# NATION, NARRATIVE AND GENDER: A READING OF SELECTED KENYAN WOMEN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

**BY**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS, FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND FILM STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE**

**MOI UNIVERSITY**

**2025**

# DECLARATION

**Declaration by the Candidate**

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# DEDICATION

To the Almighty God who grants all.

And in the words of Maya Angelou, "*You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them*," this thesis is dedicated to the resilience of the human spirit.

To the loving memory of my late parents William Ogaro Okondo and Hellen Bitutu Ogaro for their faith in me. How I would have loved that you witness your 'little girl's' achievement. May you keep resting easy. To my siblings whose unwavering source of support and inspiration I cannot quantify. To my husband Dr. Thomas Gisemba Onsarigo, whose love and encouragement sustained me through this journey. To my dear children Joy Bitutu, Joel Onsarigo and Jeanne Angel, who have been my motivation to excel in this endeavour.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge the Almighty God for giving me wisdom, endurance and knowledge on which path to take in this research. Secondly, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisors Prof. T. Michael Mboya and Dr. Samuel M. Ndogo who have shaped my academic path through their invaluable guidance in writing this thesis. To all members of the Department of Literature, Linguistics, Foreign Languages and Film Studies whom I may have interacted with during my studies, thank you. I will be forever grateful for your contribution to my academic growth.

My sincere appreciation also goes to my family for their sincere support in all ways. Special thanks to my husband Dr. Thomas Gisemba Onsarigo for his moral and emotional support. Our children Joy, Joel and Jeanne who forever wanted to know why their mother was not completing her studies. Your prayers and constant reminder kept me on toes. To my loving brothers Dr. Francis O. Ogaro and John Khank Ogaro who have supported my academic journey without giving up on me, your love and faith in me kept me going. You will forever hold a special place in my heart. Thank you. To the loving daughters of my mother: Agnes, Mary, Peris, Ruth and Rose, your belief in me worked out the magic.

Special thanks to my colleagues, classmates and friends who provided a collaborative and stimulating academic environment. More specifically, Dr Lily Salat with whom we walked the journey by encouraging each other to soldier on even when darkness engulfed our path. Thanks to Sammy Maina for proofreading this work and giving insightful comments.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my own endurance and dedication throughout this academic journey. Despite the numerous challenges, the experience has been incredibly rewarding.

## ABSTRACT

The importance of life writing, particularly autobiography, cannot be overstated in the exploration of personal narratives that are often intertwined with the collective consciousness of a nation. Personal experiences in these stories are connected to broader social, cultural and political contexts. Through this, writers reflect on individual experiences, constructing versions of personal as well as public histories. However, in the complexity of national narratives, the voices and stories of women have tended to be marginalized. This marginalization problematizes an inclusive and multifaceted narrative of a nation. As such, this study sets out to examine the significance of the Kenyan woman autobiography in narrating the nation. To achieve this the study inspects the alternative voices and perspectives of the nation provided in these autobiographical texts. These are: Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History,* Rasna Warah's *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self-Discovery*, Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing*, Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*, Grace Akinyi Ogot's *Days of My Life: An Autobiography,* Betty Gikonyo's *The Girl Who Dared to Dream,* Ruth Nabwala Otunga's *Little Seeds of Resilience: An Autobiography* and Phoebe Asiyo's *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks*. The study settles on these texts because of the ways in which personal stories of the respective writers intersect with the socio-political history of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Kenya. Notably, besides being public figures, the chosen writers seem to contend with a male dominated society. The specific objectives of the study are: to investigate the relationship between gender power relations and the woman's narration of the nation; to examine the relationship between the professional experiences of the woman autobiographer and her narration of the nation; and to analyze the vision of the nation that emerges from the Kenyan woman's autobiography. This study is based on two assumptions. First, the Kenyan woman autobiographer narrates the nation as she tells her personal story. Second, the Kenyan woman autobiographer brings her awareness of the historical and cultural subordinate position of the woman in the male-dominated Kenyan cultures; to influence the way she narrates the nation. Three theories are employed, namely theories of autobiography, gender, and nation, which are post-structuralist as well as postcolonial approaches. These theoretical standpoints are useful to the study because they entail narrative construction, discourse analysis and gender performance. In terms of methodology, the study adopts a qualitative approach, leveraging narrative and content analysis designs to analyze the selected texts critically and systematically. Informed by interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, this study views the narrative of the nation as socially constructed, prioritizing subjective interpretations, and understanding individuals' perspectives within societal contexts. The central argument in this study is that the Kenyan woman autobiographer has played a critical role in shaping the narrative of the nation and in challenging dominant discourses by amplifying women's voices. In conclusion, this study has established that the nation is not a monolithic or homogeneous entity but rather a collection of diverse and often conflicting narratives. Therefore, there is need for a more inclusive and equitable society whose vision is to embrace the complexity and diversity of the Kenyan experiences. These findings underscore the importance of further research into the dynamics of nation narration, dominant ideologies, and women writings.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| **A.D.** | *Anno Domino* |
| **AAWORD** | Association of African Women for Research & Development |
| **ACE II** | African Centres of Excellence II |
| **ACU** | Association for Commonwealth Universities |
| **B.C.** | Before Christ |
| **CEO** | Chief Executive Officer |
| **CKRC** | Constitution of Kenya Review Commission |
| **CODESRIA** | Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa |
| **COVID-19** | Coronavirus disease |
| **CPE** | Certificate of Primary Education |
| **CRC** | Constitution Review Committee |
| **DAAD** | German Academic Exchange Service |
| **EAHEQA** | East African Higher Education Quality Assurance |
| **HIV** | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| **ICT** | Information and Communication Technology |
| **IIEP** | International Institute for Educational Planning |
| **IUCEA** | Commission for University Education and Inter-University Council for East Africa |
| **IUPUI** | Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis |
| **KADU** | Kenya African Democratic Union |
| **KANU** | Kenya African National Union |
| **KBS** | Kenya Broadcasting Service |
| **KKM** | *Kiama Kia Muingi* (Kenya Land Freedom Army) |
| **LUANAR** | Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources |

| | |
|---|---|
| **M.A.** | Master of Arts |
| **M.B.S**. | Moran of the Order of the Burning Spear |
| **MBA** | Master of Business Administration |
| **MP** | Member of Parliament |
| **NCWK** | National Council of Women |
| **NHMB** | Nairobi Health Management Board |
| **NPCP** | National People's Convention Party |
| **OSSREA** | Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa |
| **PhD** | Doctor of Philosophy |
| **RUFORUM** | Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building |
| **S.S** | Silver Star |
| **SME** | Small and Medium-sized Enterprises |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNESCO** | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| **UN-Habitat** | Habitat United Nations Human Settlements Programme |
| **UNIFEM** | United Nations Development Fund for Women |
| **USA** | United States of America |
| **USAID** | United States Agency for International Development |
| **YWCA** | Young Women Christian Association |

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

*"All art is autobiographical. The pearl is the Oyster's autobiography"* ~ Federic Fellini (n.d).

*"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (I am because we are)* - Zulu Proverb ~ Mugumbate & Nyanguru (2013).

## 1.1 Background to the Study

The autobiography is a literary genre that explores personal experiences, connecting them to broader social, cultural and political contexts. Its writing entails the reconstruction of the movement of life or part of life in the actual circumstances and environment in which it is lived. Hence there is the interplay between the past and the present. Through autobiographical narratives, writers can reflect on their individual lives and experiences and construct their own versions of their personal histories and that of their society. Therefore, the genre of autobiography, the autobiographer (narrator) and her society are key in the exploration of the narrative of the Kenyan nation. Thus, the focus in this study is on the genre, specifically, the autobiography of the Kenyan woman which has enjoyed minimal critical attention in the literary world as compared to other literary genres.

The emergence of the autobiography can be traced back to the Enlightenment period that was also known as the Age of Reason. It is in this period that thinkers throughout Europe questioned the traditional authority and embraced the notion that humanity could be improved through rational change. Several books and essays were written and several inventions, scientific discoveries, laws, wars and revolutions took place. The period was also characterized by glorification of the self and emphasis on individual achievements that were evident in the desire for scientific innovations and people telling narratives of their philosophies or individual ideas. The autobiography can

therefore be said to be taking off from these characteristics of the Enlightenment period, an era in which individuals express themselves.

Considering this, the nature of the autobiography, its form and substance, has been discussed by many critics since the emergence of the genre. Much focus is on the question of the self in the autobiography in relation to the society of the writer. Many of these critics focus on what distinguishes the autobiography from other genres of literature while highlighting the various elements that define the genre.

In 'Poetics of Difference: A Study of Autobiographies by Men and Women in Indian Politics', Gohil (2008) notes that the term autobiography was coined towards the end of the eighteenth century. Three Greek words *auto-bio-graphia*, meaning "*self-life-writing*" were combined to describe a literature already existing under other names such as memoirs and confessions. However, Mukherjee (n.d) in "The History and Evolution of the Genre of Autobiography", notes that though the term autobiography was coined in the eighteenth century, the genre had been practiced from the hey-days of Greek Literature. For instance, in the 4$^{th}$ Century B.C, Plato wrote his autobiography in the form of letters. At the turn of the 5$^{th}$ Century A.D, St. Augustine wrote the Seventh Epistle in form of Confessions. Montaigne in the latter half of the 16$^{th}$ Century called the autobiography, Essays. W. P. Scargill published the first autobiography in the form of a self-identity narrative in 1834. It was titled *The Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister.*

In his definition of the autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his/her existence with focus on his/her individual life, Lejeune (1975) highlights four major elements of an autobiography: language is narrative and prose, subject is primarily individual life based on the story of personality, the author

and the narrator are identical and the identity of the narrator and the principal character that is assumed is marked by the first person; what Gennette (1980) calls 'autodiegetic' narration in his classification of narrative 'voices'. The narrator tells her existence within a given space and time based on her judgement and comprehension of her existence.

Georg Misch notes that although autobiographies are fundamentally personal narratives, they are bound to be representative of their period, within a great range that will vary with intensity of the authors' participation in contemporary life and with the sphere in which they moved (Smith & Watson, 2001). These observations guide the study in interrogating the narrative of the nation through the personal story of the Kenyan woman autobiographer in relation to gender, historical, social, cultural and professional experiences.

The autobiography is perceived by Olney (1980) as the writing in the life of the signifier as opposed to the life being signified on one hand and on the other hand as a writing of a mixture of truth and fiction. He argues that that an autobiography is often something considerably less than literature and that it is always something rather more than literature (p.24). Situating the genre in the literary tradition Gusdorf (1980, 2001) argues that an autobiography cannot be a pure and simple record of existence, as in an account book or a logbook. Hence, in the writing of an autobiography, the literary artistic function is of greater importance than the history or objective function. Therefore, this study repatriates the autobiography into the field of literary study though its links with other disciplines such as history is acknowledged. The creative element in autobiography which stems from mediations of memory, is noted by many scholars among them Smith and Watson (2001). This also accounts for its generic complexity

as the autobiographical form makes claims to factuality. Hutcheon (1991) argues that autobiography is not a straightforward genre, but rather a hybrid form that combines elements of fact and fiction. She explores the ways in which authors use narrative strategies such as metaphor, irony, and intertextuality to shape their life stories and the role that memory, imagination, and personal bias play in the construction of self-representation. This resonates with the argument that the autobiography is an amalgam of fact and fiction (Vambe, 2008). Therefore, interrogation of factual and fictional elements in the Kenyan woman autobiography is of focus as the study explores the relation that exists between the historical facts and 'facts' produced by fictional narration about the Kenyan nation. The contention here is that fiction cannot be limited to abstract creations that have no bearing on reality. Fiction has the critical capacity to apprehend cultural reality. The relations between the factual and the fictional are what give autobiography its distinct form. The autobiography is constructed both as factual where it reflects different experiences of the self and as fictional in presenting shifting notions of the nation through narrative strategies. Resonating with this is Berryman's (1999) argument that most scholarly opinions present the term autobiography as covering the many different accounts that authors make of their experiences.

One of the standards for reading autobiography is its supposed fidelity to historical truth. Bohr (1998), on the concept of history and the being of a nation argues that:

> "To create unified and distinctive nations and impact a sense of common destiny to their members, nation-builders unearth, appropriate and exploit the ethnosymbolic resources at their disposal (e.g. customs, toponyms and ethnonyms, heroes, myths, stateiconography)" (p.14).

Just like any other nation builder, autobiographers use their own experiences as testimony to the historical happenings in the times in which they live. They unearth, appropriate and exploit the ethnosymbolic resources at their disposal as a way of

narrating the being of a nation. However, the autobiography is different from history in its use of personal details. Disciplinary convention requires historians to be faithful to the evidence available on a subject and to seek out multiple sources of evidence, including personal narratives. Vansina (1985) points out the need for historians to corroborate information by archeological findings and linguistic evidence to ensure reliability. Discussing the use of oral traditions as sources of history, Vansina says, "... oral tradition can be of real value, but doubts must be entertained about it unless it can be substantiated by other historical sources" (p. 8). Excellence in writing history demands precise objectivity. Historians preserve this objectivity and the truthfulness it pledges by maintaining a distance from their material and removing or qualifying any reference to themselves in the narrative. This then distinguishes the autobiography from being historical as the narrator is part of the narrative told.

The study further examines ways in which the self can be viewed as a metaphor for the nation given the subjective rendition of experience that is entailed in the life-story. Metaphorically, the relationship between the individual and the nation is well captured in Mbiti's (1975) observation about society in which he says: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 23). In this regard, the autobiography, being a self-narrative, can be argued to be taking off from Mbiti's observation about the "I" and "we". In this case, the autobiographer's narrative about the self ultimately becomes the narrative of her society. Individual achievements as recorded by the autobiographer are for the society in which the individual exists. Her philosophy or self-drive is given impetus by societal expectations. This then means that the development and thriving of an autobiography is also critically situated within the culture of a specific society. This essentially means that "autobiography is not to be found outside our cultural area" (Gusdorf, 2001, p.29). This notion is a useful entry point to this study in understanding

the intersecting private/personal histories/experiences and public histories/experiences within an autobiography. Therefore, the autobiography serves as a powerful narrative that intertwines personal experiences with broader societal contexts, contributing to the collective imagination of a nation and its process of nation-building. This intersection of personal and public experiences within the autobiography plays a crucial role in shaping individual identities, understanding historical narratives, and fostering a sense of belonging within the larger community. The autobiography's existence in a particular culture is an important signifier of the dynamic processes of both individual and group conception in society. It is evidence of the movement from a strict communal conception of identity to a situation where the individual is placed at the centre of existence. In this sense, the autobiography reflects the level of progression from modes of collective identities in that society (nation). Hence, the autobiographer remains intrinsically part of society as she interacts with significant moments in the history of society. In turn, through her personal narrative, she humanizes these historical events hence providing insights into how individuals navigate and respond to larger societal happenings.

It is also within the nature of the autobiography to make demands of its own on the narrator, thus, complicating the authenticity of the claim to the self and reality. These innate contradictions characterize the autobiography as a "meta-narrative that critiques the process of narration and the implicit authority that events are endowed with through this act" (Levin & Taitz, 1999, p.163). The process by which facts and experiences are woven into a story also constitutes a political statement. For instance, Brockfield (2008) questions how much credence can be given to "an account of events written by the chief actor in those events" (p.97). Vambe (2008) further declares that the very language of autobiography is "not neutral but is politically contaminated such that it becomes a

polemical text serving a particular political agenda" (p. 186). An autobiography thus intrinsically defines itself through its contradictory claims that seek to distance it from the realms of fiction when in fact it is thoroughly implicated with it. Fiction reflects reality and, in so doing, also reflects and acts on it. It can be argued that the autobiographer deliberately chooses what to reveal, what to omit, and the manner in which to present it, all while maintaining an appearance of factual representation. In autobiography, certain experiences are often privileged over others, influenced by factors such as social status, cultural expectations, and historical contexts. These privileged experiences typically reflect dominant narratives within society and may overshadow or marginalize the experiences of other individuals.

In the context of women's autobiography, the privileging of certain experiences has significant implications for the representation and empowerment of women voices in the narrative of the nation. This argument resonates well with Wa Thiong'o (1981) who notes that all writing is political. He contends that writing is not a neutral or passive act but carries within it the power to shape perceptions, challenge existing systems, and influence social change. The role of the writer, therefore, is society. It is for the writer to select what she wants to communicate and, in the process, negate other aspects of her writing that she may not consider important. This process of selecting renders the autobiography fictional. Considering the unique capacity of the autobiography to blend selected individual experiences with broader national experiences, the genre offers a rich and multifaceted lens through which to explore the narration of a nation. It illuminates the complexities of national identity, memory, and belonging. By critically engaging with autobiographical texts, deeper insights into the diverse tapestry of human experiences that shape the collective imagination of a nation are achieved. This then

justifies the choice of the autobiographical genre as a literary text to explore the narration of a nation.

In defining the autobiography, Onega and Landa (2014) argue that the autobiography attains its nationalist elements from the very process of narrating the self selectively:

> "Any representation that involves a point of view, a selection, a perspective on the represented object, criteria of relevance, and arguably, an implicit theory of reality…the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way." (pp. 3-5).

This definition reveals that process involves imposing worldviews and the privilege of certain aspects of the narrator's experience at the expense of others. Further emphasis is on the "representation of a series of events", a fact that undermines any pretensions to truth as the definitive hallmark of the autobiographical narrative. The autobiographical narrative's inclination towards making oneself the ideologist of one's own life, through the selection of a few significant events with a view to elucidating an overall purpose, is a political act (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 300). The narrator exercises authority over the subject matter, scaffolding her own image, authorizing excisions, omissions, interpretations and presenting preferred views through the process of narration. This raises the question: How does the woman's self-narration become a narration of the nation?

In fiction, as symbolic narrative, we should search for the 'political unconscious' (Jameson, 1981). This suggests that what is political is not only the visible political, organized movements; not only the themes openly relating to power or powerlessness between social classes but rather, the narrative perspectives held by writers. Resonating with Jameson is Ngugi's (1991) argument that literature is deeply intertwined with the political landscape of society, reflecting and perpetuating the power dynamics,

ideologies and struggles that exist. Hence language itself is political. The choice of language used in writing can either reinforce or subvert dominant power structures. Taking off from these arguments by Jameson and Ngugi, being a form of self-writing, the autobiography is authorized from a certain perspective; it is given power to speak for or as the author. Its themes and form are a reminder that writers carry a profound responsibility to engage with political issues, advocate for justice and use their creative platforms to contribute to positive social change. Therefore, the interrogation of the selected texts provides contestatory narratives about the nation that are authored from a gendered perspective.

While observing the differences between autobiographies written by men and women, Boynton and Malin (2005) argue that unlike men who presume an "authoritative stance" in a patriarchal society, women autobiographers must seek and/or challenge such authority to ensure that their stories are heard. They note that women's autobiographies pose a challenge when compared to male autobiographies. The women approaches are characterized by being oblique, open-minded, subdued and ruminative, introverted rather than self-aggrandizing, collective rather than solitary, fragmented rather than totalizing, reflective rather than progressive. Sharing similar sentiments with Morgan (1999), Boynton and Malin are asserting the fact that the woman autobiographer must convince her reader that she is neither a stereotype victim nor a fallen being by stressing her kinship with her male counterparts. Basing on this observation, I argue that the Kenyan woman autobiographer acknowledges her being within the patriarchal setting and realizes that the prescriptions by the patriarchal order have impacted on her story of the nation.

Narrating the nation from a woman's perspective, therefore, is problematic since the autobiographical form is historically shaped by masculine narrative conventions that privilege linear heroic journeys, public achievements, and an autonomous "I," all of which marginalize women's relational, domestic, and often cyclical experiences. As Kenyan women autobiographers attempt to inscribe themselves into national history, they confront tensions between the nation's public, progressive temporal logic and their own lived realities, which are shaped by caregiving roles, cultural expectations of silence, and limited access to public spaces. The private–public divide further weakens their narrative authority, forcing them either to downplay gendered experiences or overcompensate through maternal or domestic metaphors of nationalism. These constraints produce gaps, narrative evasions, and an unstable narrative persona that must constantly negotiate between being a woman and being a national subject. Ultimately, the genre's masculinist structure and the gendered erasure in official national memory expose the limitations of autobiography in accommodating women's modes of experiencing and narrating the nation.

The Kenyan woman autobiographer's experiences and contribution to the narrative of the Kenyan nation cannot be told independent of the history of the Kenyan nation. Kenya gained independence from Britain in 1963 following intense military and diplomatic struggles (Ranger, 2005). The birth of the Kenyan nation was accompanied by conscious political and cultural efforts to consolidate its existence. On the cultural front, there was the need to consolidate that independence through rewriting the history of the liberation struggle and the nation. This was in the wake of the attempt by colonialists to denigrate existence of any history or culture of the Kenyan people. The relative position of women in the writing of this history is evident in their contributions to myths of the nation like Mau Mau and the miscarriage of 'Uhuru'. The activities

surrounding these myths affected them in one way or another, thus they also have their story to tell in relation to the men whose story is largely told through the history of the nation.

The women's movement in Kenya and East Africa has gone very far in fighting for the rights of women, particularly in the areas of representation, land rights, property inheritance, leadership and gender-based violence (Kabira, 2012). Kabira further notes that women writers and story tellers have explored the feelings, the alienation experience, the struggle not to be that other, the efforts to be what society expects of them while denying them of who they are. They also present the struggle to understand the world around women, to define the self, to see oneself through own eyes rather than those of the other. On this basis, this study explores how the Kenyan woman autobiographer, through her struggles within a patriarchal society, emerges with double consciousness - the self as the culturally defined and the self that is different from what culture prescribes, to tell the story of the nation.

Following Ochieng (2005), the chosen autobiographies in this study are examined from the view that it is possible to write history using two perspectives. First is from the perspective of great famous people in society with the stories comprising mostly of the deeds and ideas of great men. This argument brings into the study the gendered perspective of biographies and autobiographies. Comparatively, the autobiographers selected for this study have gained the position of greatness in their societies through their deeds. Their achievements have been against all odds within a patriarchal setting. For instance, these women have successfully participated and contributed to the politics, academy and professional disciplines that are largely a male preserve as evident in their narratives. They have defied the social cultural place of the woman and

dared into the social culturally prescribed man's space. Second, is that history can be written from the perspective of common men. In a patriarchal society, women are common beings and worse alienated from even the common man for the simple reason that men are the decision makers. When the common man tells the history of a nation, then he has disrupted the dominant view of the great men. This also applies for the woman. Cognizant of this, the woman then faces double alienation of her role in telling the history of a nation, as a commoner and a woman. Ironically, even if the African woman experiences more than this double alienation, she is part of the 'sole movers of history'.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The importance of life writing, particularly autobiography, cannot be overstated in the exploration of personal narratives that are often intertwined with the collective consciousness of a nation. Personal experiences in these stories are connected to broader social, cultural and political contexts. Through this, writers reflect on individual experiences, constructing versions of personal as well as public histories. However, in the complexity of national narratives, the voices and stories of women have tended to be marginalized. This marginalization problematizes an inclusive and multifaceted narrative of a nation. As such, this study sets out to explore the significance of the Kenyan woman autobiography in narrating the nation. To achieve this the study inspects the alternative voices and perspectives of the nation provided in these autobiographical texts. These are: Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* (1998), Rasna Warah's *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self-Discovery* (1998), Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story* (2006), Grace Akinyi Ogot's *Days of My Life: An Autobiography* (2012), Betty Gikonyo's *The Girl Who Dared to Dream* (2013), Ruth

Nabwala Otunga's *Little Seeds of Resilience: An Autobiography* (2015) and Phoebe Asiyo's *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks* (2018). The interrogation assumes that nationalist narratives are constructed based on gender based on national agency and citizenship, which are assumed to be masculine prerogatives defined in contrast to femininity. Therefore, the study seeks to appreciate how the woman autobiographer utilizes narrative strategies to recount her experiences and contribute to the construction of national consciousness. Additionally, it investigates the intersection between gender and nation, exploring how the autobiographer navigates her personal/private history alongside those of the public to narrate the nation. As such, the study takes a comparative approach to identify both unique and common thematic and stylistic elements across the selected texts, with a focus on the ways in which the autobiographers depict gender and nation construction.

### 1.3 Objectives

This study has one general objective, that is, to interrogate how the Kenyan woman autobiographer narrates the nation through her personal and public experiences.

This objective is broken down into specific objectives, viz:

i) To analyze the woman's narration of the nation through gender power relations as defined by culture in the Kenyan woman's autobiography.

ii) To examine the relationship between the professional experiences of the Kenyan woman autobiographer and her narration of the nation.

iii) To analyze the vision(s) of the nation that manifest from the selected Kenyan women autobiographers.

## 1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study sets out to answer the following questions:

The general question is: How does the Kenyan woman autobiographer narrate the nation through the intertwining of her personal and public experiences?

The specific research questions are:

i. What role do gender power relations, as defined by cultural norms and expectations, play in shaping the Kenyan woman's narration of the nation within her autobiography?

ii. How do the professional experiences of the Kenyan woman autobiographer influence her narration of the nation, and what insights do these narratives offer into the intersection of personal career trajectories with broader socio-political contexts?

iii. What is/are the diverse vision(s) of the nation that emerge from the autobiographical narratives of the selected texts, and how do these visions reflect individual perspectives, historical contexts and cultural influences?

## 1.5 Research Assumption

This study is based on two assumptions. The first is that as she tells her personal story and that of her society, the Kenyan woman autobiographer also narrates the story of the Kenyan nation. The second assumption is that the Kenyan woman autobiographer brings her awareness of the historical and cultural subordinate position of the woman in the male dominant Kenyan cultures to bear on her narrative of the Kenyan nation.

### 1.6 Justification of the Study

The choice of autobiography as the unit of literary analysis for the narration of the nation enables the exploration of the complexities of genre that is supposedly factual but at the same time utilizes fictional elements. It enquires into how the individual deconstructs and invents the nation by linking personal histories (stories) with the 'grand narrative' of her society – nation - through a genre that poses problematic issues of self-reference, circumstance and fiction. Through this, therefore, this work contributes to other studies on the autobiographical genre.

Tabrez (2016) argues that Literature transcends gender. However, the woman writer's personal experiences influence what she selects to write and how she perceives it. The art of selection is quite central in the study of autobiography. It is this art of selection and perception that contributes to the genre's literariness. In this regard, this study contributes not only to autobiographical studies, but also to gender studies while appreciating the diversity of women writings.

The women in the selected texts deconstruct and construct the narration of the nation through the lens of their unique cultural and individual experiences. Their journey from childhood to adulthood becomes their space for the narration of their world. Their differentiation of gender by society gives them a voice of reason. This study, therefore, contributes to the discourses of the Kenyan nation as it focuses on the woman's vision of the Kenyan nation through personal experiences and gender power relations. It further sheds light on the understanding of the woman's role in the socio-political history of the nation through gender, cultural orientations and professional experiences.

By narrating the nation, the Kenyan woman's autobiographer sheds light on a historically marginalized and underrepresented group of writers. Women's voices and

experiences have been largely excluded from mainstream literary and cultural narratives in Kenya and other parts of the world. By focusing on the works of eight Kenyan women writers, the study challenges this trend of dominant discourses and highlights the important contributions these writers have made to the country's literary and cultural history.

### 1.7 Significance

This study makes a valuable contribution to literature and gender studies by expanding scholarly understanding of how autobiography can operate as a gendered site of national narration. Through its focus on Kenyan women's autobiographical writing, the study enriches gendered readings of the national narrative, showing how women's experiences, perspectives, and narrative strategies challenge and diversify dominant, male-centered accounts of nationhood. By foregrounding women's voices, it adds to the growing body of Kenyan literature that recognizes female subjectivity as central to cultural and historical discourse. Moreover, the study informs broader debates on gender, identity, and nation by demonstrating how women use life writing not only to articulate personal trajectories but also to intervene in collective memory and national imagination, thus positioning autobiography as a critical space for rethinking gendered citizenship and national belonging.

### 1.8 Scope and Delimitations

This study is a close critical analysis of eight autobiographies written in a span of twenty years. It examines narration of the nation in these selected autobiographies within the context of Kenya. Autobiographies by women from outside Kenya and narratives of nations other than Kenya are not included in this scope.

While appreciating that literature is not created in a vacuum, the first reason for this selection of the texts is the diversity of the cultural backgrounds and professional experiences of the autobiographers. The selected autobiographies are by authors from four former geographical and administrative regions in the Kenyan state: Nyanza, Central, Nairobi and Western provinces. They also hail from different Kenyan ethnic groups while one is of Asian origin. This is important as these regions become a representation of the diversity of Kenya in terms of regions and communities therein.

The second reason for the selection of the eight autobiographies is that the autobiographers have succeeded in professions that were initially dominated by men: medicine, politics, journalism and scholarship/academia. As a result, they have contributed to the development of their society/nation through their various professional fields. This has given them an edge to be recognized as public figures in Kenya and the world at large. This point is important because it indicates the level of these women's engagement with patriarchal structures – an aspect that this study takes to be a potentially important factor in their narration of the Kenyan nation.

This study does not focus on all Kenyan women autobiographies but rather on the selected eight. The analysis of the narration of the nation is based on these set of texts with the assumption that their experiences and perspectives represent that of the Kenyan woman autobiographer although not in entirety.

Cognizant of the fact that some of the autobiographers under study are alive and could be available for interrogation on their writing, the study delimits itself to the written form as denoted by the term autobiography. It is within this form that textual analysis that involves intrinsic reading of the selected autobiographies and extrinsic reading of secondary texts is done.

Aware that some of the selected writers have written other literary works, the study delimits itself to their autobiographies. This is because this study identifies the autobiography as the most suitable genre through which the nation is narrated. It is the genre in which the writer is both the narrator and the subject of the story. Cognizant of the fact that the autobiographer tells her own story as a way of asserting self-identity, the study does not explore this but rather investigates on how through her self-narration, she tells the story of her society (nation). Therefore, being the subject and object of narration, she is in a vantage position to clearly present her experiences and how they impact on her narration of the nation.

Since the autobiography is the space where notions of nation are contested by the woman autobiographer and considering that the critical inquiry in this study is centred on the Kenyan woman autobiography and the narration of the nation, the study is therefore conceptualized within the confines of autobiographical, nation and gender theories which are post-structuralist as well as postcolonial approaches. Even though autobiographies are personal narratives, the study focuses on the discourses of the nation as guided by the selected theories and not the individual.

### 1.9 Literature Review

In the review of related literature, the study focuses on various research carried out on autobiography in relation to gender power relations, personal experiences and the vision of the writers. Most of the studies carried out on the genre of autobiography mostly focus on the men's autobiography. However, some research has also been done on the Kenyan woman's autobiography with much focus on the concept of self-identity. This work builds upon these studies while taking particular focus on the narrative of the nation through the "I" voice of the Kenyan woman autobiography.

### 1.9.1 Autobiography and Gender

Vickers (2013) outlines a comparative approach and framework for studying 'gender diversity' in nations, nationalist movements and discourses and nation-state-making. He notes that women in many cases were not involved in active nationalism movements because of aspects of their lives like vulnerability to death in childbirth and their reproductive freedom. With time, for instance in Canada, there was a realization by nationalist elites that they had to mobilize whole communities for the nation to gain independence. In recruiting nation builders, women became active participants in nation building as teachers, nurses, missionaries and magistrates (Vickers, 2000). In this way, women influence the nature of state-led nationalism. In Kenya, women have been sidelined on issues of nationalism by the patriarchal structure that exists. Women are considered as participants in the private realm of the home while nationalism is public. However, as evident in the selected texts, there are women who have forged their way into the public sphere in various ways for instance through politics, education and professionalism. Evidently, as they tell their story, they narrate the role of women in national construction. Therefore, Vickers' ideas benefit this study in as far as it points out the challenges that lead to isolation and the avenues that lead to the inclusion of women in nation building.

Dodd (1986) observes that the point of closure of male autobiographies is conventionally the subject's achievement of vocation. In these autobiographies, emphasis is on coherent self overtime and on the singularity of the individual life. This contrasts with women autobiographies, especially those from Britain and the United States, whose mode of the self are less individualistic, relational and group based. The theme of accomplishment rarely dominates. Instead, self-disclosure and the recognition of achievements are usually linked to some higher cause, family role, public purpose or

personal ideal. In this study, I read into how these male female differences are played out in the Kenyan woman's autobiography as a springboard to the construction of the story of the nation. At the same time, I explore on how the woman autobiographer's association with the other help her to narrate the self and her society.

Barbara (1997), as quoted in Smith and Watson (1998), argues that the problem of female autobiographers is on one hand to resist the pressure of masculine autobiography as the literary genre available for her enterprise, and, on the other, to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female idea which is largely a fantasy of the masculine and not feminine. Johnson reads women's narratives as a separate genre as a means of reclaiming women's lives and voices and ending their state of otherness. With these ideas in mind, the present study reads the woman's autobiography as an alternative means of retelling the story of the nation against the backdrop of a patriarchal society.

Rytkonen (2001) advocates that the main plot in the autobiographical text is the author's development from a woman in the patriarchy to an independent emancipated personality. Questions concerning womanhood and female sexuality are important constituents in her story: the educational motif (to give an example for other women) is explicitly articulated through her openness of her experiences. She notes that each of the Russian women autobiographies that she studied presented different strategies, aims and purposes in writing about a woman's life. Despite their different approaches, they present symbolic meaning of 'woman' and 'femininity' that is based on the society's gender system. Taking off from Rytkonen's argument, this study set out to interrogate how the Kenyan woman autobiographer captures the construction of the woman by her society. It further seeks to establish how this construction impacts on her narrative of the nation.

Abu-Lughod (1993), delves into the lives and experiences of Bedouin women in the Western Desert of Egypt. Through a combination of narrative storytelling and rigorous anthropological analysis, Abu-Lughod offers a nuanced portrayal of Bedouin women's agency, resilience, and cultural practices within the context of broader social transformations. Abu-Lughod challenges prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions about Bedouin women as passive victims of patriarchy or tradition. Instead, she portrays them as active agents who navigate and negotiate within the constraints of their social, economic, and political environments. Through engaging anecdotes and personal testimonies, Abu-Lughod highlights the diverse roles that Bedouin women play as mothers, daughters, wives, and community leaders hence challenging monolithic representations of their identities and experiences. She further notes the importance of storytelling and oral tradition in shaping Bedouin women's sense of identity and belonging. Abu-Lughod demonstrates how women use narrative as a means of preserving cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge, and asserting their own perspectives within male-dominated spaces. Through storytelling, women carve out spaces of resistance and resilience, challenging dominant narratives and asserting their own agency in the process. Abu-Lughod's study lays a good basis for the current study that explores how cultural norms and expectations play in shaping the Kenyan woman's narration of the nation within her autobiography. The importance of the oral tradition and storytelling, and the public and domestic role of the Bedouin women resonate well with the shared experiences by the narrators in the Kenyan woman autobiography as they attempt to tell the story of the Kenyan nation.

Kabira (2012) argues that African women have travelled with men for hundreds of years fighting slavery, racism, colonialism and other forms of oppression. Together with men, these African women have struggled to redefine themselves as nations and

communities. Kabira reflects on stories by the African woman and about African women. She bases her reflections on Doreen in the novel *Parched Earth* by Elieshi Lema, the story of Akinyi which is a testimony of a young "old" woman of 24 years, the story of an 80-year-old Maasai woman and the story of 70-year-old Wanjiru wa Kaguru. Building on Kabira's argument, I explore the Kenyan woman autobiographer's participation in the struggles against colonialism and other forms of oppression while amid the 'other' in the reinvention and narration of the nation. In this study, examination is on how the narrator, who is the subject and object of narration, tells her story of the nation.

Muchiri (2013) explores McOdongo's journey in search of her personal identity; how she uses the autobiography as a strategy through which she investigates her life experiences and defines herself over time. According to Muchiri, McOdongo writes with an external audience in mind, hence finding it necessary to issue a warning to the reading public through the title of her narrative. Muchiri notes that this is the only autobiography about crime written by a Kenyan woman. Through her story and stories of other female inmates which she narrates, McOdongo gives a new perspective of women as criminals. In her reading, Muchiri compares this with the long-time tradition of autobiographical writing in Kenya where criminal autobiographies have been the preserve of males with the women appearing as either victims or innocent beneficiaries of criminals' loot. Just like any other socio-cultural practice shared by people, crime is a social evil that affects the community. As Muchiri observes, McOdongo uses personal testimony to gain her sense of being and her place in society while cautioning the public against crime. Taking off from Muchiri's observation on the importance of personal testimony, this study analyses how the woman autobiographer uses her personal experiences and testimonies as a means of constructing the narrative of the nation. This

study has its focus on women experiences and perspectives that inform their construction of the nation.

Muchiri (2010) focuses on the autobiographical voice and how the woman gives herself identity within her writing through the first-person narrative voice. She further indicates that the autobiography is the most appropriate form of women's self-expression as it enables them to narrate their stories in their own voices and to highlight social concerns from a domestic and personalized perspective. She observes that the field of autobiography in independent Kenya has witnessed the publication of many autobiographies by men in comparison to those by women. While there has been an increased interest in autobiographical studies by literary scholars, the Kenyan female autobiographer has been largely unexplored, yet this specialty is crucial to the understanding of autobiographical writing. She argues that most of the women autobiographies discuss and highlight social concerns from a domestic and personalized perspective. This in turn functions as a tool for women's self-exploration and self-definition. The voice of the woman autobiographer, as argued by Muchiri, forms the basis for this study as the narrative of the nation through her historical, political and socio-cultural experiences offer an alternative perspective on the construction of the nation from a feminine standpoint.

Ebila (2015) discusses how Wangari Maathai's life experiences offer an opportunity for discussing the contradictions surrounding the perception, place and identity of women in African nationhood. Against the backdrop of gendered nationalism which glorifies the role and place of women in the construction of nations, the article presents a different reality of how some male leaders of postcolonial nation states like Kenya silence the voices of women politicians by urging them to behave like 'proper women'.

The article indicates that Maathai's autobiography demonstrates that the social construction of womanhood in African politics is influenced by socio-cultural and patriarchal ideologies that construct the ideal African woman as the docile one, the one who does not question male authority. Maathai's autobiography becomes a lens that can be used to view and question the social construction of womanhood versus manhood. It further highlights the gender power relations as depicted in the women's participation in politics of the postcolonial nation states in Africa. In this context I read the selected Kenyan women autobiographies as a means through which women contest the roles assigned to them by the male dominated ideologies regarding nation construction; how the selected Kenya women autobiographies provide a means for retelling the story of the nation. The question that then arises is: How have the women (as evident in the selected autobiographies) contested patriarchy in their agitation for inclusivity and gender equality in their narrative of the nation?

### 1.9.2 Autobiography and Personal Experiences

Marshall and Mayhead (2008) argue that women autobiographers: Barbra Jordan, Patricia Schroeder, Geradine Ferraro, Elizabet Dole, Wilma Mankiller, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Madeleine Alberight and Christine Todd Whitman, represent the diversity that permeates the cultural backgrounds, life adventures and ideologies women bring to the political table. From differences in race, class, and geographical location, to variations in personal and family experiences, religious beliefs and political ideology, these women illustrate many of the divergent standpoints from which women craft their lives in the United States. Taking off from the ideas by Marshall and Mayhead, I examine the Kenyan woman autobiographer's experiences in the selected texts as a site for the narration and construction of the nation.

Vickers (2013) observes that the experiences of women who are differently located because of their race, class, ethnicity or sex minority status often vary, and so do their views of nationalism. The autobiographies under study are by different women authors whose socio-cultural and professional experiences are diverse. This diversity in experience is examined against the autobiographer's narration of the nation.

Alabi (2005) notes that there are certain recurring as well as changing features in autobiographies from these geographical regions, for instance the motif of resistance and community. At the same time, there are differences, especially in terms of their approaches to gender and language. Alabi's perspective is appropriate in reading the autobiographers under this study because the authors come from different geographical regions and professional backgrounds despite their common gender that gives the same experience within a patriarchal society.

Abdel-Maksoud (2012) observes that black women's autobiographical writing in America has been shaped by a rich literary inheritance that is rooted in both written models and African American oral tradition. They tell their stories through the spiritual narrative and bear witness to traditions of protest, work songs and blues. They are cognizant of the Anglo-European aesthetics and linguistic models rich in variations of diverse creolized origin. All these are informed by their slavery experience. She notes that the women writers tended to use the autobiography and slave narratives as a method of resistance. Abdel-Maksoud's observation relates well to this study as the Kenyan woman autobiographer's social, cultural and professional experiences are examined in relation to their role in the narration and construction of the nation. The Kenyan woman's autobiography can be read as a means of asserting her side of the story of the nation as she illuminates her experiences.

Ndogo (2016) cites writers who represent the self and nationhood in Kenya (through their social and political worlds) - Odinga (1967), wa Thiong'o (1981), Maathai (2006), Ogot (2003) - with specific focus on how memory is utilized, not merely as a tool for remembering the past but also as a narrative strategy and trope. In his study, he examines the construction of a nation and consequently the extent to which this is used in interrogating or even inventing Kenyan nationhood. He further points out that in diverse ways, these writers engage with the "official" history or the grand narrative of the nation by intertwining personal experiences with national stories. Further, he observes that these narratives not only deconstruct that history but also invent versions of self by inserting personal histories in the grand narrative of the post-independent Kenya. On this premise, this study investigates the way the woman superimposes her personal stories on those of the Kenyan nation by relating to her personal experiences. Ndogo further examines the autobiographical narration of the self and nation. He carries out a comparative study with focus on selected male and female autobiographers - Odinga, Ogot, Ngugi and Maathai -to assess how heroism and iconography can be used to mediate the contested space of nationhood. He discusses how each of these writers constructs himself/herself and the nation through memory within his/her social political arena. Ndogo's study is closely related to this study about the narrative construction of the nation. However, this study specifically focuses on the Kenyan woman autobiography and her perception and perspective of the of the nation.

Ochieng' (2005) evaluates the relevance and contribution of selected biographies and autobiographies to Kenyan history. He investigates 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 majorly focuses on Kenyan men biographies that are quite rich

in historical knowledge including Harry Thuku, J. M. Kariuki, Tom Mboya, Oginga Odinga and Bildad Kaggia. In this work, he views autobiographies as sources of history. His views lay ground for this study since as noted earlier, one of the standards for the reading of autobiography is its supposed fidelity to historical truth. In the autobiographies under study, does the woman narrator exhibit enough knowledge on the history of the nation like those mentioned by Ochieng'?

Kamau (2006) uses the deconstructive approach to analyze Camara Laye's *The African Child,* Mugo Gatheru's *Child of Two Worlds* and Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* in his critical study to the African autobiography. He links colonial circumstances which led to the growth of autobiographical writing in Africa with available oral literature resources such as narrative traditions. In his study, he looks at the structural and sociological design of the African autobiography through the issues: How life becomes a story, (Re) creating the self and others and multiplicity of narratives and meaning in autobiography. It is in this multiplicity of narratives within an autobiography that the nation is narrated. This study's focus is on how Kenyan women autobiographical writers use their self-writings to narrate the nation.

Nyandoro (2014) carries out investigation of self-identity in selected Kenyan autobiographies in which he establishes that the author of autobiography has the intention of constructing the self. The autobiographer narrates, stages and emerges as a transcendental collective identity within historically given identity. This transition from self-identity to collective identity is achieved when the autobiographer consciously selects one of the multiple and self-identities as the organizing principle upon which s/he can employ her/his autobiography. This argument benefits this study as the aspect of self-construction transcends collective identity which is historically given through

civil nationalism. This study benefits from Nyandoro's argument on the role of the construction of self-identity since it is through the self that the story of the nation is told.

Muchiri (2014) argues that autobiographers take advantage of poetic license to manipulate their narratives and produce accounts that either endorse or challenge official or state history. In the process, they create their own silences and publicize their own preferred histories. They retell the history of the nation only insofar as it relates to their personal lives and enables them to project themselves positively. She cites Rosemary Kariuki-Machua's *I am My Father's Daughter* (2008) and adds to the narrative of the history of a Kenyan government that betrayed its citizens. Kariuki-Machua narrates her difficult journey in search of the truth about her father's (J. M. Kariuki) death and justice for the family of the slain politician. The study attempts to transcend these narrations of self and history to explore the views and role of women autobiographers in the politics of the nation.

### 1.9.3 Autobiography and the Vision(s) of the Nation

Boehmer (2005), in analysing the hero's story through reading of male leader's autobiography, argues that nationalist values are enacted in the life-story of the leader who is figured in that story as the pre-eminent and most notable member of the nation. In turn, the achievement of national selfhood and independence acts to bestow pre-eminence upon him. In life-story, the leader's birth represents one of the modern origins of the new nation. His dedication and personal suffering in the national cause connect with the people's struggle while their pain and efforts reciprocally amplify and explain his own. Taking off from his argument, I explore how the woman's life experiences in the selected autobiographies impact on her vision(s) of the Kenyan nation.

Chapman (2011) argues that Mandela's autobiographical text signals a triumph of humanity over inhumanity and vindicates Mandela's arduous commitment to ideals of hope and freedom (which is the vision of the autobiographer). Even though Chapman's study is on a male autobiography, it benefits this study as far as it appreciates the autobiographers' role in visioning of a nation.

According to Buuck (1997), the history of the autobiographical form in African writing, in many ways, parallels concurrent development of nationalism in Africa. He links the development of nationalism in Africa with the textual interpretation of nation. The narrative and the nation exist contemporaneously. He implicates subjects in colonial and post-colonial situations in their effort to reconstruct their dismembered memories through the years of colonial subjugation. In his study, Buuck acknowledges the role of the autobiography in narrating the rise of African nationalism. Similarly, this study, examines the Kenyan woman autobiographer's use of the generic form to envision the nation.

Kaplan (2003) argues that literature and media can serve as a platform for expressing the collective trauma and national vision of a society. She explores how themes such as national identity, social justice, cultural diversity, and economic development are represented in literary works that deal with traumatic historical events. Through close reading of literary texts, Kaplan shows how authors use strategies to express a vision of their nation and its future. Kaplan's argument becomes particularly useful to this study as it connects literary themes to the expression of national vision. However, this study goes beyond the thematic concerns to explore how the autobiography fits into literariness and the perspective of narration that the woman autobiographer employs in narrating the vision of the nation.

In his work, *Mediated Plot in the Construct of the Theme of Struggle in Nelson Mandela's Autobiography, 'Long Walk to Freedom'*, Omuteche (2004) argues that the aesthetic value of the autobiography is essentially due to the author's deliberate use of premediated artistic techniques that interpret and shape the subject and subvert linearity of the fabula. To effectively communicate the major theme of the struggle for freedom, techniques of shifting point of view to accommodate the views of a greater spectrum of participants in the struggle including the oppressed are utilized. The autobiographer utilizes intensification techniques including description and exemplification to interpret and illustrate the action of the struggle. These techniques serve as the channel for the vision that the author has in mind - the struggle for freedom. The aesthetic appeal and the patterned, cohesive wholeness of the story of autobiography is largely provided by the mediated choices that inform the construction of the plot. I examine this aesthetic appeal in the present study as a channel for the vision of the nation by the woman autobiographer.

### 1.10 Narrative Strategies: An Autobiographical View

According to Zubenko (2021), a narrative strategy is an action plan that allows organizing of a sequence of steps to achieve a set goal. It influences the communicative situation using narrative, for instance, in plot narrative utterances. In this case, an individual chooses the means to convey his/her experiences and impressions. This choosing is reflected in the form of stories that give meaning to an individual's life and relationships. Narrative relations consist in "the movement from the reproducing consciousness to the perceiving consciousness and the further transformation of the perceiving consciousness into a renewed reproducing consciousness" (Iovva, 2018, p. 127). Therefore, the argument is that narrative strategies are techniques that writers use creatively to craft captivating and meaningful literary works. Depending on the chosen

approach, a story can take on various forms, evoke different emotions, and resonate with readers in unique ways. The autobiographies, being firsthand accounts of a person's life, employ various narrative strategies to present their experiences and perspectives. For instance, linear narratives follow a chronological order, presenting events in the order they occurred in the author's life. This approach provides a clear and coherent account of the author's journey. In reflective narration, authors use introspective and reflective passages to offer deeper insights into their thoughts, emotions, and personal growth. Autobiographers frequently reflect on their moral struggles, personal experiments, and evolving beliefs throughout their life. Thematically, autobiographies are structured around specific themes or key events, allowing the authors to explore their life through a particular lens. Often, autobiographers incorporate flashbacks and anecdotes to provide context or emphasize memories. Through this, autobiographical narrators recount significant events that have shaped their lives and their society. Most autobiographies adopt an episodic structure, presenting the author's life as a series of distinct episodes or vignettes. They present a series of episodes that capture pivotal moments in their life that may have informed specific transformations. Autobiographers tend to incorporate excerpts from their diaries or personal letters to provide authenticity and intimacy. Multiple perspectives are employed by autobiographers as they acknowledge the influence and/or significance of others in their life. They intertwine their personal journey with insights from their family members, friends and mentors. Their character development shows how the author's personality and beliefs evolve over time. They trace their growth from childhood to becoming iconic members of their society.

The selected texts have employed these narrative strategies to authenticate the portrayal of the author's life journey and that of her society. It is evident that through careful

selection of an approach that aligns with her story, the Kenyan woman autobiographer tells the story of the nation by providing valuable insights into her unique experiences and perspectives.

### 1.11 Theoretical Framework

This study employs an eclectic approach by bringing on board three theories namely theories of autobiography, gender and nation, which are post-structuralist as well as postcolonial approaches. Specifically, these theoretical standpoints are useful to the study because they entail narrative construction, discourse analysis and gender performance. These approaches guide the analysis and illuminate our understanding of the narrative of the nation in the selected texts by Otieno, Warah, Likimani, Maathai, Ogot, Gikonyo, Otunga and Asiyo.

Considering that the autobiography is a space where the narrative of the nation is contested, criticisms on autobiographical writings majorly govern this study. Several approaches to studying autobiography stem from its intricate nature, unresolved definitional issues, and other notable concerns. In this study, I draw from scholars and critics of the autobiographical genre who contribute diverse perspectives: Frye (1957, 1990, 2000), Jelinek (1980), Mason (1980), and Stanley (1990) delve into narrative and discourse analysis, focusing on structural and interpretive aspects. Lejeune (1975) emphasizes autobiography and textual analysis; Renza (1977) and Gusdorf (1980, 2001) explore the genre's theoretical implications, while Olney (2014) concentrates on the practice of autobiographical writing. Additionally, Herman (1995), Smith (1987), Smith and Watson (1992, 1998, 2001, 2010) investigate narrative and memory theory, emphasizing textual analysis and meaning construction. Despite their differences, all these approaches share a central focus on understanding the nature of autobiography

Anchoring the study on these ideas, I read into the complexity of self referentiality of the autobiography that the autobiographer metaphorically employs in narrating the self as a symbol of the nation. In understanding this complexity, Renza (1977), raises questions that are of relevance in this study: Is the autobiography an indeterminate mixture of truth and fiction? Is it based essentially on fact rather than self-invention? Is it a full-fledged "literary" event whose primary being resides in and through the writing itself- in the 'life' of the signifier as opposed to the life signified? In giving the nature and development of the autobiographical genre, various critics have addressed these queries.

Drawing on the ideas of memory theory whose focus is the construction, interpretation and representation of past experiences from the present, Smith and Watson (2010) argue that the autobiographer narrates what she knows best. As the teller of her own story, she becomes the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation. Autobiographers present autobiographical accounts through remembering historical moments ranging from childhood to adulthood experiences. Life narrative becomes a moving target, a shifting self-referential practice that, in engaging the past, reflects on identity in the present. Following Smith and Watson, I interrogate the Kenyan woman autobiographer's narration of her personal story as the story of the nation from the present by reflecting on her past and placing herself in a belonging, in a selective manner, in what she imagines is 'truth'. Smith and Watson's argument resonates well with Herman's (1995) argument that autobiographies are not bare chronicles of fact, but the artful manipulation of details and events that acquire the status of facts during the construction of a particular person as a self. This definition of the autobiography is achieved through the process of omission and inclusion. The autobiography, then, transforms empirical facts into artifacts (Renza, 1977).

Frye (1957) stresses that in selecting, ordering and integrating the writer's lived experiences according to its own teleological demands, the autobiographical narrative is beholden to certain imperative discourse. While acknowledging that the autobiographers under study have written their work within a patriarchal setting, where the narrative of the nation is dominantly male narrated, this study benefits from Frye's idea as far as it seeks to interrogate the narrative of the nation from the woman's perspective. Cox (1989), just like Frye, argues that the autobiography entails a unique act of imagination and not simply the negotiation of the constraints and/or compulsions native to any act of self-publication. The question in this study then is: How does the Kenyan woman autobiographer in the selected texts imagine and narrate the nation?

Gusdorf (1980) metaphorically refers to the autobiography as 'the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image'. Through her writing, the Kenyan woman autobiographer is looking through a mirror to see who she has been, who she is now, and who she may become in her tomorrow. To achieve this, there is a reflection and recollection of her past while closely engaging with the history and the present of her society – aspects that I interrogate in this study. Gusdorf (2001) further argues that the metaphysical precondition for the existence of autobiography is the shift from the communal conception of identity to the individual. This precondition is defined as the "realization or awareness of more difference than of similarities in life" (p. 30). However, it is possible that in some instances, differences may be insignificant compared to similarities. When such a consciousness is achieved, then it becomes imperative to guard against "the possibility of disappearance by fixing an own image" (p.30)– in this case self-creation (narration) becomes an imagined event rather than a record of existing events.

Gusdorf also argues that the "conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life is the late product of a specific civilization" (p. 30). The validity of this position is hinged on the recognition that specific civilizations and historical conditions - for instance colonial or postcolonial conditions evident in some of the selected texts - dictate certain ways of perceiving oneself in relation to the nation. In the context of this study, I use Gusdorf's ideas to explore the delicate balance between the narration of a self-conscious identity and its location within the bigger group under given social, political and cultural conditions. This is by interrogating the intricate nature of the autobiographical narrative that at one level constructs the individual as a distinct existence from the rest, and at another allows the same individual to be subsumed within the group as the embodiment of its existence and as a subject of its core values. In the case of Kenya, the history of colonial subjugation, liberation struggle, patriarchal traditions, gender and postmodern societal dynamics account for the complex conception of the self and community. How then does the woman in the selected autobiographies present these issues as a means of constructing the narrative of the Kenyan nation?

For better analysis of the Kenyan woman autobiographer's narration of the Kenyan nation, it is important to contrast between autobiographies written by men and those written by women. This therefore calls for a focus on theoretical postulations on women autobiographical writings. Jelinek (1980) points out some differences at various levels. At the level of content, men distance themselves and focus on success stories and histories of their eras while remaining focused on their professional lives while women's life writings emphasize personal and domestic details and describe connection to other people. At the level of writing life narrative, men aggrandize themselves in autobiographies that idealize their lives or cast them into heroic molds to project their

universal importance while women by contrast, seek to authenticate themselves in stories that reveal self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding, employing understatement to mask their feelings and down play public aspects of their lives. At the level of temporality, men shape the events of their lives into coherent wholes characterized by linearity, harmony and orderliness. Irregularity characterizes the lives of women and their texts. They have a disconnected fragmentary pattern of diffusion and diversity in discontinuous forms. The argument behind this is that the women's socially conditioned roles seem to establish a pattern of diffusion and diversity as they write. Despite their cultural and geographical disparities as well as individual professional and socio-cultural agenda, the autobiographical subjects recount their shared experiences as women through their self-writings.

Jelinek's views are like Mason's (1980) who argues that women recognize another consciousness in their search to establish their own identity. They ground their identity through relation to the chosen 'other'. She argues that women autobiographical writings do not merely reflect the individual but is a sort of evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity - the act of defining themselves in relation to the other. This is what I pursue in this study in examining the narrative of the nation particularly in relation to gender power relations. Stanley (1990) notes that women write autobiography differently from men; less ego-focused, locating the self within a network of others; a difference derived from women's experiences within patriarchal societies which allocate to women responsibility for the maintenance of family and other relationships. Therefore, this study reads into the Kenyan women autobiographers' writing as voices that present varied perceptions about the nation through their struggles for self-affirmation through relations to the "other".

Smith (1987) observes that the history of the traditional autobiography reveals that the genre emerged as a cultural discourse that secured the male-centered conception as selfhood and the definition of women as the 'other' in the patriarchal economy. Smith further asserts that historically, absent from both the public sphere and modes of written narratives, women were compelled to tell their stories differently. Following these observations, I interrogate the Kenyan woman autobiographer's narration and construction of the nation from a feminine perspective.

Smith and Watson (2010) identify memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency as major concepts for understanding the sources and dynamic processes of autobiography. These concepts are central to this study. According to Smith and Watson, the life narrator relies on memory to recount the past and situate personal history within the present. In this sense, memories function as records of experienced events rather than replicas of the events themselves. Remembering involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present, where the remembering subject actively constructs meaning. Because the techniques and practices of remembering change over time, how people remember, what they remember, and who does the remembering are historically specific. Acts of remembering occur in particular contexts and locations. Therefore, memory invoked in autobiographical narrative is shaped by the moment of writing and the context of narration.

Consequently, narrators draw upon multiple modes and archives of remembering—dreams, photographs, objects, family stories, genealogy, public documents, historical events, and collective rituals. These paratextual elements, which appear in the selected autobiographies, are used as anchors of truth in narrating the nation. Life writers often struggle to recall and recount traumatic experiences such as violence and suffering. In

analyzing the selected texts, I examine how such traumatic memories function as a call for collective Kenyan national consciousness through a gendered (specifically women's) lens. The autobiographies under study are thus read with attention to how personal acts of remembering are deeply social and collective, often shaped by oral narrations from custodians of history such as parents and elders. Collective memory helps explain how societies formulate shared histories and how individuals form their own memories within the social frameworks of family, religion, and social class

Smith and Watson's notion of experience guide this study in examining the relationship between the social, cultural, and professional experiences of the woman autobiographer and her narration of the Kenyan nation. Smith and Watson (2010) explain that, mediated through memory and language, experience is an interpretation of the past and of one's position in a culturally and historically specific present. It is through experience that a person becomes a certain kind of subject, taking up particular identities in the social world. These identities are shaped by material, cultural, economic, and psychic relations. Thus, this study explores how the selected autobiographical subjects come to know themselves as particular kinds of subjects based on the experiences attached to their social statuses and identities. This raises the question of how these identity categories come to appear as natural characteristics of individuals and their society. Since experience is discursively embedded in everyday language and knowledge, subjects also come to know themselves through the language available to them.

The autobiographical narrator's lived experience invites the reader's trust, persuading them of the story's authenticity and justifying the act of writing and publicizing the life story, which I interpret as a narrative of the nation. In autobiographical acts, narrators claim authority of experience both explicitly and implicitly. A key idea for this study is

the implicit authority conveyed by the presence of the autobiographers' names on the cover page. While this may seem typical of literary texts, I argue that the woman autobiographer embraces this convention as a means of affirming her authorship. This gesture strengthens the authority and authenticity of the narrative, as readers tend to trust and value texts when they can clearly identify the author. Moreover, because the women under study are celebrated public figures, their names on the cover page enhance the credibility and reliability of their accounts. This, in turn, establishes a direct connection between the narrator and her narrative of the nation.

On identity, Watson and Smith argue that life writers make themselves known by acts of identification and implication differentiation. Identities are marked in terms of such categories as: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, family genealogy, religious beliefs and political ideology. A search into which of these categories are played out in the selected autobiographies is partly the concern of this study. Identities are constructed through the process of consciousness which is dialogical. Therefore, narrators come to consciousness of who they are, what identification and differences they are assigned, or what identities they might adopt through the discourses that surround them; in this case the discourse of gender. Some explicitly resist certain identities while others obsessively work to conform their self-representation to identity frames. Reading of the selected texts is done in relation to the identities assigned, the resistance and conformity that comes from the autobiographer in her pursuit to narrate the Kenyan nation. Moreover, identities in the woman autobiography are intersectional in that to speak of the self autobiographically, one speaks as a woman and as a person. Thus, the woman gains dual identity of womanhood and personhood. The impact of this dual identity on the narration of the nation by the Kenyan woman autobiographer is evident in the selected texts. For instance, the women

narrators in the selected texts tell of their place as women within their communities, they either conform to or resist the prescribed definition of a woman as they assert the importance of a woman in the well-being of her family and society.

Smith and Watson further argue that autobiographical subjects are bodies inhabiting space. They are also positioned subjects in and of space. Space can be spatial or conceptual. Spatial equals geographical; rural, urban, diasporic, local, regional, continental, global; concrete conceptual equals national, mental, social, abstract. The narrators' stories are impacted by the space they find themselves in. For instance, the national, ethnic, gender, sexual, social and life cycle coordinates are embedded in their narratives lives by virtue of their experiential histories from which they speak. The women's social space can also be the landscape, domestic, spaces of sociality that is relationships and actions that are formalized in communicative interaction and ritualized or identified by gesture and bodily positioning. It can also be subjects located in complex spaces of citizenship or multiculturally across nations with histories of conflict. For example, Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's marital experiences as narrated in *Mau Mau's Daughter* and Rasna Warah's racial experiences in *Triple Heritage* pause questions of migration and the negotiation of borders or points of transition engaged in contradictions of geopolitical space. It can also be a place of hybridity created due to a new encounter, for example the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized - as evident across the selected texts - that created a hybrid society. The space inhabited by the Kenyan woman autobiographer then, becomes the lens through which the reading of the narrative of the Kenyan nation is done.

The autobiographical subject is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embedded in it. Life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge (a textual surface

on which a person's experience is inscribed) because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects. The cultural meanings assigned to bodies - in this case women - affect the kind of stories told. It is in this context that the narrative of the Kenyan nation is examined through the stories that the woman autobiographer tells. Through the body as a site of knowledge and knowledge production, the autobiographer negotiates cultural norms determining the proper use of bodies, engages, contests and revises laws and norms determining the relationship of bodies to specific sites, behaviors and destinies, and reproduce, mix or interrogate cultural discourses defining and distinguishing the cultural norms of embodiment. An idea that then sets out to answer the question: What is the Kenyan woman autobiographer's vision of the Kenyan nation?

Following the above discussions, it is then clear, as argued by Smith and Watson (2010), that people tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural structures about self-presentation in public. Therefore, stories told are affected by social-cultural, political and economic environments within which they are told and consumed. The autobiography, as an account of the experiences of an individual narrated by the same individual, therefore, is marked by the social, cultural, economic and political environments of the time of its production. Significantly, since it invariably locates the individual whose story it tells in society, the autobiography weaves personal stories with those of society. Although autobiographies are generally read as personal accounts, they are also complex scripts of not just the passage of time but of the dynamics that make, remake and unmake nations. Thus, to read an autobiography is to read the self as narrated by the autobiographical subject as well as to scrutinize the stories and histories of the subject's society - the nation.

From the above observations on autobiographical theories, it is evident that the autobiography is a personal account that is not devoid of the narrator's own society – a micro-nation (Maathai, 2006). Therefore, in understanding this society of the autobiographer, further reading of the selected texts is done using theories of nation and nationhood that can be understood within the broader framework of postcolonial theory, which examines the legacies of colonialism and imperialism on culture, politics, and identity. Postcolonial theorists argue that nations are not homogenous or fixed entities but are instead shaped by the complexities of colonial history, cultural hybridity, and power dynamics. In this analysis, I focus on the theory of nation as stipulated by Bhabha (1990, 2004), Anderson (1991), Hall (1990, 1996) and Watson (2002). Drawing from their ideas of the nation, I examine the narrative of the nation as presented by the Kenyan woman autobiographer.

Bhabha (1990) discusses the various factors that create nation identities. For instance, the fusion of component populations through the adoption of others' culture or through forgetting, imposing of violent customs of invaders with the passing of centuries and historical error which brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations. Thus, the essence of a nation is that individuals have many things in common and that they have forgotten many things. It is then true that the Kenyan people's experiences have elements of commonness while they may choose to forget some. These ideas are used in reading the autobiographies under study with focus on exploring the common experiences and their choices on what should be said in their attempt to narrate the Kenyan nation. Examination of the Kenyan people's consciousness of various historical experiences and myths like colonialism, liberation struggle, as well as their realization of the miscarriage of Uhuru (independence) is done through the self-narrative by the women autobiographers. Some of these women like

Otieno, Likimani, Maathai and Ogot, in one way or another, have had a role in the political arena of the Kenyan nation. In their self-narrative, we get an understanding of Otieno and Likimani's contribution to the liberation struggle, alongside the men, during the colonial era. On the other hand, Maathai and Ogot are too acknowledged for their resilient contribution to post-colonial Kenya politics. Their struggle to liberate the woman and the vulnerable in society amidst male dominance takes the centre stage of their narration. Thus, reading them, is reading into the narrative of the Kenyan nation as contested through the woman's voice.

In his lecture "What is nation?" delivered at Sorbone in 1882, Ernest Renan, a French philosopher and scholar, expressed that a nation is a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the shape of the earth (geographical factors) (Olender, 2014). A nation being a soul, a spiritual principle is constituted by two things: the past which is possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; and the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of heritage that one has received in undivided form. Following Renan's argument, the nation is a culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice and devotion of all cults, most importantly, that of the ancestors that make us what we are. The autobiographer narrates her life based on 'ancestral' origin. A heroic past, great men or women and glory are the social capitals upon which one bases a national idea. 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, are the essential conditions for being a people (Bhabha, 1990). One lives in proportion to the sacrifices to which one has consented, and in proportion to the ills that one has suffered – a concept largely shared by the autobiographers under study. Therefore, nationhood is achieved through conforming to strategic ideas in the fact of sharing a past, a glorious

heritage and regrets, having for the future a shared program to put into effect, for having suffered, enjoyed and hoped together. The study reads these aspects into the selected autobiographies as a means of exploring the vision of the nation by the Kenyan woman autobiographer. A nation is, therefore, a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feelings of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past and is summarized in the present by a tangible fact - the consent and desire to continue a common life. It is a creation of moral conscience, so long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community; it is legitimate and has the right to exist. The autobiographic narrator writes from the present and tells of the past through memory of what she considers morally right for/in the society in which she was/is in her pursuit to provide a story of her nation.

It can be argued that nations are not eternal. They had their beginning and they will end. The existence of nations is a guarantee of liberty. Bhabha (2004) argues that nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. It is from these myths and traditions of political thought and literary language that the narrative of the nation as a powerful historical idea in the women autobiographies is explored. The realization of a nation in the selected autobiographies is in the narrator's mind's eye as she narrates her own and societal experiences in the backdrop of the myths and history of the nation. She points to the historical and mythical unfolding that relates to the construction of the nation. Bhabha further argues that despite the certainty with which historians speak of the origins of the nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality. Therefore, the narrator in each of the

selected autobiographies echoes her cultural expectations that inscribe her in her space and coexistence with each other within the given space called nation.

Similarly, Anderson's (1991) idea that nations are "imagined communities" sheds light on how the autobiographers create narratives about themselves and the existence of their society/community. Hall (1996) builds upon Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community by arguing that nations are not naturally or inherently existing entities but are socially constructed through shared symbols, myths and narratives that create a sense of belonging among individuals. For instance, in the autobiographers under study there are systems of cultural representations where individual members of the community come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community. In tracing their story from childhood, the autobiographers echo the cultural conflict between the colonized and the colonizer as well as their individual experiences and communal experiences within the precolonial, colonial and post-colonial periods as a way of giving a common narrative of the nation. They identify with people they may never have met in their lifetime and imagine events they may never have experienced. Thus, I use Anderson and Hall's ideas to read the selected texts to establish the narrative of the nation as a historical practice through which social differences are both invented and performed.

In her line of thought that nations once performed become real communities of culture and power, Smith as read in Edensor (2002) argues that "nations are composed of discrete elements, and their cultures possess a variety of ingredients with different flavours and provenances". They are social facts with qualities of generality, exteriority and constraint. They are also social actors on the political stage. Thus, a nation is a piece of social engineering. In this case, the nationalists and their followers put together

the various ingredients of the nation: history, symbols, myths and languages. The autobiographer then weaves these ingredients in her narration of the self and nation. Therefore, in this study I read into how the woman autobiographer's life is interwoven in the nation and national happenings as reflected in her own story.

Since this study seeks to examine how the Kenyan woman autobiographer narrates the nation, it also draws on gender-based theoretical approaches to illuminate the relationship between gendered identity and national representation. In this regard, the insights of Butler (1990) on the performativity of gender and McClintock (1995) on the gendered construction of national identities are particularly useful. Their frameworks help explain how women autobiographers position themselves within, negotiate, and sometimes challenge dominant narratives of the nation.

Butler (1990) argues that identity is enacted daily through socially enforced norms that surround us. It is through our reenactment of the norms of masculinity or femininity that we know ourselves to be "heterosexual man or woman". However, individuals fail to conform fully because of the multiplicity of norms they are called on to reenact in their everyday lives - as evident in the roles and duties that individuals execute in their daily activities. The failure to conform signals the 'possibility of variation' of 'the rules that govern intelligible identity' and with failure comes reconfigurations or changes of identities. In this study, I read Butler's ideas into the Kenyan woman autobiographer's construction and narration of the Kenyan nation through self-construction. While acknowledging that autobiographical subjects are vulnerable to their own opaqueness, to their relationality to others and to the norms through which they tell themselves, Smith and Watson (2010) echo Butler by asserting that writing becomes a means of reforming or deforming the former empire and its enforced symbolic interactions. In

this study, I interrogate how the Kenyan woman autobiographer, through her writing, gets oriented from an oppressed subject to a critically aware subject and in the process, creates herself (womanhood) and the world around her (nation).

McClintok's (1995, 1996, p.260) theorizes on nationalisms: "all nations are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous ...[because] they represent relations to political power and... technologies of violence". She observes that all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference. She further notes that no nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation state, but rather nations are contested systems of cultural representation - the same culture that genders. It is this cultural contestation of the nation that is central in the study through the gender power relations evident in the Kenyan woman autobiographer's writings.

According to McClintok, bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in national formation is among the four strategies of the feminist theory of nationalism. The Kenyan woman autobiographer's social cultural and professional experiences is a pointer to her active cultural and political participation in nation formation. She further notes that women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation - the gendering of the nation as 'she' - but are denied any direct relation to national agency. In this case, the dominant male culture gives voice and meaning to the nation despite the female embodiment of the nation as 'she' and the imagination of her embrace role. An argument advanced by Landes (2003), that this figuration of the nation as female, paradoxically, makes present an absence.

Creating a scenario where presence and absence are like the 'Siamese twins'- her being is negated by the male culture but her societal role emphasizes her importance of being. It is this argument that this study engages in to establish the relationship between gender and the woman's narration of the Kenyan nation. The woman, Rowbotham (1989) observes, aware of how she is defined by the male dominant culture, gains a new source of strength and transformation that leads not only to alienation, but also to the potential for a 'new consciousness' of the self. She then emerges with a dual consciousness - the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription.

In McClintok's reading of Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, she identifies five major ways in which women have been implicated in nationalism: as biological reproducers of the members of national collectiveness, as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions of sexual or marital relations), as active transmitters and producers of the national culture, as symbolic signifiers of national difference, and as active participants in national struggles. These symbolic signifiers are core to this study as the analysis of the selected women autobiographies is based on the interrogation of the narrative of the nation as told in her life narrative.

From the foregoing, nation is constituted from the very beginning as gendered discourse and cannot be understood without the theory of gender and nation. At the same time, the reading of Kenyan woman autobiography is best understood within the realm of autobiographical theories.

### 1.12 Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research methodology which involves a close critical textual analysis. This is so because the study critically and systematically analyses documented literary materials in which personal and socio-historical content is

contextualized and analyzed. Through qualitative content analysis, the selected women autobiographies are analyzed by systematically inspecting the themes, characters, narratives and language used. The focus is on individual life experiences as intertwined with public experiences and the meaning of these experiences in relation to the narrative of the nation as evident in the selected autobiographical texts. This approach helps to uncover patterns, identify key concepts and explore the ways in which women contribute to the project of national identity and nationhood in their autobiographical narratives. The qualitative content analysis in this study is integrated with the narrative research design. According to Josselson and Lieblich (2001), narrative research refers to any study based on discourse or people's verbal accounts of their experiences. It aims to explore and conceptualize human experiences as it is represented in textual form. Considering that there is neither a single absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a story or a text, the narrative research is oriented towards subjectivity, intentionality, pluralism, relativism, holism and contextuality. This study, therefore, approaches the understanding of the narrative of the nation from the point of fiction and fact, while trying to unravel the points of intersection between the two as presented in the selected autobiographical texts.

This approach is informed by the ideas of interpretivist-constructivist philosophical paradigm which asserts that reality is socially constructed through subjective interpretations. Its emphasis is on the importance of understanding individuals' unique perspectives, experiences, and meanings within their cultural and social contexts, rather than seeking objective truths. Hence, this study views the narrative of the nation as socially constructed, prioritizing subjective interpretations, and understanding individuals' perspectives within these contexts. The interpretative phase entails a critical analysis of the selected texts to establish the narrative of the nation by the

Kenyan woman autobiographer. Since, as interpretivists contend, scholarship is not a deterministic sense, but as a chosen course of action towards the subjective end of the person (Van der Walt, 2020) - in this case, the narrative, multiple perspectives in connection with the research problem are gathered from the readings of the selected texts. This is done to gain in-depth insight into the narrative of the nation from a gendered perspective, specifically, through the voice of the Kenyan woman autobiographer. The interpretivist phase provides the context described and discussed in this thesis.

Closely associated with interpretivism is constructivism. Constructivism assumes that reality and the human behaviour therein is characterized by continuous fluctuations, adjustments and transformations operating simultaneously at multiple sites and that they offer a subtle depiction of how facts emerge and "truths" are shaped (Van der Walt, 2020). The selected women autobiographers are dealing with a heterogenous yet interactive space of relationships in their respective societies, where both differences and similarities are found. However, each becomes crucial at different conceptual, historical or cultural junctures. Therefore, the autobiographers (in this case, the women) work in a dynamic space-time. Through the reading of the selected texts and theoretical construction, knowledge and meaning of the narrative of the nation is generated. This argument, therefore, concurs with Lisa's (2008) definition of constructivism as a tradition of scholars tracing the origin of knowledge and meaning and the nature of reality to process generated human relationships. Hence, based on the data gathered through the analysis of the selected texts and the interpretations thereof, conclusions of the research are drawn.

The research is largely based on library resources, as well as a wide reading of other materials from journals, newspapers, and the internet. As such, the investigation involves an intrinsic reading of the selected autobiographies where each is read to identify the woman autobiographer's narration of the Kenyan nation through her personal story. These are: Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History,* Rasna Warah's *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self-Discovery*, Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing*, Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*, Grace Akinyi Ogot's *Days of My Life: An Autobiography,* Betty Gikonyo's *The Girl Who Dared to Dream*, Ruth Nabwala Otunga's *Little Seeds of Resilience: An Autobiography* and Phoebe Asiyo's *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks*. In addition, an extrinsic reading of other autobiographical writings, critical works on autobiographies and the construction of the nation as well as other related works is done to contextualize the reading of the selected Kenyan women autobiographies in the narration of the Kenyan nation.

To achieve this, the selected texts are analyzed using the theories of autobiography, nation and gender from the perspective of post-structural and postcolonial theoretical approaches. The specific focus is on narrative construction, discourse analysis and gender performance. Cognizant of the complex nature of the autobiographical genre as well as Smith and Watson's (2010) argument that for the marginalized woman, autobiographical language can be said to serve as a coinage that purchases entry into the social and discursive economy. Therefore, the study analyses the woman autobiographer's presentation of her awareness of the historical and cultural subordinate position that she is subjected to by the male dominant Kenyan cultures and how this bears on her narration of the Kenyan nation. Considering that the autobiographers write in retrospect, theories of memory and discourse analysis lay

ground for the genesis of the narratives told. Bhabha, Anderson and Hall's postcolonial ideas on nation and nationhood lay ground for the story of the nation as told by the Kenyan woman autobiographer. Butler and McClintok's gender perspectives help in understanding how the woman affirms her role in nation narration and formation through her socio-political and professional involvement in her society/nation. This is clearly demonstrated by McClintok's (1995) observation that nations are gendered, and women have an active cultural and political participatory role in national formation.

### 1.13 Thesis Structure

The thesis comprises five chapters that carry the introduction, the main body of three chapters and conclusion. Chapter One is the introductory which provides the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research assumption, justification of the study, scope and limitation, literature review, theoretical framework and the research methodology. Chapter Two examines the woman autobiographer's (Otieno, Likimani, Maathai and Ogot) interrogation of gender power relations as enhanced by culture and how they affect the narration and construction of the nation. The focus is on the narrative perspectives held as presented by the writer. Chapter Three analyzes the relationship between professional experiences of the woman autobiographer (Gikonyo and Otunga) and her narration of the Kenyan nation. It explores how their experiences influence the perception and perspective of the narrative of the nation by the Woman autobiographer. Her voice and image of the nation is of focus. Chapter Four interrogates the vision(s) of a nation that emerge from the Kenyan woman's autobiography (Warah and Asiyo). The exploration is on the rethinking/reimagining of a nation evident in the selected Kenyan women autobiographies. It focuses on how the autobiographer visualizes the nation's future. It explores into the imagination of a nation by the woman autobiography. Chapter Five is

a summary of the arguments advanced in the previous chapters on the Kenyan woman autobiographer's narration of the nation and conclusion of the study.

# CHAPTER TWO

# A GENDERED NATION

*"Each generation must assume the responsibility of securing their manhood, their womanhood, the definition of their being on earth that in the final analysis is nationhood."* ~ John Henrik Clarke (1991)

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter takes off from John Clarke's (1991) idea. The central argument is that construction of the nation is largely based on the social-cultural and historical experiences of its people, that in turn enable one to secure a sense of belonging (nationhood). On this basis, therefore, I examine how the Kenyan woman uses her autobiography as a means of narrating the nation. The focus is on how her social, historical and political experiences within the realm of culture and gender power relations impact her imagination and narration of the nation. The narrators in the selected texts in this chapter, tell their story within a time that spans over the three historical periods of the Kenyan nation: precolonial, colonial and postcolonial. Their experiences are integrated within a society that is largely patriarchal hence, a gendered discourse of the nation. The autobiographical text becomes an interplay between a historical process and a product of history. As a process, the woman's autobiography enables the narrators to demonstrate a gendered historical consciousness of the Kenyan nation as they remember specific events from their past. As a product, the autobiography becomes a public site that places women's stories into the public domain from where their version of the Kenyan nation is narrated. The chapter is centered on the study of Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* (1998), Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005), Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story (*2006) and Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life: An Autobiography* (2013), with specific focus on how each of them narrates the story of the Kenyan nation

against the background of their respective individual experiences and encounters within a male dominated society. The chapter also examines the various ways these women's socio-cultural and political experiences challenge the narratives that uphold the political status quo and patriarchal order in colonial and post-colonial Kenya. This is achieved through the woman's self-narrative that foregrounds her personal experiences. This she does by highlighting the central role played by women in the struggle for independence, political freedom and democratic space in the history of the Kenyan nation.

The act of narrating becomes a powerful means of performing the nation. Therefore, the shared and repeated narratives and myths about 'Kenyanness' and the national canon with time become naturalized. This creates a national character which is a product of public culture which stems from how a society of a collection of leaders and citizens chose to approach national decisions (Stalin, 1973). Consequently, these narratives influence the self and the understanding of the nation. Smith and Watson (2010) argue that the autobiographer narrates what she knows best and as the teller of her own story, she becomes the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation. Taking off from Smith and Watson's (2010) argument, I therefore consider biographical narrations of the Kenyan woman autobiographer's life as partly based on what she chooses to tell. This brings forth the confrontation between the demands of private and public life of the autobiographer. Thus, the emphasis in this chapter is on the ways in which the Kenyan woman autobiographer organizes and constructs experiences whilst performing gender and nationality by repeating and undoing certain aspects of both gender and the nation in textual acts of narration.

Gender relations are crucial in understanding and analyzing the phenomenon of nation and the specific boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within which the nation is constructed. As argued by Yuval-Davis (1997), national projects and ethnic processes affect gender relations. She further contends that constructed notions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of manhood and womanhood. Yuval-Davis' argument resonates well with the general observation that with language, the nation has been gendered as female — 'she'— yet the nation is largely a male dominated construct. In this case, women carry the burden of representation as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of a nation. They (women) then have an ambivalent position as on one hand they often symbolize the collectivity, honour and the reason of the being of specific national and ethnic constructs. On the other hand, they are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic and assume an object rather than a subject position. In this sense, there is the construction of womanhood as a property of 'otherness'. Hence, within the specific socio-cultural space within which the woman finds herself, strict cultural and political codes of what it is to be a proper woman are often developed to keep the woman in this inferior position despite her embodiment of a national signification (Yuval-Davis, 2003). It is on this basis that the woman autobiographer narrates her story within a given socio-cultural space with specific cultural codes whose effects on the narrative of the nation then, cannot be ignored. Through her self-narration, she offers herself an opportunity to express herself as a subject with her own selfhood, while echoing nationhood, contrary to the patriarchal culture categorizing her as an object.

In the selected texts for this chapter, the Kenyan woman autobiographer's situations relate well with Mire's (2001) observation that:

> "In the nationalist literary and political imagination, African women were, in most cases, not thought as active participants in the struggle against colonial imposition. As a result, they entered into this world of imagination, not as subjects with political goals of their own but as sisters or mothers of the nation's children and wives of men who were/are the real political subjects." (p.1)

From this excerpt, the woman was pushed away from national dialogue as she was relegated to the background. Her existence was only possible in relation to the men in her life and the role she played in "mothering" the nation. Her multiple responsibilities and lack of visibility in national construction provides the focus of investigation in this chapter.

Drawing on the ideas of Mason (1980) that women recognize another consciousness in their search to establish their own identity, and Stanley's (1990) that women write autobiography differently from men by being less ego-focused and locating the self within a network of others, I read Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter* (1998) and Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005) in their narration of the Kenyan nation as the unsung hero(in)es. By grounding their identity in relation to the chosen 'other' (the men in their lives), they tell of their role in the liberation struggle against colonial imposition in Kenya. As they tell their story, they echo Anderson's (1993) argument that nations are mental constructs, imagined communities', which nationalized political subjects perceive as discrete political entities as well as special social entities that are produced and reproduced as well as transformed and dismantled discursively.

The woman's autobiography provides defining images drawn from her life. It is through these images that the nation's emergence into subjecthood is understood, and its new arrangement of privilege and authority justified. In their texts *Unbowed: One Woman's Story* (2006) and *Days of My Life: An Autobiography* (2013), Maathai and Ogot narrate their life stories as a means of understanding the nation from a post-independence

Kenyan perspective. Maathai and Ogot's dedication and possible suffering for a national cause connect with the people's struggle while their pain and effort reciprocally amplify and explain their own. Maathai's predicaments in the political space display how the woman's body and environment become sites or platforms of contesting the narrative of the nation while Ogot's challenges in politics display the Kenyan woman's resilience to contribute to national issues. Therefore, through their self-narrative, I read the (m)othering of a nation.

### 2.2 A Biographical Overview of the Autobiographers

Virginia Edith Wambui Waiyaki Otieno Mbugua (1936–2011) was born into a prominent Kikuyu family and had two marriages in her lifetime: the first to a Luo Silvano Melea Otieno and the second to a Kikuyu Peter Mbugua. She was an activist, politician and writer. She was a former Mau Mau freedom fighter, an anti-colonial movement in Kenya, and a key figure in the women's movement in Kenya. In politics, she unsuccessfully contested the Kamukunji Constituency parliamentary seat as a member of the opposition party in 1997. She was also a leader of the National People's Convention Party (NPCP) choir and executive member of the ruling party's women's wing, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). She authored her life story *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* (1998).

Noadia Muthoni Gachanja Likimani was born in 1926 to Christian missionary parents. She got married to a Maasai Dr. Jason Clement Likimani. She is an activist and a writer. She has been an actress, broadcaster, teacher and publisher. As a writer, Likimani has written novels: *They shall be Chastised* (1974), *What Does a Man Want?* (1974), autobiographical works: *Passbook F.47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya* (1985) and *Fighting Without Ceasing* (2005). She has also authored children's literature books

among them *The Magic Bird and the Millet Farmer (*2008), *Grandmother's Fireside stories, Shangazi na Watoto* (2001) and *Nyambugi and the Ogre*. As an activist, she was involved in sneaking letters into and out of the detention camps during the Mau Mau period and has been involved in women rights activism.

Mary Josephine Wangari Muta Maathai (1940–2011) married to and divorced by Mwangi Mathai was a social, environmental and political activist and a writer. She was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize as well as the first woman in East and Central Africa to attain a doctoral degree. She was an outspoken Kenyan politician in the pro-democracy movement. In 2002, she became a Member of Parliament for Tetu Constituency under the National Rainbow Coalition Party that removed KANU from power. Maathai was the Chairperson of the National Council of Women, an elite women's organization as well as the Chair of the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (Women's Progress) Organization. She is the founder of Mazingira Green Party, established in 2003 as an eco-friendly political movement. Besides her autobiography *Unbowed: One Woman's Story* (2006), she has authored *Greenbelt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience* (2003), *The Challenge of Africa* (2009) and *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World* (2010).

Grace Akinyi Ogot (1930–2015) was a Kenyan gender activist, nurse, journalist, politician, diplomat and fiction writer. In 1983, she was elected as Gem Constituency's parliamentarian on a KANU ticket and was later appointed as the only woman Assistant Minister of Culture and Social Services by the then President Daniel Arap Moi. Some of her fictional works include: *The Promised Land* (1966), *Land Without Thunder* (1968), *The Other Woman and Other Stories* (1976), *The Island of Tears* (1980), *The Graduate* (1980), *The Strange Bride* (1989), *The Royal Bead* (2018), *Princess Nyilaak*

(2018), *Simbi Nyaima* (2018) and *A Call at Midnight* (2019). The last four works were published posthumously. She was married to Professor Bethwell Alan Ogot.

## 2.3 Unsung 'Heroi(nei)sm' in Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter* and Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing*

As observed by Alessi and Jossa (2019), there exists a gendered dialectical relationship between the female nation (who nurtures those who fight for her), and the male patriot, who both adores and possesses her (nation). Often, the heroic act is accorded to the male patriot who is perceived as the superior person to influence a nation's being and change the course of history. However, it can also be argued that heroines are as productive as heroes, if not more, when it comes to generating alternative views on the nation. The Kenyan woman autobiographer utilizes the genre to supply defining images, drawn from her life experiences, through which we understand the nation's emergence into subjecthood while justifying her selfhood in the construction of the nation. It is with this in mind that I read into Otieno and Likimani to explore their unsung heroi(nei)sm in the construction of the Kenyan nation.

### 2.3.1 Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History*: The Born Heroine

The emergence of the Kenyan nation is one based on borders and hierarchies drawn up in colonial times as well as in the roots of the traditions of a people. To understand the construction of a nation, Boehmer (2005) argues that the leader's life-story, starting with his/her birth that signals the origin, plays the important role of supplying the nation with a self-determining modern history. Nationalist values are enacted in the life-story of the leader, who is in most cases figured in that story as the pre-eminent, most trusty, typical or notable member of the nation. Anchoring on Smith and Watson's (2010) idea

of the techniques and practices of remembering, in which case, how people remember, what they remember and who does the remembering are historically specific, as well as Gusdorf's (1980) observation of the autobiography as the "…mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (p.33), I explore how Otieno reflects her selfhood in her life story as the image of the Kenyan nation. Otieno through her writing, looks at herself through "a mirror" to see who she has been, who she is now, and who she may (has) become in her tomorrow. She vividly reflects and recollects her past while closely engaging with the history and the present of her society. As she does this, she narrates the history of the Kenyan nation. Her narration draws on Bhabha's argument that "the nation is a culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice and devotion of all cults most importantly that of the ancestors that make us what we are" (1990, p.19). Otieno foregrounds herself as a leader by placing a lot of importance on her ancestry as having descended from a family of leaders and history makers:

> "…Now known as Hinga, Ole Kumale returned to his father Gatheca with whom they continued to live. Eventually, he married six wives; among them was Ngina…who gave birth to Waiyaki wa Hinga… Waiyaki was my great grandfather…The Europeans gave Waiyaki the title 'paramount chief'…It was after this fight that Waiyaki was elected the people's ruler (muthamaki)…Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president… was raised by my grandmother, who was his aunt, a member of the Ambui family." (pp.13-18)

She traces her family lineage back to a renown Kenyan legendary figure, Waiyaki wa Hinga, and subsequently notes her relation to Kenya's first president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. By associating herself with Waiyaki who symbolized the early struggle against the British and whose ancestry is traced back to the Maasai, Otieno secures her position as the daughter of the Kikuyu and Maasai micro-nations, and later as a daughter of the Kenyan nation as strongly implied in her title *Mau Mau's Daughter.* It is this same title that foregrounds Otieno's awareness of the importance of her participation (as a woman) in Kenya's liberation struggle. Metaphorically, she debunks the Mau Mau

ideology as the father and mother of nation builders. She does this through vivid description of her heroic acts in the liberation movement. She alludes her heroic deeds to her great-grandfather's heroism and shrewd leadership. Otieno writes fondly of her great grandfather's apparent admonition to the Kikuyu: "You must not surrender one inch of our soil to foreigners, for if you do so, future children will die of starvation" (p.16). Through this, the collective responsibility of the Agikuyu nation is clearly spelt out. This is further emphasized using the plural possessive pronouns "our, we, us" that are used throughout the text. She acknowledges that Waiyaki's words have given impetus to the fight for and protection of the values of the Kikuyu nation – one of the micronations of the Kenyan nation - as echoed in the song:

> "Waiyaki s/o Hinga died
> He left us a curse
> That we do not sell our lands
> And now we are giving it away"

Through this song, Otieno justifies the resistance against the colonialist, their land.

She adds that Waiyaki had "died a hero" (p.17) for courageously resisting European "foreigners". While drawing her heroi(nei)sm from her family lineage, Otieno equates her contempt towards European "foreigners" to that of her great grandfather, Waiyaki. She further confesses that she was compelled to join the liberation struggle by a desire to take vengeance upon those who buried her great-grandfather alive in Kibwezi: "…my intense resentment of the brutal treatment of my great-grandfather…, for I had openly said that I was prepared to do anything to avenge him" (p. 33). Therefore, despite her roots, her initial motivation to participate in the freedom struggle is instigated by commitment to a personal cause of revenge and the collective cause of Kikuyu nationalism as spelt out in the Mau Mau oath of allegiance "Fight for the soil of Gikuyu and Mumbi's children, which had been stolen from them by the whites" (p. 34) and

later for Kenyan nationalism. I argue that it is this motivation that finally leads her to heroic deeds in the making of a nation as she represents her selfhood as a product of freedom struggle.

The leader's dedication and possible suffering for a national cause connects with the people's struggle. From an experiential point of view, Otieno gives an account of the horrors of detention in colonial Kenya from a woman's perspective. For instance, she vividly talks of the torture and suffering she went through while in detention in Lamu. Her story captures the suffering of the Kenyan people in the struggle for freedom from colonial masters. This resonates well with the argument that active participation in national struggles is one of the five major ways in which women have been implicated in nationalism as observed by McClintok (1995) in her reading of Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias. In her self-narration, Otieno weaves the various ingredients of the nation: history, symbols, myths and languages. For instance, she agrees with Kanogo (1987) that the oath practice, traditionally used as a tool of unity, was radicalized to include and unite Kikuyu, regardless of sex or age against colonialism. Otieno's participation in the freedom struggle, just like any other freedom fighter, is indicated by the various oaths that she took. The oaths and the songs sang symbolized unity for the Kenyan people in their liberation struggle. Their secrecy, commitment and protection from each other was assured by this unity.

Historically, Otieno's rendition of Kenya as a nation begins at the family level with the story of Hinga. While foregrounding the importance of the woman in the being of a family and emphasizing the role played by women in the narrative of the nation, she deconstructs the patriarchal order as the means to identity and existence of her people. She narrates the silenced history of Nyina wa Hinga (Hinga's mother) as the heroine of

her family. "…my family had no idea of the life of our courageous ancestress who walked from South Kinangop with her son to Kikuyuland…" (p. 11). I read Otieno's digging up of her female ancestresses as her attempt to gender the history of the nation. Despite her consciousness of the male dominated accounts, she reverts to the oral archive to successfully incorporate the names of women in her genealogy. She is cognizant of the othering of the woman by patriarchy that has ignored or avoided noticing the role of the woman as the contributor to history, whether of family or nation. It is this narrative of otherization that she demystifies by establishing a counter narrative to the patriarchal narrative on the being of a nation. She reiterates:

> "We can only recount our family history beginning with her young son, whose life she was saving…Had her origins been preserved and her history handed down, we would today be referred to as the Kaputiei lineage rather than the Waiyaki line. I find it very discriminatory that a person is referred to as "son of Mr. so-and-so." I prefer that people be referred to as "son or daughter of Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so," except in cases of single parenthood. Because of this belief, I will show both sides of my family as I write about my genealogy." (p. 11).

From the above excerpt, the male dominant narrative is obviously being contested through the search for identity. I read Otieno's reiteration into Butler's (1990) idea that identity is enacted daily through socially enforced norms that surround us and that individuals fail to conform fully because of the multiplicity of norms we are called on to reenact in our everyday lives. I argue that Otieno's challenge of the patriarchal order through personal and collective memories signals subversive strategies to dominant discourses of patriarchy that oppress women and silence their voices. Hence, she gives them a voice as she illuminates their heroic deeds.

Growing up as a woman, she prides in her participation in the liberation struggle. She links her initial knowledge of the liberation struggle to her readings of newspapers and books as well as her interaction with freedom fighters like Jomo Kenyatta and Mbiyu

Koinange. I read her association with these great persons of Mau Mau movement as her assertion of the greatness of women that goes unrecognized. The perception by the patriarchal society of women being innocent and harmless is what empowers the woman into great deeds. For instance, she tells of how her being in the Girl Guides Movement made it easier for her to be initiated into the Mau Mau movement without much suspicion. She tells of the various assignments that were allocated to her. Her roles range from getting documents from government house, enrolling house servants into the movement to smuggling firearms that were needed for operations by the Mau Mau members. On several occasions, she managed all these by disguising herself as either an innocent woman in love with a man or through change of dress code. Her light complexion also favoured her. This resonates well with Kanogo's (1987) argument that:

> "The women who did not go to the forest comprised the vial civilian wing of the struggle…The women also took up new roles, modified the old ones and grappled with the extensive social organization to accommodate their new dual politico-domestic identity…" (pp.78-79)

Otieno's planning for the various attacks that were carried out against the colonialists as well as her fearless and daring nature bore fruit. She recalls the success of her spy activities that humiliated the British forces:

> "I had an opportunity to spy around …Later I learned that our fighters attacked the places I had spied on and that they killed eight policemen…than in Kandara, where ninety-three white soldiers were killed. They were part of a battalion sent by the Queen to fight us. The British forces were so humiliated by the defeat that they painted the dead bodies black, then reversed the victory, claiming they had killed ninety-three terrorists. And that became the "official version" of the incident." (p. 41).

This negating nature of the colonialists clearly undergirds the liberation struggle discourse between the Africans and the colonialists. Appreciatively, Otieno also tells of the role played by other women in the liberation struggle. For instance, some women accepted to be used by the white soldiers for their pleasure. As these women did this,

they took the chance to learn more about the planned activities of the colonialist and smuggle guns and ammunitions (p. 39). This resonates well with Kanago's sentiments: "…Women were allowed to (and might have been asked) to flirt with 'enemies' to gather vital information, weapons and other resources" (p.93). From these observations, I argue that Otieno redeems the woman when she subverts the silencing of women within the narrative of anticolonial armed struggle. Through embracing her image as a female militant as well as recognizing the role played by other women, she is re-inventing herself and other women (and men) as militants. Thus, by voicing the women's role in the struggle, she debunks the portrayal of the militant struggle as a male-only affair.

Alessi and Jossa (2019) argue that heroines were customarily identified with the idea of sacrifice for their homeland. Throughout her self-narration, Otieno tells of her sacrifice for her people from a very tender age. She prides in her embrace of multiple cultures. As a young girl, born in a Christian family, she embraced both Christianity and Kikuyu traditional way of life. She also assisted her mother in taking care of her younger siblings after attending Sunday school and carrying out other household chores as was expected of a Kikuyu girl. She outlines the multitude of roles for women, as evident in her tone, that make the woman a heroine. However, she echoes with her rejection of many of the restrictions imposed by either of the cultures - an aspect that shows her early nature of resistance. She vividly tells of the unjust deeds of both cultures. For instance, her detest for the patriarchal order within her Kikuyu cultural life is evident when she notes:

> "What would make me mad was that my dear father, without even asking, would pick a goat he liked and herd the animal into the bush where he and his friends would slaughter and roast the goat and feast on it… One time he did that to my black-and-white goat, Ngotho, and I cried the whole day. To this day, I do not think I have forgiven my

> father for this. Men generally looked down upon women and children…" (p. 26).

From this, evidently, I argue that despite the influence of her father's patriarchal worldview on her young consciousness, Otieno can recognize, even as a child, the gender biases in her society. Thus, she begins to inculcate a militancy against misogyny. Her bitterness and lack of forgiveness for her father shows her determination to liberate herself from the oppressive patriarchal culture. These gender power relations are basically played out throughout her rendition as she asserts the role of the woman in nation construction.

She contemptuously talks of her parents' Christian attitude that denied them the freedom of association and interaction with their relatives who were supposedly not Christians, "we were kept from visiting relatives who were not Christians lest we learn from them our Kikuyu culture and folklore. I strongly resented this parental attitude and almost rebelled…" (p. 25). She strongly felt that the missionaries through their foreign religion (Christianity) had created a great rift amongst the Kikuyu people. For instance, because of the Christians teachings against female circumcision, they "expelled any girls in their schools who were circumcised or Kikuyu Christians barred their children from associating with the circumcised ones" (p. 27). This is reminiscent of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's portrayal of the alienated African, Joshua, in the novel *The River Between* (1965). This conflict can be perceived to have given great impetus to the determination and resilience of the liberation struggle for the Kenyan people as it evoked the spirit of rebellion against foreign teachings. In her resentment of the foreign teachings as opposed to her admiration of the African culture, Otieno acknowledges the importance of circumcision for both boys and girls in Kikuyu culture, "…it was during circumcision ceremonies that the young boys and girls were taught proper Kikuyu

behaviour and culture (*kirira*)." (p.27). Just like Muthoni (wa Thiong'o, 1965), it is lack of this sense of belonging that led to Otieno's many conflicts with her agemates as her mother had denied her the right to be circumcised. Nevertheless, her zealous nature enabled her to go through the torture inflicted on her by her agemates. Ironically, later she appreciates that she was spared of this cultural practice which she later perceived as detrimental to the woman and a means of depriving the woman of her right.

Her love for her Africanness and her hatred for the deeds of the white man strongly contributed to her continuous defense of her culture and her people. She protested any bias against her culture. She questioned the white man's ways as they were just different cultural practices from hers, "…however, nothing could convince me that the Kikuyu dance was inferior to the Scottish one. In defiance, I rebelliously learned all the tribal songs and dances…" (pp. 29-32). Otieno feels that her people's mind has been imprisoned by the colonial mentality of denigration to a point where they have lost insight into the value of their being. This calls for agency to "decolonize' them. Drawing from Smith and Watson's (2010) argument that the autobiographers remember events from their past to negotiate their personality in relation to questions of representation of the ordinary aspects, (p.145) I argue that writing in retrospect, Otieno envisions herself as fulfilling the promise she had made to herself (revenge for her great grandfather Waiyaki). She therefore portrays her militancy through her encounters with the white man in the anticolonial struggle as an activist, prisoner and detainee. This way, she believes she can then set her people free from the colonial regime.

As noted earlier, the Mau Mau movement was the vehicle for the liberation struggle. The course and activities of the movement attracted other tribes to join and take the oath. New strategies that included union movements, demonstrations and legislative

councils in which Otieno and other women fully participated were launched to enhance the freedom struggle. The Kenyan people ignored their tribal cocoons for a common cause. Otieno became a member of The Nairobi People's Convention Party led by Tom Mboya and actively participated in recruiting members and organizing activities of the party. This she notes, many a times landed her in trouble with the colonizer. Later, she became the Chair of Kanu Women Wing, Nairobi Branch whose other officials were Gichuru, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya. At one point she was arrested for activities carried out by the group that annoyed the colonial officials (p.71). Other parties like Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) party and Kiama Kia Muingi (KKM) (Kenya Land Freedom Army) were formed all with the same agenda of ensuring Kenya becomes a free state. Besides the oneness witnessed among the various ethnic groups in Kenya in their pursuit for freedom, Otieno acknowledges the importance of having international support in constructing of a nation. She appreciates the support that was given by the international freedom fighters. She notes: "they gave me a spy camera, one of the many donated to us by President Joseph Tito of Yugoslavia, who was a staunch supporter of Mau Mau" (p.41). I therefore read that it is this oneness in the liberation struggle, collaboration and support from the international society, as well as the presentation of Otieno as an African woman with multiple, conflictual, and contending identities that gives her narrative the credentials of being the representation of a Kenyan nation born of multiple ethnic compositions and multiple races. This bears Otieno's enthusiasm for a unitary nation especially when she expresses her participation in the construction of Kenya as unitary nation.

On the other hand, Otieno voices the challenges faced by a nation in its search for unity and a common voice to its cause. This she tells through a recollection of her experiences of marriage to her Luo husband, S. M. Otieno. Her marriage outside her Kikuyu

community as well as tracing of her lineage to the Maasai can be perceived as an acknowledgement of the diversity of the Kenyan nation. It signals the boundarilessness of a nation despite the micronations therein. Through this, I argue that Otieno is advocating for the co-existence of the Kenyan people despite their different ethnic affiliations. However, the challenges coupled with betrayal that she faces when her husband dies symbolize the challenges of a nation considering the divergent cultural beliefs and practices of its people.

Representing the Kenyan nation, Otieno notes that suspicion and betrayal is one of the biggest obstacles to achievement of a unitary state, but one ought to stay on course. During the freedom struggle, despite the betrayal by fellow Africans, Otieno still remained devoted to serving the movement. Together with other freedom fighters, they stayed on course and sought their inspiration from God through prayer and singing. Belief in oneself and avoiding guilty conscience as well as self-determination is what Otieno perceives as the additional source of success for a national course. While in detention in Lamu, she learns that she was betrayed by her colleague and friend. "…Do you know who betrayed you? …it is your colleague and greatest friend" (p.83). It is this same betrayal that she faces in the cause of duty in various organizations as well as after the death of her husband, from the relatives and friends and politicians aligned to him. Cognizant of the effects of betrayal in nation development, Otieno argues that it is only when people shun negative ethnicity, political hypocrisy, egocentricity, gender inequality and embrace oneness that Kenya shall be a great nation.

It is then clear that Otieno narrates her contestatory acts against a background of patriarchy over institutions such as girlhood, womanhood, motherhood, widowhood, ethnicity, and marriage that render women vulnerable. By doing this, she foregrounds

patriarchy as an evil against national building and a sense of nationhood and, advocates for inclusion and recognition of women, besides men's contribution to the being of a nation. Therefore, her autobiography becomes a public site that assigns women's stories into the public histories/sphere - which then becomes a way of performing or writing a womanist historical version of the nation.

### 2.3.2 Muthoni Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing:* A Heroine in Her Own Voice

I start off this analysis from Likimani's own pronouncement that "a woman is the backbone of a nation." (2005, p.336). My analysis of heroi(nei)sm in Likimani's autobiography is cognizant of the invocation of women's bodies in nationalist myths to further nationalist agency but also as a subversive weapon. Likimani locates herself in the paradoxical position of victim and subject possibly to indicate the oscillation of her selfhoods between her embodiment as a nationalist symbol and her individual political agency. Her heroi(nei)sm is also well echoed in the title "Fighting Without Ceasing" that encapsulates the essence of her remarkable life and enduring struggle for justice, equality and freedom. The title is read as drawing from the biblical allusion of "praying without ceasing" as exhorted by apostle Paul as he calls for resilience from Christians. It carries the significance of a continuous struggle. As evident in the analysis in this section, this title serves a poignant reflection of Kimani's unwavering commitment to fighting against oppression and discrimination in various ways.

Likimani, just like Otieno, draws the source of her heroic deeds from family ties. Her link with her husband Dr. Jason Clement Likimani, who became the first African doctor in Kenya, exposed her to the needs of her people (Kenyans) to whom she then had a responsibility. Growing up during a time of political unrest in Kenya, with the struggle for independence from British colonial rule at the forefront, Likimani finds herself

involved in the fight for national liberation. Her role in the liberation struggle is evident in her vivid recollection of how, as she accompanied her husband to the detention camp, she could smuggle letters for those detained by the colonialists. This she did without much suspicion because of being a woman. As these detainees were admitted in Kajiado Hospital for treatment she smuggled their spouses and other family members to visit them; paradoxically sickness became the exit to freedom (pp.70-71).

Likimani's resistance to colonial order did not just start with her participation in the liberation struggle as mentioned above. As a child, she felt alienated from her peers as she lacked knowledge about childhood adventurous activities that were experienced by other children (p.17). This was caused by her Christian upbringing that curtailed her freedom of association with other children. Religion then becomes one of the means through which colonial order was imposed on the African. They were expected to embrace it without question; thus, creating a power discourse with the colonialist ideas being at the centre and the African ideas at the periphery. It is this power discourse of otherizing that awakens Likimani's desire to learn more about her culture. Out of curiosity, Likimani is determined to witness and understand the performance of circumcision that had been demonized by the colonialist (p.33). Being a daughter of a reverend, her sneaking to witness the circumcision of girls at dawn signals her resistance to the Christian practices. She perceives Christianity as one of the ways that the colonizer used to oppress and exploit the African thus the need to understand and appreciate her Kikuyu-African culture. I argue that her childhood experience in a Christian family developed an inquisitive Likimani who through personal drive and determination had to understand the values of her community's practices. By documenting them in her autobiography she is advocating for the understanding and embracing of the positive aspects of the Kikuyu culture.

Likimani strongly resents colonial indoctrination through religion that leads to emotional captivity of a people. Humorously, she tells of how the colonial missionaries preached with vigour and in the process emotionally confused the girls at Kahuhia School:

> "The white American lady evangelists…told us that the end of the world was near, so near that it could be now! … the Lord's trumpet could be blown at any time. "Repent, girls! Repent, girls, so that we can be the chosen ones. Others will be thrown into the fire. They will be thrown into the valley of Hell, where they will cry and gnash their teeth forever and ever. What pain! What pain! Repent now! God is calling you!...The end of the world is near, it could be now, this day, this night. The angels are waiting to usher you into the glory of heaven, where there are no tears" (pp.37-38).

Unlike most of the girls who got emotionally carried away by the preaching, Likimani did not. She says that she was then perceived as a hardcore sinner. However, according to her, she was a Christian and a God-fearing person who could not go against the Christian beliefs as the colonialists who brought this religion did. As evident in her motto "FEAR GOD AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT" (p.41), Likimani is strongly cynical of the Christian practices that are characterized by hypocrisy. She feels it is hypocrisy that has infiltrated into the Kenyan society thus becoming a bottleneck to national development. Her rebellious character to this kind of influence is a subtle way of enlightening Kenyans to shun pretense and hypocrisy and instead embrace sincerity and truthfulness in whatever they do to enhance national development in all spheres of life. Her observation and condemnation of the colonial injustices committed against Africans clearly indicate her desire to see a just nation.

Likimani's extensive use of the first-person personal pronouns 'I' and 'my' in her autobiography emphatically signifies the role she has played as an individual in the construction of the Kenyan nation. Her entrepreneurial skills can be interpreted as her heroic contribution to the Kenyan economy. She asserts that her business skills

developed from a very tender age, "…I started becoming involved in business when I was about ten years old" (p. 81). A skill that she claims to have inherited from her mother. By retracing her entrepreneurial nature back to her mother, she echoes the important role played by women in the economic development of a nation. As she retraces her employment and education history, she appreciates the exposure to new ideas and attitudes towards life that she acquires. Her emphasis then is on the value of hard work as she notes that:

> "I value the virtue of working hard and I believe that it is important to have a plan for each day, time to work and time to socialize. Otherwise, many people waste a lot of time, sometimes with unnecessary, unproductive company and yet … Time is money, and lost time is never recovered." (p.88).

Likimani's emphasis on the importance of economically empowering a nation and its people resonates well with Odinga's (1995, pp.76-94) argument that it was important for the African to assert himself in economic independence as a way of battling against white dominance during the colonial rule. It would be the only way to show ability in entrepreneurship. This venture, Odinga narrates, brought many people from across Kenya and East Africa together. It also became a means through which the African's consciousness was aroused against the oppressive nature of the colonial administration. Hence, the need for the freedom struggle, not only for political liberation but also economic freedom, as witnessed in the history of the Kenyan nation. As a public relations officer in a prestigious public firm (that she does not name), Likimani turned out to be the pillar for the organization (just like Odinga) and brought many aboard (pp.158-159). She later established her own company, Noni's Publicity', which she successfully ran and through it, she was able to help many other people establish themselves. Her great contribution to the establishment and growth of Seagram in Kenya cannot go unnoticed. From her credo, I argue that Likimani becomes a heroine

in ensuring the economic growth of the Kenyan nation; an aspect that is rarely realized as an important contributor to a nation's development.

Her work as broadcaster greatly contributed to the oneness of a nation. She used the media to inform the citizens of the newly independent African state (Kenya) of various ways of improving the community's standard of living. She focused on national issues like health, community development and education. Her role in enlightening women and children about who they are, and their environment gave her the title 'Shangazi'. Through children's programs, she clearly echoes the importance of our African oral tradition and the recognition of identity with our roots as the genesis of the making of a nation (p.146). The children and all the other citizens got enlightened about the various ethnic groups that make up the Kenyan nation and their way of life. Thus Likimani, just like Ogot, advocates for the enhancement of national cohesion and development through appreciating cultural diversity of the various people of Kenya.

Reflecting on Butler's (1990) argument that identity is enacted daily through socially enforced norms that surround us and Yuval-Davis (1997) observation that women are burdened with the task of maintaining the nation's honor and integrity, I consider Likimani's self-narrative as an assertion that patriarchy is the key instigator of women's oppression. Both men and women act as agents that institute oppression of the women while some men are rendered vulnerable to patriarchy. Just like Otieno, Likimani at a very tender age can recognize the gender biases that exist in her society. She talks of her aunt Prisca who constantly reminded her of her role as a woman and how her brother Kagu, despite being younger and more vulnerable than herself, ordered her around as he still believed that girls were weaker and needed protection. Even the girls believed that with a brother around them they were protected (p.263). However, as Butler further

notes, individuals may fail to conform to the socially enforced norms fully because of the multiplicity of norms we are called on to reenact in our everyday lives. For instance, Likimani could argue with her brother Kagu and frequently tell him off when he ordered her despite being aware of the patriarchal order that empowered the man and disempowered the woman. She resists the oppressive patriarchy when she bravely fights for her land in Maragwa and the right for her daughters to inherit their father's property. She notes that social injustices against women are instigated by patriarchy:

> "In many traditional communities in Kenya, women are not supposed to dream of inheriting anything from their parents - be it property, land or any other asset. It was regarded a pipe dream…if no sons born in the family, all the property would be given to the uncles or step brothers or cousins. That is why when a woman does not have sons, the husband will marry another wife…If your husband dies, some tribes in Kenya would go further and inherit you with all your husband's property." (p.290).

Contrary to this, she is appreciative of families, her father included, that appreciated their daughters and left them some inheritance. She also recognizes the great role played by women and calls for gender equality as she reiterates:

> "Children are equal, whether they are boys or girls, and it has proven beyond doubt that daughters, in particular, educated girls, can play the same role as boys and even contribute towards family education of their siblings. Women can contribute to the family income, and women take care of their parents and other members of the family when they are in need…" (p.290).

From this excerpt, Likimani is arguing that society should recognize the ability of women to play crucial roles at family and national levels hence cease from relegating them to the background. The women also must be aware of their ability and resist any injustices committed against them. The act of resistance should not be seen as disobedience but rather as a means of empowering the woman. Likimani's decisions to walk out of her oppressive marriage and exploitative employment is read as a way of asserting her self-worth as a woman and advocating for justice for all, whether women

or men. This metaphorically communicates the importance of a nation and its people realizing its self-worth by discarding unjust practices and doing what is beneficial for the nation.

She observes that the patriarchy had become one of the hindrances to the recognition of the women's role in national development. This prompts her to highlight women's contribution through publication in her periodicals 'women of Kenya'. She recognizes and applauds the role of women in the development of the nation through education, employment as well as through self-initiative activities. Together with other women, they empowered the women at the grassroots (p.168). She acknowledges the important role played by women in taking care of a family and the responsibilities that come with womanhood.

Just like Otieno, Likimani proposes collective empowered womanhood as a strategy to reinstate justice in the volatile patriarchal society. This she does through the various women groups and activities that she participates in. For example, Dynamic Women Organisation, Maendeleo ya Wanawake, African Women Members of the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), The Kenya Women Finance Trust, The Girl Guide Movement, the Women Guild of St. Mark Anglican Church, Patron of St. John's Kahuhia School for Girls, Women Communication Trust, FEMART for Women Writers, SIA Women Economic Development, Women in Radio and Television, Young Women Association among others. Besides advocating for recognition of the major role that is played by women in national development, she also prides in her commitment to women issues:

> "My commitment to women issues has been my major target in all my life. To me a woman is the backbone of the nation; and despite a woman being marginalized through lack of education and being less

> empowered economically, politically and socially, nothing can be successful without involving her." (p.336).

Despite her narration of the importance of gender equality and recognition of the woman in national development, Likimani highlights obstacles that hinder national development. In her self-story, Likimani tells of her struggle against the odds of society from time to time despite her dedication and hard work. She is mistreated in her marriage, undermined while working with the Kenya Broadcasting Service (KBS) and exploited while working at a public relation company and Seagrams. Her endeavors to succeed are met with resistance from those who would not want her to succeed. This disappoints her. Her experience is read as the experience of the Kenyan nation. It is this disillusionment which is characteristic of post independent African states that hinders any efforts made towards national development. She narrates the challenges she faces with bitterness but does not despair. Instead, they give her new impetus to explore new avenues. Her personal life experiences enrich her with wisdom and knowledge to handle new issues. She lives by her principle of "I must win, I have to win." Her resilience to overcome all the odds is echoed in the title 'Fighting without Ceasing'. Taking into account that autobiographies, once published, become public sites that assign women's stories into the public histories/spheres which then becomes a way of conducting a womanist historical version of the nation, I therefore argue that Likimani's *Fighting Without Ceasing* is a public site for all Kenyans to fight all forms of injustices that retrogress the development of a nation. For instance, neo-colonialism, tribalism, nepotism, corruption, insecurity and gender disparities. This she hopes can be done through the spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood as symbolized in her struggle and sacrifice to fight for her brother Kagu's freedom (pp.263-271).

Through her own voice, Likimani's tells of her heroi(nei)sm. Following her inspiring self-narrative, Likimani advocates for the importance of unwavering determination in the pursuit of justice and societal transformation. This is projected in her contributions to community development through advocating for better standards of living for her people, fighting for the rights of the oppressed, insisting on fairness in all spheres of life, assisting persons to secure jobs or chances in institutions of higher learning and offering counseling services to others. Besides challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for gender equality, she emphasizes communal/collective responsibility as the genesis of nation-building and nationhood.

## 2.4 (M)othering the Nation in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story* and Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life: An Autobiography*

Since the argument that gender relations are crucial in understanding and analyzing the phenomenon of nation and the specific boundaries of inclusion and exclusion upon which a nation is constructed, I analyze Wangari Maathai and Grace Ogot's autobiographies. The selected texts are analyzed as spaces through which the autobiographer expresses herself as a subject with her own selfhood. How her subjecthood contrasts the patriarchal culture that categorizes her as an object as she attempts to represent the Kenyan nation is explored. Through her self-narration, she offers herself an opportunity to ambivalent positions of the woman as the embodiment of a nation on one hand and as the excluded from the collective on the other hand. Hence, the (M)othering of the nation.

### 2.4.1 National Allegory in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*

The allegorical representation of the Kenyan nation is read in the light of Hall's (1996) allegorical approach to the nation. Hall examines how the allegorical nature of the

nation enables both exclusion and inclusion within national identities. He argues that nations construct narratives of their pasts which serve as foundational myths that reinforce collective memory and a sense of shared history. These narratives often exclude certain voices and marginalize alternative perspectives. Hence the nation becomes a site for democratic struggles for both inclusion and exclusion that marginalize certain groups. For instance, Maathai in her narration of the nation is aware of the patriarchal ideological project of constructing the nation that excludes the woman's role. Her narrative digs into the role of the excluded voices and marginalized alternative perspective of the nation. It is within this complexity of national identity that the gender narrative of the nation is fused.

Resonating with Hall's arguments are Butler (1990), McClintok (1995) and Yuval-Davis (1997,2003) arguments on the gendering of a nation. These scholars argue that gendering of a nation involves enforcement of gender norms, the instrumentalization of women roles and the exclusionary construction of national identity. A complex interplay between gender, power and nationalism then arises. For instance, Maathai recognizes that society acknowledges the role of women as mothers of a nation but fails to acknowledge their contribution to the very nation hence 'otherizing' them. In reference to the political space, during her husband's political campaign, she asserts:

> "…they wanted to project their 'Africanness' through their wives both at home and in society. Women are commonly described as carriers and promoters of culture. Yet men are also carriers of culture: Why in these instances couldn't they express it?" (pp.110-111).

Maathai foregrounds the woman as the mother of the nation by alluding to the origin and existence of the nation in the myth of creation of the Kikuyu community. In this myth, God created Gikuyu and Mumbi and blessed them with ten daughters from whom the ten clans of the Kikuyu community arose (p.4). This parallels Kenyatta's mythical

narrative in *Facing Mount Kenya* (1995) although in this case the daughters are nine (pp.3-6). In both versions of the myth, matriarchal system is recognized. She notes that despite the clans being matrilineal, otherizing of the woman was evident as many privileges like inheritance, ownership of land, livestock and perennial crops were transferred to men (p.5). Despite the mystery behind the change from matriarchy to patriarchy in the Kikuyu nation, that in other oral narratives has largely been alluded to the legend of Wangu wa Makeri where leadership of women is overturned by the men, Maathai feels that otherizing of the nation began with the coming of the Europeans as missionaries, traders and administrators. In her own observation, the Europeans' renaming of anything they came across led to a 'new order' and loss of identity for Africanness at the expense of embracing Europeanness. It is this 'new order' that gave birth to new geographical nations (p.7) thus distorting the existing nations albeit micronations. As they did this, they distorted nationhood and destroyed the rich African culture by demonizing it for their own selfish gains:

> "Before the arrival of the missionaries, Kikuyus and all the Kenyan communities had largely oral cultures…Ironically, the missionaries described such instruments in detail, but then encouraged the local people who had converted to Christianity to destroy them. Even as they trivialized many aspects of the local culture, including various art forms, they also recorded them and saved some of the artifacts, which now reside in European museums. I have heard that one of these *gichandi* is in a museum in Turin, Italy" (p.9).

Through orature, Maathai reemphasizes the evils of the colonizer and African political leaders. She vividly retells of the story of 'Konyeki and his father as narrated to her and the other children by aunt Nyakweya (pp.297-303). In the story, 'four young women admired a very handsome man at a dance. However, with each passing time three of the women noticed something strange with the man: he had two mouths and had eyes like those of a chameleon. Each of these times they told the fourth girl, but she dismissed their observation as she was madly in love. As custom permitted, after the

dance, the girls went with the man to his home. One of them too scared of what she saw, of the man, on the way decided to leave for her home. While at his home, the two witnessed the horrific sight of the man-eating parts of a human being. Cunningly, they sought their escape leaving behind their love-stricken friend who finally became his wife and bore him a son, Konyeki who was an *Irimu* like his father. While in search of her sister who had not returned home after the dance, the woman's pregnant sister visits and before she could escape as cautioned, she is eaten by Konyeki and his father. Her twins whom Konyeki takes to his mother to cook for him are saved by Konyeki's mother and finally, they kill Konyeki and his father thus gaining freedom to go back to their people together with their aunt.' This allegorical story cannot just be read as the literal monster/ogre story. It is a commentary on the naivety of the Kenyan citizens, the Africans, of the evils emitted upon them by both the colonialists and their fellow African leaders- *the Irimu* (Ogre)- on one hand and on the other as a warning to them (Kenyans) that they must always stay alert to see these evils, and patiently craft a way of freeing themselves and their nation as evident by the women's actions in the story. Symbolically, the vulnerability of the women to deception and their ability to conquer evil is contrasted as a way of illuminating the democratic struggle between evil and good.

As she takes us through the journey of her schooling, Maathai observes that the colonizer imprisoned the minds of the young Africans in various ways. First, she talks about how Mau Mau was demonized through religion:

> "…at St. Cecilia… I had been sufficiently indoctrinated to believe that the Mau Maus were the terror group and that everyone else was trying to restore order. The British propaganda kept us naïve about the political and economic roots of the conflict and was designed to make us believe that the Mau Mau wanted to return us to a primitive, backward and even satanic past…The extent of the misinformation and brainwashing was such that we prayed that the Mau Mau would

> be arrested. I did not understand that the Mau Mau were our own freedom fighters!" (pp.63-64).

Just like *Irimu* (Ogre) in the story 'Konyeki and his Father' the colonizer disguised herself in religion as she inflicted fear (of the Mau Mau) among the young girls in school and kept them off from the truth about the reason for the liberation struggle in the country. In retrospect, she takes us back to the breach of the agreement signed in 1890 between Captain (Lord) Fredrick Lugard and Waiyaki wa Hinga on land and other property (p.62). Just like Otieno, she points to the betrayal by the British as the cause for the organization of the Freedom Army (Mau Mau). It is in one of the theories of what Mau Mau stands for (*maundu ni mau*- 'the main issues are') that she echoes the issues that make up (mother) a nation: Land, Freedom and Self-governance. These three issues form the basis for her narration of the Kenyan nation spanning the precolonial to the postcolonial era while cognizant that betrayal and liberation struggle characterize the existence of the Kenyan people.

Other than religion, the colonizer imposed the use of the English language on the students at St. Cecilia – an aspect reflected in our education system today. She notes that this trivializes anything African and lays a foundation for a deeper sense of self-doubt and inferiority complex (p.60). Swoyer (2003) draws on Sapir–Whorf hypothesis which has also been called linguistic relativity. This hypothesis is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language. They understand their world through the culture embedded in their language and that language shapes thought. Therefore, by imposing the use of English language, the colonizer aimed at shaping the mindset of the young African students to embrace Westernization at the expense of Africanization. The punishment of the 'monitor' and inscription of the phrase 'I am stupid, I was caught speaking in my mother tongue' (p.59) for speaking in a language

other than English, was to demean the value of the African languages and by extension, the African culture. To debunk the narrative around the African languages, Maathai reverts to the importance of the African languages: “The reality is that mother tongues are extremely important vehicles of communication, and carriers of cultures, knowledge, wisdom and history” (p.60). In this case, Wangari is emphasizing the need for the preservation of the Kenyan cultures as a means of giving the Kenyan nation its identity.

As discussed earlier, Maathai, the other girls at St. Cecilia and other Christians had been indoctrinated to ‘Western’ ways of life. Their way of life was to match what the missionaries had considered socially right: language, names and even dress code. At birth, Maathai is given the name Wangari according to the Kikuyu culture, later, as an infant, she is baptized Miriam. Upon joining St. Cecilia and converting to be a Catholic, she changes her name from Miriam to Mary Josephine and later reverts to her name Wangari after her studies in the United States (p.96). I therefore argue that this naming journey for Maathai metaphorically represents the identity crisis that Africa, in this case Kenya, finds itself in, due to the overreliance on foreign ideologies. In her own observation, the Europeans had eroded the Kenyan African identity by imposing a new culture on them as signified by their Christian names at the expense of their African names contrary to what they (Europeans) were practicing. She notes: “The way surnames were forgotten in Kenya struck me as similar to how many African Americans in the times of slavery and segregation were known only by their first names yet had to address white people as Mr. or Miss, followed by their surnames.” (p.98) In this case, Maathai is reminding Kenyans that the responsibility of reclaiming the nation’s lost glory squarely lies in their own hands.

In her narrative, Maathai gives prominence to issues of social justice, leadership and environment. Maathai describes her origin as a way of authenticating her self-story and that of the Kenyan nation. She takes the reader back to the past practices of the Kikuyu nation on how a child was initiated into the community, hence given identity (nationhood) and all the rights that come with citizenship. She asserts:

> "When a baby joined the community, a beautiful and practical ritual followed that introduced the infant to the land of the ancestors and conserved a world of plenty and good that came from the soil…Even before breast milk, I would have swallowed the juice of green bananas, blue-purple sugarcane, sweet potatoes and a fattened lamb, all fruits of the local land. I am as much a child of my native soil as I am of my father…" (p.4)

The elaborate reception of a newborn baby by the community echoes a sense of communalism as the fabric that knits a society together. By linking a child's identity to both the land and parent, Maathai justifies her struggle and that of other women to ensure fair, equal treatment and privileges for both men and women in post-independent Kenya. Maathai, like many other Kenyan young people who had acquired education during the colonial time, had a clear vision of what their country Kenya should be after the departure of the colonialist. From her American experience, Maathai dreamt of a Kenya that is persistent, serious and visionary (p.95). The excitement for a new Kenya after all the troubles of colonialism, signaled an optimistic atmosphere for Maathai and others who had returned from overseas to develop their nation: "We felt that Kenya's destiny was in our hands. It truly was a whole new world" (p.100). Ironically, on her return to Kenya from America with a promise of a job at the University of Nairobi, she faces a totally different world from what she had expected of an independent country. The new nation was marred with corruption, nepotism, tribalism and a myriad of injustices. 'Uhuru' was elusive and had left the citizens disillusioned. It is at this point that Maathai's struggles for her identity as "a child of her native soil and of her father"

begun. She and other disillusioned Kenyans started a journey of restoring the stolen freedom of the Kenyan nation.

Maathai notes that gender discrimination that is greatly instigated by patriarchal order, is one of the retrogressive aspects of a nation. While at the University of Nairobi, being a woman, she and her female colleagues are not accorded same privileges as their male counter parts. At one point she wonders how, as a professor, she could be earning less than her technician: "…there was no reason on earth that I should receive less money than my technician" (p.117). In her criticism of the way independent Kenya took over most of the colonial systems, she pegs the genesis of the women discrimination in the employment sector to the legacies of the colonial era (pp.114-115). This she feels should change as it echoes neocolonialism in a post-independent African nation (Kenya). Her desire to actualize this change is what gives impetus to her and the other women folk to fight for justice. She and her colleague Vertistine Mbaya resiliently fought for the rights of the women in the University. This is despite the resistance from the University management and other women who had been advised by their husbands against it. Their success was beneficial to both men and women as she notes: "To their credit, I never heard any criticism from the male colleagues with whom Vert and I raised these issues…In retrospect, Mwangi was a beneficiary of our struggle" (p.117). Therefore, equal opportunities and distribution of resources to both men and women will serve as a benefit to the wellbeing of a nation's people regardless of their gender.

However, her gain is ironically coupled with challenges in her marriage. Maathai's story of her marriage to Mwangi and the consecutive divorce, allegorically represents the construction of the Kenyan nation through the struggle for independence and the failure of a nation after independence. Despite this disappointment, her dream and

determination for a better Kenya is still evident in her leadership skills. Skills that stem from her clan Anjiru that was associated with leadership (p.5). Her leadership positions at various levels, for example at the university in both the Staff Union and in the Department, National Council of Women (NCWK) show her contribution to the development of the Kenyan nation. She argues that it is these leadership skills that enable her to succeed in her support for her husband, Mwangi, to win elections in 1974. Her vision for a better Kenya gives her the determination to keep Mwangi's promises to the people despite his reluctance on the same. Her take was that political deception and exploitation of a people's emotions by politicians are bottlenecks to the development of a nation. These evils are only beneficial to egocentric politicians and only disillusion of people who have faith in their leaders. It is for this reason that Maathai, a woman, and a wife in this case, feels obliged to keep the promises made by her husband. Under the umbrella 'Envirocare Ltd', she ventures into a project in which resources would be shared between the rich and the poor (p.27). It is worth noting that even though this failed, she tried to cultivate a spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood in national development.

Maathai narrates her experiences in politics as a way of foregrounding some of the obstacles to national development. Her entry into politics in 1997 as an aspirant for both presidential and parliamentary seats was because of her good leadership of the Green Belt Movement. The people's desire to have her as their leader was based on the hope that she would help them out of their problems given the expertise she had displayed in the movement (p.255). She perceived this as a chance to serve her people and save them from the evils of poor governance. As she notes, her entry into the presidential race of fifteen candidates was to enable her to dialogue with her fellow candidates to form a united front so that the opposition would not lose elections like in the 1992 elections.

Despite her efforts, she meets resistance, hostility and even false accusations from both the people that she thought she was out to save and the media. On this basis, she lost both seats. Her loss, she believes was due to lack of unity, ethnic cocoon as she was expected to support the "local favourite son" as well as false rumour that she had dropped out of the races. Ethnicity, falsehood and lack of unity, she notes, are some of the obstacles to national development. Despite this, her role as a woman in the political scene before elections both in the 1992 and 1997 of calling for a united opposition that would take over power to end the oppressive KANU regime is recognized. In her own wisdom, she had predicted no win if the opposition is not united, and true to her prediction, the opposition suffered a humiliating defeat in both 1992 and 1997. She relates the cause of these losses to the selfish motives of both the leaders and the citizens of post independent states who have resorted to the politics of ethnicity and personality cults (the "Big Man in Africa" syndrome) (p.258). Nevertheless, she celebrates the unity and win experienced in the 2002 elections. Her participation in the political scene just like Otieno and Likimani, as well as Ogot, whom I will discuss, puts the woman in the limelight of a nation's politics that is largely male dominated. In their narration, all these women echo the extra vigour that is required of a woman to compete in politics amidst the challenges they face, as she says: "A woman politician needs the skin of an elephant." (p.254). Maathai insinuates that some women can be better leaders than their male counterparts and their contribution to national development is worthwhile, hence their capability should not be downplayed.

Amid the aborted independence for Kenya characterized by assassinations, lack of freedom of expression, insecurity, false accusations among other political and patriarchal injustices, the Kenyan women never gave up their commitment to fight for justice. For instance, at one time when Maathai had been arrested and falsely accused

of spreading malicious rumours, sedition, and treason; at her most painful and agonizing moment, the women were there with banners reading: "WANGARI, BRAVE DAUGHTER OF KENYA, …YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE" (p.215). This gave her hope that there were people who care and are ready to fight for the future of their nation. This, I argue, is an indication of the womanhood and sisterhood spirit for the purpose of achieving nationhood despite the obstacles. It is this same courage - under the guidance and advice of Maathai - that is exhibited by the women in the fight for the release of their sons from prison (the political prisoners; the young men who had been detained for advocating for greater democratic space). Women's advocacy for the release of their sons and their enduring suffering reflects on the mothering of a nation through sacrifice and resilience. As the political class otherizes its citizens, the mothers mother them (p.222). This resonates well with Achebe's argument on the supremacy of motherhood. While in exile, Okonkwo is warned by his maternal uncle, Uchendu, for his stubborn character:

> "Then listen to me," he said and cleared his throat. "It is true that a child belongs to his father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you…And that is why we say that mother is supreme." (2010, p.133).

Achebe's presentation of the image of a mother as the protector and soother of a child in times of trouble, parallels what Maathai is narrating in her autobiography. The Kenyan nation has found itself in trouble because of the aborted 'Uhuru' that was hard earned. The post independent leadership has mismanaged resources, oppressed its people and deprived them of their basic rights. Women like Maathai have the responsibility to get the nation back on its feet. The question then is: Could she and the other women, just like in the story of 'Konyeki and his Father', be the four women who

admired the young handsome man and reacted to his ugliness - monster traits - differently at different times? Considering her presentation of the woman in her narration, Maathai constantly echoes victimhood (just like the four women in the story). The female characters' harassment and oppression by various systems (*irimu*/monster) become a catalyst for turning victimhood into self-sacrificing heroines as both a feminist and a nationalist gesture.

Maathai sums up the genesis of her deeds that have created the unbowed Maathai with the phrase "A great river begins somewhere" (p.119). In her self-narrative, Maathai accords 'mother earth' a lot of importance. As noted earlier, a child at birth is first initiated into the abundance of mother earth as a way of giving him/her a sense of belonging (nationhood). Hence, her passion and love for the environment began at birth and got ignited by her childhood experiences at Ilhuthe, her home:

> "…These were the experiences that made me feel very close to the land and appreciated the beauty of the environment. I have never lost that closeness to the soil. I knew that the soil should remain on the land and painfully recognized the destruction of the land when I saw the silt in rivers, especially after the rains." (p.48).

It is this appreciation for its importance that drove Maathai to defend the environment from destruction. She satirizes her people's naivety into the acceptance of the destruction of the natural resources as a sign of progress: "…traders and administrators who introduced new methods of exploiting our rich natural resources: logging, clear cutting native forests, establishing plantations of imported trees, hunting wild life and undertaking expansive commercial agriculture…accepting it as a sign of progress" (p.6). She strongly opposes this destruction that has continued even after independence. Her fight to preserve the environment is evident in the many encounters and confrontations she had with the government. For instance, her opposition to the construction of the Times Towers at Uhuru Park and the grabbing of Karura Forest was

met with a lot of hostility from the government. She is cynical of those who either violated other people's rights or ruined the environment for their own benefit. It is for this reason that she foregrounds her major concerns for the nation:

> "For me, the destruction of Karura Forest, like the malnourished women in the 1970s, the Times Complex in Uhuru Park, and the political prisoners detained without trial were problems that needed to be solved, and the authorities were stopping me from finding a solution" (p.273).

With a lot of resilience, she met every confrontation with a new strategy as she confesses: "Throughout my life. I have never stopped to strategize about my next steps" (p.286). It is this resilience and forging of new strategies from time to time that she recommends of the citizens in their endeavour to the development of their nation. Her persistent protection of the environment finally gains her international recognition as she wins the Nobel Peace Prize. This award justifies her call: "…we must be patient, persistent and committed" (p.289). Linking this to her role in politics, she recognizes that the 2002 political win by the opposition was because of patience, persistence and determination, coupled with hope that it had finally restored democracy and brought change. However, she is quick to caution that democracy does not solve problems but no matter how minute the change may be, it is worth the struggle: "However, I do feel that it is better to try to bring about some change from the inside than hammer in vain on the doors from the outside…" (p.289). From this quote, Maathai's desire to participate in politics as a member of parliament was informed by this thought. It is also this line of thought that she uses to encourage people to plant trees even if they will take too long to mature. This should be done to benefit the communities in the future. In being optimistic about the future of the Kenyan nation, she juxtaposes the life of a seedling to that of a nation:

> "I remind them that like a seedling, with the sun, good soil and abundant rain, the roots of our future will bury themselves in the

> ground and a canopy of hope will reach the sky…No matter how dark the cloud there is always a thin silver lining, and that is what we look for. The silver lining will come, if not to us then to the next generation or the generation after that. And maybe with the generation the lining will no longer be thin." (pp.289-290)

Allegorically, Maathai emphasizes the need for enduring hope and intergenerational progress for a nation's growth. She uses nature to symbolize resilience and the promise of a brighter future that may only be fully realized by subsequent generations. Using the extended metaphor of a seedling growing into a mighty tree she represents the development and eventual triumph of hope for a better future. The sun, soil, and rain symbolize the necessary conditions for progress, suggesting that while the immediate generation might only see a thin "silver lining," consistent effort across generations will eventually build a lasting canopy of hope**.** Therefore, Maathai's narration of her political and environmental experience and engagement allegorically represent her narrative of the Kenyan nation.

Through the analogy of a traditional African stool that has three legs and a basin to sit on it (p.294), Maathai highlights what makes the greatness of a nation: democracy, sustainable and equitable management of resources, and a culture of peace upon which society (nation) is built. All three must coexist for a nation to develop. For these to be achieved, resilience and persistence are key as she says "We cannot tire or give up. We owe it to the present and future generations …" (p.295). She asserts that the journey to gaining a free and just nation is full of obstacles. However, they should not hinder the completion of the journey (p.164). It is for this reason that at the beginning of her story, Maathai mentions her Kikuyu community as one of the ethnic groups in Kenya, hence, signaling the mothering aspect of a nation- forty-two children of Mother Kenya. She notes that there were conflicts and coexistence among neighbouring communities in Kenya before colonialism, but this did not deter the communities from interacting

peacefully through trade and marriage. Therefore, Kenyans should learn to coexist and learn to handle conflicts without creating a rift that will hinder the development of the nation.

### 2.4.2 Reincarnation of a Nation in Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life: An Autobiography*

Just like Maathai, Ogot's narration of the Kenyan nation is given impetus by the rich oral traditions of her people (Luo). Cognizant of the woman's role in the making of a nation, Ogot links her passion for creative writing to her grandmother's folktales. It is this artistic heritage that defines her and her nation (Kenya). As Ogot highlights her literary writings, she lays emphasis on the importance of a people's literature as being the backbone of a nation. It is through the recap of literary works in Africa – in this case Kenya – that she echoes the documentation of the narrative of the Kenyan nation from pre-colonial, colonial to post-colonial Kenya, thus, echoing the importance of history in the construction of a nation. In her lecture at University of Washington DC, she refers to her first novel, 'The Promised land', in which the Kenyan nation is symbolized. The character Nyapol, metaphorically represents Kenya – a land that had not been contaminated or exploited, that now yearns for Western ways that later destroy it. Her (Kenyan) life is tied up with her motherland (culture) that she must go back to and appease to be free of the curse. (p.120). She further parallels events in 'The Promised Land' to those in 'Song of Lawino' by Okot P'Bitek to emphasize the destructive nature of the alien culture. By taking us back to the oral literary world, Ogot is recollecting the genesis for the problems of a nation and possibly suggesting remedies to these problems to construct a better nation.

Ogot lays a lot of blame on colonial administration and religion for the decadence and destruction of the African moral fabric and social order. She argues that geographical boundaries were created by the British that destroyed the then existing nations (what Maathai calls micronations), traditional rulership was replaced by power derived from Western education and religion, colonial injustices cropped in, for instance, the Africans were prohibited from hunting while the colonialists were permitted, men were taken to towns to serve whites while women remained to head the families. Reminiscently, Ogot tells of the rich cultural practices that mothered (nurtured) the Luo nation starting from economic, social, educational and religious. She then goes further to juxtapose this with Western culture that countered each of these practices hence otherizing Africa. For instance, she vividly tells of the religious beliefs of the Luo:

> "The Luo believed in a personal God (Nyasaye), creator and source and sustainer of life. He is everywhere (Nyakalega), especially in large objects such as the sun and moon. He is also responsible for the goodness on earth…" (p.11).

It is these beliefs and practices that define the Luo nation. However, Ogot is quick to note that the Christian missionaries who arrived in Luoland did not recognize the Luo people's religion. They saw the region as being in the dark, hence the need to liberate it from agony of darkness. It is for this reason that Ogot, with a lot of cynicism, condemns Western perception of Africans: "Christian homes …to become beacons of light in a land of darkness" (p.12). Humorously, she goes further to scorn the foreign ideologies being introduced to Africa while at the same time, satirizing the naivety of the Africans who blindly embrace Western ideology. Despite all this, in a paradoxical twist, Ogot is quick to acknowledge the positive impacts of Western culture. She talks of how her parents discarded the African culture and embraced the "new"; an aspect that led her father to empower the girls as he sent them to school. He also helped in chores like fetching water that were traditionally perceived to be for women:

> "…He decided to ignore all Luo traditions and customs regarding the establishment of a new home, which require that the father must be accompanied by his eldest son…he decided to establish his new home accompanied only by his baby girl …our father started to refer to his three daughters as his "boys", and argued that there was nothing boys were doing which his "boys" could not do. True to his word, he decided to send all of us to school, at a time when most parents in the area preferred to send only their sons to school. And since our mother Rachel was sickly and suffered from high blood pressure, our father undertook the woman's job of fetching water for the family from a nearby river, so that his "sons" could go to school. For a Luo elder to do this was abominable." (p.23).

I read this subversion of patriarchy as an imbibement of European culture to advance gender equality. In the process of doing this, men are emasculated hence destroying the African traditional structure of manhood and nationhood and instead creating a new structure of personhood and nationhood in which both men and women participate equally in national construction. It is within this same reasoning that she explains the genesis for the wide gap between men and women in national development: "At colonial time the men/boys were guinea pigs for education while the women/girls remained at home protected by the cultural heritage" (p.122). The gender disparity in the education sector that has greatly impacted on the development of the Kenyan nation is therefore traced back to the colonial times. The colonial education system created clear demarcations on the kind of education and profession that each gender was entitled to, as she observes: "The curriculum at the school, I discovered was gendered for girls…" (p.41). She, like Maathai and Gikonyo, further notes the extensive gender discrimination on the girl child where the girls were tailored for nursing or teaching jobs while the boys were exposed to other professions that were considered masculine. While agreeing with her father that there was "no training or job completely exclusively for men" (p.42), she advocates for a curriculum that is socially, historically and culturally determined and that looks to the future. By doing this, she is calling for the need to tailor the education system in a manner that enhances gender inclusivity in all

spheres of knowledge and skills acquisition to foster both gender participation in national development. It is for this reason that she, and other women, worked so hard to improve girl education as narrated in her autobiography.

In her narration of the Kenyan nation, Ogot asserts that the society's continuity was greatly harboured by the women who had to remain behind as their men explored the world for different reasons: "the woman was left to care for the land, home, children and old people…" (p.121). Though the woman's heroi(nei)sm is unsung, Ogot argues that it is her role to protect (mother) her society that gave life to the Kenyan nation amidst colonial atrocities. Even long after colonialism, the woman's contribution to the well-being of the nation is immense:

> "Many African women were supporting families, managing market and business centers, harnessing vast tracks of land to produce food and cash crops, raise livestock, all of which are crucial to the development and stability of African societies. Unfortunately, they are never known or recognized." (p.199).

This clearly indicates that Ogot, as a woman autobiographer, is cognizant of the unrecognized roles played by women in the representation of a nation. Through her own narrative, she includes experiences of other women as a way of voicing their oppression and suppression. For instance, despite the patriarchal setting that has socially engineered the woman to be at the periphery, Ogot observes that the absence of a woman at either family or society orphans the members of that family or society. It is on this basis that she narrates the fear of her children being orphaned (yet their father would still be alive if she died) that gripped her father-in-law and her husband when she was sick (p.161). This reemphasizes the mothering of a nation as the woman is entrusted with the caring and nurturing of the society (nation). The fear realized in her father-in-law and her husband is a clear indication that in their silence to voice her role is her presence and in their voicing of the fear of her death is the repercussion of

her absence. This vividly reads into Landes (2003) argument that the figuration of the nation as female, paradoxically, makes present an absence, creating a scenario where presence and absence are like the 'Siamese twins'- her being is negated by the male culture but her societal role emphasizes her importance of being.

Ogot, therefore, advocates for the empowering of all women as a way of appreciating their role in national development. This, she argues, can only be achieved through empowerment of women and women in power. While appreciating her husband's role in empowering her, Ogot reflects on a Luo proverb *Dhako en muandu* (an empowered wife is wealth). Through this proverb, Ogot voices the need for both men (just as her husband did) and women to realize the importance of a woman in the well-being of a society (nation). This therefore means that one's identity and role in society must be performed as argued by Butler (1990). This is what Ogot and other women in The Fourth World Conference of Women held from 4th to 15th September 1995 advocated for: the change in politics from the 3Ms (money, men and muscle power) to 3Ws (women, wit and will). Ogot acknowledges the role played by women, like her, who dared the male space to acquire education and achieve that which glares to the world as the men's role (p.120). In the role of art in the imagination of nations, particularly in East Africa, she is quick to point out her contribution as a woman amidst male writers to the literary world which she perceives as a channel through which an individual can contribute to the society's economic, social, political and even psychosocial issues. However, she does not fall short of sighting the dilemma and obstacles faced by an educated African woman in her pursuit for national development:

> "The educated African woman, therefore, is in a dilemma. Her Western culture has isolated her from her African heritage and turned many of her agemates against her. Yet, the African man eyes her with great curiosity, amazement and often jealousy. She is capable, dynamic, and confident. But many African men do not accept the

> achievement of an educated woman. They accuse her of being too westernized, and therefore she is not a proper woman who can be trusted." (p.125).

While relating this scenario to that in her story "The Middle Door" in which the character Achieng is accusing Angelina (pp.123-124), I contend that Ogot enables the traditional African woman to voice her role in national development during the liberation struggle that the educated woman like Angelina fails to appreciate. At the same time, Ogot foregrounds the potential of the educated African woman, that equals that of the educated African man, in national development while at the same time scorning the patriarchal order that is blind to her capability thus depriving her of her rights to participate in national development.

Ogot further echoes the disappointment that came with independence. She records the aborted 'uhuru' as evident through imprisonment and harassment of writers as well as banning some of the literary works. This became an obstacle to the nation's development as the artist's (who is the holder of the mirror - art) freedom was curtailed. Equally, the African leadership encouraged neocolonialism while depriving its citizens of their rights (pp.127-129). In her observation, independence that was meant to benefit all people turned out to be a transfer of power from the British male elite to the Kenyan male elite, hence, discrimination on the illiterate men and all women. However, in a quick rejoinder, she notes that the women's voice in national development was/is heard through the various groups or organizations formed by women (pp.155-156). Through these groups, the women emphasize their participation in the empowering of all women as demonstrated in their discussions during the various conferences attended (p.193). Recognition of the various roles played by women in all spheres of life, as well as her leadership and participation in these organizations both in private and public sector, vividly represent the woman's crucial role in national development. As Ogot notes, the

discourses of gender then become evident as the women's resilience to be part of national development is supported by the United Nations (UN) and the enacting of legislative and constitutional provisions by nations - in this case Kenya.

In her emphasis of the role of both men and women in national development, Ogot recognizes both her paternal and maternal lineage with a lot of pride. As observed by Were (2017), despite her society being of paternal lineage, Ogot re-invents remembering practices by reconstructing the maternal lineage from her paternal side by furnishing a chart with both men and women ancestors (p.5). It is within this paternal lineage that she recognizes the genesis for her leadership skills. This resonates well with Jelinek's (1986) views that women recognize another consciousness in their search to establish their own identity by grounding their identity through relation to the chosen 'other', in this case, her being and the leadership. In asserting the self, Ogot sneaks her identity through the patriarchal order of fatherhood and sonhood by linking herself to her father: "…the third son Oyuma was the father of Joseph Nyandunga, my father…" (p.14). She then goes further to tell of her maternal lineage with great praise and appreciation of her maternal grandmother who initiated her into the story telling culture. She incorporates the story of both her parents, instead of writing a biography for each as she had wanted, as a way of emphasizing their centrality in her selfhood as well as the centrality of both genders in the being of a nation.

As noted earlier, in her autobiography, Ogot lays a lot of emphasis on the role of the oral tradition in the rendition of a nation. Her entry and participation in national politics are well envisioned in the political songs that she documents in her-self narrative. It is in these songs that Ogot foregrounds how in a patriarchal society, the public political selfhood is gendered, hence creating disparities between political manhood and

womanhood. For instance, the campaign songs: “Do you know Gem has changed/ Gem has changed and want to elect a woman.” (p.251), and “Grace has many votes, she will defeat you/She defeated nine men.” (p.282) Signify an ideological shift towards the perception of womanhood in the political history of the Kenyan nation. The cultural change to embrace women leadership, an aspect that was previously unimagined in the Luo community, is now being contemplated and embraced. The narrative of ‘one woman verses nine men’ subverts the narrative of patriarchy thus creating a new narrative that foregrounds the woman. The society’s appreciative attitude towards women’s ability and potential to lead is further emphasized in the song “The daughter of Asembo is developing Gem” (p.283) that is composed in honour of her by a male character; Erick Opalla. From the foregoing discussion, I therefore argue that through the inclusion of these songs in her narrative, Ogot affords the poetic license to subvert the patriarchal order and assert the woman’s role in the construction of the Kenyan nation. Ogot further argues that for women’s contribution to national development to be recognized, they must “crow even louder” (p.241). Do hens crow? No. They cluck after laying or cackle at the sight of perceived danger. Crowing by roosters is a sign of power. Hens can only crow on a power trip. Therefore, Ogot employs this analogy as a way of advocating for the 3Ws (women, wit and will) to achieving the woman’s role in national development. This is cognizance of the observation by Mrs. Obote that “women are the transmitters of a nation’s cultural heritage and traditions…” (p.170).

In her political leadership, besides documenting the challenges that she had to go through as a woman, Ogot foregrounds her successes in leading her people of Gem and Kenya as whole. She fought corruption, improved security and bettered the lives of her people through socio-economic empowerment. She is cognizant of party politics that were wanting in all ways from lack of ideology, democracy to being gender insensitive

(p.299). She argues that betrayal, political hypocrisy and sycophancy, intimidation and assassinations threaten the well-being of a nation. For instance, by documenting the eulogy (that is read by her husband) of one of the political assassins; Horace in her autobiography, Ogot is calling for resilience and optimism for a better nation:

> "…But as we mourn Horace's death we should not despair. We should not lose faith in democracy, in honest and dedicated leadership, in dignity, in independence and genuine progress for all peoples. If we do, then Horace would have died in vain. His cruel and untimely death must inspire us to continue even more determinedly to strive for peace, freedom and happiness for all." (p.302).

As an Assistant Minister for Culture and Social Services, where she worked under four male ministers, Ogot like Likimani, envisions a Kenyan nation whose being is greatly influenced by the recognition and appreciation of its culture:

> "We believed culture could be a powerful weapon for national integration and for harnessing economic development. Many Kenyans were highly gifted in such areas as crafts, art, music and dance; and these were not being exploited. We were convinced that their exploitation, nationally, could be linked to tourism and become a major employment sector for the youth. Internationally, we could sell the products of creative talents to earn foreign exchange." (p.294).

Through this argument fronted by Ogot, I argue that the African-Kenyan social fabric could be enhanced through embracing Kenyan culture that would in turn authenticate the identity of Kenya and Kenyanness. Artifacts of oral traditions as well as literary forms can give Kenya its voice, identity and confidence (p.137) hence liberate it from apemanship of Westernized values. Therefore, according to Ogot, our Kenyan nation can be reincarnated through our literary world which is a mirror of society.

### 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on autobiographies of Otieno, Likimani, Maathai and Ogot. While they document different historical time frames in the construction of the Kenyan nation, both colonial and post-colonial, all the four echo their life and that of their

societies (Kenyan micronations) back to the precolonial period as a way of documenting the history of the nation. The shift is then realized as the first two major focus on events inclined towards the colonial period that spill over to the post-colonial experiences that the latter two focus on. Their representation of the Kenyan nation within these historical periods is done through their selfhood that is presented in form of womanhood, wifehood, widowhood, motherhood, daughterhood, sisterhood and niecehood. Their being becomes the being of a nation. Hence their success is the success of a nation, and their challenges are the challenges of a nation.

Examined against the background of their cultural traditional status roles of women, it is evident that these women evolved as they moved from their exclusively domestic and subordinate positions to the forefront of national construction. This development involved contravening of established societal patterns of behaviour and male supported stereotypes of female roles. As observed, the women studied in this chapter seized the opportunity to fight not only their own traditions that suppressed the woman, but also the colonial and postcolonial forces which relegated them to an inferior and exploited position. To achieve their success in national issues, they used traditional symbolic rituals as well as self-determination and commitment. Resistance to injustices of patriarchy became the means of empowering them. However, this was not devoid of elements of stereotypes that remained strong within their society and other areas of their operation as they endeavored to participate in the construction of the Kenyan nation.

My argument, therefore, is that the selected writers in this chapter raise awareness against injustices/forms of oppression that have been normalized by patriarchal systems that have greatly impacted on the social, economic and political well-being of a nation. These oppressive systems have been greatly enhanced by both cultural and foreign

ideologies. However, these writers also present an appreciation of the contribution of the cultures to gender roles in national development. It is for this reason that they recognize and advocate for the embracing of the African-Kenyan cultures as a way of reinventing the Kenyan nation.

As already argued, the woman autobiographer niches her selfhood through relation with the consciousness of the other. I equally observe that these autobiographers invoke their intimate partners (husbands) to negotiate their own identity and that of the Kenyan nation. More so, since they do not show any initiative to divorce their public images from these men. For instance, Wambui Waiyaki-Otieno retained her husband's surname by hyphenating hers with his despite the rejection and betrayal she faced from his people. Wangari Maathai choses to retain her husband's name by adding an "a" to it despite being divorced. Muthoni Likimani still maintained her husband's name even after divorce. Grace Ogot, neither divorced nor rejected by her husband and his people, conspicuously includes her husband in almost all the activities that she carries out as documented in her autobiography. Besides their husbands, the autobiographers acknowledge the role played by both men and women relations in enhancing national development. For instance, they draw a parallel between their patrilineal and matrilineal ancestry. Paradoxically, they are also cognizant of the oppressive patriarchal order that is advanced by both men and women. Therefore, through self-narration, the narrator contests the status quo created by patriarchy. Kenyan women autobiographies in this chapter become sites for contesting patriarchy in the project of nation building.

This highlights a crucial dynamic in identity politics and self-definition within Kenyan women's autobiographies: the tension between individual self-fashioning and the gendered social structures that mediate women's public identities. By invoking their

intimate partners and retaining their husbands' names—even in situations of betrayal, divorce, or strained relationships—these autobiographers demonstrate how women's identities in Kenyan society are deeply entangled with patriarchal lineage, marital affiliation, and social expectations. Their continued attachment to their husbands' names signifies not merely personal choice but a strategic negotiation of legitimacy, visibility, and national belonging in a cultural context where a woman's public identity is often validated through her connection to male authority or lineage.

At the same time, the fact that these writers highlight both patrilineal and matrilineal ties signals an attempt to broaden the basis of identity beyond the male-centered framework. By foregrounding the contributions of both men and women—and drawing parallels between these lineages—they subtly contest the narrative that national development or personal worth is solely rooted in male ancestry. This dual invocation suggests a more expansive, relational model of identity, one that recognizes women's agency while acknowledging the social constraints they must navigate.

Thus, their engagement with their relation "other" reflects a complex identity politics in which women are both constrained by patriarchal structures and strategically engaging them to assert their place within the national narrative. It signifies that self-definition for these autobiographers is neither entirely autonomous nor wholly submissive; instead, it is negotiated through culturally sanctioned affiliations, public visibility tied to male identity markers, and a deliberate balancing of personal history with broader national symbolism.

# CHAPTER THREE

# NARRRATING THE NATION THROUGH CAREERISM AND PROFESSIONALISM

*"It is far better to be free to govern or misgovern yourself than to be governed by anybody else"* ~ Kwame Nkrumah (n.d).

*"Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould it and those committed to breaking it up; those who aim to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow […]and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes"* ~ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (Facebook August 09, 2013).

## 3.1 Introduction

At the heart of this chapter is the narrative of the nation as told by the Kenyan woman autobiographer through herstory and that of her journey to and of careerism. As already discussed earlier, the nation is gendered as "she" with women expected to be carriers of culture while men are the constructs of the nation and its beneficiaries. Reading the foreword in Gikonyo's autobiography written by H.E Judge Joyce Aluoch, Aluoch disagrees with the myth that a professional/career woman must forfeit the pleasure of being a wife and a mother (Gikonyo, 2013, p. ix) which are the tags of cultural responsibility of a woman. It is against this backdrop that I read Betty Gikonyo's *The Girl Who Dared to Dream* and Ruth Otunga's *Little Seeds of Resilienc*e*: An Autobiography* to establish their (re)narrating of the nation through careerism. Paramount is their struggle and determination to excel as individuals and the impact their success has on society despite the narratives that surround their being.

Smith and Watson (2010) identify memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency as major concepts for understanding the sources and dynamic processes of an autobiography. The autobiographers under study, in this chapter, take us through their memory lane as they recount their journey through education into the world of

professionalism. Their experience at every point of their life points to their resilience and determination to overcome all obstacles that would otherwise deter their success. On identity, Watson and Smith argue that life writers make themselves known by acts of identification and implication differentiation. Identities are constructed through the process of consciousness which is dialogical. Therefore, narrators come to consciousness of who they are, what identification and differences they are assigned, or what identities they might adopt through the discourses that surround them - in this case is the discourse of gender as played out in their educational and professional journey. It is in this journey that the woman autobiographer gains triple identity of womanhood, personhood and professionhood/careerhood. These identities greatly influence their narrative of the nation. The women autobiographers under study embody the professional anxieties as education for girls was relegated to the periphery. Social moralistic discourses on girl education portrayed women as incapable of carrying out their family roles if educated. However, through their self-narrative, the writers invert this perception as they attempt to explain the reason behind this imaging and demolish the myth that a professional woman must forfeit the pleasure of being a wife and a mother (Gikonyo, 2013, p. ix). This resonates well with Smith and Watson (2010) as well as Butler's (1990) argument that some people explicitly resist certain identities while others obsessively work to conform their self- representation to identity frames.

The narrators appreciate the role academic achievement has played in differentiating them as unique individuals among a generalized group lumped together as women. Having otherized women as different from men, patriarchy turns a blind eye to the unique abilities and achievements of individual women. Metaphorically, this locates her position and delineates her expected relationship with her male counterparts in national development. Based on these observations, I read into how the narrators'

education sharpens their critical appreciation of the self while also arousing their consciousness of the gender similarities and differences. Furthermore, I explore how this realization leads them to question cultural codes and to foment resistance by pursuing professional paths that were otherwise reserved for their male counterparts. How education and professionalism can be harnessed towards national reconstruction and rebirth is the focus.

### 3.2 A Biographical Overview of the Autobiographers

Married to Dr. Dan Gikonyo, Betty Muthoni Gikonyo (initially baptized as Beauty Rose Gathoni Mwangi) was born into a poor home on 27th May 1950 in the village of Kiamabara near Karatina town in Nyeri County to Difather Mwangi Ngure and Beth Nyakonyu Kahugu. Inspired to become a doctor by her elder brother Dr. Wallace Kahugu, Gikonyo attended Alliance Girls High School and later at the University of Nairobi where she acquired her Bachelor's Degree in Medicine and Surgery, a master's in Pediatric Cardiology and a Diploma in Tropical Medicine. Her Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Pediatric Cardiology is from the University of Minnesota, USA. She also has Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Daystar University. She is a Kenyan medical entrepreneur, pediatric cardiologist and one of Kenya's best-known health care professionals. She is a professional member of the Kenya Medical Association, Kenya Cardiac Society, Kenya Pediatric Association, founding chair and member of the University of Nairobi Alumni Association. She was the chairperson of Nairobi Health Management Board and a member of the University Council in which she rose to the position of Deputy Chair of the University of Nairobi Council. Gikonyo is a recipient of two presidential awards: Moran of the Order of the Burning Spear (M.B.S.) and Silver Star (S.S). She won the CEO Global Limited East African

Regional Awards – Most Influential Woman (Medical category) in 2016. She is the author of her autobiography *The Girl Who Dared to Dream.*

A fourth child but a first daughter of Jonathan Wepukhulu Wabomba and Zipporah Nasike, Ruth Nabwire Otunga was born among eleven siblings on the 18th day of December 1957 in Matulo Village, Webuye, Bungoma County. She was married to the late Maurice Fredrick Otunga in 1977 and has five children.

Otunga attended Khalumuli Primary School, Butere Girls High School, the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University and Moi university. She holds PhD in Curriculum Studies (Moi University), Master of Education (Kenyatta University) and Bachelor of Education (University of Nairobi). She is a Moi University Professor of Education (Curriculum Studies). She rose through the ranks in the university arena from a Tutorial Fellow through to Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor. She started her teaching career as a graduate teacher at high school and lecturer in teacher colleges. Otunga has served in the university system as Head of Department, Dean School of Education, Deputy Principal (Academic & Students' Affairs) - Chepkoilel University College and is the immediate former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Students' Affairs) - University of Eldoret. Over the years, she has attended training in Higher Education leadership by Association for Commonwealth Universities (ACU).

Besides teaching, supervising and examining students' research, Otunga has published four university-level books, an autobiography- *The Little Seeds of Resilience*, book chapters and articles in refereed journal. She has attended workshops/conferences and presented papers on Education, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) and Gender. She has won research grants and served as a research team leader for study abroad programs at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI)-Moi

University Partnership. She has undertaken consultations at national and international levels and reviewed international social science journals. She is a beneficiary of the first scholar exchange programme to Makerere University on DAAD through IUCEA. She has been a peer reviewer and quality auditor for Commission for University Education and Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) as the key expert on East African Higher Education Quality Assurance (EAHEQA). Otunga has served as a curriculum expert for the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building (RUFORUM) and the first Chairperson, Regional Academic Advisory Board for PhD (Aquaculture and Fisheries) Programme under the African Centres of Excellence II (ACE II) with focal point at LUANAR, Malawi. She has also served as one of the Vice-Presidents of OSSREA, participated in UNESCO-IIEP Gender Equality in Education and member, Association of African Women for Research & Development (AAWORD).

### 3.3 Voyaging the Nation in Gikonyo's *The Girl Who Dared* to Dream and Otunga's *Little Seeds of Resilience*

Pascal (1960) establishes how a writer retrospectively composes his or her life in view of the past and the present and on what he or she needs to disclose. It is on this basis that I explore Gikonyo and Otunga's voyaging of the nation through professionalism as they tell of their past, present and project the future that signifies the very journey of their nation. The stories these writers tell unfold transformations that everyone goes through for their survival within different classes of inequalities precipitated by gender in education and professionalism. They narrate the difficult decisions that they make that alter and impact the course of their lives. These women's self-narratives signal common challenges through their diverse professional experiences and how they negotiate around them to survive the atrocities of gender stereotyping.

### 3.3.1 A Dream not Deferred in Betty Gikonyo's *The Girl Who Dared to Dream*

Gikonyo's narration of the nation reminiscently begins from the mythical story surrounding Mt. Kenya - source of medicinal values, holiness and the habour for the liberation struggle:

> "…what enchanted me most was the mystery behind Mt. Kenya. This magnificent mountain …was home to many of our secret herbs and medicinal roots …it was a holy place not just for my people the Agikuyu but also for many other communities in Kenya and Africa. It was this mysterious mountain that played home to the Mau Mau freedom fighters as they waged war for Kenya's independence from Britain…" (pp.4-5).

Gikonyo alludes to the mountain as the source of life and security. Pointing back to her childhood memory, Gikonyo tells of the Kenyan history through the experiences of its people in the hands of the colonizer and the liberation struggle that ensued therein. By taking us through this, just like Otieno and Likimani, Gikonyo clearly lays ground for her narration of the Kenyan nation as a people of shared experiences. The pains and sacrifices of liberating Kenya are equated to the woman's role of ensuring that her children are provided for shelter, clothing and food since the husband was either in the forest fighting for freedom or in detention camps (p.8). She attributes her resilient and hardworking nature to these village experiences and her mother. Gikonyo's emphasis on the role her mother played in her life and in that of her siblings as she provided for them and nurtured them symbolically reaffirms the metaphor 'mother' for a nation as -she'. A nation has the task of nurturing and protecting its citizens through clearly laid out systems. It is therefore for this reason that Gikonyo takes us back in history to understand the sacrifices made by those who fought for independence. Gikonyo foregrounds the importance of a nation's history as a way of acknowledging the liberators of the Kenyan nation from the yoke of colonialism. She highlights the reasons behind the liberation struggle:

> "The root cause of the Mau Mau revolt was the fact that Africans were disenfranchised and deprived of property and freedom in their own country. Their fertile land, beautiful hills and mountains were taken to be the preserve of the White man. They had brutally snatched the land and displaced African populations rendering them internally displaced persons…imposing the colour bar … We owe our freedom and liberation from colonialism to the sacrifices that were made by the freedom fighters from all parts of the country led by Dedan Kimathi." (pp. 24-25).

The land was their source of livelihood. It is where she learnt how to be responsible as she went with her mother to the farm (pp 16-17). According to the myth of creation of the Agikuyu people (which is the mythical story surrounding Mount Kenya), their land was God given and they had to protect it. It is within this spirit of the liberation struggle that she notes the power discourses between nations; in this case, the British and the Japanese during her father's experience in World War II. During this war, the Africans realized that their masters, the British, were just human as witnessed in their suffering in the hands of the Japanese hence debunking the myth of their immortality. This enlightened the Africans and propelled the Mau Mau movement (p.24), whose main agenda was to free their people from the evils of oppression, exploitation and dehumanization that were being meted upon them.

As noted, the other importance of this mysterious mountain is its medicinal value, which I read as a foreshadow of her dream of becoming a doctor. While still on her childhood memories and experiences in the village, she recounts the exposure of children to diseases and other infections like jiggers, diarrhoea and measles while vividly describing the procedure for treatment. This observant characteristic of what was happening to her fellow children then back in the village, can be read as her subconscious drive to study pediatrics. Her dream of becoming a doctor, she says, began early in her life while in class one (p.30). This is despite the perception that being a doctor was a preserve for the boys. This, she says, was the reason for the whole class

bursting into laughter at her response to the teacher that she wanted to be a doctor. Her brother Wallace was her symbol of success and source of inspiration:

> "My brother was the spark that kindled the embers of ambition in me…He had become my idol. Wallace Kahugu was the epitome of success to me. He symbolized all that I wanted in life; my dreams, my hopes, my desires and aspirations…" (p.28)

Gikonyo's dream of becoming a doctor clearly indicates the demolishing of the social configuration of gendered identity that attempts to impede and limit the performativity of the woman in her educational and professional journey. She recalls how there was no physics in Alliance Girls High School which then necessitated one girl who was her senior to attend the physics classes at the boys' school since she had expressed interest in going to the medical school. This led to the introduction of pure sciences at the girls' school which later enabled her and other girls to join the medical school (p.52). To reemphasize the limitations for girls to study medicine, she lets us know that there were only six girls at the medical school. Equally, in her narrative, she lets us know that female doctors are relatively fewer than the male doctors. This I read as an indication of the perception that the medical profession (medical doctor) was a preserve of the male, a domain that Gikonyo and a few other women dared to venture into. Her training and partnership with her husband Dan in establishing and running Karen Hospital is an indicator of her vision of a nation. She advocates for the provision of resources and chances to both gender in pursuit of professional growth. This, she argues, contributes to national development.

Gikonyo's narration of her education journey is punctuated with episodes of resilience and determination that she greatly links to her upbringing, and influence from those around her: her mother, principal, teachers and brother. She visualized her success through the life of her brother who was the pride of her mother. The power of education

was evident in the success of her brother and the pride her mother had in him. This motivated her to work hard to get to the promised land. Besides her brother's inspiration, she appreciates her mother's nurturing of virtues of self-discipline, hard work, assertiveness and self-control in her formative years that later became part of her 'academic and social DNA'. This she believes is what makes life as she notes:

> "Life is not a lottery. You cannot sit back and wait to win the jackpot. Life is a journey best suited for those prepared and armed with knowledge, skills and passion for conquering and pushing back the frontiers." (p.31)

While narrating about her parents, Gikonyo attaches a lot of compassion to her mother by titling the chapter on her mother as 'A Mother's Love' as compared to that on her father 'My Father'. She does this as a way of putting more emphasis on the role of a mother in the being of an individual. As she narrates, her mother was just more than a mother: she was her mentor, her friend, her protector. It is for this reason that she expresses her pain of losing her and the longing for her to have been present to witness and celebrate her successes through her life's journey. At the death of her mother, she felt orphaned. Having equated 'mother' to nation, then I argue that the being of a nation becomes the source of one's existence. The moment a nation ceases to nurture its citizens, they are orphaned (p.17) and they start to struggle on their own. It is this individual strive and struggle that gives new life to a nation.

For the success of a society (nation) and the individual, she believes dreaming is important and no dream should be deferred. She encourages young people to 'dare dream' (p.55) no matter the circumstances they find themselves in. It is in this I observe that through herstory, Gikonyo debunks the myth that society, which is largely patriarchal in this case, is the determinant of one's path in life. All people, despite their gender, can pursue the path they desire. Her story impacts on and changes the lives of

African children and society. For her, personal responsibility for one's destiny and that of his/her society is paramount:

> "I hope my story can inspire, motivate and encourage the boy or girl who has a dream to pursue for self and society's benefit…This book is for millions of African boys and girls who struggle against difficult odds and harsh realities. They work under tough conditions to excel in school and pursue their chosen career paths…When you lose, don't lose the lesson, too, for each loss has a moral. I have learnt that each one of us is in full control of their destiny. We must take full charge of managing our lives…we must take responsibility for our lives and hold ourselves accountable to ourselves. We should not trust other people to make important decisions for us. Although good advice is proper, the buck stops with the man or woman that stares back at you in the mirror." (p. 289)

Gikonyo's academic and professional journey illuminates a nation's journey. The Kenyan nation must realize its harsh realities ranging from the evils in leadership, to the economy, to health, to education and even social fabric and purpose to free herself out of them to realize its dream of a great healthy and progressive nation.

As she explores the diverse experiences in her education journey, Gikonyo perceives education and educational institutions as avenues for celebrating diversity and tribal cohesion (p.58). For instance, while at Alliance Girls High School, she met with girls from various parts of Kenya and witnessed their speaking of vernacular language that were not Kikuyu. The school then became the venue for equality as students from various ethnic and social backgrounds interacted without prejudice. This can be interpreted as her vision of what Kenya as a nation should be: its citizens interacting with members from various ethnic and social backgrounds without prejudice or stereotype. She goes further to echo Ogot's ideas that cultural festivals enhance national cohesion. She recounts her experience at Alliance Girls High School where they had to participate in folk songs and dances from different ethnicities during inter-house competitions:

> "My exposure at Alliance Girls High School during my formative years opened up my mind. It ingrained in my impressionable mind the capacity to appreciate people for who they are without recourse to their background. Learning and presenting dances and folksongs from the different tribes made us appreciate the roots of the different girls without ever having gone to those locations. Each girl became the ambassador of her tribe in the conducive diplomatic platform that was Alliance Girls High School…" (p.58)

This spirit of coexistence instilled in the girls lives at the Alliance Girls High School. She echoes this in her story as throughout her life she recounts various encounters with people who are either patients, colleagues or friends, from various communities. To emphasize this, she foregrounds the importance of collective responsibility by a nation and the merits of coexistence through the story of an ailing young boy. Dan and her are entrusted with the care of a young boy from Moi's Bridge who was scheduled for a heart surgery in Minneapolis. She vividly recounts their experience during the journey that was greatly punctuated with health relapses of the young boy, Sammy Keter, whose family they hardly knew. Thirty years later, they got to know one of Sammy's family member, Joshua Arap Sang, through the Kenya historical occurrence against humanity (post-election violence) in 2007-2008. Although Gikonyo does not focus on recounting the events of this time, she is juxtaposing the peace and gains that come with coexistence with the destruction and instability that emanates from tribal conflicts. It is in the chapter that she titles "The Flying Doctors" that she vividly echoes Homi Bhabha's (1990) concept of the nation as being a group of people who share common experiences but may never have met or meet in their lifetime. Despite coming from a different ethnic background, the Gikonyos appreciated Sammy and took care of him as one of the family members. They later enrolled Sammy in school, educated and offered him employment (pp. 136-146). This can be interpreted as her perception of a nation. One whose people have trust in each other and are willing to help. This, according to Gikonyo, can offer a glim of hope for a nation that is facing challenges. Sammy's

parents trusted strangers with their ailing child and the Gikonyos were willing to help. This finally bore fruit as Sammy got well and their experience led to the idea of starting a medical charity in Kenya that finally gave birth to Heart to Heart Foundation (p.199). Gikonyo's narration of the multiple challenges they faced in handling Sammy during their journey and how they overcame them, can be read as her perception of a nation that is faced with multiple challenges that must not lose hope but rather get solutions. This can be summed in her biblical allusion: "We have learnt that every mountain is scalable, every Goliath has his David, and no obstacle is too big to conquer" (p.208). She is optimistic that all challenges have solutions.

Just like the experiences with Sammy, misfortunes can be a blessing. It is her unfortunate experience during her masters at the University of Nairobi that finally gave her an upper hand in getting a scholarship in USA Minnesota for pediatric cardiology. During her masters' studies, she initially had the objective of determining the different microorganisms, either bacteria or virus, causing diarrhea in the children (as noted earlier, a disease that was rampant in her village during her formative years that may have given her the urge to be a doctor). However, because of lack of facilities within Kenyatta Hospital, she had collaborated with a Dutch laboratory that had the capacity and capability to carry out viral analysis without consulting her professors. This led to the rejection of her results:

> "My professors were offended that I had not consulted them on the part of collaboration and rejected my results…I found this strange, for, using my own initiative, I had bridged a gap that existed at Kenyatta National Hospital. The hospital laboratory could only do bacterial and protozoa analysis of stools at the time. I thought the collaboration put me in a position to proffer a conclusive report that should serve everyone well." (pp.149-150).

This oppressive nature of her supervisor and confinement of research to scarce facilities, she feels is retrogressive for a nation's growth and development. It is

important to learn to share and explore what others have for the benefit of a nation – a practice that she has let Karen Hospital live to by providing not only treatment to patients but also training for those who wish to pursue a career in the medical profession and having the hospital's ICT infrastructure linked both internally and externally to other institutions such as hospitals and medical schools in Kenyan universities (p. 251). After the rejection of her results, a resilient and determined Gikonyo embarked on another research on heart diseases in children which finally turned out to be one of her strongest points during the interview at the University of Minnesota (p.150). This determination to excel and offer service to her country Kenya is evident in her focus to return to Kenya and offer the skills she and her husband Dan had acquired. "Dan and I began to dream of working in a first-class medical facility offering world class cardiac services…We knew we had to participate in the creation of such a facility at home". (p.151). Their conceived dream is finally realized in their establishment of Karen Hospital. As evident in the story of her mother's childbearing experiences that were punctuated with long treacherous journey to seek midwifery services as health facilities were rare (p.9), Gikonyo contributes to the nation's health sector by establishing the Karen Hospital facility. She appreciates Joe Kiser's mentoring and encouragement to return to Kenya and apply the skills acquired on the people who needed them the most. By doing this, Gikonyo contributes to the project of nation building through professionalism. The argument is that an individual's experiences and successes are a nation's experiences and successes.

Gikonyo's passion for a nation's dream to prosperity as not far-fetched is well juxtaposed with her narration of her husband's desire to study in the USA that finally led to her achievement of pediatric cardiology:

> "Dr. Kiser granted Dan's desire to train as a cardiologist in the USA…The possibility of a priest securing us a scholarship seemed a remote if not an impossible proposition altogether. Our psychiatrist friend Dr. Frank Njenga would have called this situation "Building castles in air and going to live in them". However just like Saul's unlikely conversion on the road to Damascus, the impossible happened…The good news that Dan had been offered a scholarship to study cardiology in Minneapolis arrived…" (p.133)

This parallels Gikonyo's cognizance of many unresolved issues that could be obstacles to achieving prosperity of a nation. As she alludes to the biblical story of Saul, she is optimistic that solutions will always present themselves. It is this optimism that she advocates for amongst citizens of a nation.

She is quick to scorn those who put finances or self-gain before the nation. She admonishes them for the misconception and stereotyping of Africa. This she feels is worsened by the media that broadcasts images of starving and dying children, emaciated and helpless adults (p.152). She diligently demystifies this Western stereotype of Africa with the beauty of wildlife that characterizes Kenya: "That was a real experience of Africa's wild savannah that both Bob and Beth will live to tell their grandchildren." (p.153). Through this Juxtaposition, Gikonyo is emphasizing on the evil of misrepresentation of a people's society (nation) by both foreigners and the media hence advocating for responsible citizenship that will represent their society as it is.

In a quick rejoinder, Gikonyo narrates of a peaceful nation with truism and sincere people. In her story of a trip to Mombasa while at the university, she and her friend Frank Njenga hitchhiked in different vehicles, an indication of the hospitable nature of the Kenyan people and the security that existed then. The oneness and communal responsibility of a people of a nation is also evident in the concern from her brother's friend that they met at the coast (p.65-68). These she feels are the values that have become elusive of the present Kenyan nation. Being a beneficiary of free university

education, Gikonyo further reminisces the just system that rewarded excellence and frowned at mediocrity (p.81); one that treated both the poor and the rich equitably, a just system on which a nation's posterity is anchored. It is on this basis that she echoes Dan's belief in the cause of the present state of Kenya: poor leadership and a creation of dishonest, greedy and corrupt citizens despite its rich diversity and dynamic nature evident in the skilled manpower and available resources. Sarcastically, she tells of how these leaders lack a manual on how to lead. She is quick to point out the paradox of this realization in that the very exploited citizens are the ones who empower these leaders with titles like 'Mheshimiwa', ambassador and other honorifics that symbolize vessels of wisdom - which they lack (p.79). It is this ailing state of the nation that Gikonyo wants treated. The basic remedy being entrepreneurship. She argues that just like Dan and herself started a health institution that employs more than 400 members, Kenyans are entrepreneurial in nature and should purpose to invest in their fields of specialization. (p.80). In her argument, she resonates well with Maathai's belief in 'everyone doing their best to improve the universe'.

Gikonyo equally argues that recognition and celebration of a great achievement by statesmen and stateswomen like Wangari Maathai is a step towards reclaiming an ailing nation (p.85). In her narration of her encounters with Maathai while both at the university and after, she tells of how she (Gikonyo) silently shared in the suffering and successes of Maathai. It is her experience while at the university that Gikonyo tells of the importance of amicable ways of solving problems. In her narration, she condemns the unruly approach to problem solving exhibited by the university rioting students as she highlights the dangers that come with this kind of behaviour. In her vivid description of the reasons behind the riot, she presents a group of ungrateful and unreasoning students:

> "A riot in the making led by the senior girls…This is when I got to know our warden, Prof. Wangari Maathai. She argued the case for harmony and understanding. She persuaded the girls to consider dialogue and not resort to primitive techniques of sorting out grievances. Unfortunately, reason did not prevail … What started as a complaint about preferential accommodation…snowballed to drag in the catering department…The meals were boring. There were demands for varying the menu from the choice breakfast of sausage, bacon, eggs, toast and beverage…The main meals of chicken alternating with beef were labelled monotonous…" (pp.83-84).

It is evident from this narration of university life that the students were being treated well yet they were ungrateful. This can be equated to a nation and its people who fail to realize certain privileges available to them. Gikonyo juxtaposes the rioting students with Maathai's suffering in the hands of the government of the day as a way of illuminating the lack of appreciation of the benefits of preserving the environment as advocated for by Maathai. Just like the students, the political leadership of the day instead subjected Maathai to a lot of suffering and failed to recognize and reward her achievement for the sake of the nation (p.86). Agreeing with the other women autobiographers already discussed in the previous chapter, Gikonyo notes that the unjust political leadership leads to the retrogression of a nation. Rewarding the unjust politicians choke the nation at the expense of experts like Maathai.

Gikonyo's self-narrative is punctuated with episodes of health challenges starting from those of her childhood peers, to her mother's childbearing challenges, sickness and death to those of patients that she encountered in her professional journey. Through these experiences, Gikonyo justifies the need for a healthy nation. Her documentation of the great contributions that she has made in the health sector spanning from her duties as a medical doctor, to the chairperson of the Nairobi Health Management Board (NHMB), Council Chair University of Nairobi, Founder of University of Nairobi

Alumni and cofounder of Karen Hospital speak volumes of her contribution to the project of the Kenyan nation.

Gikonyo's recollection of her life's journey and that of her husband Dan, is a mirror of the Kenyan nation. The varsity of their existence to their meeting creates an amazing, beautiful story just like Kenya's endowed amazing beauty (p. 86-87). Her narration of how she and Dan collapsed the short physical separation, that separated their homes, through marriage to journey together and create a beautiful family, career and enterprise, is read as her wish for Kenya to collapse the distances created by tribal and ideological differences to create one great cohesive and progressive nation.

### 3.3.2 Ruth Otunga's *Little Seeds of Resilience:* A Nation's Epic Journey

Otunga's self-story provides a captivating account of her growing up in a society with minimal role models, mainly primary school teachers and her uneducated parents. This, she contrasts with her resilience to conquer all odds to emerge as one of the cream academicians in the Kenyan education system. It is through this resilience that she tells the narrative of the Kenyan nation through the eye of careerism.

Evan Mwangi (2009, p. 42) notes that the narrative's appropriation of the properties of the epic is not to primarily advance nationalistic military endevours associated with the traditional epic, but to celebrate the heroic achievements of the characters in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial patriarchal conditions. As she tells of her epic journey in the academy, Otunga clearly communicates the essence of perseverance to attain success. She recalls her refusal to go to school because of what she considered hardship only to find more hardship in menial work. It is through her schooling that she and her sister assist their parents to read any communication made to them, an aspect that foregrounds the importance of education for the benefit of a nation's citizens. As

Otunga advances her argument on the importance of education to society, she is quick to point out the gender disparity that exists in the education sector: "Our class at Khamuli had many boys and very few girls" (p.40). Sadly, she talks of the gender stereotyping and oppressive attitude that had lingered on for decades and led to high levels of dropouts of girls from school. Despite this, she soldiered on as she got encouragement from her father. With pride, she appreciates the achievement of her friend with whom she soldiered, who later became a Deputy Vice Chancellor at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. This success is read as the success of the nation through professionalism. This gender stereotyping is later witnessed during her secondary and university education. Secondly, the science subjects were said to be difficult to pass, especially for girls. Hence, a subject like Home Science was labelled as a girls' subject. As Otunga advances her argument on the role of gender in education, she contrasts the helping and encouraging nature of the female teacher, Ruth with the harsh disciplinarian nature of the male teachers Messrs. Masike and Makete. She shuns corporal punishment that supposedly made her as she foregrounds the gentle nature of the female teacher that I equate to the nurturing nature of a nation.

Otunga's career path, just like that of Gikonyo, was influenced by both her experiences back home and school as a young girl. Her cousin Joseph Wabomba Nasokho and his wife Neddy's generosity to those around them as well as Neddy's hard work and persistence inspired her. Nostalgically, Otunga recalls a lesson learnt from Joseph: "…for the little mustard seed to grow to be a huge tree to accommodate birds of different species that rest on its branches, it must be carefully nurtured and long enough…" (p.45). Through this analogy, Otunga observes that one's success is a journey over time that requires proper nurturing, and so is a nation's journey. It is this

nurturing that she receives through her professional journey and narrates how through professionalism an individual can impact a lot on society's wellbeing.

Otunga recounts the start of her academic excellence with a lot of nostalgia. The passing of her Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) and the air of importance that comes with it. Her success becomes the success of those around her (p.46). Hence resonating with the argument that an individual's story is the story of her society. Otunga further lays a lot of emphasis on the gratification that comes with academic and professional excellence. Especially that by a woman. For instance, her doctoral achievement is applauded. In foregrounding the importance of women's achievement, she highlights the description by the Vice Chancellor and the crowd's reaction, the women's ululations:

> "He said "Today, your excellence, I have the honor of presenting the first ever female candidate for the conferment of Doctor of Philosophy of Moi University…" And he read out my name – Ruth Nabwala Otunga – to the thunderous applause from the cheerful gathering. …The ululation of joyous women filled the graduation square." (P.1).

Just like Maathai's historical achievement in being the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctoral degree, the first woman professor, the first African to receive the Nobel Prize (Maathai, 2007), Otunga registers history by being the first woman to attain a doctoral degree from Moi university. Through this achievement, Otunga contributes to the historical narrative of the institution and that of the nation. Resonating with Anderson (1991) is the people's celebration of Otunga's achievement. As observed, there is sense of nationhood amongst the people. Those who praise and share in her success are people whom she hardly knew nor did they know her. The joy expressed by the women reflect the concepts of womanhood that is realized through one woman's achievement that becomes the achievement of the women folk. Otunga further links her success to her supervisors as a way of asserting the need for collective

responsibility in achieving success. (p.2). It is in the breadth of collectiveness for success that Otunga digresses from her own success to narrate and acknowledge the success of other women professionals: the headmistresses of Butere Girls; Alice and Mrs. Omoka. Her elaborative narration of Alice's excellence from school as a student to her teaching and administrative duties in various institutions clearly illuminate the contribution of the woman in the development of a nation through professionalism and careerism (pp.49-50).

As earlier noted, part of Otunga's inspiration for success is through her interaction with people, especially family members. Neddy's hard work and persistence impacts on her as evident in her resilience in a patriarchal society. Resonating with Watson and Smith (2010) that life writers make themselves known by acts of identification and implication differentiation, Otunga notably tells of her struggle within a patriarchal world, more so, in the academia. Cognizant of the identity frame labelled against her for being a woman, she resists by subverting the social norms that are used to define the identity of the woman. As she earns her doctorate, she is cognizant of the fact that few women had dared navigate the academia that is majorly a male dominated route (p.2). Further, she tells of her being the first woman professor in Moi University to deliver an inaugural lecture. She was the only woman among ten professors who delivered the lectures. Otunga, therefore, subverts this narrative by being among the ten and demonstrating the equal ability in both men and women in their contribution to the project of nation building. Emerging with a dual consciousness of the woman's position in the male dominated professional space and the woman as different from cultural prescription, Otunga in her narration of the subsequent inaugural lecture, rarely mentions the male professors and the titles of their inaugural lectures. Instead, she goes into summary details on what she and the other two women professors (Naomi Shitemi and Eunice

Kamara) presented on. As she nostalgically recalls missing her undergraduate graduation ceremony despite scoring a first-class honours degree, she gives an account of those who graduated with her and their professional progression (p.88). Intentionally, she lists six women verses five men as an assertion of equal contribution by both men and women professionals towards national development. I also argue that her recount of inaugural lectures by professors from different fields and her vivid description of her siblings' personalities and professional experiences signify the importance of diverse knowledge, personalities and professions in the epic journey of a nation.

She tells of how she competes favourably with her male counterparts for the position of deanship and won. It is through this triumph that she advocates for leaders who are well versed in their areas of specialization, despite their gender, who have networks and good relations with others (pp.151-153). Of concern to Otunga is the injustices against women by the patriarchal society. While resonating with Gikonyo on the perception of women pursuing certain professions, Otunga notes the discrimination that the woman in Africa faces. She (the woman) is discriminated from pursuing professions like engineering and law. She is also suppressed by being denied the opportunity to express herself especially in the presence of men. However, she (Otunga) appreciates the strides made by women in debunking this patriarchal narrative:

> "…that some professions like law and engineering are not suitable for women and the requirement that women should not express themselves especially in the presence of men are some of the things that demeaned women in Africa. However, with availability of information and communication across the globe, African women have made efforts and indeed continue to make incremental emancipation strides." (p.142).

Otunga tries to explain the reasons behind this gender disparity as being either the patriarchal fallacies or the societal responsibilities bestowed on women. Otunga, just like Gikonyo, is determined to demystify the myth around the woman as far as her

professional and family responsibilities are concerned. In negating the myth that educated women fail to fulfil their wifely and motherly roles, Otunga tells of her experience of marriage and motherhood during her educational and professional journey. She tells of the dejection she experiences, as a young mother, from her collegemates and lecturers to the support she got from her mother, sister and the female teachers at Alliance Girls during her teaching practice. Her sacrifices and resilience amidst difficulties saw her succeed in her motherhood, studenthood and professionhood. She tells of her ability to handle both family and professional responsibilities successfully without disadvantaging either:

> "At the time of pursuing my PhD, I was a mother of five young children and a full time lecturer. My hands were full but I had to strike a tripartite balance of motherhood, education and formal employment. My normal life oscillated around official duties in the lecture halls, further studies and research and domestic obligations towards my young family…It was a tough undertaking but I steadfastly kept on." (p.3).

This foregrounding of the multiple responsibilities for a professional woman is an indicator of the uncelebrated sacrificial role of a professional woman in the development of a nation. The woman therefore, has a dual role in the development of a nation: nurturing and developing. It is this ideology that Otunga shares during her professional life. While a teacher at Ngandu, she notes the importance of a teacher sacrificing to better her students' success. Otunga observes that a woman professional has a dual responsibility as evident in Sister Nazarena: "She understood that young ladies of Ngandu needed not only a teacher but also a mother" (p.91). It is in this same breadth of responsibilities that her acquisition of PhD comes with a social obligation to make a difference that would benefit others beyond her. She uses this academic achievement to engage in noble mission of empowering others as a way of developing society:

> "I had been empowered to go forth and do all that appertained to the degree, which included empowering others. Yes, empowering others! This was and has continued to be my greatest passion in life. I value and embrace academic mentorship for it gives me great satisfaction as I help others realize their potential. (p.4)

From the above words by Otunga, it is evident that educational achievement is the cornerstone of a nation's growth. Education empowers one to empower others, hence empowers the nation. Otunga emphasizes the role of education in national development; it fosters national unity, harmony, globalhood, and eventually humanhood:

> "…education must empower the learners and give them relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes…I also believe that education must serve and foster national unity and global harmony…facilitate eradication of racial prejudice across the globe. It must also enable society to appreciate that ethnicity is just but a way of life or language of communication while other aspects of humans remain constant. It should help us celebrate our social cultural diversity and enrich our being, not divide us…we are all human beings packaged in different colours and cultures." (pp. 4-5).

The above argument by Otunga resonates well with Smith's (2002) observation that 'nations are composed of discrete elements, and their cultures possess a variety of ingredients with different flavours and provenances'. In this context, Otunga shares Gikonyo's observation on the role of educational institutions in enhancing nationhood. According to Otunga, national unity is and can be enhanced through educational institutions as students from diverse cultural and social backgrounds are admitted to institutions of higher learning. These students come together to share and appreciate their diverse cultural experiences as they learn to coexist, hence foster a sense of nationhood:

> "Given the scenario of student admission, it is possible that universities can cultivate and enhance a sense of national integration and social cohesion. University students come from all parts of the country and even beyond. Besides the students' admission criteria for both public and private universities, it is possible to generate admission policies and encourage mixing of students from various

> ethnic groups in Kenya. This is one way of providing opportunities for university students to live together." (p.7).

While still emphasizing the role of educational institutions in enhancing national social and cultural harmony, Otunga points out the deficit in the current education system that focuses on only two pillars: learning to know and learning to do. This leaves out learning to live and learning to be, that are ultimately the pillars of a nation. She argues that these two can be achieved if paid attention to by all cultures that are by extension harnessed in the institutions of higher learning that admit students from various ethnic groups.

Otunga gives account of her professional growth starting from being an untrained teacher, to a high school teacher, college tutor, tutorial fellow, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and finally a professor. In this journey of professionalism, Otunga faces challenges that she resiliently overcomes as she endevours to contribute to the academy and the society _nation. In her narration, she is keen to highlight her contribution through teaching, supervising students' work, presenting academic papers and visiting other universities. By listing the institutions visited that span across continents, Otunga emphasizes the role of education and professionalism in unifying the globe as ideas are shared. Just like Gikonyo who narrates her contribution to the nation through her medical practice, Otunga's contribution is through the academia. She notes:

> "I have regarded education as one of the key components of human development. The spirit of learning and impacting others…generating, gathering and sharing of knowledge. This is one of the platforms that can enable people to 'think-alike' and eventually 'act-alike' and project diversity of mutual understanding, growth and development." (p.115).

Through her writing of academic papers as a contribution to and appreciation of topical debates on issues affecting the Kenyan nation, like gender and education, she

participates in the making of the nation. In noting that change is necessary where there is dissatisfaction with the values of a nation, she singles out education as the best instrument through which a system of values could be appreciated, moulded and changed. Being an expert in education curriculum, she advocates for an all-inclusive process in preparation and implementation of the curriculum rather than absolutism in policy making by the policy makers. It is through the curriculum that evils that ail a nation like gender discrimination and illiteracy can be addressed. She advocates for a literate citizenry as she argues that illiteracy is a predicament to a nation's development, a source of famine, poor living conditions and exploitation as well as a source of empowering men and disempowering women. Passionate about the curriculum, she further argues that the reforms therein should be international to remain relevant in this era of globalization. The curriculum should open the graduates' knowledge on global matters which contribute to the phenomena that affect political, economic and social developments of a nation. Professionals should embrace change and be keen and observant of the unfolding dynamic generations for the present and future of the nation.

Otunga is cognizant of the setbacks to a nation's unity that should be addressed by the academy. For instance, through her profession as a researcher, she and other scholars participated in an International Symposium on Dialogue, Healing and Reconciliation in Kenya following the chaos witnessed in the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. She further admonishes the negative perception held by scholars who tend to isolate themselves from the realities of life, as she asserts: "Education must co-relate and mirror society because human beings do not exist in a vacuum" (p.4). It is for this reason that she argues that higher education institutions should disseminate knowledge for the benefit of the larger society (p.9).

Away from formal education, Otunga vividly narrates how informal education based on gender impacts on a nation. She points to an experience witnessed in Dakar during one of her visits. The girls were basically being taken through informal education with the principal purpose of preparing them to be good wives. An aspect that she argues created a mentality in the girls is that their duty was to get married and bear children. She, together with other women in the conference, sensitized the residents on the importance of giving all children, both girls and boys, equal opportunities to education. She notes that gender roles are psychological orientation. Hence, there is need to mentor the girls and women towards professional participation for the benefit of national development. It is during this participation in gender discourses in CODESRIA that she asserts her contribution to girl-child education in Kenya. In her paper, she points out the causes of gender disparity in enrolments in schools as: cultural and religious beliefs that depress the women folk, a negative attitude towards education and early marriage for girls. Otunga further observes that the girls are seen as both a source of wealth and 'tools' of procreation. Therefore, these cultural aspects curtail the participation of the women in national development. It is for this reason that she recommended readmission of the girl child back to school after giving birth, admission of married women to school (those willing), free primary and secondary education and appointment of women to key positions in government and other public sector institutions (pp.141-142). Consequently, she applauds the benefits of these recommendations to the progress of the Kenyan nation since their adoption.

In the light of the argument that the autobiographer narrates her life based on 'ancestral' origin, Otunga, just like the other women autobiographers already discussed, gives the relevance of the lineage of both parents to her life. She traces her leadership qualities to her father's lineage and personal virtues to her mother's lineage. Like Otieno, she

talks of a Bukusu legendry Maina wa Nalukale the great leader of the Bukusu nation being in her lineage. This legend was both a prophet and leader of his people who prophesied about the future leadership of the Bukusu nation and led his people in search of new settlements. Through this reference, Otunga is foregrounding the need for visionary leaders - an aspect that she has tried to live to as a leader in her academic and professional journey as told in her story. She equally analogizes the being and journey of a nation to the myth of creation of the Bukusu and their migration journey (p.14). Due to migration, the Bukusu border other ethnic groups hence share some aspects of intercultural influences like initiation and age sets. Through this, Otunga is reemphasizing the importance of coexistence of the Kenyan people as they share common boundaries and experiences.

As noted above, Otunga attributes her personal virtues of hard work, being peaceful and responsible to her maternal lineage (p.17). This she does as a way of emphasizing the role played by women in nurturing a nation. Her maternal grandmother, Susan Nyelesa Namukabo was an only child of her mother. Her identity as daughter of Mukawale is a deliberate intention by the narrator to subvert the order from the culturally accepted reference of son of so and so. While acknowledging that ‘it is a man’s world’ (p.23), Otunga clearly indicates that patriarchy had ironically empowered the woman to being the pillar of a home. She notes that her grandmother taught her mother’s family responsibilities. This was done in accordance with the gender roles that contribute to the being and success of a family: farming that generates income, entertaining visitors which is a sign of hospitality, guiding and leading siblings which is a sign of leadership and how to raise her own family which is nurturing ability (p.18). Further, Otunga intentionally talks of the feature on the East African shilling with the portrait of the queen of England as a way of asserting the role of women in the economic

well-being of a nation (p.26). She narrates about the market as being synonymous with the woman. It is here that women went to either sell or buy food stuff. The marketplace, therefore, became a space for economic empowerment. In a very paradoxical manner, she relates buying of meat and drinking of beer, that is ironically prepared by the women, to men's concern. By juxtaposing the village peculiarities of women and men, Otunga narrates the important role played by the woman in national development.

Otunga advocates for Africanism – African socialism as opposed to capitalism that leads to individualism. In praising the communal coexistence and oneness that makes a nation, she recounts when their houses were razed down by fire and the assistance they got from their relatives and neighbours. Equally, when her father died out of lack of proper medication that they could not afford, her uncle took up the responsibility of caring for them. From these occurrences, the argument is that challenges should not deter progression: "A bend on the road is not the end of the road, unless you fail to make the turn." (p.69). Despite the state of poverty her family was in, coupled with the loss of her father, she did not give up. Under the care of her uncle, she was able to progress with her education. Otunga tells of the family spirit at Butere Girls; one that inculcated responsibility among the girls over their fellow students - the family tree: child-mother-grandmother-great grandmother. This was to instill the culture of coexistence amongst the students and to be a sister's keeper. This I read as her vision of a nation. Hierarchical levels of responsibility which are translated to mentorship. She strongly feels that this culture of daughter- mother- grandmother and great grandmother nurtured leadership and a great sense of responsibility. If practiced in the larger society of the Kenyan nation; Kenya would be great (p.54) as individualism would be discouraged and social responsibility encouraged.

Besides poverty that affects her family's wellbeing, Otunga points out the other cancers of a nation: ethnicity, nepotism, sycophancy and favouritism. This she does by appreciating the role played by art in illuminating societal evils. She points out the play "Shackles of Doom" by Butere Girls and Ngugi's writings that were banned and Ngugi fled into his exile. Her solution to this cancerous state is to let people ventilate what they think is a problem and cultivate fertile ground for a solution. She also points out betrayal and envy as other hindrances to progress of a nation. For instance, she tells of the envy from institutional management towards those with higher academic qualifications. She also points out the betrayal by fellow colleagues in the academy during the agitation for better working conditions by the public university lecturers. She condemns Kenya for failing to appreciate its intellectuals as she narrates the plight of the lecturers in an oppressive regime that does not want to be challenged. The injustices against both lecturers and students are retrogressive to the growth of a nation. Therefore, sacrifices must be made to get rid of the evils in society. This is evident in the consequences faced by the lecturers on strike.

Unlike Gikonyo, Otunga does not journey with her husband in her academic and professional journey. However, her narration of her experiences in marriage as a student and a professional illuminate the challenges she faced. She remained determined to keep her marriage as it was taboo to walk out of marriage. Although culture exerted power over her that she had to conform, she did not fall short of focus to succeed in her studies and profession. It is this determination and resilience even in times of atrocities that she advocates for citizens of a nation; a never giving up spirit and focusing on the good of a nation.

Otunga's self-story is a major focus on how academics and professionalism are the cornerstones of a nation. She is cognizant of the many challenges that one must negotiate through to succeed. It is realism in the academy that ultimately constructs the nation. She sums up the values of a nation that her citizens should embrace as they pursue education and in their profession by creatively deconstructing Ben Carsons' acronymic concept of THINK BIG: T=Talent, H=Honest, I=Insight, N=Nice, K=Knowledge, B= Books, I= In-depth Knowledge and G= God (p.4). This, she believes, is the formidable key to a successful nation.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The women authors in this chapter narrate how they emancipate themselves from a coercive traditional authority to become self-made women. This emancipation is channeled through their quest for education and literacy. Exploration of paths that are contrary to their culturally prescribed social roles manifests itself as the first step to self-accomplishment which is symbolic of their narration of the nation. They emancipate themselves from the power of social construction of gender through literacy and claim authority through professionalism and qualities inherited from their parents or family lineage. Although most of their achievements are attributed to the support from family members, their direction in life depended wholly on their personal determination and abilities. For instance, Otunga, who had minimal inspiration from her family, is depicted as a self-made woman. Her courage and resilience are extolled especially when it comes to educational matters. Gikonyo's dared dream to become a doctor and her successes in the medical field are a major contribution to the Kenyan nation.

Both Gikonyo and Otunga view the spaces, that is, the institutions where they schooled and worked as societies that nurtured them to whom they become. With pride, they also express their contributions to the successes of these same institutions. It is through this that we learn of the nurturing ability of an institution and an individual's contribution to the being and successes of the very institution, hence symbolizing the role of a nation to its citizens and that of the citizens to the nation.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# THE VISION OF A NATION IN THE KENYAN WOMAN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*"Our children may learn about heroes of the past. Our task is to make ourselves architects of the future."* ~ Jomo Kenyatta (n.d.).

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the woman autobiographer (re)imagines a vision of the nation and nation-ness within the possibilities offered by the autobiographical form as a mode of structuring and ordering sociocultural and political realities and experiences. The vision of a nation is a crucial aspect in understanding the aspirations and goals of a society. As argued, the development of a vision of a nation is a complex and ongoing process that is influenced by a range of factors, including historical and cultural context, economic conditions, and political priorities (Smith, 2006). It is shaped by both the aspirations and the limitations of a nation's people and reflects their hopes and dreams for the future (Jones, 2010).

In a literary context, a vision of a nation can be expressed through themes such as national identity, social justice, cultural diversity, and economic development (Kaplan, 2003). These themes are often woven into the fabric of a story, providing a rich and nuanced portrait of a nation's character, history, and aspirations. Hence, from a literary perspective, a vision of a nation provides a powerful tool for exploring the complexities and diversity of a country's culture, history, and aspirations. The authors offer an insightful and thought-provoking portrayal of a nation, inspiring new ideas and approaches to national development and progress. The Kenyan woman autobiographer tells her own story and challenges the dominant narratives about a country's history and culture as a significant role in shaping the vision of the nation. She imagines and

articulates alternative futures for a nation. She challenges the status quo and encourages new ways of thinking about national development. Based on this, the chapter privileges the scrutiny of the literary imaginative vision of a nation in two autobiographies: Rasna Warah's *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self Discovery* and Phoebe Asiyo's *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks.* It is through vision that the future can be told. In this case, the future of the Kenyan nation.

While exploring the vision of a nation in this chapter, I consider Ernst Bloch argument as read in Ashcroft et al (1989):

> "Literature …is inherently utopia because its [*raison d'etre*] is the imagination of a different world. It is by narrative, by stories, we tell that we have a world and it is utopian thinking, utopian forms, utopian narrative that we have a conception of a radically changeable world." (p.12).

As cited above, vision can be conceived of as the definite essence of every work of literature. It is the possibilities imbued in the imagination of every writer as part of her/his conscious desire to invest her/his identifiable worlding with new and alternative interpretations and meanings to project the future. The Kenyan woman autobiographer, just like any other writer, engages in this activity of imagination. Therefore, in this chapter the question is: How does the woman autobiographer use the self-narrative to bring into presence that which does not exist, to bring into the region of possibility that which is yet to exist: the vision of the Kenyan nation?

Northrop Frye as read in Jameson's *Political Conscious* (1981) reminds us of how literary exhibits itself in his profound articulation of the romance novel. He observes that romance (read as vision) is a wish fulfillment or utopian fantasy that aims at the transfiguration of the world of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost 'Eden', or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and

imperfections will have been effaced (p.110). In some specific ways, the two autobiographies under study in this chapter tend to gesture towards this kind of a vision mostly regarding an attempt to project a sense of nation and nation-ness. As such, in very explicit ways, the vision of the Kenyan nation as narrated in the autobiographies appears to be romanticized; a kind of desire or wish to transfigure the sense of nation and nation-ness to re-imagined 'Edenic worlding' (Odhiambo, 2009).

The vision of the nation in this chapter is particularly interpreted as one that obviously obliterates the more complex and dynamic processes of the nation formation in the post colony: the role of colonial legacy and politics of ethnic and racial patronage as well as gender discourses and material culture. The basis for this approach would be the question: Is it possible to achieve the vision of a nation by simply negating the role of history and in its stead only embrace 'the current' as the vehicle for the realization of the sense of a nation and nation-ness? To answer this question, I interrogate how through their self-narratives, the autobiographers not only affirm that the history of the Kenyan nation predates colonial history but also obliviate that the tensions and conflicts between the colonized Asians and colonized Africans, as evident in Warah, are just artificial. The collective myth of their existence clearly points to a common experience. The chapter also explores how the autobiographers' narratives legitimize the unification of a Kenyan nation to its unitary configuration before the vicious contact with colonialism that resulted in fragmentation. It acknowledges historical injustices as a bridge to future justice.

### 4.2 A Biographical Overview of the Autobiographers

Born in Kenya in 1962 of Asian ancestry, Rasna Warah holds an M.A. degree in Communication for Development from Malmö University in Malmö, Sweden, and a

Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and Women's Studies from Suffolk University in Boston, USA. She is an editor, writer, journalist and communications consultant at the national and international levels.

Warah worked with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) for nearly twelve years. She was the Editor and Co-author of two editions of UN-Habitat's flagship State of the *World's Cities Report* (2006/7 and 2008/9) and served as Editor of the quarterly magazine *Habitat Debate*. In 2007, she edited Kenya's Vision 2030, and in 2012, she was part of a team that edited Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission report. In 2011 Rasna served as the Editor-in-Chief of the State of the Cities in Africa report series for the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town. In 2020, she edited "Towards the Just City in Kenya", a report published by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Kenya Office.

She has also provided strategic communications expertise for complex projects leading to impactful communication campaigns, including for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) that took place in Istanbul in June 1996, and the World Urban Forum held in Vancouver and Beijing in 2006 and 2008, respectively. In 2011, she prepared a communication strategy for Kenya's National Urban Development Policy. She has also worked with Kenya's county governments in preparing public health strategies as part of a USAID-funded initiative to assist the health sector in Kenya.

Warah wrote an op-ed column for Kenya's largest and most influential newspaper, the *Daily Nation*, from 2006 to 2018 and was a columnist and copy editor with *The Elephant* from 2017 till 2020. She has authored seven books: *Triple Heritage* (1998), *Missionaries, Mercenaries and Misfits* (2008), *Red Soil and Roasted Maize* (2011),

*Mogadishu Then and Now* (2012), *War Crimes* (2014), *UNsilenced* (2016) and *Lords of Impunity* (2022). She has written several articles and essays that have appeared in the UK's Guardian newspaper, the East African, Africa is a Country, South Africa's Mail and Guardian, among other newspapers. She is currently a writer with the ONE Campaign's COVID-19 Aftershocks project. She is also a board member of Haki Yetu, a non-profit organization devoted to defending the rights of Kenya's marginalized coastal communities.

Married to the late Richard Bezellel Asiyo, Phoebe Asiyo, was born on September 12, 1932. She is a former parliamentarian of Kenya, ambassador to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). She was the first woman elevated to the position of Luo elder for her efforts to promote education for girls, women's rights, and gender equality in Kenya. Fondly called Mama Asiyo, she has dedicated her life to improving the political arena in Kenya, the role of women and girls, and those affected by the HIV epidemic. She is the first woman in Kenya to become an elder of a community.

In 2001, Asiyo was selected to be the Commissioner of the Constitution Review Committee (CRC). She was part of the delegation to Uganda to advocate for the participation of women in the peace talks in Uganda. She currently serves as chair of the Caucus for Women's Leadership, formerly called the Kenya Women's Political Caucus, where she mentors young women and advocates for women in leadership roles. She is the author of her memoir: *It Is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks* (2018).

Asiyo has Membership to Member of parliamentarians of Global Action, Goodwill ambassador for united Nations Development Fund for Women of AFRICA, Commissioner in the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC), Delegate to

the UN General Assembly and the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Consultant for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Chairperson of the Kenya National Council of Women, Caucus for Women's Leadership. She also has the following honors and awards: Order of the Golden Warrior: 1st class chief of the burning spear, Doctor of Humane Letters from Lehigh University, Honorary Doctorate Law Degree from the University of York.

### 4.3 The Discourses of a Rainbow Nation in Rasna Warah's *Triple Heritage: A Journey of Self Discovery* and Phoebe Asiyo's *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks*

Bhabha (1990) argues that a nation is constituted by two things: the past which is possession of a common rich legacy of memories; and the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of heritage that one has received in undivided form. From this observation, the nation then becomes a culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice and devotion to all cults, most importantly that of the ancestors that make us what we are. It is this that the woman autobiographer brings out as she narrates her life based on 'ancestral' origin. A heroic past, great men or women and glory are the social capitals upon which she bases her national idea. 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- are the essential conditions for being a people (p.19). A people of a nation live in proportion to the sacrifices to which they have consented, and in proportion to the ills that they have suffered – a concept largely shared by Warah and Asiyo in their autobiographies. Taking off from Bhabha's argument, Warah and Asiyo are read to establish how the discourse of a 'rainbow' nation is forged in an environment of fierce opposition to racism and ethnically and gender divisive projections.

Mandela's speech: "South Africa is the rainbow nation. We have all the colors of the rainbow represented here and all the cultures of the world."(1990), asserts the discourse of a rainbow nation as a symbol of hope and a call to action for all to strive towards a more inclusive and diverse society. Borrowing from Mandela's speech, the reading of the selected texts is done to answer the question: how is/will the journey towards a rainbow nation be achieved? The discourse of a "rainbow nation" in both Warah and Asiyo is critically examined through the challenges faced by marginalized communities and gender while highlighting the importance of taking concrete steps to address and challenge these inequalities.

### 4.3.1 Straddling Borders of a Nation in Rasna Warah's *Triple Heritage: A Journey of Self Discovery*

In her search for identity, Warah presents a socio-economic and politically straddling nation. She observes that the colonial history of the Kenyan nation has contributed to the integration of non-Africans and native Africans into class-based expressions of social citizenship. The racially constructed stereotypes and myths that define the 'other' are exploited to potentially undermine and defer the sense of nationness. She says:

> "… Despite being fourth generation immigration to Kenya, my status lay somewhere between citizen and refuge[e], of one not quite belonging anywhere" (p.6).

Warah reflects on her personal experiences as a Kenyan of Indian descent, and the ways in which her heritage has shaped her understanding of cultural, political, and geographical borders. By exploring her own experiences of navigating multiple racial, cultural and political systems, Warah provides insight into the challenges and opportunities of straddling borders, and the ways in which individuals can reconcile these conflicting racial, cultural and political identities for the benefit of a unitary nation.

Hall (1990) argues that cultural practice is an ongoing production of identity that is never complete. Reading Warah in the light of Hall, through her narratives, she explores a new sense of identity. An identity that is projected onto the homeland of Kenya and an embrace of a non-essential Asian African consciousness. In telling about her community's existence, she takes us to the distant past, to her wonder of why her grandfather left Punjab for a new life in Africa. This draws her to a dilemma on identity: "Who am I? Kenyan or Indian?" (p.10). It is observed that because of this void in identity, she acquires a triple identity: Indian, Kenyan and the West.

> "Over the years I have learnt to accept that my identity is multi-faceted and that I am a product of: the Indian subcontinent, where my ancestors came from; Kenya, where I was born and brought up; and the West, where I attained higher education and which invariably influences all people who were once colonized." (p.11).

Warah glorifies this 'rainbow' identity as opposed to the monolithic identity that some Asians have retreated to. She acknowledges the benefits of interacting with others beyond one's race. She argues that interaction beyond racial borders leads to new discoveries and acquisition of new skills. She contrasts this with the closed nature of most Indians in Kenya and many parts of the world who have resisted embracing new ways available in their immediate space(s) of existence. This kind of attitude, according to Warah, has contributed to the statelessness or half citizenry or half refugee for the Asians in Kenya. This is despite their enormous contribution to the liberation struggle and economic growth of Africa as evident in her narrative. Her argument therefore is that the enclosed nature of Asians to their culture problematizes the realization of their identity and in turn that of the nation.

Warah, in envisioning the Kenyan nation, narrates of how the three race communities; British, Indian and African contributed to the development of the nation: the British brought the railway, the Indians provided skill while the Africans provided the

environment/land. Besides the railway construction, Warah talks of other reasons for the three communities' presence in Kenya and how they complemented each other: Indians for entrepreneurship, British for economic, political and aesthetic values and Africa for its richness in resources. By pointing out this, Warah is foregrounding the need to appreciate the richness of Kenya in terms of race and skill as a way of cushioning against animosity between various races and ethnic groups. This is interpreted as her vision of the nation; one that does not have racial boundaries, a rainbow nation.

Warah narrates how the evils of discrimination and stereotyping retrogress the development of a nation. She tells of how the colonialists discriminated and stereotyped the Indians and Africans:

> "By 1905, for example, Sir Donald Stewart was just justifying Sir Eliot's demand by claiming that "owing to the unsanitary habits of Asiatics and Africans, they are not fit persons to take up land as neighbours of Europeans." …If the Indian…It is not because his skin is black that he is unpopular; it is because he is a foul liver, a drunkard and a thief." (p.22).

Besides relegating the two races to the periphery, the European incited the Africans against the Asians in their attempt to consolidate their position of authority over the Kenyan land and the resources therein. He created animosity between the two races by using divide and rule'. To subvert the threat posed by the Asians economically and numerically, the British initiated a policy that would reserve parts of the Rift Valley and the highlands exclusively for European settlement. This sow the seed of mistrust (p.21) between the Asians and Europeans. The colonialists suppressed the Indian's progress in Kenya and deceptively took away the properties of the Africans by exploiting their innocence and gullibility. Asians bore the blame for the evils upon

Africans while the colonialists cleansed themselves as the guardians/benefactors, yet they were the oppressors:

> "Thus, by claiming to be 'guardians of the "innocent" and "gullible" natives, Europeans managed to consolidate their hold on both the Africans and their land… Yet despite stealing the Africans' land, the Europeans still claimed that the Indian was the thief driven by greed and avarice. The ability to disguise self-aggrandisement into charity was a key factor in strengthening the British position in the colonies. What was it, if not clever gimmickry, that made millions of colonized people around the world consider the British as their benefactors instead of their oppressor?" (p.21-23).

From the above excerpt, historical injustices and experiences of the Kenyan people, despite the race, have a bearing on the present state of the nation. The racial prejudice between the Africans and Asians has part of its roots to this experience. By posing the rhetoric question, Warah notes the hypocritical nature of the British and the evils of hypocrisy. From this, I argue that Warah is cautioning the Kenyan people against being influenced by historical injustices and biases while urging them to be cognizant of the hypocrites who deceptively use their positions for selfish gains at the expense of national coexistence. In a twist of events, she tells of how the Asians would prefer to marry a white person instead of a black. Even though the Europeans had stereotyped them as thieves and wrong influence on Africans, the Asians racial prejudice on the Africans is evident in this preference. This she argues, contributes to the strained relationship between African Kenyans and Asian Kenyans.

While acknowledging the contribution of the Asians to the freedom of the Kenya-Africans through representation of freedom fighters by Asian lawyers, she points out the stereotyping of the Mau Mau as violent. Despite their sympathy for Africans struggle for independence, they egocentrically chose to focus on the security of their property instead of working together with the Africans to achieve freedom. These resonances back to the closed nature of the Asians. The reference to Asians as "guest

race" (p.25) clearly spells out the degree of discrimination on the Asians. To her observation, it is this discrimination that led to the Asians reluctance to participate in the country's politics. The Africans, at the onset of independence, did not want to form parties with Asians as they felt this would dilute or adulterate their demands:

> "…justifications put forward to explain why Asians were relegated to the back seat was that their presence would dilute African demands…it would have the negative effect of adulterating the demands of the African people to form an alliance with immigrant groups whose only interest was to use the African majority to achieve their own aspirations." (p.30).

The Africans had stereotyped the Asians as egocentric. This attitude lived on after independence where the government's emphasis shifted to Africanization rather than Kenyanization. The Asians who chose to remain in Kenya after independence faced racial prejudice. The process to attain citizenship became problematic. It is these evils that Warah foregrounds as being unproductive for a nation. She calls for the belonging of an individual to enhance his/her participation in the development of a nation.

Warah identifies ignorance, historical, cultural and economic factors as the reasons behind unsuccessful integration of Asians and Africans in Kenya (p.48). She tells of how both the Asians and Africans lack sufficient knowledge of the Indian culture as well as the historical factors behind the existence of the two races in Kenya and how they complement each other for the success of a nation. She is cynical of Shikuku's criticism on the Asian as she perceives his action as informed by a lack of historical knowledge and racial generalization. Through this observation, Warah is advocating for adequate knowledge on historical facts and avoidance of racial segregation. She further narrates how the historically conditioned tensions and anxieties of economic structures, from colonial times, have dichotomized Kenya socio-economically. This has led to economic class differences that provide, in contemporary reality, a site upon

which desires for nationness play out. Even though the smaller Asian family businesses employ Africans, most of the other Asians grow their economy without benefiting the Africans yet their investments are in an African landscape. This I read as her observation of the reason for the race contest witnessed in Kenya. Through this, Warah is calling for tolerance and accommodative approach for a better society since both races benefit from each other. She is cynical of the egocentric nature of the Asians that is evident in "their own economic salvation" (p.34) just in the same way she is cynical towards Africanization. Her vision of the Kenyan nation is one that glorifies Kenyanization devoid of race. This should be realized through participation in and integration of the economic and political power by all races in Kenya. It is on this basis that she gets optimistic that the new class of elite Africans will no longer be threatened by Asian economic status. She is also hopeful that the Kenyan government is aware of the economic effects of expelling Asians. As she agrees with the narrative that Asians dominate the Kenyan economy, Warah argues that Africans lack of economic excellence is due to their vulnerability to corruption and their unwillingness to take risks in economic endeavors.

Warah tells of the 'elusive' unitary nation. She notes that lack of cohesion in Kenya is advanced through racial discrimination. Just like the discussions in the earlier sections of this thesis, where gender discrimination is advanced by both men and women, Warah argues that racial discrimination is also a product of both the discriminated and the discriminating. Despite the Africans' discriminating attitude towards Asians, they too have a part to play. For instance, she talks of how the Asians have failed to make any attempt to negate the stereotype labelled against them. They instead glorify their closed culture that does not allow Africaniness to infiltrate their space. She notes that Asians have a strong aversion to those outside their own racial enclave. She deliberately gives

a vivid description of the Asians that brings out their strongly held stereotypes and myths suggestive of their supposed exclusionary tendencies. Contemptuously, she recalls the evils of discrimination through her experience. She experiences race isolation while in Britain, as she neither belonged to the blacks nor whites. Ironically, her experience echoes in contrast to that of Ocol's self-alienation and hatred for his well-defined identity when he wonders why he was born black (p'Bitek, 1972, p.126). As she reflects on her experience, she proudly embraces the triple heritage as a way of emphasizing the importance of identity for an individual and by extension, the nation. It is the self-acceptance of one's identity that gives belonging hence fostering nationhood among a people of a given society.

Warah compares the racial discrimination to the gender and religious discrimination as evident in her Asian society. She perceives the denying of women rights by the Asian society as a violation against human rights:

> "My quarrel with arranged marriages is not so much the fact that the people involved do not love each other, but rather the fact that arranged marriages are a violation of human being's right to self-determination and can be a device used to perpetuate the oppression of women in patriarchal family set ups." (p.44).

As she advocates for mutual agreement in a relationship, she acknowledges the change taking place among young Asians who can choose their partners as long as they are from the same race; an aspect that still echoes the enclosed nature of Asians to their culture.

Just like in the African society that foregrounds the importance of the boy child in a family, Warah talks of a similar experience in her Asian society. Her participation in the final rites of her father is a reminiscence of Imbuga's (1988) character Aminata who takes up the role of men, as prescribed by the Membe culture, to bury her father and

assist her people. Warah's defiance of the cultural norms to carry out burial rites of her father, considering that there was no son of her father, is an indication of the subversion of the norms; the changes that ought to be embraced by the people of a nation:

> "…That was the day when a woman lit the funeral pyre of the deceased thereby breaking the age-old custom where the deceased's son or male relative is supposed to perform the final rituals of death. The woman's father had no son. So being the only unmarried daughter, she volunteered to light the pyre which, according to religious belief, is supposed to release a person's soul into eternity…Not everyone agreed with this decision. Religious leaders present at the funeral insisted that it was not a woman's place to perform the final rituals of death (women were considered "impure" and therefore polluting influence in religious ceremonies.). But they had no choice but to succumb. The spectacle so moved mourners (many of whom were women who had themselves broken tradition by the mere fact that they were attending the cremation ceremony) …" (p.42).

From this excerpt, it is evident that women have subverted the patriarchal narrative to carry out responsibilities that were otherwise a preserve of the men. Her argument in this case is that women's 'disobedience' to patriarchal society expectation should not be criminalized. Instead, the people of a nation should find pride in the positives of its cultures and discard the negatives. Freedom of participation in a society's activities and decision making, despite one's gender, is her vision of the nation. The appreciation she gets from those present that the 'deceased was lucky to have daughters who played the role of sons is an indication of society's embrace of inclusivity and gender equality. As she attests, it is her urge to liberate the Asian woman from "inferiority and docility that are embedded in Asian girls as soon as they learn to walk" (p.42) by the patriarchal culture that drives her to tell her story that is a culmination of her long-life struggle. It is in her argument on the importance of liberating the woman from the prison house of culture, that she resonates well with the other women autobiographers discussed in this study that education and employment only confer on the woman little status and privileges but does not give her respect and honour:

> "No matter how educated or well paid a woman is, her *izza* (honour) still lies in her actions. Education confers upon her little status and a few privileges. In fact, educated women are often seen as potentially immoral and destructive to the family institution, immorality being almost completely synonymous with sexual accessibility." (p.43).

The above argument brings into play the dual responsibility and expectations bestowed on a woman: to uphold her reputation and that of her community while also striving to liberate herself from the yoke of patriarchal suppression. As noted in the other autobiographies, education and employment serve as avenues for self-liberation and insight for a woman's contribution to national construction. Warah, just like the other women autobiographers, calls for the woman to be resilient and aware of her straddled position in society to succeed in her endeavors of national development. Women must purpose to be part and parcel of socio-economic and political decisions. It is on this basis that Warah further asserts the importance of everyone being aware of who they are and where they have come from. She urges all to filter all the negative aspects of culture which inhibit human growth and potential while embracing the positive ones.

From the foregoing discussions, it is then clear that Warah's vision of the nation is anchored in the inclusive discourses of interracial and gender perspectives of a nation. She pits the Africans, Asians and Europeans against each other. Through the binary opposition, she reaffirms that racism is propagated and perpetuated by all. Equally, she notes the role of culture in the gendering of the nation. Patriarchy deprives citizens of their human rights and imposes oppressive regulations on members of a nation. Thus, according to Warah, the realization of the vision of a nation is possible through enlightenment, avoidance of conservatism and embracing inclusiveness.

### 4.3.2 Reimagining the Nation in Phoebe Asiyo's *It Is Possible: An African Woman Speaks*

Taking off from Pascal's (1960) argument that an autobiographical writer retrospectively composes his or her life in view of past to present and on what he/she needs to disclose, I read Asiyo's self-narrative to establish her reimagining of the nation through selection and retrospection of the self. Her story is read as the statement of the Kenyan nation: politics with its challenges and the women's role in it, contribution to Kenyan history with women at the centre, Kenya's experiences with the colonialist and the post-independence struggles towards democracy as well as the struggles against patriarchal domination in the journey towards equity and equality.

Asiyo's reflections on reimagining the nation are grounded in her experiences as a Kenyan woman who has been involved in political and social movements. In her narration, she brings into play the need to consider the diverse cultural identities and experiences of individuals within Kenyan societies and the importance of addressing gender inequalities as the processes of envisioning the Kenyan nation. Asiyo's story artistically illuminates aspects of Kenya's national history. It illuminates the roles and experiences borne by women of Kenya as they struggled to make sense of their social, cultural and political environment. She lays a lot of focus on the women's struggle for their dignity in a heavily patriarchal Kenyan society. Through a vivid account of her life and her experiences, she sheds light on the challenges faced by women in Kenya, including lack of access to education, employment opportunities and deprived of economic empowerment.

As she takes us through her education journey, Asiyo foregrounds the role played by the British colonialists in propagating gender inequality in the education system. Like

the observation made in the reading of Ogot, Asiyo elaborates on how the colonial education trained girls for specific female gender roles while the boys were trained to be bread winners:

> "…such policies further marginalized girls, who were already underrepresented in the education system…we all learnt all other subjects with the boys, but were additionally taught home economics and farming skills. This type of education was skewed towards training girls to become farmers, housewives or teachers…The missionaries decided not to teach girls Mathematics and English language. They argued that the two subjects were for future breadwinners…girls were destined to be housewives anyway, there was no need therefore to waste precious time and energy teaching them how to count and speak English." (p.18-19).

It is this stereotyping that she perceives as a hindrance to the development of a nation. However, she appreciates her father's defiance of these expectations that led him to empower his daughters to learn English and Mathematics. She documents other challenges that disempower the girls in their education journey: gender bias at leadership positions as the schools had a head boy that would be deputized by a girl, deprived freedom of choice for courses to pursue and early marriages for girls as they were trained for wifehood. While acknowledging the role played by men in empowering the women, besides her father, Asiyo talks of African teachers, one at Kamagambo and another at Gendia, who encouraged her to study rather than get married. This is interpreted as her reimagining of a nation where gender equality is upheld by both genders. It is on this basis that she links her life successes and contribution to national development activities to this early support and encouragement in her education journey.

As argued above, Asiyo's reflections highlight the importance of gender equality in the reimagining of the nation. With a few exemptions, she notes that patriarchal structures within Kenyan societies have often resulted in the marginalization of women in political

and social decision-making processes. Asiyo argues that a more inclusive and egalitarian vision of the nation must address gender inequality and ensure that women's voices are heard and valued. She narrates to us how she gets empowered politically by the council of Luo elders:

> "…Luo Council of Elders meeting in Nairobi Kenya Polytechnic Hall resolved to support my quest to represent the people of Karachuonyo Constituency. The elders made intense deliberations lasting two days in a meeting that had been convened to discuss among the candidates who to back in the coming elections between two strong candidates, incumbent MP…David Okiki Amayo and myself…The elders candidly told us of their deliberations and why they had decided to support my candidature…" (p.109).

As she appreciates empowerment, she is cognizant of the gender roles spelt out by society. While agreeing with Jelinek and Mason's (1980) views that women recognize another consciousness in their search to establish their own identity, Asiyo narrates how the woman autobiographer niches her selfhood through relation with the consciousness of the other. Just like Ogot and Gikonyo, she appreciates the role played by her husband in realizing her empowerment. She notes: "My husband Richard Asiyo Genga would accompany me to meet the elders" (p.109). Being a patriarchal society, she talks of the vulnerability of women leaders to insecurity as compared to her male counterparts. Society is presented as being aware of this, hence the advice given to her to be home early (p.110). This I read as Asiyo's advice to women to be strong, resilient and determined to pursue their dreams in national leadership but not to provoke legal patriarchy.

Asiyo is also aware of how leadership may interfere with conformity to patriarchal societal expectations. She tells of how leadership endows new responsibilities on a woman that could be contrary to cultural expectations:

> "Their support, however, meant that I had to adjust a few things; for instance, I would no longer be answerable to my husband in matters

> related to constituency and Luo leadership, and that the people of Karachuonyo and the Luo community were now my immediate priority" (p.109).

From the above excerpt, Asiyo presents a realization of a deviation from cultural norms as political responsibility overrides family responsibility. She advocates leadership based on individual qualities and not gender or mass support.

Resonating with De Beauvoir's (2010) argument that a woman is oppressed by virtue of 'otherness', Asiyo narrates the opposition she receives as a woman in her political endeavor. She tells of how the symbol of power is grabbed by a man: "He claimed the revered rod could never fall into the hands of a mere woman of childbearing age" (Asiyo 2018, p.111). However, this rod is later handed to her by an elder. In justifying their perception of a woman as incapable of leadership, the men biblically allude to the events in the garden of Eden: "…it was a woman who brought misery to man at the beautiful garden" (pp.112-113). Unlike the previous defense that she had received from the men, this time her defense is from the women folk who justify her ability to lead by referring to the leadership exhibited by other world women leaders. For instance, they equate her ability to lead to that of Margaret Thatcher, the then elected Prime minister of Britain. They equally question why man just followed a woman's advice as documented in the story of Adam and Eve in the bible. Despite all the support to empower her, Asiyo is aware of the social conditioning of women by society. The women are suppressed as they are pushed to the periphery; they are provided with a different political script from that of men. It is this gender power play that is witnessed during her political endeavor to vie for a Member of Parliament seat in 1979. She recounts the injustices meted against her as she is perceived as "a mere woman trying to upset the patriarchal apple cart of the community" (p.129). She is further reminded of her role as a woman: to cook for her husband. This reminder echoes observations

shared by Virginia Woolf (1977) in her book *A Room of One's Own* in which through her fictional character Judith Shakespeare, she (Woolf) presents the place of women in a patriarchal society- to stay at home and get married despite their talents and abilities that equal those of men. It is this enslaving of women to roles assigned to them by the patriarchal society that Asiyo feels leads to gender stereotyping that is retrogressive to a nation's development. This realization makes her to advise women to be prepared for this kind of discrimination and have some level of training through empowerment initiatives before they venture into the political space. She recognizes the extra effort that women must put on to acquire skills and deliver on both economic and leadership of the nation:

> "The training opened my inner eye and ear to visualize and listen to the other reality, often hidden from public discourse - the reality that women live day and night." (p.114).

She further asserts the economic and social empowerment that women had endowed on themselves:

> "…Women were actively involved in agriculture, market trade and other initiatives to enhance food security, pay fees and meet other needs of their families. Women carried heavier loads and walked longer distances than strong young men in the military to market their goods in order to feed and educate their families." (pp.234-235).

By contrasting the effort put in by women to that of strong young men in the military, Asiyo is cognizant of the ability in women to drive the economy of the nation. It is this extra effort that Asiyo focuses on to foreground the role of women in national construction. In her argument, gender roles allocated by society place the woman at the periphery and the man at the centre; women shoulder family burdens while the men make decisions; hence the gendering of a nation as 'she' verses the 'he' narration. She tells this from her own experience and that of her mother and sisters Martha and Perpetua:

> "Martha learnt the art of saving coins she earned from Belinda…Belinda believed that men disrespect women who do not have their own money and instead ask for money from them…Determined to save, Martha travelled to Kisii to open a savings account, interestingly, a bank official told her she needed to tag her husband as part of the requirement in opening an account. That only her husband had express authority to give consent to the bank to take her money…Martha went to see her father-in-law, paramount chief Mboya…Mboya gave her a note which she presented to the bank and was allowed to open an account…I too was a beneficiary of the same letter written by Mboya when I got my first job in Nairobi and was not allowed to open a bank account without my husband's consent…paved way for others to have accounts where they were able to save money earned from sales…He had in his hand Perpetua's savings book which he did not hesitate to show to my father. My sister was operating a savings account; something that did not sit well with her husband… My father turned to Perpetua's husband and said '*Wuon Odolo'*, you and I are lucky men. We have people who can run our homes and provide us with good meals …" (pp.8-10).

From the above excerpt, it is evident that being a largely patriarchal society, the women's identity was only possible through their husbands. They are voiceless even in personal decision making; a presentation of a dictatorial patriarchal order that, according to Asiyo, needs to be looked at. Economically empowering them (women) is beneficial to the society as evident in her father's words: "…We have people who can run our homes and provide us with good meals." Reading this from the lens of Mutuku and Kabira's (2018) argument that African feminism theory differs from other strands of feminism, in that it advocates for men and women working together to end the subjugation of women, I argue that Asiyo's vision is to have a nation that has both men and women economically empowered so that they both can contribute to national construction. Both men and women have a role in reimagining the nation. From her story, as much as the discrimination on women is from the men in their lives (husbands), their liberation from this oppression is equally from both men (Father and father-in-law) and women. As she recognizes the role of women in empowering their fellow women, Asiyo tells of some of the steps taken to protect women from these evils

brought by colonizers: improve laws of succession by enacting laws that govern all matters of family succession and encourage women to compete favourably with their male counterparts. It is for this reason that she tells of the purpose for the women's visit to Kenyatta when he was in prison (pp.52-59). She reminds women to demand for their roles in government as they also played a part in the liberation struggle. Her call is informed by her realization that women are discriminated against and perceived as incapable just because they are women. She cites the example of Tabitha Ogega who had contested for chieftainship in Kisii, won, but was denied just because she was a woman (p.59). This experience of Ogega brings out Asiyo's observation that womanhood has been equated to inability - an aspect that she sets out to negate in herstory.

While cognizant of the patriarchal order that exists, Asiyo reflects on the history of the Luo community. She observes that the British colonial rule enhanced gender inequality. She juxtaposes the customary law brought about by the colonialists and the traditional Luo practices. In the customary law, men owned property and less power was given to women; in traditional practices, women were empowered and owned land/property:

> "The Luo community, like other African communities in Kenya, placed women in subordinate roles in the family. The lowering of women's status was further exacerbated by the colonial government, which endorsed customary law in which women wielded very little power, if any, in both civic and social circles. Under customary law, property was owned by men. It reduced women to mere dependants who had to submit to the will and wishes of their husbands or male relatives to survive…In traditional Luo community, land belonged to the clan but at family level, it belonged to the mothers hence all of the land in Ka-Rachuonyo (place of Rachuonyo) was owned by his wives." (pp18-19).

As Asiyo continues to argue for a nation free from gender discrimination, she takes us back to the past of the Kenyan nation to appreciate the way society handled gender issues. She advocates for a nation that can go back in time and trace the genesis of the

evils on its people as far as gender inequity is concerned. Historically, the woman's role in society was greatly appreciated. It is in her reflection back to history as documented by Ogot (2009), that a story is told on the importance of a woman in the security and protection of her people and society:

> "The role of respected war leaders was not confined to men. There were also women who led female regiments into the battlefield and fought side by side with men…Rachuonyo co-owned the land with his five wives. Every wife had her own land where all her sons were settled." (pp.4-5).

From the above observation, I argue that Asiyo is glorifying the traditional African Kenyan practices that valued the place and role played by each gender in society. She feels that the colonial rule polluted the place of each gender in Kenyan societies at all spheres of life ranging from social, economic, political to education.

Taking off from Zinn's (1995, p.3) argument that one's story is the story of the nation, Asiyo is aware that her success is the success of the village. She tells of her success in education that led to her admission to Alliance High School. She could not join the school because the church (which is a construct of the colonialist) had alternative plans for her (p.23) to join Kangaru Teacher Training College in Embu. She views this as an obstacle to the realization of her dream to pursue medicine. She narrates how her success is shared by the whole village as they "all knew about her impending departure" (p.24). This virtue of unity and communal responsibility in a nation is further realized in her narration of how her father's friends receive her at Nakuru and Nairobi railway stations. Resonating with Warah, she observes the evil of a nation in racial segregation as witnessed at the Nairobi Railway Station. She recognizes the vast and multilingual state of the Kenyan nation as she recalls the dynamic shift in language across small towns during her journey. Her appreciation of Kenya's geographical landscape and her interaction with varied Kenyan cultures (pp.26-27) points to her reimagining of a nation

rich of diversity and inclusivity. Hence, Asiyo's argument is that the process of reimagining the nation must consider the diverse cultural identities and experiences of individuals within Kenya as well as the nation's beautiful landscape. She notes that the colonial legacy of the Kenyan nation has often resulted in the imposition of western values and ideas on Kenyan societies and individuals. This has led to a lack of appreciation of the cultural diversity that exists within Kenya.

Through her self-narrative, we realize the role of the Kenyan woman autobiographer in documenting and preserving the history of Kenya. Her writing serves as a record of the lived experiences and perspectives of women, offering insights into the ways in which women have contributed to the nation-building process and the larger historical context in which they lived. Despite her exposure to westernization, of a life molded around angelism and heavenliness, Asiyo takes us back to her ancestral roots. "… I was a daughter of Nyakach from Waingu under Agoro sub clan" (p.2). She tells of the migration journey of her people under the leadership of a great warrior, hence, the naming of Rachuonyo after a great warrior. She further talks about the neighbouring micronations whose contribution to her people's identity is important. By taking us back to her origin and glorifying her past, she is visioning a nation that values its past despite the changes that may have taken place. This resonates well with Smith's argument that the development of a vision of a nation is a complex and ongoing process that is influenced by a range of factors, including historical and cultural context (2006). Asiyo's constant narration of her people's shift from ancestral home to another area then back as well as the ownership of an individual by the new home is an indicator of her reimagining of a nation without boundaries or discrimination; one that values its people despite their ancestry. Her argument resonates well with that of Warah as they both call for a rainbow nation - a nation that embraces all and appreciates the

contribution of everyone despite their cultural or racial identity. Asiyo deliberately uses the example of Obama to justify her argument:

> "…Barack Obama Sr. who was at the time preparing to travel to the United States of America for further studies…Barack was quite a personable man, who dressed and spoke articulately, like Ombogo (white man). Having lived in Nairobi with his father who worked in a white man's house…He was born and raised in Karachuonyo where his Kogelo family had settled before returning to their ancestral home in Alego, Siaya. Karachuonyo have always treated him as their son." (pp7-8).

The above quotation clearly resonates with Bhabha's (1990) argument that the essence of a nation is that individuals have many things in common. Barack's experiences in the various spaces within which he lives and his interaction with the residents of these places give him a multiple identity and acceptance. His contribution to each of the places he lived in is recognized by those he interacted with as narrated by Asiyo. It is in the spirit of shared experiences that Asiyo tells of her interaction with great African leaders within her residential environment. She tells of how the colonized Africans and beyond were united for a common cause: to free their nations from the yoke of colonization. It is this unity and common purpose that Asiyo wishes for the Kenyan nation:

> "…Mboya's house, meeting with Africans, Indians, Arabs and leaders from all parts of Africa and the world…police officer stormed Mboya's house and arrested Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. Before being forced into the police vehicle, Nyerere threw his briefcase at us, which I picked up. The briefcase remained in our house for many years, until Nyerere sent a messenger to come pick it. I handed it over to the messenger without opening it, so I never knew what was inside it. Many years later I received a thank you letter and an invitation from Nyerere asking us to visit him at his home in Butyama." (pp.31-32).

As she advocates for oneness among people who share common experiences, she also demonstrates the importance of trust among the people of a nation. From the above extract, she narrates how with her husband they safely kept Nyerere's briefcase as well as the faith and optimism that Nyerere had that they would and had kept it safe.

Her vision of a nation born out of collective responsibility and shared experiences is further realized in her narration of the events surrounding the death of Doctor Orwe. (p.37). The whole Gendia community, from the patients to workers and neighbours. His death sends a wave of loss and pain to all those he had interacted with whether as patients or in other quarters. A similar experience is realized at the death of Tom Mboya as grief engulfs the whole country and tensions and violence erupts (p.209). As she (Asiyo) tells of the events surrounding Mboya's death, she points out the disillusionment of the Kenyan people as expressed through the song '*Paka Odok chamo gwendgi* (the cat that ate their own chicken). Metaphorically, she is referring to the evils of assassination, ethnicity, corruption and exile that have prevented the nation from coming to birth:

> "Our history has played out like tragedy in three acts: first, we have mindlessly assassinated some of our best and brilliant minds; second, we have retreated into the all-consuming ethnic agenda, using its blinkered sights as the organizing principle in our politics of statecraft; finally, we have wholeheartedly embraced the insidious and crippling ogre of corruption in an everlasting 'happy' matrimony…" (p.206).

Asiyo singles out assassination as one of the major drawbacks to a nation's well-being. Besides Mboya, she highlights other characters assassinated: Pio Gama Pinto in 1965, Josiah Mwangi (JM) Kariuki in 1975, Robert Ouko in 1990, and Odhiambo Mbai in 2003. As already noted, Asiyo injects aspects of orature to ridicule the evils affecting the Kenyan nation. During Odhiambo Mbai's burial, The University of Nairobi students are said to have chanted a popular Luo dirge "*tho jajuok*" (death is a witch) symbolically translated as "who bewitched Kenya? Why does Kenya gobble up its ablest, brightest, sharpest and most energetic?" (p.225). Assassination, she notes, is one of the most retrogressive aspects of a nation. The pain, loss, trauma and the disillusionment brought

about by assassination is quite extensive. For instance, she tells of Mboya's assassination:

> "… the news struck; 'Tom Joseph Mboya is dead". "Tom Mboya shot" …a man I had just seen beaming a broad smile in the early morning paper, had been cruelly wrenched away from us. I was shaken. I was speechless. I choked on clusters of anger. I felt a deep thin freezing thread of pain running down my spine. I was quickly losing control of my physical balance. I was terribly weak in my knee joints…Amid the agony, in the thick mist of my refusal to come to terms with what had happened…" (pp.208-209).

Ironically, those assassinated are portrayed as committed and loyal citizens to the government that eventually eliminates them. This poses several rhetoric questions that point to the betrayal felt by the people of Kenya. In her narration, Asiyo acknowledges Mboya as a symbol of hope for the oppressed despite their ethnic divide. He pointed out the negative repercussions of tribalism and advocated for the creation of an African community or nation. Asiyo notes Mboya's solution to tribalism as being in education that is practical civics. This observation as advocated for by Mboya resonates well with what Gikonyo, Ogot and Asiyo visualize as the solution to tribalism in their reimagining of the nation; a nation achieved through cultural integration.

As she takes us through the great contributions to Kenya by the characters assassinated, she envisions a Kenya that does not forget its history. Its heroes and heroines who have done great works for the good of the nation at the expense of their lives and freedom should be acknowledged and their legacy let to live beyond their lives. This, she says, is characteristic of any advanced society in the world. She is cynical of the way Kenya has adopted modern inventions at the expense of its history. She reiterates:

> "I have had the rare blessing of travelling extensively around the world and from this, I have observed that advanced societies…strive to improve their welfare of all citizens … have never forgotten their history, however unkempt. There are museums and foundations and memorial centres dotted all over the world in memory of great women, men and events that shaped the identity or advancement of

> such societies. In Kenya, we have adopted many modern inventions: the internet, the most advanced gadgets, innovative money transfer platforms…left our heroes and heroines behind…we have neglected the gallant fearless warrior who was hanged while fighting for our liberation." (p.225).

She argues that the nation's beauty and ugliness should both be a constant reminder of who people are, where they come from and where they are headed. History will illuminate the ugly and trigger reasons to get rid of the ugliness in the present:

> "… by immortalizing those whom we cruelly eliminated from our midst, we may outgrow our proclivities – insatiable greed for unpruned political power, narrow ethnic exclusivity and the undying appetite for wealth, corrupt practices, greed and tendency to murder some of the best in our society." (p.226).

Considering that the autobiography is a personal account that is not devoid of the narrator's own society, Asiyo juxtaposes the nation's challenges to her own experiences. As she reflects on her life, she tells of the pain and suffering she goes through in bringing up her children. The sickness of her daughter Lillian and the determination she exhibits in ensuring Lillian is well and safe can be read as symbolic of the challenges that the Kenyan nation is exposed to and the expectations of the citizens in ensuring the success of the nation. Besides the gender inequality that is instigated by colonialism and patriarchy, Asiyo tells of the political upheavals affecting Kenyans long after independence. The birth of the new nation, just like the birth of her first-born child Lillian, is not devoid of pain. Contrary to her appreciation of KANU at liberation, it turns out to be full of betrayal with chauvinistic leadership. It became a regime that inflicted pain, fear and suffering on its people as already noted in the assassinations discussed above. Besides betraying its people, it created divisions (p.117). She talks of curtailed freedom in politics as KANU barred other parties from election. It is these obstacles that she had to face in her pursued for political leadership, just the same way that Kenya must face various obstacles in its pursuit for national

development. Individual efforts, shared experiences, and support from both local and international organizations and people will contribute to the birth of a new nation. She relates her success in national and local politics to her experience in public life and participation in various international conferences where she learnt about servant leadership and formulation of policies. She also appreciates the support she got from elders in her Luo community, her father, women, youth and other politicians.

She further marvels at the spirit of nationhood realized when she (Asiyo) wins nomination to vie for the Karachuonyo seat. Her victory is shared and celebrated across borders:

> "At Nyakoe in Kisii, women blocked roads and cheered. One elder Maobe who operated a posho mill, offered to powder maize for free for all the women who took their grains for grinding that day as a way of celebrating." (p.128).

These gestures by Maobe and the Kisii women symbolize the spirit of nationhood. The celebrations across the constituency and the excitement from the patients at Gendia Hospital are an indication of the collective sharing of success of an individual who has broken all odds (p.129).

In her narration on affirmative action, pushing against the walls of patriarchy, Asiyo is cognizant of the challenges faced by women in patriarchal Kenyan society. Besides her cynicism on the language use in the August house's motto "*for the just government of men and society*" (p.165) she tells of how she moves the affirmative motion in which she insinuates that it was time to change the history of the nation. Her argument is that the use of the word "men" would be one of the causes for oppressive patriarchal order in parliament. Aware that women formed most of the citizens and that they improve politics and policies in critical sectors like food security, household livelihoods, agriculture, education, health, rearing and welfare of children, sick and marginalized

people and national security, it was important to involve them in decision making organs in the nation. However, she feels that the defeat of the affirmative motion had "watered the seeds of a national women's liberation movement" (p.160). Despite this set back, the resilient nature of the women is evident as they form a caucus to agitate for their political rights:

> "As a caucus, we committed ourselves to the realization of a new Kenya in which women's numerical strength was to translate into credible political voice for realizing gender equality, democracy, prosperity and peace for all citizens. Our mission at the caucus was to enhance and facilitate the attainment of gender equity and equality in decision making structures and elective leadership at all levels. We were driven by the belief that gender equality was intrinsic to national development." (p.161).

From the above extract, Asiyo envisions a situation where women would use their numerical strength to assert their voice in the realization of gender equality which is one of her ways of reimagining the nation.

Their lobbying to have the gender issue engrained in the constitution was met with resistance. Their resistance to elections without reforms led to oppression by state machinery that witnessed loss of lives, maiming, detention and physical harassment. However, all these did not kill their spirit to fight for their rights. This is read as Asiyo's vision of a Kenya nation that is not devoid of challenges, but whose citizens must sacrifice amidst the challenges to realize the development of a nation. As Asiyo recounts the journey to have the affirmative action anchored in the constitution, she reminds us of the evils of patriarchy as evident in the resistance from male legislators. It is amidst this realization that she applauds the prolonged process that bore fruits hence encouraging persistence from citizens to achieve the ultimate goal. It is on this basis that she clearly echoes the title of her book '*It is Possible'* as she recognizes some

of the women who have fought the hostile political and patriarchal environment to register some degree of achievement on behalf of women in Kenya.

In a similar vein, Asiyo points to the importance of reconciliation amongst conflicting fractions of a nation. She points out the achievement gained through negotiation between the then ruling party (KANU) and the opposition as well as the 'handshake'. With pride, Asiyo satisfactorily talks about the building bridges initiative commonly known as 'handshake' between the fourth president of Kenya and the then opposition leader as being a compromise that "not only produces statesmen but also puts the country on the path of economic growth, prosperity and a feeling of nationhood." (p.233). By taking us to the experiences of political reconciliation(s), Asiyo is envisioning a nation of leaders who put aside their greed for the sake of the nation, both locally and internationally. She talks about the peace that prevailed after reconciliation and the effect it had across the Kenyan borders. This she does while reminiscently reflecting on the effects of divided political leadership of 2007/2008 post-election violence that tore the country along ethnic lines. While comparing Kenya's experience with that of other countries that have sought a reconciliatory approach to save their countries and citizens, she is optimistic that African leaders will appreciate the importance of peace, inclusivity and the value of listening to other voices as a way of discarding animosity.

### 4.4 Conclusion

Reading the two autobiographies reveal that the narrators' vision is engrained in their strong desires for an ideal Kenyan nation. This resides in the realm of their imagination and actions that are analogous to the project of the Romantic poets who saw themselves as bards or poet prophets writing to "reconstitute the grounds of hope and pronounce

the coming of a time in which renewed humanity will inhibit a renovated earth on which men and women will feel thoroughly at home" (Harvey, 1990, p.287). The narrators credibly depict the problems that militate against the realization of the nation against the backdrop of the successes in the construction of a nation. The autobiographers, in their vision of the nation, have provided a space where women have participated in asserting their presence in the nation-building process, challenged dominant narratives, and addressed the specific challenges and experiences of women in Kenya. Through their narratives, the narrators have documented the history of Kenya, providing a valuable resource for future generations and contributing to the larger conversation around what it means to be Kenyan.

In this chapter's arguments, Warah's vision is anchored in the contradiction in the complex nature of tensions and anxieties that she narrates. She presents obstacles to the realization of the sense of nationness, and resolution(s) proffered within the realm of her narrative. Using both the first person and third person omniscient narrator, she takes us through the search for her identity and that of the Asian community in Kenya. Through the historical happenings in Kenya, she illuminates the role played by the three races: Africans, Asians and Europeans, in the construction of the Kenyan nation. She further lets us know the source of the conflict that exists among the Kenyan people; that is racial differences. As she envisions the Kenyan nation, she argues for a rainbow nation, one that embraces a people of different races and appreciates their contribution to the construction of a nation. It is within this realm of inclusivity that she presents gender issues within the Asian culture and calls for a society that recognizes the potential of everyone regardless of their gender. She also calls for the appreciation of the positive aspects of our culture (s) while discarding the negative.

Asiyo imagines a more inclusive vision of the nation, that recognizes and values the diverse cultural identities and experiences of individuals within the Kenyan societies. As she argues for gender equity and equality, she argues that in all areas of national discourses, the woman's voice must be heard and appreciated. The woman, like her male counterpart, should be participate in leadership and ownership. As she says:

> "My vision is and has always been that one day, we will have an economically empowered, politically active, financially secure, culturally aware, well-adjusted and socially integrated individuals, who are part of a powerful, proud and effective…nation, a community that understands the diversity of our country and are ready to embrace other communities to build a strong and united nation." (p.232).

Asiyo reimagines a nation that is cognizant of its diversity. A nation that aspires to include everybody in social, economic and political decisions.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Summary

In summary, Kenyan women's autobiographies are not just personal accounts, but also valuable sources of knowledge about the Kenyan nation and the experiences of women within it. The narrators become a testament to the resilience, strength, and perseverance of Kenyan women and serve as an inspiration to future generations in their project of nation building. The Kenyan woman autobiographer's writing plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's collective memory. Through her writing, she has shared her personal experiences and perspectives, providing a unique and valuable insight into the history and experiences of women in Kenya. She has subverted the dominant patriarchal narratives that have excluded women's experiences and perspectives. While appreciating the role played by men, she has also challenged the dominant and often male-centric narrative of the nation's history. Hence, through her autobiography, the Kenyan woman has contributed to a more diverse and inclusive understanding of the nation’s past, present and the envisioned future.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the narration of the nation in the Kenyan woman autobiography. It demonstrates the diversity of experiences and perspectives that exist among Kenyan women as highlighted by eight Kenyan women autobiographers. In these undertakings, we have seen how these writers use their autobiographical works to challenge dominant narratives of Kenyan history and culture while promoting gender equality and inclusivity for social transformation. They have challenged traditional ideas about gender and power and have shown how women have played an integral role in the nation’s social and political development. We can therefore conclude that despite

facing different challenges and barriers; by claiming the nation and asserting their role and identity, these women share a common goal of contributing to the development and progress of the Kenyan nation.

Besides the use of the voice "I", the narrators have blended their self-narrative with aspects of the oral tradition as a way of narrating the nation. The genres of oral literature integrated in their self-narrative do not exist autonomously of other social, economic and political institutions. They are rather perceived as agents of communication for change in society as well as a reflection of the same society. It is worth noting that with these genres, the narrators not only articulate ideas and emotions about the nation but also, on how the happenings in the nation have shaped them.

This study has established that the Kenyan woman autobiographer has played a critical role in narrating the nation and shaping the public discourse around the experiences and perspectives of women in Kenya. Her self-narratives become the space for narrating the nation. Through her writing, the woman has given voice to her own experiences and that of the nation by providing an intimate and personal perspective on the challenges and triumphs of daily life in Kenya. She has used her personal narrative to challenge dominant narratives and to provide a counter-discourse to the official histories and narratives that often exclude the voices and experiences of women. In addition, she has helped to expand the conversation around gender, race, class, and other forms of inequity and inequality. Consequently, she has provided a powerful and nuanced understanding of the ways in which these factors impact on the development of the Kenyan nation. Moreover, through the self-narrative, the Kenyan woman autobiographer has been instrumental in highlighting the experiences of women in Kenya and in drawing attention to the ways in which patriarchal systems and

institutions perpetuate inequality. These women have challenged traditional notions of femininity and gender roles and provided a framework for understanding the ways in which systemic and institutionalized forms of oppression impact on women and their society - the nation.

Through the woman's voice in Otieno, Likimani, Maathai and Ogot, we see that the narration of the nation is contested through gender power relations. Her autobiographical writing provides a space for women to assert their agency and to challenge patriarchal structures and systems of oppression. Through self-narration, the narrators contest the status quo created by patriarchy. In Otieno and Likimani, we find that the Kenyan woman autobiographer narrates the story of the struggle for independence from a female perspective. This narration helps fill in some of the gaps left out by male writers when talking about the liberation struggle. It contests the silenced narrative of the nation by oppressive systems enhanced by both cultural and foreign ideologies. Therefore, through her self- narrative, the woman autobiographer raises awareness against injustices/forms of oppression that have been normalized by patriarchal systems and how they have greatly impacted on the social, economic and political state of the nation. We have seen that these women move from their exclusively domestic and subordinate positions to the forefront of the project of nation building. They subvert already established societal patterns of behaviour and male-supported stereotypes of women. They seize the opportunity to fight not only their own traditions that suppress the woman, but also the colonial and postcolonial forces which relegated them to an inferior and subjugated position. It is for this reason, that these women reclaim their unsung heroe(in)sim in the narrative of the Kenyan nation.

It has also been established that the Kenyan women autobiographers' writing has provided a space for women to engage in critical self-reflection and self-examination. Through their writing, they explore their own experiences and challenge their own assumptions and beliefs, seeking to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and the world around them. This process of self-reflection is crucial in helping her develop a sense of identity and understand her place in the larger social, economic and political context. In their self-reflection, Gikonyo and Otunga let us know how the nation can be built through education and professionalism/careerism. They emancipate themselves from a coercive traditional authority to become self-made women. They explore paths that are contrary to their culturally prescribed social roles as their first step to self-accomplishment which is symbolic of their narrative of the nation. The nation's success story is anchored in education and health. Besides emancipating themselves from the power of social construction of gender through literacy, they also claim authority through professionalism/careerism. Otunga tells of her contribution to and authority in education while Gikonyo prides herself in her contribution to and authority in health. We realize that the two sectors form the backbone of any nation. Education aids national development as it fosters national unity, harmonious globalhood and eventually, humanhood. We establish that professional women have multiple responsibilities in the development of a nation, they nurture and develop the nation.

As a way of presenting the vision of the nation, the Kenyan woman autobiographer advocates for a more inclusive and equitable society. The study concludes that a truly inclusive and representative vision of the nation must be one that embraces the complexity and diversity of the Kenyan experiences. Through the voices of Warah and Asiyo, women have emphasized the importance of addressing systemic and

institutionalized forms of oppression, such as racism/ethnicity, gender inequality, betrayal, corruption and political marginalization which impact all aspects of life. They have also advocated for policies and practices that promote accountability and transparency as well as inclusivity at all levels of nation building regardless of gender, race and ethnicity.

Through the autobiographies of these Kenyan women, we can see that the nation is not a monolithic entity but a collection of diverse and often conflicting narratives. The women in the study often grapple with the tension between their personal identities and their roles as representatives of the nation as well as between their cultural construction and self-construction. Their stories reflect the ongoing struggle to reconcile these competing demands.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The findings in this work underscore the importance of further research into the dynamics of nation narration, dominant ideologies and women writings. In this regard, this study's focus on narrating the nation in the Kenyan woman's autobiography provides important insights into the ways in which literature can be used to challenge dominant ideologies, promote social and political justice and advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment. For instance, studies on women writings can be read through the lens of the woman's voice to encourage the inclusion of diverse voices in the literary canon. It can also be useful to conducting further research on women writings. While the study focuses on the autobiographical narratives of eight Kenyan women writers, there are many other women autobiographical writers whose contributions are yet to be explored. It is therefore recommended that further studies be conducted to explore the autobiographical narratives of other women writers in Kenya

and beyond. Considering that the study demonstrates the value of history and gender in narrating the nation through culture and personal experiences, it is recommended that interdisciplinary approaches be encouraged, more so, in cultural studies to better understand the intersections of gender, race, and class in shaping cultural practices and values.

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# APPENDIX

## A1: Plagiarism Certificate

SE510

*ISO 9001:2019 Certified Institution*

**THESIS WRITING COURSE**

*PLAGIARISM AWARENESS CERTIFICATE*

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Awareness test for Thesis **entitled: NATION, NARRATIVE AND GENDER: A READING OF SELECTED KENYAN WOMEN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES** with similarity index of 9% and striving to maintain academic integrity.

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Awarded by

Prof. Anne Syomwene Kisilu
CERM-ESA Project Leader Date: 3/05/2024