dismissed any meaningful structures that guarded against social, political, and economic injustices. Thus, any meaningful appropriation of self-identity has to first and foremost disabuse the self of values that are self-defeating, values that only suck the victim deeper and deeper into the quagmire of social, gender and economic injustice (Ebila, 2015). Likimani acknowledged the presence of these self-defeating values in her marriage, and this influenced her decision of moving out of her marital home blaming her misfortune on her ignorance of social forces.

Apparently, the element of women bondage through marriage is reminiscent to Aissatou in Mairama Ba's (1980) *So Long a Letter*. This involves severing the bond of marriage, dependency and submissiveness. There are roles that may be taken as defining the role of a woman in a marriage. Apart from being a wife, the mothering role is considered a privilege in *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005). The loss of this role translates into disappointment, bitterness and despair. In Likimani's case, losing this vital role 'finished the little hope she had' (2005, p.97).

In retrospect, the African woman who Likimani is, 'a special woman' whose 'tolerance is difficult to explain,' (2005, p.98) subjects herself to physical and psychological torture in a bid to cling to the last straws of this social definition. Even if it means a complete loss, concerns for selfhood appear to be submerged under motherhood. The woman is not concerned with her own destiny, and Muthoni Likimani's exit from marriage embodies then a gesture that amounts to the assertion of her personal identity (Muchiri, 2010).

Significance to Likimani's exit from marriage is financial and material depravity with which she started life on her own. Regardless of her input in marriage, there is no structures to protect the woman. Women must therefore rise on their own to challenge these structures by asserting their identity and dignity. In fact, Okeng'o Matiangi (1999, p.73) observes that, 'the greatest challenges to the African woman's identity have got to do with how she deals with her socio-cultural and religious institutions and how she responds to the changing social-cultural environment'. Social-cultural and religious constraints that confront women should as well include the economic institution that is central in women's negotiation for dignity and identity.

Fighting Without Ceasing (2005) has an apparent didactic essence that emphasizes the centrality of economic independence. Likimani's exit from the security of marriage illustrates how

the lustre of this perceived security obscures the woman's potential. By sharing these intimate details of her life, Likimani points out that consolidating one's experience and a determination to forge ahead, to challenge uncertainty, can illuminate one's path towards self-knowledge that is expressly linked to the attainment of personal identity. The element of fighting is key in this endeavour.

5.8 The Process of Self-Realization in Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing*

Events narrated in *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) are hallmarks in the process of self-realization of Likimani's first residence, Makongeni A2 door 4 is an important symbol for her self-realization. Likimani moving out of her marital home and willing to start afresh on her own is a gesture and an affirmation of independence, freedom and peace. She describes her first night in this residence as 'satisfying' and as having nurtured 'many sweet ambitions.' (2005, p.103). The meaning of these sentiments cannot be lost. In contrast to her previous home of comfort, this bare, dilapidated room becomes a starting point in her quest for freedom and independence. This phase of the autobiographer's life can be viewed as a recollection, and re-collection enhancing the interplay between the past and the present, punctuating social and economic beginnings (Casby, 1987).

Literary critics have explored how, in literary works, African women respond to social, cultural and economic entanglements entrenched by marriage and the patriarchal order (Magu, 2014, Okeng'o, 1999). Mbye Cham (1987) is categorical in his postulation when he states that these women will 'surrender.... and bear the burden while lamenting and exposing social and other kinds of ills,' or advance a 'categorical refusal to shoulder the burden, and determination to opt for freedom through various means' (p.90). This translates into a power struggle between social,

cultural and economic forces and institutions on one hand, and the individual (woman) on the other.

The struggle must be probed in the context of a victory/defeat binary set, with the study's comprehension of the situation hinged on a particularized, yet universal dimension. The study must, to aid in the understanding, explore didactic elements suggested in the text and their gendered celebration of the woman's success. The study should assess, as Cham suggests, 'the experience of the individual and the letter's ability to examine, articulate and utilize the transformative capabilities of such an experience of struggle (1987, p.90, p.91).

In *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) the study encounters victory/defeat binary opposition being played out to explore meaning and significance of what the autobiographer experiences. Victory is privileged and celebrated, and the entire text gravitates towards this celebration project thereby highlighting the autobiographical intention of devaluing defeat. In its socio-cultural, economic, historical and political setting, the text examines the appropriation of experience, knowledge and energy that enhances the attainment of victory and success in making the self. This involves an act of introspection, self-dissection and the recalling of an aspect of the autobiographer's life in an attempt to make sense of it. To the autobiographer, this serves as a therapeutic function while to the audience it serves as an inspiration.

This phase of the text is marked by a high degree of melancholy and bitterness and the study rightfully argues that her exit from her marriage left a wound in Likimani's psyche. Recovering from this traumatic experience calls for the summoning of inner psychic energies. Likimani develops a capacity for self-reliance and self-interpretation and thus manages to purge her emotions. By confessing her intimate secrets and feelings through the act of writing, the

autobiography becomes more than an act of courage. It has a cathartic effect both for the autobiographer as well as the audience. The autobiography helps to educate the audience on the possibility of victory in fighting against social injustice.

Women's writings represent gendered discussion that aims at influencing the social cultural, religious, historic and economic institutions. Convincingly, Hazel Carby in *Restructuring Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist,* views women's literature as enticing our attention and shaping our approach to social issues. She proposes that this literature should be viewed, 'not only as determined by social conditions within which they were produced, but also as cultural artefacts, which shape the social conditions they enter' (Carby, 1987, p.95).

Carby's assertion is conscious of literature's ability to engage social forces and institutions. Texts should prick our conscience and suggest a means of interrogating social institutions. Writing should be perceived as an agency of social indictment. *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) in this way exemplifies an indictment of social institutions and the extent to which women must struggle to negotiate for their identity. Power relations in marriage as depicted in the text repress individual potential.

It is this study's interest to observe Likimani's attempts to realize her business potential while in marriage. These attempts can be read as indications of a struggle for economic independence. She tries to put her hand in various small-scale investments such a sewing, poultry-keeping and ghee making. In contrast, the study views her success afterwards as qualifying the fact that in marriage her potential was inhibited. As a matter of fact, it is after leaving her husband that Likimani is able to advance her education in Britain, after fighting against dwarfing social stereotypes and attitudes. The opportunity opens new vistas for Likimani and sharpens her outlook.

While in London, her socio-economic and political consciousness evolves. The text states that she interacts with diverse personalities such as Mbiyu Koinange and Joseph Murumbi (who became Kenya's vice presidents). By attending seminars and talks, she developed a yearning for freedom. As she admits, '(she) too became bold, it was nice to feel free and talk freely and live freely,' (Likimani, 2005, p. 137). These interactions helped in shaping her evolving consciousness.

Subjective truth in the autobiography serves as a literary window through which the reader assesses values esteemed by the autobiographer. Historical events such as State of Emergency and Kenya's attainment of independence are relegated to the background while Likimani's experiences are foregrounded. It is from these foregrounding of personal moral ideals that the study filters Likimani's assertion of her identity.

Up to this point, events that have been narrated are more representative of the writer's particular concerns. However, as she expands her outlet and gathers more experiences, her humanism grows. Concerns with the particular become less important and she adopts a universalistic approach. The more she interacts with people from various parts of the world, the more she establishes areas of commonality, and the more universalistic her outlook becomes. She has her father's 'sharp sense of progress,' (Likimani, 2005, p.5) which she imbibes and celebrates as having influenced her identity.

The self is attached to people and events that help elucidate how the person is configured. Autobiographers set out to explore not only who they are, but also how they become who they are. The autobiographer in this regard accounts for the influences that result from encountering not only influential people, but also the unique aspect of their influence. For instance, while in Britain, Likimani interacted with students and politicians from Kenya and other parts of Africa. These

encounters opened political vistas which were originally imperceptible to her. As she admits, 'listening to them and discussing Kenyan politics with them was very enriching and I learnt a great deal' (Likimani, 2005, p.137).

There is in this assertion the admission of an aroused political consciousness, as well as awareness of a national identity. She establishes a connection with Kenya, a fact this study may argue results from her distance from the country. Her postcolonial sensitiveness is sharpened by exposure to a totally different set of racial realities. Though the enlightened members of the colonial societies have been perceived as originally displaced from their cultural backgrounds, they should also be seen as expressions of multiculturalism.

Paul Sharrad (1996, p.61) in *Contemporary Suspensions: Form and Multicultural Expressions* contributes to the argument by suggesting that in essence 'writers who emerged out of this social process insist on differences (and) make plain their particular torments, and resist the erosion as individual choice.' This is an endeavour that involves an effort to locate the self. Cultural, historic, and familiar landscapes acquire re-awakened relevance and significance, and consequently, self-identity begins to thrive with these factual appropriations. Likimani in line with this renewed outlook defines her attitude more boldly. She is not ready to view herself from a point of inferiority. This relates to the incidence where she interrupts a speaker who gives a misleading presentation on forced communal labour back in Kenya.

In writing the autobiography, Likimani puts the self on a pedestal. This creates an idealized image that the writer projects for her readers. Her perception is focused on a particularized perception. At the same time, she has at her disposal strategies that invite empathy from her audience. As readers then, our perception of the writer's image is solely shaped by our

identification with what she experiences, and inevitably our appreciation of the writer's identity will definitely be subject to how she carves her own portrait. With this consideration, the study interrogates the text's subjectivity. Likimani gives the study the side of her story that illuminates her identity and self in total disregard of other occurrences that she felt had no direct impact to her self-definition. Her primary aim is to elicit empathy from her audience. For instance, the readers do not get to know Dr. Likimani's version of what led to the dissolution of their marriage.

In *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), the study encounters the autobiographer echoing her parents' entrepreneurship. As a matter of fact, she claims to have learnt the art of trade as early as the age of ten. Full significance of these revelations to the autobiographical persona, as well as the audience is hinged on the fact that as a background looking gesture, the writing of an autobiography allows the autobiographer a chance to engage in self-representation and self-interpretation. It is evident that even to the autobiographer, these reflections do enhance her understanding of her circumstances, and in retrospect in understanding of the process of being and becoming. The autobiography is consequently an exploration of Likimani's identity. It is a progressive endeavour aimed at unveiling meaning attached to particular events and experiences.

The fighting motif forms a thread that interlocks diverse personal experiences. It is an attempt to explain myriad treacherous experiences that she has encountered while on the path of self-realization. Her life then and the autobiography are captured through this motif. Muthoni Likimani fights oppressive cultural, religious and social and even political and economic injustices like unequal gender power relations, infringement of women's sexuality and physical violence. Nevertheless, she remains humane and philosophical. As she claims, her relentless struggles are not aimed at putting others at a disadvantage but rather fighting for the disadvantaged.

A lexical examination of Likimani reveals the importance she attaches to words related to the fighting motif. Examples of such words include 'battle,' 'demanding' and 'complaining.' These words provide cohesion to the text. Likimani appears to us as a woman who fights oppression, exploitation and subjugation for herself and also for others who are incapable of fighting for themselves. Likimani's activism introduces to this study as part of her character, an elevated level of humanism captured through her sentiments about acts of unfairness, injustice and foul play mated out on others in society. She denounces social evils and the mistreatment of others.

For instance, when visiting a lands office, she is dismayed by the helplessness of 'bare-foot poorly dressed, and hungry looking,' people seeking justice from the powerful tribunals composed of corrupt, partial individuals who collude with the rich to 'exploit these poor, shy, old women, many of whom could not read or write' (Likimani, 2005, p.302). This act amounts to identification with the plight of the poor and the disadvantaged. Interestingly, feminists' undertones are felt in the sense that what strikes Likimani most is the situation of women. These are old women who had been subjugated by cultural constrictions, and who have been marginalized by a new socio-economic dispensation where education becomes a determinant of how well an individual can access basic economic and administrative justice.

The impetus behind Likimani's unceasing fight for her rights, as well as the rights of others emanates from social injustices and oppression, she has personally experienced. As the case when she encountered these 'miserable-looking women,' (p.302) pity, anger and determination is roused within her. Women's operation has manifested itself in the emerging post-independence, capitalist society. These are tycoons who are using their financial muscle to deprive the disadvantaged (mostly women) the little they still have. Her case then is not an isolated case, but which is a

general representation of gender imbalance and oppression. There exists disillusionment with the social, cultural and economic relationships.

Most important to the study is the writer's perception of her personal identity, as well as the identity of women in post-colonial Kenyan society. Though there are encouraging considerate gestures such as from her father from whom she inherited land, societal attitudes that relegate women to the subaltern are still prevalent. To the writer then, there is a persistent search for fulfilment. There is evidently an attempt to organize the self in opposition to the limiting social-cultural and economic forces. Frantz Fanon (1952, p. 81) in *Black Skins White Masks* captures this trajectory by suggesting that 'the formation, the eruption within the ego, of conflictual clusters aris(es) in part, out of the purely personal way in which that individual reacts to these influences.'

Though Fanon's suggestion derives from a psychological analysis of racial relations, this study can use it to illustrate how gender and material difference is used to construct identities. This view illustrates how individuals subjected to discrimination may organize their psychological orientation in an attempt to re-define the self in negation to the oppressive situation. As a woman who encounters patriarchal domination an inherent subjugation of women, Likimani's autobiographical text can be seen to strive to construct an identity that refuses to be defined in the position of marginalization. The outcome then is an interpretation of the self not as a marginal being, but central in terms of social-cultural definitions. For this to be realized, the autobiographer must in essence subvert social myths that attempt to encompass and dominate in line with social constructions of gender.

For instance, land inheritance which is a practical domain, is used in the text to examine women's position as well as to challenge their marginalization. Traditions and cultural values are

in effect used to reinforce this marginalization. As a consequence of her divorce, her daughters are perceived as the tribal other, and they are disinherited of their ancestral land. This amounts to severance of the ancestral chord that holds the spirits, the living and the dead together. With anger and bitterness Likimani laments, 'they have been thrown out of the family homestead even as the spirits of their ancestors fill the atmosphere of the Ngong forest,' (2005, p.318). The text in this instance appears to contest and question tribal and familial identity, affirming the African traditional beliefs in the existence of a tribal and ancestral identity.

The text illustrates a systematic marginalization prevalent even in corporate institutions. Likimani's career in these institutions, for instance while in broadcasting and public relations, she illustrates the plight of women in a gendered society. As a social construct, gender categorization is used to rank employees in opposition to merit. It is unfortunate that though she had an outstanding career, her merits were overlooked. And she wonders, 'is it again because I am a woman?' (2005, p. 153). Women are in this social context surrounded by an aura of insecurity, their qualification is negated and side-lined as priority is given to the dominant gender.

Throughout the text, Likimani is not dwarfed by either gender or racial discrimination, she is aggressively optimistic. Being the most outstanding trait in her character, her resilience enables her to transcend any limitations that emanate from social, economic and religious imperatives. The self-narrative strikes to reveal Likimani's character. This study strives to derive how the persona interacts with the outside world. The conflict, which the persona attempts to resolve through an internalized focalization of the self is the best description of how the inner and outer persona, and the subjective and the objective, interact in the process of self-recreation.

It is with this conviction that Leggo (2005, p.5) in *Autobiography and identity: Six speculations* describe writing the autobiography as 'a rapid intervention of the universe' where memory offers the autobiographer 'a panoramic visual impression.' Selectivity and the shifting focus given to events and experiences tend to highlight the autobiographer's evolving focus. She undertakes to present a 'sense of control of an individual destiny.' The use of private documents such as photographs provide para-textual evidence and create a sense of achieved identity. These documents are in essence assertions of the autobiographer's sense of self. They are systematic punctuations of Likimani's story which are better told with visual accuracy through these visual texts. They are bound to supply accounts that may not necessarily fit in the body of the autobiography.

5.9 Conclusion

Likimani has been depicted as the object as well as the subject of the narrative of the analysis of *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005). Likimani assumes the focal point from which events, situations and circumstances are exposed. Images, events, actions and the enactment of the writing are all organized from the autobiographer's subjective slant. An implicit analysis of this organization has consequently afford the study a way of getting to understand the writer's identity, as well as the handling of wider aspects of the theme of identity and self.

Likimani has also been approached as a means of not only self-revelation, but also as an explorative tool that lays bare the autobiographer's life as narrated in the autobiography. In fact, the text analysis cogently confirms that through the autobiography, Likimani intended to bring order into her own past and ultimately wished to explore her female self and identify, which the study considers done successfully.

Character and Consciousness in Passbook Number F47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya (1985)

5.10 Introduction

This section interrogates Likimani's *Passbook Number 47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya* (1985) as focused through the writer's choice and portrayal of her characters. The study chooses to read the text from this angle due to the conviction that characters are the writers building blocks in the process of creating a text. It is imperative therefore, that this study considers how characters are presented in examination of Likimani's treatment of the theme of female self and identity.

Textual presentation of characters is closely related to the writer's perspective on central issues that are raised in their works. Scholes and Kellogg (1966, p.191) view characterization as tampered by a writer's quest for 'extraordinary range of dramatic possibilities, made up of aspirations, suppressed desires. masks and anti-masks, depravity and nobility.' In the endeavour to filter Likimani's perspectives on identity, this study will lay emphasis on the significance of characterization in close reference to the representation of female self and identity in Kenya. This decision is informed by the conviction that the focus of the text revolves around character more than on incidences.

Passbook Number F47927 (1985) places female characters as its focal point. The episodes and scenes that are described are informed by a stream of feminine consciousness in their pursuit for exploring social, cultural, historical and gender implications on women. This points towards the writer's inclination to explore women's experiences in the range of domestic and public domains. Likimani relies heavily on the resource of female consciousness to make statements

about women's condition in the context of these two domains. This study will thus use the archetypal women characters in the text to explore how each is used as a prism of gender, cultural and historic female and self-identities.

In the projection of female characters, the text also makes statements about the identity of men. These statements are used in a complementary sense of contrast, to reinforce or even substantiate women's identity, by way, of the fact that gender relations are the evocative grounds from which identification with the situation of women is developed. Crucial to the reading of the text is the fact that Likimani appropriates both typical and apparently factual modes of mimesis. Factual, historical events and autobiographical experience merge to shape the nature of characters involved in *Passport Number F47927* (1984). Likimani's feminist discourse enacted through her female characters in the text is an explicit exposition of the condition of womanhood. Apart from gender roles, women involved in the text embody a negotiation of a wider social space.

Women adopt a boisterous assertion of individual and collective identity. This assertion demonstrates the fact that individual destiny is expressly tied to the collective sense of identity. Characters actively influence and seek to resolve impediments inherent in economic, patriarchal and historical institutions. Primary in these impediments are patriarchal notions that impose a double-edged oppressive system. In her portrayal of female characters, Likimani advances a challenge to male social and political domination.

5.11 Patriarchy as A Double-Edged Oppressive System To Women

In *Passport Number F47927* (1984) Likimani relates the role of women in Kenya's struggle for independence. The entire text is composed of strings of narratives, widening the sphere of its focus in the sense that ultimately, the study has a diversified portrayal of colonialism and its

particular effect on the situation of women. The episodic text is replete with autobiographical elements. For instance, Likimani cites the title of the text as her own passbook number but which she fictionalizes through Wacu. Women under colonialism are subjected to social-political and economic constraints, a fact Likimani highlights through her woman-centred text.

For women, the acquisition of a passbook is subject to conditions that deny them their rightful individual, independent existence. As Likimani writes, 'as a woman, you must be a wife of a passbook holder or must be legitimately employed' (1984, p.4). For those who, like Wacu, had no immediate employment, they had to pose as wives of passbook holders. This led to the emergence of the 'passbook wives' phenomenon. However, being in possession of a passbook is not a guarantee against colonial oppression.

There exists a contrast between the colonial impact in rural and urban areas. Though Wacu manages to escape repatriation by posing as Irungu's wife, her experience with colonial oppression is relatively mild. Her story ends with her celebration of the protection afforded by her passbook. This is evident in the last line of this part of the text: 'The passbook was so precious, it had to have a special plastic bag, and to be hung around Wacu's neck always, like a precious gold chain, that green passbook number 47927' (1984, p.23). It is evident from this citation that Wacu had effectively cushioned herself against colonial oppression by way of her acquisition of the passbook.

However, her celebration may be viewed from a different angle as a statement of her acceptance of patriarchal and colonial subjugation. Wacu's situation is made worse by her fear of repatriation. She dreads returning to the village for she is going to 'be hunted day and night by that ex-husband…. who is jealous of my smooth skin, and (who) complains and calls me a prostitute'

(1984, p.15). Either way, Wacu is insecure and subject to oppression. If she returned to the village it meant she would be a victim of a man's ego which was more traumatic; thus, she prefers to get protection by again subjecting herself to a man's protection.

By enacting Wacu's dilemma, Likimani exposes the extent of insecurity and helplessness that colonialism sanctions against women. Colonialism, a male-dominated structure, is overly oppressive to the woman. This oppressive system promotes a general denial of justice and freedom for the African, and there is a lack of recognition of the problematic situation caused by patriarchal impunity. Wacu as a character precipitate that sense of helplessness and lack of choice that women in particular suffer in the hands of men. As a woman, Wacu has no clear definition of her identity. She is a woman who is running away from the grip of patriarchy, but who finds herself running back to attach herself to a man in search of protection from the colonial system. The colonial situation is in this regard a factor that colludes with patriarchal social dispensation to erode Wacu's freedom and personal identity.

Symbolically, the passbook may be taken not just as a tag that identifies Wacu as a colonial subject, but also a symbol of patriarchal ownership. By demanding that a woman should be the wife of a passbook holder, women are in essence relegated to the status of male appendages. In this case then, the colonial system institutionalizes women's denial of individual identity. Although Likimani does not say it in print, the stereotype of the prostitute is the impetus behind conditions imposed on women before they can be furnished with a passbook. The notice reads in part, 'if an unemployed woman, she must be living with her husband or her father' (Likimani, 1984, p.9). Unfortunately, such conditioning creates a dilemma for the woman. She is a victim of two equally oppressive systems, meaning that she is under a double yolk.

As from the cited notice, the woman is stereotypically subject to definition in relation to male custody, meaning that she must be owned either as a wife or a daughter. This is tantamount to the denial of a woman's identity, a denial that is further entrenched through the colonial code. Even though Wacu might have subjected herself to male custody, the element of personal choice is apparent. She appears to have agreed to the idea of patriarchal custody in a bid to create a space for her individual freedom.

In another narrative, Likimani depicts the phenomenon of forced communal labour with its particular impact on women. Colonial chiefs, as in the character of Gikandi, are congenial in exerting colonial oppression and exploitation. Women are left helpless and bitter, as expressed in this part of the text, 'they grinded their teeth and were ready to bite. But bite whom? And bite them if they dare!... so, in the end, the angry women had me to listen and obey!' (Likimani, 1984, p.26). They are double victims of the inhuman colonial systems, as well as the victims of society due to the demanding domesticated roles assigned to them

Through the colonizer's eye as focalized through the Young D.O. Mr Clifford, who is described as a '……young boy who had just finished school at Prince of Wales in Nairobi' (Likimani, 1984, p.34), colonialist perception of the African is an express derivation of racial othering. They are, as Clifford sees them, dirty terrorists, evil-doers and savages. The aspect of othering is evident meaning that the colonizer constructs his identity by negating the humanity of their subjects, or even by attempting to 'inferiorize' them. In a similar fashion, the patriarchal structures dominant amongst the home guards has as their primary target, those women who fall under their rule.

In recounting the sad story of Nyokabi, a squatter on Major Greying's farm, Likimani heightens the study's insight in the predicament of women during the Mau Mau uprising. When other quarters are ferried to detention camps, Nyokabi is not anywhere near the farm, explaining her isolation. This aspect of being set apart from the others individualizes character depiction. Nyokabi is beaten, harassed and abused by the barbaric home guards. This sad incidence is described as follows:

> They later pulled the Land Rover by the roadside, pushed her into the bushes and POOR Nyokabi had to struggle in vain with four men. They attacked and raped her as if it was the only thing they wanted in the world. And Nyokabi who wanted to die did not care but made them know that what they took was through sheer beastiality and nothing she would give to the likes of them. Nyokabi was overpowered, bruised, battered and raped (Likimani, 1984, p.105).

The barbarism that is meted on the colonized is perhaps well evident in the rape of Nyokabi. This is an exertion of muscular power symbolized or equated to the colonizer, as opposed to the effeminate perception that is imposed on the colonized. This incident involves not only a feminist protest against the violation of women but also to a larger extent symbolizes dominance over the other. The self /other binary should be read in terms of power relations and the desire to dominate. It is necessary to bring into the argument the element of resistance. Nyokabi's resistance in the face of her powerlessness makes known her defiance. Although women are depicted as vulnerable, they retain a strong sense of defiance and resilience.

5.12 The Role of Women in Kenya's Struggle for Independence

Women take the brunt of communal labour, as well as curfew rules. In the fictitious Kimuri location where most men have taken to the forest to join the Mau Mau fighters, women are left at the mercy of the home guards. It is in such a context that the study encounters Wambui, Kamau's mother. Her son is imprisoned and she is harassed. There is despair, anger and bitterness. She understands the ultimate prize for her sufferings. All her other sons have been killed, most probably in the struggle for independence. Her husband has disappeared without trace and now her last son has been imprisoned.

Wambui's agony is captured in this part of the text, 'poor Wambui wished that she was a forest-fighter. This would satisfy her, even if she got killed, at least she will not die like a sheep, not like a woman, but like a man fighting for the land' (Likimani, 1984, p.33). As a prototype of women's strength, Wambui is representative of women's suffering during colonialism. She voices the frustrations, bitterness, and the pain experienced by women. Nevertheless, this woman remained stoic, focused, and defiant. This is a woman who embodies the role of the male and the female in her fight for independence, by refusing to be restricted to the marginal feminine boundary.

In the light for this argument, Wambui and others like her are accorded an identity that disrupts the dependent, silent other. In contrast, this study finds a woman depicted as the reverse. In Wambui's character, the woman is articulate, independent, assertive and innovative, as in this argument where the authorial voice wonders at the woman's ability:

> It is hard to believe how close to death the woman at Kamuri were. It is unimaginable how they survived. Their legs and arms grew thin, their veins

showing all over and the women's softness was replaced by cracked, rough hands and feet (Likimani, 1984, p.37).

Of essence, this citation exemplifies how women shouldered the burden of colonialism. They had to manage their domestic affairs, and at the same time serve in forced communal work. It is through Mumbi's character that Likimani depicts the image of a woman who is committed to the Mau Mau cause. Mumbi has been left without a husband when her husband joined the forest fighters. Furthermore, she is forced to work in the forced communal projects, and at the same time look after her family. But when she meets General Gaitangi, the leader of a Mau Mau battalion, she dedicates her resources to help the fighters fulfil their mission. She collaborates with her mother-in-law in hiding and feeding the fighters. Mumbi engages herself in the dangerous scheme of attacking a home guard post. It is thorough her efforts and those of her mother-in-law that a successful attack is carried out.

It is from such a significant encounter with Mumbi that we can filter the image of the woman that Likimani projects to the reader. The text does not in any way present a complacent, naive Mumbi. On the contrary, Mumbi is proactive, courageous and highly efficient. Through these character traits, Likimani makes a strong case for women's identity. This is contrasted in relation to Kamau's report to his inquisitive, nagging wife. In a fit of anger Kamau silences his wife thus, '… you women, your minds think of nothing else even during emergency times…. if it wasn't for women, the world would have been great' (1984, p.87). Kamau's statement has an explicit negativity towards women. All the same, it is denied any significance for it appears self-defeating.

This is reinforced by the fact that as much as Kamau would want to view women thus, Mumbi undermines any significance to his words. It is Mumbi who pioneers the attack on the

home guard post, and even covers all traces of the family's involvement. She is sly, cunning and calculating. The woman from the foregoing appears to appropriate a new perspective. She plays a bigger role that is in all its merit beyond the contrivance of the scared, emotional woman. In fact, the likes of Mumbi and Nyakio embody androgyny in their presentation. They fuse together male and female traits, and their achievements are in no doubt a reflection of this synthesis. Moreover, these women characters sharply contrast with a male foil. This is aptly captured in their moral standing. Despite being separated from their husbands, they remain unattached. This is significantly absent on the side of men.

Likimani's portrayal of her female characters is an outright negotiation for a reassessment of social values, their meaning and significance. Even when we encounter female characters such as Wacu and Nyakio confronting the 'passbook wives' arrangement, they are driven justifiably, by the contextual demands of colonial oppression and not by bodily cravings. In this case then, the study argues that Likimani's characters devalue prevalent social prejudices that purpose to depict women as sentimental and whimsical. In contrast, these women are astute, and are also exemplifications of moral probity. This character builds up is inextricably tied to women's social-political consciousness. As evident in their constant refrain, 'the land is ours,' these women understand social and political imperatives that shape their immediate reality. Furthermore, as exemplified in the character of Mumbi, these women understand their role in the struggle for independence. They undertake this task with an incredible degree of efficiency and commitment. They are enduring, daring and decisively anchored in the struggle.

Women's resistance and defiance exudes a sharp sense of character. In this text the study is presented with the nurturing and visionary side of women in a dominated and oppressed society, Joseph is sent for further education abroad through the efforts, and guidance from peasant village

women. It is through the visionary Rebecca that such a huge task is made a reality. Rebecca is endowed with a consciousness that helps her guide the society on the prospects of a future without the colonial masters. She mobilizes her community by reminding them of the need for education, which would provide individuals who would take the helm of leadership after the attainment of independence.

'Hero's welcome' no doubt illustrates how the contest for the future is played out. When Kamau the village hero who has been to Britain, comes back, he has to be clothed in African attire, thus symbolically cleaning him of Western influence. This welcome is depicted thus:

> …there was chanting, more singing, more excitement. There was Rebecca ready with the calabash of porridge, the mother was ordered to feed him. Mingai placed the skin cloths on him saying, 'you are one of us. Welcome home.' And Macharia gave him (sic)spear saying, this is to fight for our land, and here is a shield to protect us and our land from our enemies (Likimani, 1984, p157, p.158).

The absence of men in this communal effort that is significant in the moulding of the future of the community, makes a strong statement in regard to gender and consciousness. This illustrates the visionary character of women, who embody a signification of social and political consciousness. Rebecca takes centre stage in showcasing this depiction.

More than any other character, Rebecca is militant, and again serves as a symbol of strength and hope. In this depiction. Likimani makes a case against gender and colonial marginalization. To support this claim, the study examines the concluding line of the text when Kamau becomes politically conscious. After his false arrest, Kamau decides to become a sworn participant of the struggle for liberation. As he says, 'I know I must take that Mau Mau oath. It is a shame that I

never took one, I must be a real Mau Mau.' (1984, p.171). It is significant that Kamau takes the oath administered by Rebecca, meaning that she is a conscientizing agent.

5.13 Conclusion

Through the text then, Likimani identifies women through a particular slant. They are pivotal in not only building the society, but are active participants in the social political growth of the society. The fact that women are given this role in political and societal discourses support this study's claim that Likimani explores woman's identity in the context of social-political upheavals. They are the pillars that supports the society as it grapples with these problems. Their identity is negotiated from a socio-political and historic context. Women are not cushioned against colonial abuses. They have their share of suffering and abuse, and in fact they are more vulnerable to the excesses of the oppressive colonial system. Women are victims of the existing social and political values.

It is with this revelation that the study examines Likimani's treatment of social class and social placement in this historic period. In the 'Vanishing Camp' Likimani through the character of Nyaruai enacts a discourse that the study may use to interrogate her quest for identity. This text attempts to bring to the fore, issues of class and tribal identities. In all the other accounts included in text, 'Vanishing Camp' has its characters drawn from the upper strata of the society. Nyaruai is married to a doctor this reminds us of the writer's marriage to Dr Likimani. Autobiographical elements in this case reveals the writer's personal participation and in general participation by women across the entire social-economic divide.

Nyaruai's effort in supporting Mau Mau fighters and detainees begin, first of all, with influencing her husband. She opens his mind to political issues of the day. In this way we find

Likimani asserting an integrative, all-inclusive contribution to the struggle, that cuts across gender and tribal divisions. Towards such an approach, Patrick Taylor (1996, p.141) views the anti-colonial discourse as one that 'provides possibilities for restructuring distorted communicative processes by enabling subjects to decipher their own historical trajectories and recreate them as incessant movements towards reciprocal human understanding.' This kind of discourse is not exclusive in its portrayal of gender and tribal identities as in 'Vanishing Camp.' But the study notes the presence of racial differentiation. Mwacharo, Nyaruai's husband, comes to terms with his racial and political identity after persistent prodding from his wife.

It is thus again in this depiction that points to the woman taking up the role of the conscious part of the society. As evident from this part of the text, Mwacharo has been awakened. As he queries himself:

> ….is that flag so important, is human life of less importance than the Union Jack? if the colonialists think so, then I think I'm making a mistake not to help my people to have our own flag, slightly torn, flying outside where masses stay helplessly frustrated. The flag is tearing just as their colonial power is falling to pieces…. He felt deeply where he belonged, he looked at his hands, yet I am a black man, black African and a Kenyan (Likimani, 1984, p.145).

The choice of characters from various tribes adds to the creation of a national identity. The study has looked at Mwacharu, Wambua, Omondi, Mungai and others providing a cocktail of different tribal backgrounds. The writer, in this case, tries to create a tribal balance in the text, and therefore provides a national identity. As Mwacharo further asserts, 'we are both black, and blacks

we are going to remain,' (1984, p.146). Racial considerations are important if one is to discover their true identity.

CHAPTER SIX

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND CONTESTING TRADITIONS IN GRACE OGOT'S *DAYS OF MY LIFE* (2012)

6.1 Introduction

The discussion in this chapter focuses on Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012). The text highlights the adverse sociocultural and socio-political factors that shape issues of ethnicity, sexuality, gender, social and political class in Kenya. These factors, as argued in the chapter, constitute the primary factors that subvert women identity and association within the social and political spheres. The chapter argues that the nation – which appears to depict consciousness or choice as the criterion of self and national identity - primarily and fundamentally affects women's identity. The nation affects women in complex and multiple ways in which women define and redefine themselves as members of the nation and within the sociocultural and socio-political conditions.

Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary defines culture as constituting the beliefs and customs of a particular society, and politics as the activities that influence a government's actions. The discussion about women's self-identity in this chapter further interrogates how culture affects the development of the female self in women's autobiographical writings. Nevertheless, the chapter furthers an understanding of the sociocultural and sociopolitical grounds on which the distinction between the two terms is formulated in Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012). An examination of Ogot's selected text aims to fill the gap resulting from the lack of a mainly female position from male writers on nationalist issues concerning sociocultural and socio-political spheres that women occupy.

Women's opinion on national issues is evaluated within the interactions of family, politics, socio-economic, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and education. All these factors portray women in complex and multiple ways which in turn, shape their individual and national identities. Boehmer (2005, p.220) views women's writings as "occupying an enabling position, from which to articulate selfhood [and nationhood]". She also states that you will observe in women's writings "fascinating ways in which they addressed, redressed, and distressed the historical legacy of compounded oppression and survival that it, has become almost emblematic of postcolonial writing as a category" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 220). In other words, women's writings articulate their histories of struggle and survival within the postcolonial nation.

6.2 Grace Ogot Brief Biography

Grace Ogot, author, businesswoman and politician, is a Kenyan woman whose life story needs to be told. Ogot came from a strict Christian background, and her parents were such strong advocatess of girls' education. As an exemplary gesture, her father used to perform socially assigned female gender roles such as fetching water, (habitually considered as the work of young women), so that Grace and her sisters could complete their schoolwork (Ogot, 2012). With such significant exemplary leadership and support from home, Grace Ogot became one of the first African women to travel abroad for further studies in Britain. She earned a series of firsts positions during her educational pursuit (Ogot, 2012).

The first part of her autobiography reflects the colonial context and the place of African women within that context. African women's education was confined mainly to nursing and teaching (Kanogo, 2005). These jobs were perceived as an extension of women's caring role. During this time, young African men and women gained colonial education, and some traveled

abroad to pursue further studies. Ogot was one of them, travelling first to Uganda, then to the United Kingdom for her higher education. On her return to Kenya, Ogot worked in various hospitals. She also began writing professionally, establishing herself as a renowned author.

Grace Ogot's foray into politics began when she was nominated to the Kenyan Parliament by President Daniel Arap Moi in 1983, and after the MP of Gem was murdered in 1985, she contested in the by-election and won the seat. In her biography, Ogot narrates how women of the Gem area sent a delegation requesting her to run for the Member of Parliament position (Ogot, 2012), and she agreed. Ogot's political career started in a primarily male-centric post-independence era with the transfer of power from white colonial leaders to African male leaders (Ogot, 2012). Male leadership continued for most of the 1960s through to the late 1990s. Early leaders like Mzee Jomo Kenyatta believed that women were incapable of leadership (Thongo, 2017). This patriarchal attitude persisted in the political landscape and marginalized women until the late 1990s (Aubrey, 2001).

By narrating this section of her life in *Days of My Life* (2012), Ogot aims to show the value of education in the projection of female agency. For her, educated people have the knowledge to claim their rightful space in society. Ogot's experience informed her decision to contribute to the values of women's empowerment. She links her success to her father, whose commitment to girls' education saw herself through school at a time when education for girls was not prioritized. Ogot appears to have been lucky twice when she married a man free from chauvinism. She said, "I was lucky also to have a husband who was free from chauvinism, and who endowed me with real power in the family" (2012, p.173). The men who formed the most influential part of Ogot's society in her life were those already freed from the vice of patriarchy.

6.3 Writing the Self in Ogot's Autobiography

This section first conceptualizes autobiography as a literary genre. After that, it compares Ogot's life narrative against the characteristics of an autobiography. This study hopes to show that *Days of My Life* (2005) is an autobiography and then use the text to study how Ogot narrates a life of contestation with traditions while projecting an agency for women's self and identity.

Muchiri (2014, p28) holds that the autobiography is the form of a 'coming-of-age story.' This is because it depicts the narrator's journey from childhood to adulthood as a process of acquiring experience, knowledge and understanding. In Ogot's text, her transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by a physical journey as she progressively moves from one geographical location to another. In the process, she acquires knowledge through her pursuit of education and develops a strong personality that is shaped by her life experiences.

Moreover, Ogot's autobiography is also marked by an effort to relay a truthful account of the narrator's life. This need for truth calls for the cultivation of autobiographical truth. Muchiri (2014) quotes Smith and Watson's book, *Reading Autobiography* (1998, p.28), where they define autobiographical truth as 'an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing the meaning of a life.' Cultivating autobiographical truth relies on the narrator's earnestness as they relieve their life story. Muchiri (2014, p.28) then expounds that:

> 'Standards of autobiographical truth appear in terms of the sincerity of the writer, evaluated through the seriousness of personality and the intention of writing; subjective truth, that is, the unique truth of life as it is seen and understood by the individual; historical truth, that is, the truth that can be verified through history; and

fictional truth, that is artistry. Autobiographers cultivate autobiographical truth through cohesion, especially in terms of consistency of narrative voice.'

Ogot builds truth in her autobiography by incorporating a coherent narrative voice which becomes the cohesive device for the story she weaves of her life in the text. She is equally consistent in how she depicts herself as opposed to traditions that subvert women. Throughout the narrative, she remains an advocate for female empowerment and seeks an end to traditions that do not respect the dignity of women. In addition, Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2005) also involves using para-textual components such as photographs and dates of historical events to authenticate her claims in the text. References to historical events like the 1992 first multiparty elections in Kenya and the 1995 World Conference on women held in Beijing, China, are claims that can be proved true or not through the lens of historical facts.

The autobiography is also marked by an element of experience since narrating a person's life story relies on interpreting their lived experiences. In their book, *Reading Autobiography, Theory,* Smith and Watson (1998, p.10) contend that 'in women's autobiography ---- often authorize their text by appeal to the authority of experience …' Ogot's name exhibits the outcome of her experience in the social, political and cultural contexts influenced by her upbringing. Abbs (1998) argues that the central concern of all autobiography is to describe, evoke and generally recreate the development of the author's experience. The author's experience thus becomes the primary source of information that is recalled in building content in autobiographical work.

Ogot's life-narrative accounts for the outcome of her life as experienced while growing up, studying, working and advocating for women's welfare in a society whose culture and politics are steeped in patriarchy, thereby portraying her contest with traditions in the process of advancing

her call for women's empowerment. The value of experience in autobiography is given weight and breadth by Muchiri in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* when she says:

> Experience is another crucial feature of the autobiography because the form (of autobiographical writing) involves narrating and interpreting one's experiences through retrospection and introspection. The experience presented in the autobiography is not merely personal but an interpretation of the past and the author's place in a culturally and historically specific present. Autobiographical narrators do not predate experience; instead, they come to be through experience. Experience is the process through which a person becomes a specific subject, having particular identities in the social realm, constituted through material, cultural, economic, historical, and social relations (2014, p.30).

As the primary source of evidence in self-narration, experience is authoritative and invites readers into believing the story and authenticating its claims.

Memory is another important feature of any autobiography. Writing an autobiography requires writers to have a good memory of the events they relate to. In recounting their past lives, autobiographers employ memory and recollection as valuable tools in recalling the events of that past life and relaying them in the present. The autobiographer is thus a mediator who stands in the present time linking the past and the present through recollection and narration.

Olney sees the autobiographer as an active participant who engages memory in the process of recollecting and narrating past accounts in the present time. According to Olney, therefore, the autobiographer is not just a passive and impartial recorder of information but one who becomes an active maker of creative work. Regarding memory and narration, he asserts as follows:

> Recollection, or memory, in this way a most creative faculty, goes backwards so that narrative, its twin counterpart, may go forward: memory and narration move along the same line only in reverse directions … memory creates the significance of events in discovering the pattern into which these events fall… it is in the interplay of past and present, of present memory reflecting over past experiences on its way to becoming present being, that events are lifted out of time to be resituated not in mere chronological sequence but in patterned significance. (Olney, 2014, p.47).

Olney links memory to the process of narration and establishes the need for a backward search for information in recounting an individual's life. The narrative is, therefore, an outcome of well-ordered events that proceed from the narrator's memory of the past and relies on the ability to rearrange such events to produce a powerful story. Muchiri states that memory can draw from various sources, making the process of memory a strictly individual activity and a corporate one. She says:

> Memory is not entirely a private activity, but can be a collective activity to a certain degree. Various communities of memory, such as religious, racial, ethnic and familial, develop their occasions, rituals, and practices of remembering, which aid in preserving and passing on memories and shape the memories conveyed. Some of the sources are personal (dreams, photographs, objects, family stories, genealogy), while some are public (documents, historical events, books, collective rituals) (Muchiri, 2014, p.29).

Ogot's autobiography, for instance, traces her memory to her family story and tells how her parents' conversion to Christianity had an impact on her religious upbringing. She says of the Christian gospel, 'my parents imbibed and accepted this revolutionary gospel. And for the rest of their lives, they tried to live by it; and we, as their children, were brought up in this strong spiritual brew' (2005, p.22). She also recalls her family tree and dates it back to the end of the nineteenth century. She narrates it thus:

> My family's story within Asembo goes back to the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century. Our great-grandfather was called Moli, who, on moving from Lwak, established his village at Rakombe. He had four sons and three daughters. The first son was called Ombaye, the father of Two; the second son Akeno was the father of Ongonga; the third son Onyuna, was the father of Joseph Nyanduga, my father; and the fourth son Mchura, was the father of Jethro Ombaye (2005, p.14).

The photographs she attaches to the story also help to authenticate her memory base and provide a rich source of information for her narrative. For instance, the photographs of her parents, and that one taken in 1963 at their home in Rakombe, shows Ogot leaving her parents with her sisters Rose and Sophia and their children. It is a photo that shows the strong ties that Ogot held with her family. There are also paragraphs about her participation in development programs like the one at a fundraiser in aid of St. Mary's School, Yale, presided over by President Moi in 1988. She can confirm that President Moi visited her home through the photograph showing Ogot's arrival. The photographs are, therefore, a memory source, for they provide material for her self-narrative.

The autobiography is also marked by the principle of selectivity, which enables the narrator to decide the details that go into the story and which to leave out. Muchiri says, '…the author deliberately selects what or who to include or leave out of the narrative, thus determining where and how the autobiography starts, proceeds and ends' (2014, p.32). Like many other autobiographers, Ogot delivers her life story through the first-person narrative technique. This technique enables her to retain control over what we can do at each point in this course of her life. As the autobiography relies on the cultivation of historical realities to authenticate the claims made therein, it becomes possible to detect certain omissions and silences where the narrators may avoid discussing aspects of their lives that readers consider necessary.

For instance, following President Moi's nomination into Parliament in 1983, Ogot declares that there indeed arose speculations concerning reasons for her being awarded such an opportunity but does not mention any speculations. Coming at a time when she had not campaigned for such an appointment, and with her husband out of his teaching job at the University of Nairobi, whose Chancellor was the President himself, one feels that Ogot leaves a lot unsaid concerning her nomination into Parliament by the President's party, Kenya African National Union (KANU).

She also says the nomination had surprised both her and her family because 'for the preceding three years, my husband had been out of work following his criminal dismissal from work by the same President…. He was prevented from going back to teach at the University of Nairobi. What could be Moi's motive…?' (Ogot, 2005, p.246). She only says the speculations were then irrelevant and that she focused on serving the people. There is a notable silence in her dismissal of the speculations.

Tonney (2015), rightly puts it when he states that Ogot's self-narration gets credibility as a result of her consistency in self-portraiture and the giving of historical information supported by photographic evidence against which we can assess the reliability of her statements. We can, for example, confirm her marriage through a religious ceremony based on the photos she links to the tale. Ogot, as the narrator of her life's story, becomes the exclusive source of information about her life because she controls the delivery of facts in her self-narrative.

6.4 The Autobiography as Literature

This section analyses artistic elements that autobiographers usually incorporate in writing their life narratives. There are several artistic elements that autobiographers employ in their narration. In this section, therefore, the study shows the literariness of *Days of My Life* (2012). Ogot has employed such literary devices as narrative voice, plot development, setting, characterization, dialogue, flashback and soliloquy in reconstructing the narrative of her life.

In her definition of narrative, Mieke Bal in *Narratology*: *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* introduces and defines the terms "story" and "fibula". She defines a narrative text as one in which "an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof" (1985, p.5). She goes ahead to define a story as 'a fibula that is presented in a certain manner' and a fibula as 'a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (1985, p.5). From this definition, a writer may also refer to an account of events that have passed and are being reconstructed through narration. There must have occurred events whose details are getting recounted, which calls for a narrator's presence.

Autobiographical narrators try to reconstruct their lives in the actual circumstance in which one's life was lived. Ogot's autobiography is the real account of her life which she recounts using her unique narrative ability, making her life story an interestingly related account to the reader. Throughout the story, we follow her life's journey, which she unfolds using her voice and other aspects that make the story an exciting picture of her life. Being the narrator and subject of the narrative, she becomes the one we see and whose path we follow through the narration so that we only see and hear what she reveals at every point in time. A case in point is when she goes for her studies at Mengo Medical School in Kampala and the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Britain, she does not relate what happens back home in Kenya. Instead, the story shifts to her location, and as readers, our knowledge is limited to what happens in her presence.

In narrating their life stories, autobiographers use the first-person's narration technique which relates to us the story's events only as they are delivered through the narrator's voice. This narrative voice is assumed by a narrator who is also the narrator's subject. This means that both the one whose voice delivers to us the events of the story and the one whom events of the story revolve are the same person, also called the subject narrator. In Ogot's text, she relates her life's events in several ways. She narrates her achievement from school, work, politics and leadership in the social and family set-up, telling us what she did and experienced, including what she said and heard or witnessed in various situations. For instance, she remembers her experience in Britain, saying:

> The year 1957 was going to be an important one. First, I had to take the Final State Examination at the beginning of the year. Secondly, I had my practical work at Ipswich in a strange environment. Thirdly, I had to take my in-service training as a

> Tutor at St. Thomas Hospital in London. Finally, I had to start preparing to go back home to begin a new life (2012, p. 65).

She eventually comments on her experience in Britain, saying it had "been a series of successes. I moved smoothly from one success to another; I was able to help so many souls either in the hospital or outside it …. I also overcame many difficulties: language, new surroundings, more educated classmates …'' (p. 65). This approach helps to establish Ogot as the first party to the events narrated in the text. The first-person narrator thus becomes reliable and closer to the audience, enabling the narrator to develop an intimate relationship with the readers.

However, the first-person narrative voice adopted by autobiographers is prone to limitations due to its subjective nature. This subjectivity favors the narrator's discernment concerning what detail to make public and what to conceal. The first-person narrative voice is equally limited in the scope of time and space as it reveals to us only the events around the narrator. Therefore, the readers can only see, hear, smell, taste and feel what the narrator does, when and where the narrator does so. Any detail outside the narrator's reach is equally out of the reader's, however crucial such information may be to the story's development.

In *Days of My Life* (2012), Ogot takes care of such limitations by varying the mode of her narrative delivery. She does not deliver her story through one long monologue; she incorporates such artistic aspects as a flashback, dialogue, and direct and reported speech, detailing the lives of other characters who influence and shape her life. In addition, she provides para-textual details such as dates, photographs and references to both historical personalities and occurrences like the presidency of Moi that was marked by disregard for women's empowerment; the 1992 multiparty elections in Kenya, which she says was conducted based on politics and not development; and the

1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. She says the 1992 elections were marred with violence and hooliganism. She further states thus concerning the election:

> Stones were thrown at our vehicle by militia youth, young girls sang insulting songs against us, some priests compared me with Judas, and the police and the provincial administration turned a blind eye to all this. Some of my supporters were killed or maimed, and the police declined to record any statements from us, saying they did not wish to be involved in politics (2012, p. 287).

The use of another delivery mode for her story complements her narrative voice and diverts our attention from the shortcomings of her narrative voice. Irrespective of the notable silences in the text, the ever-present figure of Ogot as the subject-narrator holds the story and lends to it the cohesion that makes the story hold together as a unified whole.

The plot involves the arrangement of the events in the story to have some events occur only after or before others have been witnessed. The actions, events, occurrences and celebrations are ordered in a way that allows for the achievement of cause and effect, which lead to the development of an organic whole out of the narrated story. Ogot develops her plot chronologically, beginning from the days before her birth to situate the settlement of her clan in place of her birth. Ogot is unlike many writers who follow the conventions of autobiographical writing to narrate factual information beginning with the time and place of their birth. She begins by narrating a story of her parents, saying:

> When I retired from politics and public life in 1996, I planned to write two books: a biography titled *My Father* and *A Woman called Rahel*. The first book was about my father's life, and the second was about my mother by the same name. They were

> role models in my life, and part of me kept telling me that it was only by writing about them that I could thank them for giving me a wonderful childhood experience (2012, p.1)

She dedicates chapter one of her book to narrating her family tree and follows her parents' conversion to Christianity and their Christian life. It is only at the end of the chapter that she is convinced that she has told the story of her parents'. She claims thus: "the lineage of My Father and A Woman called Rahel has continued to prosper in different fields globally. I count myself as one of the fruits of the blessed union, whose personal story must now be told" (2012, p. 32). She tells the circumstances of her birth in Butere on 15th May 1930, when her father 'was selected for a further teacher training course at Butere Normal School (at a time when married), teachers taking training courses at the school were allowed to take their wives with them. Ogot's plot takes us back to a time long gone and then moves chronologically to the time of her retirement from active politics.

In literary work, setting refers to the geographical location of the event's story and the historical time frame within which the events occur. Ogot sets her narrative from the time of the Luo community's settlement in the Gem area of present-day Siaya County, running to the time of multiparty politics in Kenya. Geographically, the text is set in changing locations, including Kenya, Uganda and Britain, among other places that Ogot visits during her travels as a women's leader to attend regional and global conferences like the 5th African Regional Conference on Women held in Dakar Senegal in 1994. The change in setting conforms to the journey motif, which is one of the critical features of an autobiography.

The story's setting during the early missionary incursion in Nyanza invites readers to witness Ogot's parents contest with tradition marked by their conversion to Christianity. She speaks of her parents as pioneer converts saying, 'my father…. was among the first Christian converts in Asembo… and my mother was… similarly among the first women converts in the Rarieda who were persecuted for their faith when they became Christians' (2012, p. 1). She explicitly singles out her mother, who walked a long distance at night at the risk of wild animals' attack to receive baptism. The setting of the story in situations where Ogot experiences discrimination based on her gender and race, as exhibited in the attitude of her British women classmates, wins the readers' sympathy over Ogot's side. This follows the study's understanding of why she has to contest what she considers oppressive to her and the female gender.

Characterization allows the writer to fashion the readers' understanding regarding the role each character is assigned. The autobiography is dominated by one main character, while other characters' existence is limited to the extent that they complement the development and portrayal of the main character. Character depiction is done by enabling the characters to hold dialogue, thus allowing us to hear directly from them and the narrator's comment, which also reveals them to the reader further. In literary writing, character depiction is also achieved by what one character says about the other(s) and the details that the writer may reveal about them.

In an autobiography, characters are revealed to us through the eye of the subject narrator. One such character that is developed in Ogot's autobiography is Ezekiel Apindi. He is said to have championed the education of girls in South Nyanza in the 1930s. Ogot says Apindi resigned from his teaching job at Maseno School against pleas from the then Principal, Mr Carey Francis and left "his home …taking his family to South Nyanza to develop the area, start schools and churches and to improve the standards of living of the people" (2012, p.37).

He is credited with the inception of such schools as Maria Secondary School, Pe-Hill High School, and Ogande Girls' High School. Ogot describes Apindi as a strong promoter of girls' education when most parents preferred boys (2012, p.38). She categorically states: "In that context, we have included this brief biography of Apindi as a champion of girls' education in Nyanza and a pioneer educationist" (2012, p.38). The development of these other characters is therefore limited to what the narrator may be willing to make known to us. In Ogot's autobiography, she is the main character who shapes the events of her narrative. In contrast, the others only exist to authenticate the progress she claims to have made in the course of her life in the development of her self and identity. As with the nature of an autobiography, she has carefully selected whom to include among the characters in her narration.

6.5 Ogot's Representation of Colonial Discourse and Strategies of Domination

Ogot expresses concern with the presentation of women in mass media. She recalls that while opening a Media Management Course for Women in Nairobi in 1986, her discussion centred on the unfair presentation of women in the mass media as the "major constraints to development in this profession" (2012, p.292). Ogot expressed concern by stating the following;

> I pointed out that case studies of African countries had shown that the mass media concentrated on the traditional image of women as housewives and mothers. At other times, women were mainly projected as beneficiaries of social services. They were portrayed as social liabilities or as a passive group playing supportive roles to male members of society rather than as active participants in development, which they were (2012, p.292).

Ogot also decries the exploitation of feminine sexuality by advertising agencies where “women often appeared as eye-catchers intended to direct customer’s interest to some consumable product or other (even when) the half-naked woman bore no relationship to the extolled product” (2012, p.292). Expressing her advocacy for women’s empowerment, she recalls urging media practitioners to "urgently correct this and produce advertisements that will reflect the true picture of society and its values" (p.292). Although this exploitative presentation of women has persisted today as the norm, Ogot has shown that it is a vice and can and should be addressed.

With the situation for women in education, politics and employment being this sorry, Ogot notes that the first step towards empowerment of women is "through imparting correct information and providing life-long education" (2012, p.151), which she tried to do by providing weekly talks in Dholuo and Kiswahili in response to a request from the Voice of Kenya Radio Service. This medium offered her the voice to air the silent wishes of women, thus achieving agency. By such broadcasts, Ogot was convinced she was educating women, thus "contributing to their liberation" (2012, p.152).

By narrating this section of her life, Ogot aims to show the value of education in the projection of female agency. For her, educated people have the knowledge to claim their rightful space in society. Ogot's appointment to head the Kisumu Home Craft Training Center elevated her to another platform upon which to continue her empowerment effort for women. With courses that aimed at providing home care skills, the training centre complemented Ogot's position as the District Community Development Officer for Central Nyanza, which comprised "the present counties of Kisumu, Siaya and Busia" (Ogot, 2012, p.152).

The institution worked towards women's empowerment by providing them "with the capacity to form and manage their own organizations which function as platforms for discussing their issues and as avenues for influencing public opinion" (Ogot, 2012, p.154). Even though there were still challenges of translating the skills acquired effectively at the national level, Ogot drew satisfaction in the organization's achievement in changing the male/female roles at the local level. She says her role in mobilizing, organizing, and motivating women provided her with "an invaluable experience in the process of women empowerment" (p.156), as could not be achieved by mere rhetoric.

A significant move towards the realization of women's voices in Kenya came with the need for political power for women. Kenya women were seriously under-represented politically, considering that by 1983, the Parliament of Kenya had only one elected female member and two nominated ones "in a House of 158 males" (Ogot, 2012, p.155), thus making women's representation insignificant. National women's organizations like Maendeleo ya Wanawake and the National Council of Kenya Women provided women with leadership skills and the ability to shape such skills.

Further in her projection of the female agency, Ogot became the Public Relations Officer of Air India and was in charge of the East and Central Africa Region between 1964 and 1966, an experience that gave her a view into the competitive life in the private sector and enabled her to "arrange for cheap airfares for Kenyan students studying in India" (Ogot, 2012, p.158). Of specific interest to my study is that she thus became "the first African woman in Kenya to hold a substantive position in a foreign company dominated by Asian men" (p.158). With this experience in the private sector, Ogot opened her first boutique within the Central Business District of Nairobi, becoming one of the first Africans to do so. She says the business was financed using a bank loan

acquired in her name but supported by her husband, a phenomenon "which at that time was unheard of" since for her, an African woman, "to obtain a loan in her name from a commercial bank was in itself a major act of women's empowerment" (p.160).

This effort emphasizes the pioneering spirit that Ogot exhibited and the successful end to which it led her. In a way, it speaks for Ogot and on behalf of the women in their ability to rise beyond the limits of traditional gender-role specificities. Ogot narrates her success in business that diversified to include printing and trade in books exemplified by her businesses whose names and locations she provides as Anyang Press Ltd. and West Kenya Booksellers Ltd. in Kisumu; real estate company, Winam Developers Ltd.; and educational institutions like Jubilee High School in Yala Town. She recognizes that her husband, in bestowing the responsibility of managing the family business on her, "… demonstrated in a very special way, his full support for women's empowerment" (Ogot, 2012, p.163). She recognizes, too, that by her husband's action, she "was not only being empowered, (but also that she) was being installed in power. With such a solid base in the family, I now felt strong enough to go out into the world to fight for women's rights as part of human rights" (p.163).

Ogot emphasizes recognition of the family, the basic social unit, as an indispensable ingredient in seeking and realizing the successful empowerment of women. Ogot participated in the women's empowerment effort by attending several regional conferences both within the country and outside to understand the theory and practice of women's liberation. She says: "the first regional conference on women empowerment I ever attended was sponsored by the Kenya National Council of Women in collaboration with the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs" (2012, p.163) which was held in Nairobi between the 24th and 28th of April 1967. In the same conference, whose theme was "Women in a Changing Society", Mrs Miriam Obote, the then

Ugandan First Lady, spoke of the need for women's inclusivity in development and emphasized the need to seek women's views on cultural issues, since "women are the transmitters of a nation's cultural heritage and traditions" (Ogot, 2012, p.170).

This may have incited in Ogot the desire to attend many more such conferences and the need to advance the welfare of women against the backdrop of a patriarchal societal structure. One quite memorable conference that Ogot attended was the Fourth World Conference on Women held from 4th to 15th September 1995 in Beijing, China, which became famously known as the Beijing Women Conference. She lists the resolutions they made at the conference focusing on the need for women to have access to reproductive health care and fundamental freedom at the domestic and political levels. Also noted was the need for women to gain access to credit facilities as a requisite tool for both justice and development. She says that lack of access to education, credit facilities or property rendered women incapable of the power to make decisions.

Therefore, "women and men around the world must work together to transform the political, economic, social and cultural institutions that perpetuate gender-based discrimination" (Ogot, 2012, p.223). From the conference, the Kenyan women were optimistic and waited only for action to implement their resolutions. However, patriarchy was not yet ready to accept women's inclusivity, as she reveals that back "in Kenya only words, not actions, waited for us on arrival from Beijing. President Daniel Arap Moi issued an extraordinary statement saying that he rejected cultures alien to Africa, which were discussed at the Beijing Conference" (p.230). She says the President's statement insinuated that the women had gone to learn about same-sex marriages. Ogot sums the magnitude of the problem to have been a consequence of patriarchy and political power structure.

It was part of a silent connivance with patriarchal societal forces that opted to paint the Beijing process and other international moves to address gender inequality, such as Western propaganda, cultural pollution, and even promiscuity. The fact that the Beijing Conference made headway in obtaining a global consensus on the conditions of women and policies and programmes needed to ameliorate their status was anathema to President Moi and his male supporters. They preferred a patronizing approach that had little to do with addressing Kenyan women's problems (Ogot, 2012, p.231). Ogot lays all blame on the then President Moi saying that "Kenya women will therefore remember Moi for squandering the opportunity to put them at par with men and for failing to rise above mere tokenism" (p.232).

By this statement, Ogot refers to several parliamentary motions that were passed but never became laws, such as the motions on maternity leave and gender commission, despite the support that these motions received from the public. She acknowledges the role played by women from her rural home of Gem. The latter sent delegations to persuade her to contest the Gem Constituency by-election following the death of the then legislator Horace Ongili Owiti on 27th May 1985. She says that at the time, she was attending a United Nations World Conference on Women, also attended by twenty thousand women from all over the world who had gathered in Nairobi "to demand women empowerment, including political empowerment" (2012, p.248). It is to the encouragement of these women from Gem that Ogot credits her entry into elective politics.

According to the Weekly Review (1985 p.20), Grace Ogot was a key contender for the vacant seat: The indications so far, however, are that Ogot, who hails from the area, may be interested in the seat. Ogot has been highly visible around late, especially during Owiti's funeral, when she was the mistress of ceremonies. Informed sources say that Owiti's supporters, including the MPs from the district, consider Ogot the most appropriate replacement for Owiti in Gem, even

as the parliamentary representative and this, they say, is a suggestion that Ogot is finding quite agreeable. There is a snag, however, in that Ogot is already a nominated MP, and it is as yet not clear whether she will consider resigning her nominated position to seek an electoral mandate in the forthcoming election.

Women composed and sang songs in support of Grace's campaign (Ogot, 2012, p.251), and an example of some of their lyrics are: *Do you know Gem has changed? Gem has changed and wants to elect a woman. Do you know Gem has changed? Gem has changed and wants to elect a woman.* The women then began to run a grassroots campaign. Grace Ogot (2012: p. 249) states that they (the women) agreed to conduct a home-to-home campaign on foot on a twenty-four (hour) basis, working in shifts. Furthermore, even more significantly, they never asked for monetary handouts, although this was to change later during the multiparty era in the early 1990s. Ogot provided them with a large room in her house in Kisumu, which they used as their resting place, and where they cooked their food. On election day, many of them were her agents who jealously guarded Ogot's votes. She stated that she will always remain grateful to Gem women.

The support from the women of Gem demonstrates women's solidarity, and support was a significant factor in Ogot's rise to Member of Parliament for this constituency. Despite the common misconception that women fail to support other women as the reason for the lack of women in politics, Ogot's life story shows that women can be a core part of a woman candidate's electoral strategy. Ogot's election bid almost ended before it truly began since she found out the night before the nomination that she was supposed to tender her resignation as a nominated Member of Parliament to the Speaker before going ahead with the by-elections (Ogot, 2012).

It is not clear whether Grace knew that she had to do this. This lack of information, or, sometimes, the provision of inaccurate information, is part of what Sara Longwe describes as dirty tricks to hinder women from vying for political leadership roles (Longwe, 2000, p.26). Eventually, Ogot resigned and tended her resignation to the Speaker late at night, and she travelled back to Gem to participate in the by-election the following day. She was successful and became one of two women elected to Parliament in 1985, thus beginning her political career.

Ogot inherited a constituency facing several crises: three previous Members of Parliament had met untimely deaths. Robbery and violence were also rife in the area (Ogot, 2012). Despite inheriting such a crisis-filled constituency, she initiated many development projects: such as a Gem constituency bursary fund and women's development projects through the Gem Mabati women's group. Owing to her dedication and track record of development, she was re-elected as Gem Member of Parliament. It was only in 1992, during the onset of multiparty politics, that Ogot exited the political stage, and she managed to leave the constituency in better shape than when she was elected. She narrates that in just over eight years, the kind of disillusioned constituency she inherited had been turned into a constituency of confident, hard-working, and dedicated people (Ogot, 2012, p.288).

6.6 The Impact of the Socio-Political Environment on Women's Search for Identity

The social-political set-up also affects the female's search for self and national identity. While the accuracy of figures and statistics of women in politics and public office is outside the confines of this study, the fact to be emphasized is that women are yet to achieve equality with men when reference is made to access to these offices as educational opportunities.

Regarding literature and politics, Chinweizu (1980) argues that literature and politics influence each other, and African writers cannot avoid commitment to their societies at the periods of their writing. He further observes that the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assumes a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his or her writings and not to preoccupy himself with his puny ego. Because in Africa, we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory for the artist. This observation demonstrates the need for writers to situate themselves within a specific social context within which they write and confirm their selfhood and identity as a woman. In this regard, the social realities within which the writer writes determine the outcome of her writings. In engaging with the social issues of the day, writers will be dealing with the politics of the day and challenging the prevailing sociocultural order.

Ogot actively played a political role from 1983 when she was nominated and later elected in 1985 to the Parliament of Kenya, enabling her "to more fully realize that Kenya women were still invisible in formal political institutions" (2012, p.173-174). She noted that she faced significant challenges as a woman in a representative house dominated by male members. One of her challenges then was the awareness of the fact that "being in that position meant that I had not only to prove that a woman could be as good a political leader as a man, if not better; but my actions, behaviour, and utterances, had a major bearing on the prospects for women in politics generally" (p.174). This was a burden since her understanding and definition of her selfhood will affect Kenyan women's perception generally in a patriarchal society.

Her eventual appointment into the cabinet as an Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in 1985 placed her second to Dr Julia Ojiambo in the list of Kenyan women to have ever held such a position. Rising to such positions of influence placed Ogot in a

vantage position to project the female voice quickly. There is a way in which this appointment made it possible for her to play an influential role in the life of women, mainly because it accorded her the ability to legislate for equality of women in both the domestic and social circles.

Ogot appreciates that her Ministerial appointment presented her with the ability to legislate laws geared toward advancing women's welfare. From the seminars she attended locally and regionally, she understood the universal position of women as victims of patriarchal dominance. For example, Ogot says that as a member of the Kenya Delegation during the Thirteenth Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1975, the women from Kenya recognized and "expressed their great sympathy with their sisters in South Africa, Namibia and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) who were not only suffering from racial discrimination…but who were also suffering from discrimination based on sex" (2012, p.176).

She decries the glaring under-representation of women in government appointments and the obstacles that stifled their attempts to correct such imbalances; of specific concern is the reference to the August 1984 meeting of Kenya women leaders in which they resolved to demand more excellent representation in the country's decision-making organs. She says they had prepared a document which revealed discrimination against women in government appointments, a position comparable to today's government's unwillingness to implement the constitutionally stipulated two-thirds gender rule. In response, the then President Daniel Arap Moi said that "for women to demand equality with men was to imply that God erred when He made man the head of the family" (Ogot, 2012, p.181).

Ogot attributes the President's response to "the traditional male chauvinist attitude" (2012, p. 182) which the said leader may have carried with him from a patriarchal environment during

his childhood. The President's take on the women's call for equality and Ogot's narration of female under-representation confirm what Ladele notes when she says that “politically, African women are not traditionally visible in the political landscape of the continent” (p.75). While the lack of visibility may be blamed on women’s disinterest in politics, patriarchy is primarily to blame for side-lining women and frustrating their effort to acquire leadership positions. Magu (2014) argued that the development of the self is an essential index in identity formation. Politics and public office are certainly one of the ways of self and identity formation because it gives women a voice.

6.7 The Impact of the Socio-cultural Environment on Women’s Search for Identity

This section examines *Days of My Life* (2012) as a form of female writing in the quest for identity in sociocultural spheres. In the invention of tradition, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) posit that people who experience quick transformations and social change will subject pre-existing traditions to reinvention. Where it is found to be rigid and devoid of adaptability, such traditions will be discarded, and in their place, new ones will be installed. This study sought to argue that Ogot's parents were the first among their people to change tradition by converting to Christianity, thereby setting the pace and justification for Ogot's life which has been depicted as one who has lived in opposition to some of the traditional African ways of life.

Molara Leslie-Ogundipe (1993), in her article "*African Women, Culture and Another Development"*, identifies six challenges on the back of African women and identifies men as the fifth among these mountains. She calls upon African women to dismiss men from their lives because they are steeped in the centuries-old attitude of patriarchy, which they do not wish to abandon. After all, male domination is advantageous to them. Leslie-Ogundipe's (1993) position is attractive as against Ogot's (2012) text as she narrates a subversion of patriarchal social

structures to project her agency as well as other women's while, in the end, retaining her domestic relations with men. Rather than do away with the men, Ogot (2012) advocates contesting the patriarchal structures that permit male dominance. She does not advocate for Leslie-Ogundipe's (1993) radical stance against men.

In her fiction, *The Promised Land* (1990), Grace Ogot describes a detailed procedure of establishing one's new homestead away from the parents' homestead. While in her autobiography, *Days of my Life* (2012), she tells of her father, Joseph Nyanduga Onyuna, whose decision to build his 'dala' (home) without the traditional son, cock and axe is by itself a contest of the established ways of life among the Luo people. Narrating her father's open defiance of the demands of tradition forms the basis of the argument presented here that Ogot's contestation of tradition comes from the seeds of rebellion planted by her father in her childhood which agrees with the replacement of cultural practice argued by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) if it refuses to update into a contemporary cultural context.

Ogot's experience informed her decision to contribute to the values of women's empowerment. She links her success to her father, whose commitment to education for girls saw herself through school at a time when education for girls was not prioritized. Ogot appears to have been lucky twice when she married a man free from chauvinism. She said, "I was lucky also to have a husband who was free from chauvinism, and who endowed me with real power in the family" (2012, p.173). The men who formed the most influential part of Ogot's society in her life were those already freed from the vice of patriarchy.

Advocating for change, Ogot calls for the enforcement of new models of renegotiation that can positively influence the development of the female self and national identity in the 21st

Century. Ogot advocates for the respect and protection of women against social, cultural and political marginalization, which is both violent and exploitative. She endeavors to alter the devastating consequences of gender interiorisation and hence her dedication of her autobiography to the development of the female self. Ogot hopes that with concerted efforts, women in postcolonial Kenya will likely be accorded justice and dignity as they enact both selfhood and nationhood. Justice towards women is only achievable through interdependence and coexistence between men and women so that sexuality ceases to be an aspect of exercising gender power through gender-based violence. Through literary representation, Ogot assumes agency towards women's progressive social change.

6.8 Conclusion

Through the analysis of Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), the chapter has demonstrated issues of the female search for identity in a patriarchal socio-cultural and socio-political environment within the context of Kenya's post-colonial era. Grace Ogot believes that writing provides a space within which a historical meaning can be contested. Moreover, because literature provides space for contesting meaning, it is an essential tool for teaching and mobilising women, drawing Kenyan women's attention to social meaning and their role and function in shaping and making history. Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* has shown that Ogot is keenly concerned with how colonial categories of knowledge flattened the complex experiences of the African people. Therefore, she sets out to put the record straight. Attempts at recovering African gnosis by evoking the Luo mythology while striving for a new mythos rooted in contemporary experience engendered by colonialism are at the heart of Ogot's earlier works which re-image a new geographic and political space in Kenya.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOCATING THE DISCUSSION: WOMEN, MARRIAGE, AND SELFHOOD IN MARJORIE OLUDHES'S *COMING TO BIRTH* (1986)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how Macgoye reconstructs women's image in *Coming to Birth* (1986). By making particular references to the political changes and events within which the text is set, the chapter interrogates how the writer attempts to empower women in Kenyan society. Generally, this study examines the woman in the text as a persona with the capacity to emancipate [herself] from socio-economic ties to men. The central concern of this chapter is how Macgoye employs Kenya's postcolonial social changes to provide an alternative in exploring their influence in the construction of individual women's identities in a changing postcolonial society.

The chapter illustrates how African women are typically portrayed in African literary works. The discussion in this chapter demonstrates how Macgoye departs from this tendency in an attempt to redefine women's image in society. The chapter further explores how marriage and motherhood are constructed by society to limit women's choices and to ensure women's subjugation. Furthermore, it shows how women subvert the patriarchal construction of marriage and motherhood to liberate themselves from social and cultural structures that confine them.

7.2 A Brief History of the Author, Marjorie Oludhe

Macgoye was born on October 21, 1928, in Southampton, England as the only child of Richard and Phyllis King. As a child, she grew up in an extended family comprising her parents and grandparents. She had her early schooling in England and obtained her master's degree from

Royal Holloway College in London in 1948. She moved to Kenya in 1954 as a lay missionary bookseller for the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the mission arm of the Anglican Church (Kurtz, 2005, p.4). In that period, Kenya was volatile as the colonial administration was forced to relinquish power to the Kenyan people. While working in Kenya, Macgoye met Doctor Daniel G. W. Macgoye Oludhe in the late 1950s and got married to him in 1960, leading to her integration into her husband's Luo community in particular and Kenyan society in general. She was later naturalized as a Kenyan citizen after their marriage.

Macgoye has worked in Kenya and Tanzania, teaching creative writing at Egerton University in Kenya. Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye is one of the most creative women writers in Kenya who has written extensively while managing different literary genres. She started her literary career as a poet, and the initial reception of her poetry in Kenya was criticized as being too political. She has published volumes of poetry, fiction, children's books and non-fiction works. Some of the works she has published include *Coming to Birth* (1986), currently a literature set book in the Kenya secondary school curriculum. This text is also an award winner of the Sinclair Prize for Fiction in 1986. *Homing In* (1994) won second place in the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 1995.

The Present Moment (1987) is set in Nairobi and features older women who meet in a home for older people. The women are drawn together from different regions of the country and have different societal experiences. *Chira* (1997) deals with the AIDS scourge in Kenya and people's views on the AIDS pandemic. *Street Life* (1987) deals with the plight of street children, especially the physically disabled, in society. The proceeds from this book were dedicated to charities dealing with destitute people in Kenya.

Her most recent novel, *a Farm Called Kishinev* (2005), explores the feeling of the period around 1905 when the British colonial government set aside a farm called Kishinev in the Rift Valley province of Kenya to resettle the Holocaust victims. Lastly, the children's stories she has written include *The Black Hand Gang series*. Macgoye's *Song of Nyarloka and other Poems* (1977) is about the experience of a young woman adapting to a matrimonial home. The poems attempt to show the struggles that Nyarloka goes through in trying to cope with the new environment and new expectations as a married person.

Germane to the present study is the struggle that the main character engages with to cope with her changing marital status. The study explores women's experiences in relation to social changes and how women try to adjust to new environments presented to them. Kurtz (2002, p.102). argues that *Song of Nyarloka and other Poems* "embodies the hybrid, syncretic crossings and mixtures that constitute its subject matter". The hybrid mixtures include foreign and alien influences that the character (Nyarloka) has to accommodate to coexist with others in the new community she is part of. The accommodation of new lifestyles creates new images for both men and women. Kurtz's analysis is relevant to this study because of how it explores the hybrid mixtures exhibited by characters in *Coming to Birth* (1986) and their interaction with others in the new environment. Kurtz's argument also enables the study to examine how Paulina's[1] "crossing over" from the village to an urban centre affects her development as a woman in postcolonial Kenyan society.

In *The Present Moment* (1987), Macgoye tells a story of seven Kenyan women developed during the turbulent period of Kenyan national history. These women met at the nursing home for the homeless in the Eastleigh section of Nairobi. The women are divided along the line of ethnicity, language, class, and religion due to their diverse backgrounds of origin in Kenya. While at the nursing home, these women unearth their personal histories that connect them as women in Kenyan society. For instance, they talked about stories of their struggles for self-determination, conflict, violence, and loss, but also of survival.

In relation to these women's stories, Macgoye explores the past and present history of the nation and the struggles the country has gone through, especially the story of women and their struggles in a male-dominated society. *The present Moment* illustrates that though these women meet in their old age, their discussion brings the reader to the past by revealing their hidden struggles and how such struggles have redefined their social status. Moreover, *The Present Moment* (1997) gives insights into examining Marjorie Oludhe's struggles for self-determination. Oludhe's novels and poems are written and set in Kenya and draw on her Kenyan experiences "[exploring] Kenyan history and dynamics of Kenyan patrimony" (Kurtz, 2005, p. 5). The present study shall only review *Coming to Birth* (1986) and *The Present Moment* (1997).

7.3 A Brief Synopsis of *Coming to Birth* (1986)

This chapter focuses on Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*, published in 1986. The text is a story about Paulina Akello, a young Luo girl who has been married off to Martin Were. The events in the text begin in the early 1950s when Kenya is in its final stages of attaining independence from the British colonial administration. In the year 1952, a state of emergency was declared over Kenya by Governor Baring on behalf of the British government as one of the ways to suppress Kenyans'

unrelenting demand for independence. The book opens by presenting Paulina (the protagonist) as a naïve sixteen-year-old village girl who has travelled unaccompanied from Nyanza, in the western part of Kenya, to Nairobi by train to join her husband, Martin Were. On her arrival in Nairobi, she is picked up by Martin at the Railway Station and taken to Pumwani slums, where Martin has a room. The room became available because of Operation Anvil, which moved Kikuyus away to protected villages, creating an opportunity for people from other tribes like Martin to get rooms.

Luo (also called Jo-Luo) is an ethnic group in western Kenya, Eastern Uganda and northern Tanzania. They live in the basin surrounding the Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria. They speak the Dholuo language, though, with a variety of dialects. They are believed to have originated in Southern Sudan. The Kenyan Luo migrated into present-day Western Kenya via present-day Uganda, and the Kenyan Luo are identical to the Acholi of Uganda (Ngugi, (1983). Rachel, Paulina's neighbour, informs her about the emergency and "Operation Anvil", which is underway as part of the colonial administration's strategy to overcome the Mau Mau uprising and informal gatherings, especially for KEM, an acronym for Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities. People from these communities had formed guerrilla groups to revolt against the colonialists and to demand that their land that had been appropriated to the whites be given back to the natives. When Paulina arrived in Nairobi, the KEM people were allegedly notorious for distributing leaflets that called on people to rebel against the colonial administration.

In Nairobi, Paulina knows little about politics, but she is lucky enough since Rachel briefs her about the happenings in the city. Paulina experiences a miscarriage on her first night in Nairobi, but because of the curfew, she is taken to the hospital in the morning, where she learns that it is too late to save the baby. Due to the scarcity of resources at the hospital, Paulina is hastily discharged before Martin comes back to pick her up. She leaves the hospital alone, thinking she

can trace her way back home unaccompanied as she always did in the village. However, it turns out that Paulina gets lost on the way, and it takes her two days to locate Martin's house after having been locked up in the police cell. She spends her first night after being lost in Susana's house, and while there, Drusilla, a midwife and single lady, who has decided to work for God, examines her and informs her that she is out of danger. Through the help of Ahoya, a white missionary lady, who gives Paulina accommodation after being rescued from a police cell, Paulina can locate Martin's house.

However, Martin is angry and beats her up for roaming in the city. Paulina conceives the second time but has a second miscarriage due to violent police intrusion into her house in Pumwani. This time Martin blames the police for causing Paulina's miscarriage. When Paulina miscarries for the third time, Martin beats her up and accuses her of imagining that she is pregnant. After the third miscarriage, Martin sends her to his rural home. She stays there until the harvest is gathered, and after ensuring everything has been stored, she returns to Nairobi, this time with more confidence than on her first journey. She notices some smell of coconut oil in the house but does not ask Martin about it. She is surprised because coconut oil is used by women and not men. On her second return to Nairobi, Paulina calls on her friend who has joined the Home Craft College and demonstrates the desire to join the college in future so that she can keep her house neat and earn some money like her friend. She later enrols in Home Craft College in Kisumu for vocational skills when she returns from Nairobi.

While at the Home Craft College, she starts a relationship with Simon since Martin has been absent because he is having illicit relationships with other women back in Nairobi. Martin learns about Paulina's relationship with Simon, comes home and beats her up, resulting in their separation. Paulina conceives with Simon leading to the birth of Okeyo, who, unfortunately, is shot

dead at the age of three by police officers when President Jomo Kenyatta went to open a hospital in Kisumu in 1969. This is immediately after Tom Mboya, a leading regional politician, was assassinated in Nairobi. Her son's death compels Paulina to relocate to Nairobi as a domestic worker, first in Okello's household and later to Mr M's, a politician's family.

When the narrative ends, Paulina is expectant again with Martin's child, just like at the beginning. Therefore, we are left in anticipation that her pregnancy will come to birth the same way Kenya is to birth as a mature independent country. In summary, Macgoye's fiction exploits the relationship between public and private life in a postcolonial society, as seen in how individual characters try to cope with the changing times. The narrative parallels the materialisation of a new type of Kenyan woman in the embodiment of Paulina with the emergence of a new nation as it traces the female protagonist's development between 1956 and 1978 against the backdrop of the nation's development.

The book is divided into seven chapters, and each explores Paulina's development from a naïve girl to a mature and independent woman cognisant of her rights. Macgoye's narrative interrogates the existing sociocultural structures in Kenyan society. This is seen in her deliberate departure from what marks the difference between her and other Kenyan writers, in that she endows her female characters with prominence in the text. This prominence with which Macgoye empowers her female characters makes it necessary for this study to examine how and why she engages with women's experiences and issues in Kenyan literature.

7.4 Kenya as a Troubled Marriage: Macgoye and the Plight of Women in Postcolonial Kenyan

Due to the dismantling of traditional social institutions after Kenya gained its independence, women were left in an even more vulnerable and ambiguous situation with new burdens and responsibilities. It was also a challenging time for the Kenyan writers who had two options; either to be praise singers for the political class or to be critical and risk being sacrificed at the political pyre.

In her texts, Macgoye conceptualizes the Kenyan nation as a woman. The travails that the Kenyan woman has gone through are reminiscent of what the Kenyan nation has gone through. This suffering is brought forth by unfeeling leadership that has been given the mandate of guarding the Kenyan dream. Ndii (2016) wrote a compelling article titled *'Kenya is a cruel marriage, it is time we talk divorce'*, in which he contends that nationalism in Kenya is dead and has been replaced by sub-nationalism. 'The tribe has eaten the nation' was his clarion call.

It will be recalled that the idea of the nation was construed by Benedict Anderson (1983). Anderson defined nations as social constructs – political communities bonded together by common interests. Therefore, we are implying here that a nation is like a marriage union in which a sense of connectedness guides people with each other. The intellectual problem of the study of nationalism is understanding why and how people develop or fail to develop this belonging. In Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986), Paulina is married off to Martin at a young age. The narrator reports: She was sixteen, and he [Martin] had taken her at the Easter holiday.

The marriage union between Martin and Paulina took place in 1956 in colonial Kenya against the nationalist struggle for independence. Martin was allowed to take Paulina regardless of

her age on condition that he had enough to pay the bride price. Still flat-chested, Paulina's twenty-three-year-old husband even laughed at her when she asked him for a brassiere. Even Rachael, Martin's neighbour in Nairobi, was surprised to see Paulina because, in her opinion, Paulina was too young to be married. She sarcastically comments: 'they are in a hurry to get you settled these days and pregnant?' (Macgoye, 1986, p. 8).

These questions voice a fellow woman's concern that a young girl could be married off by her parents. According to the patriarchal mindset of Paulina's parents, the woman was the man's property and lacked the capability to make personal decisions. The man was culturally allowed to beat his wife whenever he thought he should. This beating was a show of love and care from Martin, as we learn later from the text. Ahoya says: 'Well, he [Martin] does love you. I could see it on his face as he caught sight of you. Nevertheless, I thought also he would beat you…' Ahoya continues to explain to Paulina how important it was to be beaten by her husband.

Macgoye does not demonize Martin's actions and does not praise them too. She seems to understand that 'every young man has problems too'. Hooks (2000) argues that in the Third World, men are socialized to accept their exploitation and abuse in the public sphere. For such men, dominance in the domestic environment restores their sense of power and provides the space for relieving tensions. This often leads to violence against women. Women are easy targets because there are no consequences for men in a cultural environment that equates coercive power at home to masculinity (Hooks, 1984, p,121).

A few days after arriving in Nairobi, Paulina experienced a miscarriage and was taken to Pumwani Hospital, the nearest hospital. As soon as she showed signs of improvement, she was discharged. Paulina could not wait for Martin at the gate like the other women. A curfew was in

place, and she had to hurry home. Unfortunately, being new in the capital city, she got lost and was even arrested for knocking on people's doors, asking if they knew her husband's place. This prompted Martin to beat her mercilessly.

Nevertheless, Martin's violence against his wife is not ill-intentioned. It is just cultural, and he is, in fact, a caring husband, as we see when he consoles her over the miscarriage (Marjorie, 1986, p.26). Thus, even though the young couple later separate, the sense of freedom that Paulina gets after separating with Martin is not celebrated in the novel. The freedom looks hollow, a false totalizing narrative. Indeed, Macgoye depicts marriage as an institution where both parties should strive to stick together and weather all storms. This can be attributed to her Christian roots. It will be recalled that Macgoye came to her adopted country, Kenya, as a Christian missionary. At a more symbolic level, 'freedom' is portrayed as a contested concept, both in the family and at the national level.

As Amina, Paulina's long-term friend, tells her [Paulina], 'with freedom or without freedom, with a job or without a job…you are not going to get a baby that way' (Marjorie, 1986, p.60). This emphasizes the necessity of a man in Paulina's life even as she has gained personal independence. Later Paulina gets a child, Okeyo, with a married man, Simon. This act is not different from the many amorous acts that Martin Were is involved in. Nevertheless, the death of Okeyo indicates that Macgoye disapproves of adultery. This strongly points to Macgoye's moral consciousness: she does not approve of adultery, whether by men or women, whether it is being committed for pleasure, sexual frustrations or even out of revenge. Martin Were and Paulina face the same castigation from Macgoye.

What is happening in Paulina and Martin's family is a replica of the state of affairs in Kenya some more than fifty years after independence. Branch (2011) lucidly shows that Kenya is between hope and despair. During the struggle for independence and in the years immediately following its successful outcome, it was widely believed that after the exit of the colonial powers, Kenya would forge ahead to realize her aspirations of political sovereignty as well as social, economic and cultural prosperity. The first independent KANU government was expected to put an end to poverty, illiteracy and disease and thus open the gates to all-round development. However, this was a vision whose realization has been problematic and still needs to be completed to date. The main reason is that the political leaders who took power were only concerned with their selfish interests.

In Kenya, the state's politics must be understood in light of the shifting social formations along ethnic lines. This is true for most African countries, where ethnicity is an essential phenomenon around which individuals, households and communities aggregate for common action (Thomas-Slayter, 1991, p.303). Macgoye understands the Kenyan state not as an entity 'holding' or 'exercising' power but as forming a meeting point for coordinating power relations. This argument is expanded upon by Ferguson (1977, p.273-274), who argues that the state is 'not an actor but a way of tying together, multiplying and coordinating power relations, a kind of knotting and concealing power'. Thus, statehood becomes 'multiple parallel spaces in which power is encountered and negotiated' (Newman, 2005, p.2). This reads into the conceptualization of a Kenyan state as a marriage union as stated above. In Macgoye's writings, especially in *Coming to Birth* (1986) the woman character is not in competition with men.

Macgoye's representation of gender creates spaces which only the other gender can fill. Her social consciousness gives space for both the heroine and her husband to try out their ways of

searching for identity and self-definition in a tenuous social and political context. The internalized Luo traditions fundamentally define Martin's and Paulina's gender identities. This becomes problematic when they meet new experiences. Their relationship is full of constraints, contradictions and dilemmas owing to the changing circumstances, unaccustomed life situations and novel influences. The tensions in their marriage prefigure the predicament of independent Kenya in the hands of Kenyans themselves. Paulina felt the 'death' of her marriage but could not rescue it due to her inability to bear Martin a child. In the novel, Kenya is symbolically also about to face the 'death' of the unity of her people, which existed when they all fought against colonialism. In post-independence Kenya, this unity proves difficult to sustain owing to politicians' self-aggrandizement and greed for power.

The train journey that Paulina takes from Kisumu to Nairobi is long, tiring and troubled. Although it is a journey that Macgoye uses to detach her protagonist from the patriarchal village life, it also serves as a voyage that ushers Paulina not only to the political landscape of her country but also to modernity. Nairobi, the nation's nerve centre, offers Paulina the political experience that was only accessible to men. Martin Were, Paulina's husband, is fixated on the past, the past that Paulina leaves back in Kisumu. Their good marriage soon gravitates to an oppressive union full of mistrust and violence.

However, as Macgoye shows in *Coming to Birth* (1986), both Paulina and Martin are hopeful to be the beacon of change in an exceedingly patriarchal society. Macgoye's social consciousness echoes Awua-Boateng's formulation that there is an impending change 'in attitude for both men and women as they evaluate and re-evaluate their social roles' (Awua-Boateng, 2010, p.90). This means that although Macgoye condemns patriarchy in society, she does not demonise men but encapsulates a world where the two genders coexist in harmony.

Paulina is determined to overcome all women's oppression in patriarchal Kenyan society. Her struggle for self-reliance and identity as a woman is expressed in her hopes for motherhood. As she tells Martin: '…though I hardly dare to hope, I must give you also this hope, after giving you disappointments for so many years' (Macgoye, 1986, p.147). This hope, by extension, is a hope for a better Kenya both politically and for the Kenyan woman in the patriarchal world.

7.5 Construction of Women in African Literature: A Brief Overview

Writers like Wole Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o are some outstanding male African writers who have presented multidimensional, resourceful, determined and flexible women who, according to Durosimi, when necessary, "break through the barriers imposed by tradition to take their stand by men" (Durosimi et al., 1987, p. 2). In most of the texts, there are women who help men accomplish their goals, thus being very instrumental in men's lives. However, it is worth noting that the role given to women characters in some of the male-authored texts is not an independent role but that of helping the main character, in this case, a man, to accomplish his task.

For instance, in most of Ngugi's literary works written about colonialism and Kenyan people's struggle to attain independence, women characters only help Mau Mau fighters by supplying them with arms and food and informing them of what is happening in villages. However, we do not see women arming themselves to fight against the oppressor by joining the guerrilla fighters in the forest. This is a pointer to female subordination in a society where their importance is to offer support to men. Though the above writers give women characters some positive portrayal, the very women are presented as people stripped bare of all that makes them central and relevant in the traditional African socio-political domain.

In examining the large spectrum of African literature from the colonial period to date, one realizes that it has tried to come to grips with primary problems emanating from colonialism, struggle for independence and postcolonial disillusionment, especially from African states. However, the representation of female characters has been scantily dealt with as a serious problem requiring redress. Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986) attempts to rectify this anomaly by manipulating the main character in relation to other characters in the text. The author gives women characters' central roles in her text to offer insights into understanding women's struggles and experiences.

Macgoye traces the female figure from the ashes of colonialism to the postcolonial period and shows how the female figure has been constructed and deconstructed over time. She juxtaposes the emerging nation and the emerging woman, which shows that, in the same way, the nation has to be reconstructed from the colonial powers, the woman has to be reconstructed from the patriarchal social order that has dictated her life and eventually distorted her image and potential for an extended period. For example, the dichotomies of women's power and definitions of mother/motherhood and woman/womanhood in the traditional and modern periods are some of the ideas mirrored in *Coming to Birth* (1986).

A reading of the text also raises questions such as: if the traditional woman is traditional, what makes her so? Do women have any power in African society? If so, under what circumstances? What are the defining parameters of femaleness and maleness, strength and weakness? Have these parameters remained the same over time? Does a traditional woman reside in the traditional milieu? This is because in African countries today, there has been a tendency for people to draw a dichotomizing line between modernity and tradition. However, it is worth noting that the two, modernity and tradition, cannot be neatly separated since we have occasions where

aspects of the two spaces are fused, leading to a hybridized culture. This affects the practices, values, principles and behaviors humans manifest and the geographical spaces they occupy. These are some of the critical issues that Macgoye seems to interrogate in her text in relation to the woman's position in society. In answering the above-raised questions, Macgoye avails space for women's emancipation.

7.6 (Re)defining Women's Image

One does not stand in one spot to watch a masquerade. As with dancing masquerades, vantage points shift, and one must shift with them to maximize benefits (Nnaemeka, 1997, p. 5) In this section of the chapter, the study focuses on individual female characters in *Coming to Birth* (1986) to demonstrate the strategies women use to emancipate themselves. The chapter will examine how women characters struggle to redefine themselves in relation to patriarchal dictates in Kenyan society. The study argues that patriarchy inscribes stereotypes of females in society and that this limit women's potential in life. The study uses the term stereotype to refer to the generalized perceptions of personality types and how they influence the nature of the interaction of individuals in society.

For instance, the character traits of men and women are considered predictable from the contexts in which they occur. For instance, men and women are expected to (re)act differently in the face of danger. The man is expected to fight back, while the woman will scream and flee. Another example is that the kitchen is a woman's domain; therefore, no man should cook or interfere with its operation, especially in Africa. This demonstrates that stereotypes are not innate but socio-culturally constructed based on generalized assumptions that society has used and

accepted. However, with time, stereotypes often become an identity that marks individuals as distinct from other groups in society.

In this study, the term stereotype is used to refer to those generalized, and often unreasonable assumptions used to depict the female gender in society. Stereotype can be defined as cognitions held by one social group about another social group (Elligan, 2008), or as oversimplified standardized images (Moore, 2006). Thus, the chapter discusses women's attempts to transcend limitations put on them through gender stereotyping, as depicted in *Coming to Birth* (1986). The study considers novelistic (re)conceptualization of the female self in the context of enacting both selfhood and nationhood. In addition, the text is an enabling site for the reader and the critic to grasp another dimension of women's realities in the postcolonial Kenya: self-determination and self-fulfilment in the nation.

The analysis in this section focuses mainly on Paulina and Amina to demonstrate how they have made choices aimed at their emancipation. Paulina in the narration of her personal journey uses 'I' in the text *Coming to Birth* (1986). The 'I' speaks on behalf of the collective 'we' and frames a multiplicity of potential responses to the central question of the female footing in Kenya. The focus of the story is on the identity of the modern postcolonial woman that is expected to create a new paradigm for female representation. The chapter engages with how Macgoye [re]creates the female figure and how women question traditional and cultural practices by subverting the construction of femininity in society, eventually giving them freedom and choice. According to Brown (2001), the choice for women is good for self-empowerment, which should be understood as rebellion and resistance aimed at seizing upon a capacity for liberation.

Through writing, Macgoye engages in an act of writing about women's selfhood and the interaction between women and national identity. She presents women in Kenya today as having self-identity problems since their 'self' is conceptualized in the image of the 'other'. There is no regard to the self as fundamental to the question of self and national identity in respect to women's self-agency. Renan underpins the dialectic relationship between the individuals living in a nation and the nation itself when he points out: "to have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present: to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more–these are the essential conditions for being a people…" (p.1).

Essentially, the nation and its individuals have many things in common, some of which are forgotten in the self/other dichotomy. Renan's proposition is that people, including women, should share in the past and present glories of Kenya. Women have to be unified with the nation by participating in Kenya's national activities. In this regard, Macgoye historicizes the female self in the postcolonial nation in her writing. Furthermore, she reinforces the female in the nation and emancipates her from patriarchal notions which undermine her selfhood. (Re)conceptualization of the female self in Kenya, therefore, assumes a dialectical mode that unites both the woman and the nation she lives in.

This dialectic relationship is expected to harness any differences and ambivalences between the female self and the nation and hence subvert the inhibitions on the woman. Macgoye (re)conceptualizes Paulina's development of nationhood as an on-going process from her life at the Home Craft College to the time she takes up a teaching job in the same institute. Her experiences in Kenya influences her self-identity and she also influences what is happening in Kenya. By so doing, she transforms herself as well as Kenya and indicts women's otherness.

7.7 Marriage and Motherhood

Marriage is a fundamental institution in African societies where female exploitation results from male dominance. This underscores the assumption that women's exploitation often continues into marriage as a result of the socialization process that regulates women's upbringing and individual interaction. A woman is socialized to believe that she must be submissive, and her work is to serve men in her life, be it a father, a brother, a son or a husband. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that marriage has been one of the oppressive structures for African women. According to Ogundipe, marriage as an oppressive entity is a process that takes different forms. She writes;

> "Woman loses status by being married because in the indigenous systems, which are still at the base of the society, the woman as daughter or sister has greater status and more rights within her birth lineages. Within marriage, she becomes a possession; she is voiceless and often rightless in her husband's family except, in some groups, through what accrues to her through children" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, p.75).

This observation is evident in *Coming to Birth* (1986) when Martin notices that Paulina has not prepared his food, and he wonders why he got married. Martin bursts out in anger, asking Paulina whether she wants him to "carry my own key, fetch my own water, [and] cook my own food! What the devil am I married for?" (Macgoye, 1986, p. 25).

Martin’s outburst in the above discussion presupposes that a woman is married to serve the man and ensure that the man is well taken care of regardless of her well-being. This outburst occurs when Martin beats up Paulina badly, locks her in the house and leaves with the key. Here Paulina is incapacitated and cannot do much, but still, Martin expects her to have prepared food for him

when he returns in the evening. Paulina is forced to prepare food for Martin despite her aching body. Martin's violent beating of Paulina elevates his self-esteem, giving him a sense of control over his household. Martin's act of locking Paulina inside the house can be interpreted as patriarchal walls created around women to curtail their liberation. Through this action, Paulina cannot access the outside world since her movement is curtailed within the house.

The study argues that Paulina's journey led to her being lost, and eventually, the beating we mention here is a search for self-realisation. Therefore, when Martin locks her up, he creates a barrier to Paulina's emancipation. From Martin's outburst, it becomes Paulina's primary duty to take responsibility for her husband's welfare and ensure everything is in order for him. This is typical exploitation of Paulina's services since she is not considered equal to Martin, but as a 'machine' that is supposed to offer its services to the master. Apart from this incident, Paulina has to be productive, so she is sent to her husband's rural home to till land while Martin remains in the city. We are told that "she stayed there for six months, till the harvest was gathered in, and her mother-in-law reported favourably on her hard work and obedience" (Macgoye, 1986, p.32).

It becomes a woman's responsibility to feed her household through hard work in the fields since society expects her to have plenty. It is worth noting that the restriction of women to remain in the rural place, while their husbands worked in the cities has a history that can be traced to the colonial period in Africa into the postcolonial era. According to Obbo (1980, p. 26-30), "retaining women in the village served as a control measure against influx of 'loose' women or prostitutes in towns". Thus, women had to be restricted to the rural areas to prevent them from prostitution which was considered immoral.

Restricting women to their rural places hinders women's emancipation since they are not exposed to other opportunities outside the home. The writer presents Paulina as a passive and voiceless person entrapped in the selfish male ego of society. The study uses the term voiceless in this chapter to refer to women's lack of assertiveness in expressing what is good for them, making them passive and submissive to what men do to them. Paulina's marriage at such a young age depicts patriarchal forces at work where childhood is assassinated by the society in which they are born.

According to Emmanuel Obiechina (1997), patriarchy has often been portrayed as a blight that prevents women from attaining full personal development and social power. The present study uses patriarchy as an oppressive system, particularly in the context and setting of the text, while aware that patriarchy does not oppress women uniformly in the world since it has variants. The oppressive nature of patriarchy is evident in Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986). For instance, Paulina finds herself controlled by patriarchal rules and regulations. She is not asked about marriage, but because the deal was settled and accepted by her father, she is married off to Martin. Macgoye interrogates arranged marriages, where parents marry off their daughters at very young ages. She demonstrates this by giving us Paulina's age of sixteen.

One may wonder why Macgoye has to let us know Paulina's age. Is it not enough for her to tell us that Paulina was married off? However, this study argues that by revealing Paulina's age to the reader, Macgoye is, in effect, ridiculing the cruel traditional practices that allow child marriages to satisfy their interest in getting wealth without considering the implications on the lives of those who find themselves trapped like Paulina. Macgoye seems to be indirectly cautioning against such traditional practices for society to avoid such situations in future. This is because arranged marriages deny women the choice as to when and by whom the various parts of their

body should be allowed to be emotionally felt. In this manner, a woman's body becomes a joyless commodity to be used by men.

The fact that Paulina is a girl justifies her being used as a source of wealth to her biological family since she is married off, and the family gets a dowry. For many young girls like Paulina, control of their lives is in the hands of their parents, who choose husbands for them irrespective of the suitor's age. The girls' wishes and desires are rarely considered, given their young age and the view that women are not supposed to make crucial decisions. Due to ignorance or poverty, parents marry off their daughters in exchange for the low bride price. For instance, in September 2004 in Kenya, The Eastandard Newspaper carried a story that nine-year-old Esther Kaiseiyie was to be married off in April 2004 to a 65-year-old suitor who had booked her soon after birth.

In Paulina's case, her father had asked for two cattle, a watch and a food-safe for her mother (Macgoye, 1986, p. 2) as dowry, and he accepted Martin to have her for a wife on condition that he would bring five more cows. This action strengthens the claim that a daughter is like a bank, and it is a right that her father should be able to draw on her from time to time in terms of material gains. Traditionally, dowry entailed the delivery of livestock by a suitor to the father of his bride in exchange for a woman's reproductive and productive labour since the woman first has to be able to bear children and also be able to feed her family by working hard, especially in the fields.

Macgoye interrogates the idea of women's exclusion in essential decisions which directly involve women's own lives. In the society explored in *Coming to Birth* (1986), women are expected to be passive observers in matters pertaining to their betrothal. One is expected to accept the outcome of such decisions without question, which is the case with Paulina since she is not consulted about her consent to marry Martin. The only information we get is that she got married

because her father told her to do so, as they had struck a bargain with Martin. This lack of consultation among the parties underscores the dichotomy between public and private spaces, highlighting African patriarchal constructed spaces based on gender differences.

Since marriage is considered an important issue, it becomes a man's sphere to decide what is suitable for the woman without her contribution to the outcome. The dichotomy of the public and private spaces is aimed at silencing women to accept the status quo that perpetuates their subjugation. The fact that Paulina is not given an opportunity to contribute as far as her marriage is concerned is, in effect, silencing her. Women's voices were mostly suppressed and only projected in the private domain, while men operated in the centre ground where they could be seen and felt. Paulina moves from the control of her father to being controlled by her husband, there is no hope of being independent as a person.

Unlike Paulina in *Coming to Birth* (1986), Gathoni in Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) is presented as having a voice to question the dictates of the society that privileges the boy child, especially in relation to their education. Gathoni, like Paulina in *Coming to Birth* (1986), strives against all odds to attain freedom and emancipation from the 'walls' created by her family, which, the study argues, is the embodiment of the oppressive Kenyan society against women. Unlike Paulina, Gathoni has a say as far as her marriage is concerned. Though it appears a futile attempt, she registers her message of self-realization in the minds of those around her, especially her 'greedy' mother.

In a war of words with her mother (Wangeci) as to why Gathoni cannot get a husband who will procure her a spring bed, Gathoni retaliates by posing, "Is that why you refused to send me to school, so that I may remain your slave picking tea and coffee so that you can pay your son's school

fees?" (Wa Thiong'o 1982, p. 233) To demonstrate her rebellion, Gathoni ignores the proposal to marry. When her mother revisits the topic, she tells her mother plainly, "I shall marry when I want, nobody will force me into it". Ironically, a mother is expected to protect her children against uncalled-for suffering. However, in Gathoni's case, Wangeci yearns to see her married off so that she can get a dowry, according to Gathoni's allegations, to pay fees for her sons.

Obioma (1997, p. 21), points out that women in African society become "victims of multiple oppressions that are internally generated by oppressive customs and practices and externally induced by an equally oppressive, inegalitarian world order". In Gathoni's case, her oppression is internally generated by her family. It seems her mother is in a hurry to dispose of her to any willing man, the same way Rachel observes in *Coming to Birth* (1986) that "they are in a hurry to settle you these days" (Macgoye, 1986, p.8). Like Macgoye and Ngugi, Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) interrogates the reluctance of parents to take girls to school by preparing them for marriage.

Through Adaku, we learn that in the Igbo society, it was customary for girls to be forced into early marriages so that the bride price could be used to send boys to school. This is illustrated in the novel where Adaku, the widow inherited by Nnaife declares that when the twins (Nnu Ego's daughters) reach puberty, they will be forced into marriage so that the bride price obtained will be used in paying fees for their brothers. With respect to this, it becomes evident that girls were socialized to be mothers and wives, which was considered significant. This is similar to the way Paulina is socialized. Paulina believes that every woman of "marriageable age should get married because there was no space for single women" (Macgoye, 1986, p.16). She, therefore, initially accepts her status as a wife since that is what she is supposed to be anyway.

However, this marriage proves a barrier in Paulina's quest for empowerment. She realizes that the marriage can no longer offer her fulfilment, it is only when she is single that she gains independence as a result of her education. This argument demonstrates that marriage is an inhibitor to women's emancipation since, within the marriage institution, society dictates people's lives hence choices for women are minimal. This is precisely what happens with Amina. She is not married, which makes her very assertive and economically independent. We are told she is a landlady of the house that Martin is renting. The study argues that she has attained this status because of her single marital status. It is this character of Amina that influences Paulina's later life.

In a patriarchal society, children are highly valued for the marriage to be considered complete, and the inability to conceive and carry the pregnancy to term, irrespective of the woman's industriousness is a 'scar' that one has to live with. Why a scar? This is because barrenness is something that one is constantly reminded of by society. In this respect, women are perpetually seen by men as productive and admirable only to the extent that they can bear and nurture children; otherwise, they are mistreated by their men. Because she cannot conceive a child, Paulina is betrayed by her husband, who keeps women back in Nairobi while she is kept in the rural area.

F. K. Buah (1988), in *A History of Ghana* emphasizes the importance of motherhood in African societies, though from a patriarchal point of view. According to him, a successful marriage should have children, in the event that the marriage is not blessed with children, it must be considered a failure which may result in divorce. In most African societies, the woman who cannot have children, 'the barren woman,' is seen as evil. Instead, the woman who has many children acquires a higher status and is considered blessed and a source of pride in the family.

However, the irony in Paulina's inability to conceive a child, which is a source of her constant frustration and an embarrassment to Martin, turns out to be a journey toward freedom and growth of the self. She rebuffs sexual advances by Martin and his clansmen, which gives her a space to concentrate on her studies at the Home Craft College. She only conceives with Simon after getting a job in the same programme to teach other women. In this case, Paulina's child is born out of wedlock. Paulina justifies her unfaithfulness to Martin by pointing out that "she was a married woman denied a married woman's rights and respect and in custom she could seek a child where she could" (Macgoye, 1986, p.54).

We are left to wonder why Paulina can conceive with Simon, yet she has failed to do the same with Martin after the last miscarriage. This suggests that one can only be fulfilled in a place with freedom. In Simon's and Paulina's relationship, no obligation ties the two, and it is a relationship that can be stopped at will. This confirms our argument that marriage is a barrier to women's development; therefore, there is no way Paulina can get a child in such an environment that limits her freedom. When Paulina finally has the child, the child gives her the urge to work harder and be independent rather than rely on her husband.

In, *Coming to Birth* (1986), Macgoye suggests a redefinition of motherhood as a mark of fertility and life and a source of feminist power in society. Perhaps, Paulina's inability to give Martin a child is an interrogation of the assumption that every woman should be a mother. Macgoye's text suggests that this belief is an oppressive measure aimed at disciplining those who cannot bear children by being looked at as outcasts. This is seen severally in the text when Paulina broods a lot about her inability to conceive. However, the assumption of motherhood as a source of joy for women is negated in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Emecheta disputes the assumption that motherhood is equivalent to female self-fulfilment. The persona of Nnu Ego, who

labors all her life to raise several children, finds them deserting her at the end when she most needs their help. Here, Emecheta satirizes the belief that childbirth brings joy to the mother and defines her self-fulfilment and position within her household and society.

In the above expose, one may argue that Paulina's lack of motherhood hurts her most. This makes her withdrawn and broody. Paulina is aware that motherhood gives a woman power, privileges and entitlements, as observed by Martin, who says that so far, he does not have a 'home' because one only talks about a home if it has children. Indeed, the writer makes a strong claim about one dimension of women's power over men in society, the creation of homes and, by extension, villages and nations. As long as Paulina does not bear Martin a child, Martin will forever remain homeless, shuttling between filthy slums and a denied social definition and identity in society. Martin can only have a home if he has children, especially boys. Furthermore, because Paulina cannot bear children, Martin has to live with this situation since even the extramarital affairs he has with other women are not blessed with a child.

Through the depiction of Paulina's inability to get children, Macgoye interrogates the predicament of barren women who feel children are necessary to fulfil their joy in marriage. Children are desirable because they ensure the continuity of the human race, an ideology that Paulina confirms by remarking that "a Luo baby was meant to widen the social circle, not to constitute it" (Macgoye, 1986, p.71). However, the value accorded to children has been violated by patriarchy to define and confine women in most societies around the world. For instance, Paulina's hard work and obedience are not appreciated because she does not have children. Therefore, a woman's importance and stability in her husband's home are judged by the degree of her fertility, especially to bear sons. If she is childless, she is considered a "failure in her primary duty as a mother and often suffers considerably as a result" (Chukukere, 1995, p.15).

Paulina's refusal to be confined within the institution of marriage once it cannot offer her the supposed security and comfort is a significant step toward liberating herself and women. She breaks tradition by showing defiance and strong will. She resists being tied down to her matrimonial home, where it is supposed to be 'her place' in society. Paulina is able to retrieve and regain control over her body and sexuality when she decides to leave Martin. At this point, Paulina makes a deliberate choice for independence and freedom. The narrative voice informs us that after the fight, "Paulina packed up her belongings without comment, gave her mother-in-law ten shillings to achieve a reasonably dignified exit, and piled up her furniture by the wayside to wait for the bus" (Macgoye, 1986, p.58).

Rather than remain in a loveless marriage, as the traditional woman would have done, she opts out of her marriage. She cannot continue in this mentally exhausting state. Although Martin Were is her husband, chosen by her father, and the traditional demands of staying with the husband for better or worse, Paulina demonstrates her sense of self and autonomy to make sound decisions. Having made this bold step, Paulina starts to challenge traditional practices, thereby liberating herself for her happiness. Marriage as an institution put in place as a form of superiority, and subordination is a point in question for Macgoye. This relationship renders women passive and has faithfully been championed to enslave them further by putting them in their 'proper place'.

The idea that women have to remain in their matrimonial homes regardless of the abuses therein is a pointer to decisions made by men to exercise their patriarchal powers on women. In most African communities, motherhood has always been seen as a vital power base for women. This is because it " guarantees women companionship and protection, which they do not expect from their husbands" (AdeleyeFayemi, 2000). In *Coming to Birth* (1986), Macgoye suggests a rejection of the devaluing of women who are non-biological parents in the persona of Amina.

Through Amina, a Muslim single lady and an influential land lady in Nairobi, Macgoye interrogates the notion of motherhood. The narrative voice tells us that her sexuality is kept discreet. Though she does not have a child of her own, she decides to adopt Joyce, the child born by Rachel's house girl.

Amina's decision to adopt a child deconstructs the notion of motherhood, a requirement of every woman in African society, as seen in the socialization process of the girl child. This shows that a woman does not have to be a biological mother to raise a child. Amina rejects wifehood, which implies rejecting being controlled by men in society but embracing motherhood. Nnaemeka (1997, p.5), points out that "motherhood should be viewed as both a patriarchal institution that is retained by men to control women and as an experience". Since it does not avail spaces for women's emancipation in society. Since Amina is not married, her action is, in essence, a strategy to avoid being controlled. She finds fulfilment in nurturing a child who is not hers.

Thus, Amina's refusal to have a child of her own is a rejection of being controlled by men in her society. This is because a woman's body and sexuality as commoditized by society are key issues often exploited by men to exercise their power over women. Since Amina does not allow her body and sexuality to be used for the gratification of men, she interrogates tradition. Moreover, structures of power and subordination arguably shape sexual desire itself. In this case, Amina contests the exploitation of women's bodies as "reproductive receptacles or as instruments of sexual pleasure for men" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997, p. 151). In this way, Amina refuses to conform to sociocultural stereotypes by claiming ownership of her body which transcends social limitations.

She converts marginalization and confinement into a space that offers salvation. Through Amina's action, the author redefines motherhood as a mark of fertility and life and a source of

women's power in society. This is because, in most African societies, motherhood is an institution that imposes a limitation on the woman's social choices compared to her male counterparts or those who are single. As a result of this, motherhood emerges as a source of ultimate power where women are supposed to exercise absolute control if they have to transcend social inhibitions designed to curtail their choices. In this case, motherhood becomes a revered space for women, which no man can violate for gratification. It is also important to appreciate that both motherhood and fatherhood are constructed entities in a society where each has its own designated expectations.

A close reading of the text indicates the author's projection of fatherhood as a constructed space that gives men more power over women (Mehta 2000). Glissant (1989, p. 79), links the idea of the "reconstitution of the body with that of reclaiming or controlling the passage of subjectivity leading to the ultimate liberation of the body". The passage of subjectivity is embodied in women's sexuality and bodies. In this case, the body becomes a fundamental part of how the individual negotiates her way through reality. The search for the self is predicated by a desire in the characters to convert marginalization and confinement into the need for action.

Amina's decision to adopt a child rather than have her own assures her control over her body which can be interpreted as an attempt to dismantle the continuation of women's subjugation. Through Amina, Macgoye interrogates what motherhood is. The author projects motherhood as a call beyond the idea of being a biological mother to that of being able to nurture. Macgoye, in this regard, offers an alternative to motherhood that can reform society by nurturing children rejected by the same society. Through this setup, women can find fulfilment away from marriage. Apart from the above observation, Macgoye, at this point, introduces Western practices into African society in that adoption was unheard of in the African family setup. We interpret this as authorial

moralizing and her Christian teachings at work since Christianity encourages childless couples to adopt children.

7.8 Feminism and Development

Macgoye's social consciousness involves the construction of a feminism that is political, the one whose opposition is not men or patriarchy but the social and political evils that chokes Kenyan society. Mama (2005, p. 96) argues that: the attainment of nation-statehood has made it incumbent on women to pursue their integration into public life, and much energy has been devoted to lobbying for legal and policy reforms and demanding women's equal representation in the hierarchies of power and fairer access to resources. In other words, feminism can be understood in terms of women's energy towards global development. Women intellectuals like Macgoye have used their writings as a route out of the debilitating deprivations of the social evils that affect the postcolonial Kenyan state.

Kuria (2001) compellingly argues that to be Kenyan is a psychological construct. It involves the play of two essential elements: geopolitics and nationalist consciousness. Kuria suggests that African women were imbibing western values and opposing marriage, motherhood, homemaking and other traditionally constructed feminine roles. However, Macgoye shows that the women's significant concerns were much broader and were essentially developmental. Central to their agenda is that they should have equal opportunities in education, job markets, national resources, health and other related issues.

The two novels, *Coming to Birth* (1986) and *The Present Moment* (1997), carry the personal view of the interaction between the individual and the nation. The writer interweaves the historical details in her narration so skilfully that it does not disrupt the plot's main thread. Real

political events and political leaders appear in the texts, creating the illusion of reality and signifying that she is as concerned with the fate of the new nation as her fictional characters' plights. For instance, the arrival of the body of Tom Mboya (a popular Luo party leader murdered in Nairobi) in his homeland for burial is an excellent opportunity to give a detailed account of the burial, which is one of the most significant ceremonies in Luo society. At the same time, in *Coming to Birth*, Tom Mboya's funeral is the scene of the death of Paulina's son (Macgoye, 1986, pp. 79–84).

There is ability and power in Paulina's world, which makes her more successful than her husband. In this respect, the novel has a feminist inclination. Although Paulina declares her independence and her right to choose, she still wants to maintain the relationship with her husband who is her child's father. Her courage and determination are woven into her complex character so subtly that it supplements rather than supplants her inherent humanity and never provoke any suspicion in the reader's mind that she is an enemy of her husband. In this sense, the writer conveys the holistic view of the feminism highlighted by African women, which is manifested in alliance with males rather than against them.

As Nzomo (1997, p.242) points out, despite their constraints, women make a significant contribution to the economy as farmers, crafts-persons, traders, and educated professionals. In contrast, white feminists are reluctant to bring motherhood into focus because it is often regarded as a hindrance to mobility in the public work sphere and career building. Macgoye's attitude to women in relation to their husbands complies with Nzomo's (1997) opinion that women should build alliances with men rather than generate hostility. It is a non-violent but effective way of counterbalancing male domination. This ideology matches the holistic views of feminism,

implying that women should preserve their womanliness and not turn against males, as Nzomo (1997) argues.

The ideology of holistic feminism offers a typical African woman hope for a better future for herself and her country. Paulina is equally hopeful for a child. To add to her efforts of fighting for the freedom of the Kenyan Woman in postcolonial patriarchal Africa, Macgoye has also incorporated the support of the males towards this course. Martin, Paulina's husband, started as a violent husband to Paulina. However, as the novel progresses, he learns to respect Paulina and even moves into Paulina's house, a changed man who also provides her with a shoulder to lean on after a long day. As a result of this reunion, their marriage was restored, and Paulina conceived his child after more than twenty years of marriage without a child of their own.

The novel ends on a hopeful note. In our view, the strategic inclusion of male characters in the life of the major female character's life by Macgoye serves as a challenge to the males in postcolonial patriarchal Kenya and Africa to support both the Kenyan and African woman in her efforts to establish her identity in the society instead of objectifying her. By working together, the African society will be able to forge ahead into a better society, for the African woman will be able to explore her full potential in the world outside the cocoon of domesticity in which the patriarchal society has in the past and currently placed her.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined marriage and motherhood as structures that women subvert to liberate themselves by avoiding being tied down according to patriarchal expectations. Marriage and motherhood in African society, according to Macgoye's work, are institutions that were put in place to subjugate women. Macgoye interrogates societal expectations of women in such

institutions and contrasts them with others that are 'free'. Therefore, this chapter has engaged with how women redefine these institutions to empower themselves.

Macgoye uses stereotypes imposed on women as wives and mothers to reveal the plight of women who do not actually 'fit' into their societies and interrogate the kind of society that creates such roles for women. This is realised through the artistic construction of women characters who find it hard to live within the constraints of such limited roles. This discussion ushers us in the next chapter, where we discuss women's agency in the text as one of the ways that women embrace to show that they can be active agents or subjects of their own decisions as far as their lives are concerned.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Summary

The researcher set out at the beginning of this study to examine how autobiography, as a genre, allows for the expression of personal authority through language and how this relates to the formation of a sense of self and national identity among a sample of Kenyan women writers in the postcolonial era. The study utilized a qualitative approach and was executed through a computerized platform. The study entailed a textual analysis of the following literary pieces: Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006), Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* (2012), Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* (1986), Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), and *Passbook Number F.47927* (1998).

The analysis focused on close reading and obtained information by analyzing the texts' literal meaning and formal properties. The literary analysis encompassed characterization, abstraction of themes, style, and setting. The study analyzed themes related to women's post-colonial perspectives and their reactions to nationalism. Characterization was examined by analyzing the writers' interactions and expressions of self and national identity. Narratology was employed to systematically analyse the themes of selfhood, female identity, and Kenyan women's writing in the chosen texts. Moreover, transferability is achieved in this study through the inclusion of detailed descriptions of the selected texts, compensating for the lack of replicability typically associated with qualitative studies.

Conversely, the main findings indicate that the use of autobiographical voice as a narrative device enhances its credibility within societies. Women have a collective identity that can act as a

catalyst for empowerment and personal development. A significant discovery is the interdependence between men and women, emphasizing that women do not need to conform to or compromise their own identity in selfhood or national identity. An additional significant discovery pertains to the influence of patriarchy on women's sense of self and the efforts of female authors to empower women through the promotion of self-awareness. This is exemplified in the analysis of semi-autobiographical and self-narrative fictional works, which validate women's pursuit of independence.

Another notable discovery is that autobiography exhibits reciprocity. Autobiographers explore their identities and utilize the autobiographical voice as a means for women to examine and establish their sense of self. Moreover, the analysis indicates that women writers in Kenya expressed dissatisfaction with the country's situation, particularly in terms of ineffective leadership and the development of female and national identities.

8.2 Kenyan female writers' conceptualization of the female self

The study set out to answer the question, how do Kenyan female writers conceptualize the female self? This question was answered by examining the autobiographical narratives. To begin with, autobiography, as a genre, embodies the manifestation of individual authority through language. The study established the foundation of female selfhood by acknowledging the historical distinctions between men and women. The study investigated how this tension affects women's capacity to establish their own sense of identity, particularly in relation to their voice, which is subject to societal norms and inherent ownership.

The autobiographical voice of women aims to challenge cultural restrictions and the silencing effects of traditional norms. The narrative of a woman's selfhood is inherently intertwined with her sense of community. Women do not view themselves solely as unique individuals; rather,

they engage in the exploration of their shared identity, which coexists with their sense of individuality. The representative aspects of women's experiences are more significant in forming a collective female identity than the characteristics that distinguish the narrator as an individual.

In addition, women develop a dual consciousness, encompassing both their culturally defined self and their self that deviates from cultural norms. This observation highlights the significance of the autobiographical voice in facilitating self-exploration and the process of discovery. The selected female autobiographers effectively illustrate how seemingly insignificant familial and domestic experiences intersect with important national concerns. The narrative modes employed by these female autobiographical voices tend to be modest, private, hidden, and intimate. This is because these voices aim to reclaim and understand the self through consciousness.

8.3 Women's subjectivity and its effects on the female self and national identity in post-colonial Kenya.

Answering the question of how representations of women's subjectivity manifests and what impact they have on the female self and national identity in post-colonial Kenya was essential to this study. This was considered by exploring how feminist writers redefine the concept of female self-identity by examining the differences between the 'self' and the 'other'. The concept of self and other in relation to women suggests that women often feel conflicted between an 'assigned' identity and their actual identity. Hence, it is necessary for women to reflect upon the reasons behind the failure of patriarchy to enable women to achieve self-actualization. The Kenyan women writers examined in this study engage in the process of redefining the female self and demonstrate the intricate connection between women and the nation. However, the issue of female self and national identity is complicated by the binary opposition of self and other.

On the other hand, the study portrays patriarchal society as granting men privileged status and relegating women to subordinate roles. The writers initially depict women conforming to traditional gender roles but later explore the subjective nature of these roles. They explicitly acknowledge that women are a distinct gender category from men, leading to different experiences. According to Lionnet, the self and the other cannot interact on an equal footing. The self is always required to subordinate itself to the other, whose superior qualities are always seen as the positive version of the self's own qualities (Lionnet 1998, p. 67). Achieving gender equality may pose challenges, but fostering interdependence between men and women can contribute to the advancement of society.

Further, women in Kenya have come to understand that surrendering their voice means relinquishing the determination that comes from actively shaping the position they wish to hold in the country. Women writers challenge patriarchal subordination and oppression, enabling themselves and their counterparts to access the privileges of self-identity. This is evident in the novels *Coming to Birth*, *Unbowed*, and *Days of Life*.

Maathai, Ogola, Likimani, and Macgoye show an understanding of the vulnerability women experience in postcolonial Kenyan society. Consequently, they have revised the notion of female self-identity in order to cultivate a purposeful drive among women to develop their individuality in conjunction with their national identity. Kenya is depicted as a significant location for the reorganization of both individual and public life, serving as a meaningful and cohesive space for the pursuit of female self-empowerment. The authors explore how women in their works navigate the process of reclaiming their female identity and national belonging in the face of patriarchal oppression, which leads to a sense of emptiness in their sense of self.

The writers in this context advocate for women's visibility and participation in the nation as they challenge the silencing and invisibility imposed by patriarchy. They depict women's efforts to establish their own identities as individuals rather than being relegated to the role of the "other" that is oppressed and assimilated. While women conform to their assigned roles in a patriarchal society, this does not validate the correctness of patriarchal ideology.

8.4 Women writer's perspectives on the effect of socio-political surroundings on the development of female identity.

Women in patriarchal societies often feel a loss of personal identity due to being marginalized as the "other" gender. Macgoye and Likimani argue for the importance of women reclaiming their lost identity and dignity in the face of patriarchal oppression. The authors assign significant value and attention to their female characters, establishing a sense of identification with them. Simultaneously, they challenge the societal definitions imposed on women by patriarchal culture. Female characters navigate literary landscapes as both self and other, seeking emancipation from the suffering caused by the marginalization of women in patriarchal societies.

Maathai and Ogot emphasized the societal construction of women, illustrating a transformation where women transitioned from being silent to becoming vocal subjects, from being ignored to being acknowledged. The writers offer agency by narrating stories of women who are confined within cultural and patriarchal contexts and their endeavours to overcome the limitations imposed on them as women. The female characters in the works of Maathai and Ogot are portrayed as advocating for a positive transformation in their lives. They challenge the cultural and patriarchal narratives that portray women as subordinate members of society.

Women writers employ the portrayal of the changing fortunes of women as a means to assign agency to women's issues. Women's writings offer a new perspective on the female self,

showing that self-reflection can be seen as a process that symbolically constructs one's identity. The characters are depicted as gaining knowledge and experiencing an awakening that leads to self-awareness and the chance to redefine and recognize their own identities. The authors have emphasized women's efforts to establish their own identities in a patriarchal society undergoing transformations due to women pursuing careers outside of the home in contemporary times.

This study looks into how the writers use signs, structures, and styles to convey their experiences, impressions, and elevated consciousness under the influence of their unique artistic perspectives. The study concludes that the chosen female writers possess the ability to observe, evaluate, and articulate social phenomena in a manner that surpasses mere description.

Macgoye's work centers on the postcolonial transformation and social development of the country. In the books *Unbow*ed (2016) and *Days of My Life*, authors Wangari Maathai and Grace Ogot explore the shortcomings of the Kenyan postcolonial state in fulfilling the hopes and goals that motivated the anti-colonial movements leading to independence. On the other hand, Marjorie's text, *Coming to Birth* (1986), explores her social consciousness within a specific framework, while Macgoye's literature explores political betrayal and prompts readers to reflect on the erosion of ideals that were once championed by historical heroes. This serves as a call for individuals to re-evaluate their own moral values. Macgoye's novels vehemently criticize corrupt leaders, adulterers, and patriarchal demagogues, drawing parallels between them and carriers of disease.

The chosen texts in this study aimed to address the issue of patriarchy and gender stereotypes by adopting a self-reflective approach to the problem of violence against women. Gender violence renders the victim invisible by undermining the woman's self-perception both privately and publicly. The writers argue for the implementation of new renegotiation models to promote the positive development of female selfhood and national identity in the twenty-first

Century. The authors advocate for the respect and protection of women from gender-based abuse, which encompasses both violent and exploitative acts. Their goal is to mitigate the harmful effects of physical and mental abuse, which is why they focus on creating stories that promote the growth and empowerment of women. They express optimism that, through collective endeavors, women in postcolonial Kenya have a high probability of receiving justice and dignity as they assert their individuality and contribute to the development of the nation. Achieving justice for women necessitates interdependence and coexistence between men and women, thereby eliminating the use of sexuality as a means of exerting gender-based power through acts of molestation. The narratives condemn various forms of abuse, which signify a breakdown in logical reasoning and human decency. The writers also explore possibilities for resistance and envision social and national transformation. The reclamation efforts of female victims for their nation are merely fragments of an imagined restoration, as violence against women engenders feelings of powerlessness and pessimism. The women writers being studied once again demonstrate agency in promoting progressive social change for women through their literary representations.

8.5 Gynocriticism and Postcolonial Theoretical Perspectives

This study utilized two theories: one served as a framework for studying women autobiographers, while the other provided context for analyzing women's national identity and social development in their literary works. The study explored how the theoretical foundations of these two theories merge to understand the ways in which women develop their self-identity through writing. Specifically, examining the consequences of subjugation and patriarchal perspectives on the formation of female self-identity and national identity. The study employed gynocriticism and postcolonialism as the theoretical frameworks to understand the oppression of women.

The postcolonial feminist perspective was employed to analyze how women are positioned and defined within postcolonial nations, considering their relationship to both the "self" and the "other". Postcolonial theory is pertinent to this study as it draws upon various academic disciplines, including literature, anthropology, history, and political science, to analyze and understand the complexities of the colonial encounter and its repercussions.

The theory offers a critical lens to analyze contemporary global power dynamics and the persistent existence of neocolonialism in the postcolonial era. The statement recognizes the enduring effects of colonialism and the ongoing endeavors of formerly colonized communities to articulate alternative visions for the future. History has demonstrated the subjugation of women and its enduring impact on female self-perception, identity, and unity in nationhood. The selected female writers in this study exemplify the challenges women have faced in establishing a national identity during the post-colonial era, primarily due to the prevailing colonial perspectives on women's societal roles.

Gynocriticism on the other hand, was used in this study to analyze how Kenyan women negotiate their changing identities in response to shifting socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political circumstances through their writing. The theory argues that women are the creators of their own textual significance in literature. Showalter (1997) classified feminist criticism into two distinct categories: the examination of women as readers and the exploration of women as writers. This theory highlights the critical nature of autobiography, as revealed in this study. Female autobiographers explore their own self-discovery while simultaneously serving as guides for others seeking to establish their own sense of individuality.

8.6 Findings

This study finds that the autobiographical voice serves as a narrative device, playing a central role in the cohesion of narratives. The presence of the narrator-character, who is the autobiographical subject, enhances the credibility of this voice. The study found that the female autobiographical voice reflects the various voices present in society. Women possess a collective identity that can serve as a catalyst for empowerment and personal growth.

Narrators employ language to merge individual and collective identities, thereby reflecting both their distinct and shared experiences. The autobiographical voice enables individuals to reinterpret history by incorporating their personal experiences within the context of collective history. Topics related to women include various aspects such as domestic life, motherhood, marital relationships, divorce, emotional and financial autonomy, women's education, political and economic marginalization, restrictive religious and cultural customs, efforts to resist oppression, and women's contributions to national progress.

The female sensibility enables women to navigate the emotional dimensions of life. This study reveals that the female autobiographical voice portrays a woman's life and history, encompassing various aspects of the "feminine" sphere. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that the concept of "femininity" is not inherent in the consciousness of women. However, it influences women's personal experiences and encourages them to articulate their thoughts and emotions through the use of autobiographical narration.

Kenyan female autobiographers provide a narrative of the struggle for independence from a female standpoint. This narrative addresses the gaps in male-authored accounts of the struggle by providing additional perspectives. Kenyan male autobiographers primarily emphasize the challenges they faced, particularly in relation to politics and the male experience in detention

camps and forests. Male writers often overlook the contributions of women to the struggle, but female autobiographers rectify this omission by documenting women's involvement in these endeavors.

Women in Kenya have come to understand that surrendering their voice means relinquishing the determination that comes from actively shaping the position they wish to hold in the country. Women writers challenge patriarchal subordination and oppression, enabling themselves and their counterparts to access the privileges of self-identity. This is evident in the novels *Coming to Birth*, *Unbowed, and Days of Life*.

The texts are fictional and autobiographical works that are based on the characters and the writers themselves. The two modes of representation are interconnected with the formation of the self in an effort to examine how these writers perceive their surroundings and their inconsistencies, with the aim of challenging the subjective position of women. An examination of these women's writings reveals that self-disclosure is an effective strategy employed by women to communicate personal information to others. By doing so, they advocate for the rights of marginalized women and redefine their societal roles, thus serving as catalysts for women's empowerment on a national level.

The analysis of the chosen texts in this study provides insights into the interdependence of men and women, highlighting that the female self does not need to assimilate into the other or compromise its own essence. There is potential for women to undergo transformation in an environment that mitigates the tension inherent in gender relations. Macgoye and Ogola utilize literary textual representation to illustrate women's potential for resisting patriarchal systems and contemporary forces that undermine their sense of self. Their writings initiated a transformative process aimed at empowering women by challenging prevailing notions about them.

The chosen writers focus on uncovering the suppressed aspects of female identity, as seen through their selection of characters and their use of characterization and narrative techniques. These writers aim to illustrate the various choices women face within the dichotomy of self and other. The writers refrain from assigning masculine roles to their female characters as a means of asserting or reclaiming their own identities. Their representation highlights the femininity of the female protagonists as they assert their identity as women and citizens of the nation. Through this approach, the authors construct narratives that depict the integration of women in postcolonial Kenya.

The study contends that the prevailing male perspective in African literature hinders women from being adequately represented. However, Ogot's autobiography challenges this patriarchal dominance by presenting a narrative that undermines traditional ideals, portraying women as deserving of freedom. Ogot's narrative aims to address the historical exclusion of women within a nationalist framework that is rooted in patriarchal ideals. According to Florence Stratton, it aims to present women's anti-national experience as a potential solution. According to Stratton (1994), Ogot's work aims to redefine nationalism by incorporating women's aspirations (p. 79). The study determined that Ogot's story serves as a narrative representing both herself and African women in a society characterized by male dominance.

This study found that the texts examined demonstrate the impact of patriarchy on the female self. Women's writers argue that in order for women to achieve autonomy, patriarchy must stop treating women as different from men. This is because when men are portrayed as autonomous and representing the 'self', it reinforces the idea that women are not autonomous. On the other hand, the woman symbolizes the concept of the 'other'. Women are urged to challenge the marginalization they face and confront the patriarchal norms that seek to silence them.

Therefore, female authors strive to empower women by promoting self-awareness, as demonstrated in the semi-autobiographical and self-narrative fictional works analyzed in this study, which validate women's journey towards independence. Autonomy does not overlook the complex relationship between men and women.

The study reveals that autobiographers aim to discover their identities, and the use of the autobiographical voice allows women to examine and establish their sense of self. The female autobiographical voice centers the woman's social vision by addressing social issues through her own narrative. The autobiographical voice reflects the interests of both the authors and readers of autobiographies, as they share a common societal context. Autobiographical narratives allow individuals to share their personal experiences with society, inviting public engagement.

The analysis of the chosen texts reveals that the women writers' express discontent with the current situation in Kenya. The writers have harshly criticized the leaders' ineffective leadership. They attributed responsibility to the morally corrupt leaders in their narrative. In the novel *Coming to Birth*, the leaders depicted exhibit malevolent desires driven by their personal ambitions for power above all other considerations. Leaders often fail to address their desire for power and instead divert their efforts towards hiding their distorted personalities by creating positive self-images. In the hide-and-seek game that ensues between leaders and their people, the potential for authentic leadership and service to the people is greatly diminished.

This study establishes a significant connection between the female self, politics, activism, women in the public sphere, and women's rights. The chosen women's narratives highlighted the linkages among activism, public struggles, women's rights, and politics, emphasizing the notion that personal experiences are inherently political.

When recording women's histories, there is a tendency to focus on the personal aspects of their lives. Wangari Maathai's coverage in the popular press and academic literature has focused primarily on her environmentalism, Nobel Peace Prize, and public divorce (Anderson, 2014). Insufficient attention has been given to the political activities of Grace Ogot and Muthoni Likimani in their efforts towards national liberation. Indeed, these women made substantial contributions to politics in Kenya and played a crucial role in promoting women's involvement in political leadership, both directly and indirectly. This highlights the marginalization of women within the wider historical context of Kenya.

Furthermore, Maathai and Likimani, share several similarities. One notable similarity is that both women deviated from the societal expectations of the 'typical' African woman. Likimani and Maathai faced opposition from the government and experienced a prolonged period of disfavor. Both of them displayed a radical approach while remaining committed to executing tasks that were advantageous to the Kenyan population. Both individuals ended their marriages, despite the prevailing societal belief in Africa that marriage is a significant achievement for women. This study exclusively examines the writings of Kenyan female authors and concludes that they are primarily focused on addressing the societal position of women. The novel's elements, including story, character, and point of view, contribute to the portrayal of the theme of women's empowerment in the texts.

The selected women exemplify the importance of being autonomous agents in their own lives, which is crucial for women's emancipation. The autonomy and accountability of women are vital in societies that impose restrictions and exert control over them. In Macgoye's 1986 novel *Coming to Birth*, Paulina's defiance of Mr. M's warning against purchasing food for the street children can be seen as a significant stride towards personal freedom. Macgoye (1986) asserts her

right to choose whom she purchases a cup of tea for and whom she discloses her name to, candidly expressing this sentiment to Mr. M (p. 139).

Hartsock (1987) argues that marginalized individuals seek the ability to define themselves, thereby asserting agency as historical subjects rather than passive objects. Paulina is asserting her agency in her case. In addition to the aforementioned topics, the study also examined how motherhood and the subversion of tradition can serve as avenues for women's emancipation. The chosen women writers strategically challenged inhibiting structures in their lives, asserting agency and promoting personal growth and development.

8.7 Recommendations

The texts analyzed in this study depict the oppressive conditions experienced by women and propose the potential for transformation through the development of women's self-awareness. The women writers discussed in this chapter examine the conceptualization and re-conceptualization of the female self, both explicitly and implicitly. The selected texts appear to be preoccupied with the question of personal identity. Self-identity is explored and defined through self-description and self-expression. The writers use an autobiographical mode to accurately portray women in their texts and create a sense of self in their protagonists.

The discourse of the chosen writers focuses on the subversion of patriarchy and the restoration of women's selfhood through giving voice to the female self. Her narrative perpetuates a harmful myth in the context of patriarchal gender dynamics that are reinforced in literary works. The issue of women's inclusion in decision-making processes is significant as it highlights the historical marginalization of women within patriarchal societies. Women have often been excluded from meaningful participation, and their perspectives have been undervalued.

Women artists serve as intermediaries between their own identities and the external world as they grapple with the challenge of asserting their personal autonomy. Women's literary representation encompasses a range of responses to women's self-definition and self-assertion. Women's writing is characterized by more than just being written by women. It is distinct because it gives women a voice and is influenced by the understanding that women's writing is different from men's writing.

There is a need to analyze how women's writers depict women's situations in various spheres: private, individual, public, and collective. This study examines the female selves portrayed by women writers, revealing a reciprocal connection between self and nation. The individual's actions are influenced by the self, leading writers to create literature that mirrors their nation. The authors have endeavored to challenge patriarchal ideology and promote the empowerment of women by depicting them as educated individuals pursuing careers outside of the domestic sphere.

The personal stories of the four women portrayed in this study—Muthoni Likimani, Marjorie Oludhe, Grace Ogot, and Wangari Maathai—deepen our knowledge of Kenyan women's experiences with electoral politics. The experiences of these four women highlight the political obstacles they faced, which can be attributed to factors such as patriarchal structures, ethnic politics, and a male-dominated political environment. These experiences reveal the interplay between their activism, public image, and political pursuits. These life stories illustrate significant moments and advancements in the history of Kenya. The lives of these individuals exemplify the intricate nature of African women's experiences in their pursuit of political roles. These life stories add to the limited literature on women in leadership in Africa.

The authors of this study aim to encourage women to reject the perception of themselves as an oppressed group in order to access social, economic, and political opportunities. The chosen Kenyan female writers have depicted the female identity by portraying women's lived experiences. These stories predominantly depict the personal experiences and observations of women writers in different facets of life.

This thesis partially contributes to the study of women's writing in Kenya by examining the development of female self and national identity in selected Kenyan women writers. Additional research can be conducted on lesser-known female writers from Kenya to explore their contributions to the formation of female identity and national consciousness. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to conduct comparative studies that analyze literary works authored by Kenyan male and female writers, specifically examining the interplay between the female individual and the concept of national identity.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Miss Tabitha Esther Kaburia (216076927)
School Of Education
Edgewood

Dear Miss Tabitha Esther Kaburia,

Protocol reference number: 00012726

Project title: Narrating the Nation: Conceptualization of Female Self and Identity by selected Post-colonial Kenyan Women Writers

Exemption from Ethics Review

In response to your application received on , your school has indicated that the protocol has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW.**

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited.

For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.

In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE:

Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Prof Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu
Academic Leader Research
School Of Education

APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

Barbara Mutula

Associate member

Membership number: MUT001

Membership year: March 2020 to February 2024

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19 July 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that the dissertation written by Tabitha Esther Kaburia titled **'Narrating the Nation: Conceptualization of Female Self and Identity by selected Post-colonial Kenyan Women Writers'** was copy edited for layout (including numbering, pagination, heading format, justification of figures and tables), grammar, spelling. punctuation and references by the undersigned. The document was subsequently proofread, and a number of additional corrections were advised.

The undersigned takes no responsibility for corrections/amendments not carried out by the student in the final copy submitted for examination purposes.

[redacted]

Mrs. Barbara L. Mutula-Kabange
Copy Editor, Proof reader
BEd (UBotswana), BSSc Hons Psychology (UKZN),
MEd Educational Psychology (UKZN)