

**MYTH AND GENDER DISCOURSES IN SELECTED NOVELS BY
MARGARET OGOLA AND MARJORIE OLUDHE MACGOYE**

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by Candidate

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DEDICATION

To all lovers of truth and creativity; and to God through whom everything exists, and who makes all things possible.

And in loving memory of my beloved parents, the late Rev. Daniel Salat and the late Mrs. Norah Salat, whose dedication to service, both to God and to humanity as educationists, knew no gender barriers.

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ABSTRACT

Many literary studies on gender acknowledge the significance of cultural myths in the construction and performance of gender. However, the deployment of myth as a mode of representing gender relations is complicated since on one hand it affirms the existing gender relations while on the other it debunks them. The purpose of this study was to explore gender-power discourses that highlight the interface between the problematic representation of what is regarded as natural and mythological in fiction. It scrutinized how Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye engage with myth as an ideological category to (de)construct the problematic representation of gender relations. The objectives of this study were: first to examine the nature and function of myths that informs gender construction, secondly the authors' deconstruction of gender myths and finally to explore the authors' vision in respect to mythic imagination of gender. The study focused on Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*, *I Swear by Apollo*, and *Place of Destiny*; which were analysed alongside Marjorie Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*, *Victoria*, *Murder in Majengo* and *Chira*, in so far as they illustrate how the authors fictionalize the problematic deployment of myth in the construction and performance of gender. This study employed a qualitative research method from the constructivist philosophical perspective particularly in analyzing the subjective nature of myth. This entailed a critical analysis of the primary texts using the feminist post-structural approach, to examine how the authors fictionalize gender-power relations within Luo and other emerging cultures. The guiding theoretical standpoints in this analysis include Judith Butler's 'gender performativity', Roland Barthes' 'mythologies' and Michel Foucault's 'discourses of power', all of which work together to display how language and power relations rationalize gender differentiation. Findings indicate that due to the fluidity of myth, there is a thin line between fact and fiction, thus myth has the power to manipulate gender identities and roles. Myth as a language has the power to 'naturalize' gender roles and identities, making specific, archetypal traits definitive – thus advantaging one gender over the other. Men and women were found to be potential objects and vehicles of power interchangeably and indeterminately, women often exercising power of their bodies in a subtle way to counter hegemonic power over them. While location and culture influenced conceptualization of gender, myth was still found to permeate socio-cultural, economic and religious aspects of life even in the contemporary society. Education and Christianity were also found to be the major forms of gender agency, contributing to the debunking of gender myths. The study concludes that myth is a manipulative tool of power and control; thus any gender considerations need to be realistic/ change with time so that one gender is not advantaged at the expense of the other. The study recommends that there is need to shift from communal conception of gender (fixed identity/ archetype constructed by myth) to a place where humanity is placed at the core of existence.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Every society has norms, values and beliefs that underlie its culture. Such beliefs are determined by social, cultural, religious, political factors, as well as the physical environment. Literature reflects the nature of life in society, depicting how human beings relate in the context of factors that shape their interactions (Eagleton, 2008). Gender studies have aroused significant interest in the recent past, both in the literary and the social science fields (Karin & Towns, 2019). Lassiter (2000) observes that many sub-Saharan African scholars in various disciplines have continued to identify, describe and make use of what they consider to be widespread African psychological characteristics and patterns of cultural adaptation. These include African cultural values and themes, and what the scholars believe are common African responses to the requirement of social life and external cultural influences. Stratton (2020) observes that the effects of patriarchy and gender, and the contributions of African women, have hitherto been largely ignored by critics. Considering the contribution of other critics on gender issues, I recognize for instance what Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007) point out as their concerns about gender and development. They raise some critical reflections on some ideas about gender. They particularly interrogate development narratives which entail popularization and deployment of iconic images of women through myth-making. According to them, such creation of myths results from the demands within politics and practices. This is an appreciation of the relationship between myth and politics of power which work together to determine gender identities.

Segura (2013) acknowledges that throughout history, myths have been created, established, adopted, and interiorized in different societies. He observes that while they have been present through history, myths have in a way shaped history, contributing to the creation and reinforcement of culture. True to this observation, the power of myths is displayed in different societies with regard to how they influence relationships. Armstrong, argues that human beings have always been myth makers. Mythology is still evident today in different parts of the world, and relates to ethnicity, spirituality, specific creatures, and politics often displayed through superstitions and other forms of folklore. Armstrong however observes that mythical thinking has fallen into disrepute, noting that people often dismiss it as irrational and self-indulgent. From such criticisms, mythology has undergone much transformation from majorly referring to religious deities or spirits to encompassing every kind of message communicated and which shapes worldviews concerning a wide range of subjects in theory and practice. Lincoln (1989) describes myth as a mode of discourse that may be employed in the manner of ancestral invocations or in revolutionary slogans. It can thus be argued that myth informs history, politics, societal structures, psychological understanding, and many other aspects of life.

One of the major concepts constructed and sustained through myth is gender. Scholars, such as Jayde Pryzgod and Joan C. Chrisler (2000) describe gender as ‘typically referring to behavioral, social and psychological characteristics of men and women’ (p.554). Gender is used as a basic category, and once a person is assigned a given identity, society interprets everything about that person in the light of the ascribed identity. Such identities are created through language, which embodies a form of belief that informs a people’s worldview. Saussure for instance indicates that a particular

name came to be attached to a particular object or idea, and it was believed that this could be determined historically – or even prehistorically. Therefore, people make historically determined gender attributions, which form the foundation for understanding other components of gender such as gender roles (behaving like a female or male) and gender identity (feeling like a female or male). All these have their basis in myth, which provides a worldview emanating from cultural beliefs. Myths can thus be presumed to create and interpret cultures. Literary writers use fiction to create and/or reflect myths that are embedded in culture, including gender and power ideologies.

A majority of gender studies have focused on the distinction between biological sex differences and the way they are used to inform behaviours and competencies, which are assigned as either masculine or feminine. For instance, Zinsser (1993) defines gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, the knowledge that establishes meaning for bodily difference” (p. 54). As a social construct, gender is determined by a number of cultural structures underlying every society. These structures constitute belief systems and general worldview/philosophy that informs what society expects of and from the male and female genders. Literary writers portray male and female characters in the context of culture, and a number of critics, such as Moi (2002) have observed a form of gender stereotyping in such presentations.

Oslen (1991) describes culture as “a set of ideas, symbols and meanings that is shared by a population of people” (p. 55). These sets of ideas and symbols are developed through a complex working of language as a signification process which, in essence, is myth. Barthes (1972) describes myth as a mode of signification – a form. It is, therefore, a way of communicating and understanding concepts that form a society’s worldview.

Barthes further argues that myths are created in discourse, through a mythical speech made out of a material that has been tailored to make it suitable for communication. Therefore, the more an ideology is shared/communicated, the more it is believed to be true, and thus the more it attains a mythical status. The concept of gender, alongside religion and culture in general, cannot be permanent determinants of human relations since, as Barthes argues, 'There is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely. And this is because they are historical that history can very easily suppress them' (p. 120). It is notable that despite its instability, myth is still significantly used as a means of making and normalising gender attributions and interpretation (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007).

Myth as a mode of communication, a way of conveying a message, as well as the message in itself is indistinct from discourse in its operation. The definitions of discourse are as varied as its use. Its general definition by the Oxford Dictionary ranges from written or spoken communication or debate, to the art of engaging authoritatively in a topic, and further to the linguistic notion of language in use/practice. Discourses are not only about language, but they also comprise actions, interactions, values, beliefs, feelings, non-linguistic symbols, clothes, tools and objects as well as time and place dimensions (Gee & Green, 2011, p. 46). This study uses the concept from Michel Foucault's perspective, which considers discourse as a power game, a mode of operation of power, which acts as a vehicle through which knowledge and subjects are constituted (Foucault, 1977). Although Foucault's approach has its roots in linguistics, he offers a broader perspective that is applicable to literature, cultural and gender studies. Osslon (1987) observes that for Foucault, knowledge/truth is a product of shared meanings, conventions and social practices operating within and between

discourses, and to which an individual's sense-making processes are inextricably linked. Davies and Gannon (2009, p. 318) also posit that discourse is filled with contradictory possibilities, particularly in terms of the complex relations amongst gender, ethnicity and class. This study considers the interconnections of discourse in/as myth, and its operation in the construction of gender identity and the performance of perceived/ideal masculinity and femininity.

Social myths (beliefs that everyone in a given society accepts as true and knows to be right) have been used to define femininity, the social and economic exploitation of women, as well as women's relationship with one another and with men. The use of mythic elements is observed in the creation of archetypes of exceptional women seeking self-recognition, while attempting to also express experiences of women who have somehow lost their sense of belonging, and are grappling with finding space within changing cultures and times. In this case, myth provides invaluable information about life in the past – values, fears, among other aspects – that can be used in evaluating dynamics of gender against a cultural background. Jaja (2014) emphasizes that for African philosophy to be authentically African, it must operate within the conceptual framework of a myth that represents the African reality and is authentically African in nature. The socialization of African men and women into their gender roles and identities is largely a function of myth, which creates and authenticates the African worldview of gender.

Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye are among the most significant authors who have contributed considerably to our understanding of the relationship between myth and gender in the African context. Through their works, they illustrate how myth is significantly used as a medium of controlling behaviours and attitudes of men and

women – to determine our values, fears, beliefs and other aspects of social change. As Levi-Strauss (1955) observes, mythic thought is a system of concepts embedded in images. Creative writers use symbolic images to express concepts and thoughts that carry significant ideologies that shape culture. Therefore, the study examined the extent to which Marjorie Macgoye and Margaret Ogola, in their writings, portray how myth is used to determine gender relations in a traditional society, and further explore alternatives used in rewriting female experience in the context of changing cultural trends.

The significance of myth and oral traditions in African culture is paramount to understanding African literature. Oral tradition, for instance, is a notable stylistic trend that a number of Kenyan writers, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Margaret Ogola, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Grace Ogot, Francis Imbuga, among others, have effectively used to describe African culture and experiences. Unfortunately, as Roscoe (1981) observes, some pioneer African writers have been accused of primitivism and their work considered problematic since they introduce the supernatural that is regarded as superstitious and worthy of belief only among the 'primitive and infantile minds'. What are considered superstitious, in this case, may be those aspects that can only be appreciated within the culture that constructs it (as they could be mythical elements), and by acknowledging how language is used to create it. In addition, the 'primitivism' associated with African authors does not imply any truth since the supernatural element is present in practically all literatures. The Gothic works in European literature for instance are applauded as masterpieces despite the supernatural element. Moreover, the concept of 'magical realism' is used to account for such literature. This then makes it necessary to examine the place of myth in gender studies (how literary writers and

gender scholars are informed by myth in their understanding of gender relations and culture in general) in order to understand how they themselves perceive and create culture through their writing. This is in recognition that cultural studies and literary studies are inseparable, since literature is a tool for cultural description, and literature is a cultural product.

As a product of society, literature reflects the value systems and expectations of the society from which it springs, often embedded in myth. Roscoe (1981) observes that “much of Africa is still a land of myth, of people who continue to stay close enough to the earth to hear its pastoral symphonies and to feel strongly the spin of fate’s wheel and to learn to endure” (p. 15). In this sense, as Roscoe points out, human relationships in Africa are determined to a large extent by myth. His argument, however, seems to imply that myth in Africa is connected to a kind of fate, a form of suffering that has to be endured. Though this argument is debatable, he brings out the idea that myth has power to determine one’s behaviour regardless of the circumstances around it. This is not unique to the African context. All human relationships are largely influenced by myth. Oslen (1991) also observes that “The process of social organization always involves both the establishment of social ordering and the creation of a shared culture” (p. 57). This observation implies that social relationships such as gender, and the social ordering therein, may be determined by cultural myths to a large extent.

Through analysis of the selected texts, this study explores how literature, as an influential tool for articulating the experiences of a people, either propagates or debunks myths that define gender relations and the general way of life within the Luo cultural context as fictionalized in the selected texts. Molyaer (1997) argues that good literature reflects the life and spirit of a people. Writers hold a mirror up for their society; and a

society finds expression through its authors and in this way, it is the co-author of literary works. In its literature and art, a society reveals its 'soul'. Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye are writers with such social commitment to their society. As Avvocato (2014) notes, culture, literature and poetry have been regarded as revolutionary weapons, ideological tools through which African people could finally raise their voices and define themselves. The study evaluates this observation by examining how the authors provide an alternative voice by contesting myths that exist with regard to gender and power.

Marjorie O. Macgoye and Margaret Ogola use the novelistic form to articulate the experiences of men and women in the context of the Luo culture, describing their philosophy and general way of life. This study examined how these women writers attempt to undo the mythic dichotomies that have been used to structure men and women's minds. Such myths are loaded with symbols, images and codes that represent the social, cultural and political agenda of the Luo culture and, by extension, the wider human context that forms the background or basis of their works. Tsaaior (2013) considers myth as a modernizing agent in African culture and politics. He also acknowledges the instability of myth as a construct of language and culture, arguing that "the narrative and cultural properties inherent in the African myths deployed by the writers constitute a sufficient discursive engagement with the present realities and contradictions in which the continent is enmeshed" (p. xix). Therefore, in this study, Marjorie Macgoye and Margaret Ogola were comparatively examined with regard to how they decode the symbolic presentation of the Luo world insofar as gender and power issues are concerned.

The primary concern of this study was to examine the use of myth in the imagination of gender, since, as Barthes (1972) observes, myth is an ambivalent ideology. The deployment of myth in the imagination of gender relations is questionable since both myth and gender are ideologies created from language through discourse. The temporal nature of a mythical speech also makes it fluid in its way of defining/determining gender. Consequently, myth can either affirm or debunk the existing gender relations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Myth assigns gender traits, roles and identities. These in turn determine how each gender is constructed through performance. However, the deployment of myth as a mode of representing gender relations is complicated, since, on the one hand, myth affirms the existing gender relations while, on the other, it debunks them. This fluid and ambivalent nature of myth makes it problematic as a basis for gender description. This study attempts to explore gender-power discourses that highlight the interface between the problematic presentation of what is regarded as natural and mythological in fiction. It scrutinizes how the selected authors engage with myth as an ideological category to (de)construct the problematic representation of gender relations.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To examine the nature and functions of myths that informs gender construction in the writings of Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye
- ii. To interrogate how Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye use their writings to deconstruct the myths on gender relations
- iii. To explore Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye's vision in respect to the mythic and gender imaginations in the selected novels

1.4 Research Assumptions

This study is based on the assumptions that:

- i. The myths depicted in Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye's selected novels enhance gender stereotypes and stereotyping.
- ii. Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye use their writings creatively to deconstruct myths that have been created with regard to gender relations.
- iii. Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye's understanding of the context within which their creative works are based determines their construction of character identity, roles and relationships.

1.5 Justification of the Study

Koester (2015) acknowledges that gender is one of the most persistent causes, consequences and manifestations of power relations. She posits that power and politics in the private sphere shape power relations at all levels of society, adding that gender hierarchies mark wider economic, political and social structures and institutions, and the opportunities for peace and prosperity from feminized sources of power. It is notable that Kenya has made significant strides in the quest for gender equality, especially with the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010. The constitution is one way of generating power and control. For instance, affirmative action is one of the strategies feminists would applaud for allowing women opportunities into power as well as relieving women from male domination. Kenyan literary writers have portrayed how gender relations play out in different contexts, and have pointed out the desire for economic, political and social liberation of the female gender as well. This study attempts to show how power continues to be played on the basis of myth, and how it is considered as lying within a wider historical, political, economic and social forces

constraining opportunities for action. This provides invaluable insight for formulation of relevant policies on gender issues.

The study contributes to literary studies by bringing into focus the significance of myth in the study of literature and as an approach that can be used in literary analysis. This is in appreciation of the fact that text and context are interdependent. Anthropology is a significant background in literary studies and, therefore, looms large herein from a comparative perspective.

This research is a contribution to gender studies, using an approach that sheds light on the complexities of gender performance by highlighting beliefs that guide human relationships and motivate the performance of gender. Specifically, myth has been noted as relevant in addressing contemporary issues, especially the place of postcolonial women as a continuous imagining of various paradigms of liberation; a process of 're-writing indigenous histories, appropriating postcolonial symbols and mythologies, and amplifying, where possible, the voices of women themselves' (Odiemo-Munara, 2010). By focusing on women writers' presentations of gender issues, this study highlights women's views on gender issues in general, in the light of changing culture(s).

Many studies on gender in Kenya point at the advocacy for gender equality based on assumptions of male hegemony. The desire for power and control can be explained by traditional myths on gender and power. Such myths often ascribe it to male superiority, although, as the study acknowledges, there are other ways by which power is expressed. The study interrogates presumed power and control versus real and subtle power exercised by the female gender.

Through an analysis of the two authors' presentation of myths on gender, the study illuminates the understanding of the postcolonial cultural dispensation. Shifts on perception of gender relations and the mythologies therein are better understood from the perspective of the 'outsider-insider' author (Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye), on the one hand, who is keen on understanding and integrating into the Luo culture. The 'insider' author (Margaret Ogola), on the other hand, gives us insights into the changing culture as a beneficiary and product of Western culture and education. This perspective is a shift from the traditional understanding of gender, often related to gender roles, providing a holistic approach to the complexities that determine gender relations.

This study also contributes to the debate on gender equality and the need for inclusiveness in political, social and economic aspects of life. Considering the review of the Constitution in Kenya (2010) that gave opportunity for women representation through affirmative action, it is useful in clearing notions or existing ideologies concerning gender and power that may limit participation of men and women at various levels in society. Focus is, therefore, directed at illuminating the link between the modern society and the modern woman/man and the traditional/cultural beliefs and practices to which some still cling.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focused on selected works of Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. This selection recognizes that there are other women writers from the Luo community whose works have made significant contributions to the understanding of the culture and other concerns of the community. Bole Odaga, for instance, has delved into the Luo culture through her studies and publications in the field of oral literature. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor has published two novels, *Dust* (2013) and *Dragonfly Sea* (2019),

and *Weight of Whispers* (2006), a Caine Prize-winning novella. Owuor's novels are not considered in this study since they are neither set within the Luo context nor do they make any reference to it. While *Dust* is set in the northern part of Kenya, *Dragonfly Sea* is set in the east coast. Grace Ogot's works have also been left out from the scope of this study, although she is one of the literary icons from the region. Like Odaga, her works are mainly concerned with the Luo culture, with interest in Oral literature, reflected in her collection of short stories, *Land Without Thunder and Other Stories*. Her novels, *The Promised Land*, *The Strange Bride*, *The Rain Came*, and *The Other Woman*, all have significant influence from oral literature as well. These works do not fall within the scope of this study since they are considered to have taken a rather conservative and static approach to gender issues and culture in general, and are anchored within the Luo culture. Unlike her, Ogola and Macgoye are considered progressive and are not restricted to the indigenous culture. Rather, they use Luo culture as a backdrop to present gender concerns, while appreciating the growth of male and female gender in their fiction. They do so by allowing for a shift in their setting from rural to urban, thus presenting a wide range of possibilities regarding gender.

Ogola and Macgoye are comparable with regard to how they present gender concerns in their texts since they allow their characters to develop from a traditional setting and progress to personal independence with shifts in time and place. Ogola's *The River and the Source* and Marjorie Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* are comparatively examined in view of the nature of myths therein and how the authors engage with the myths as a mode of describing gender relations in the traditional cultural set-up. The texts also illustrate how myths in their fluidity influence gender perceptions progressively in the light of changing cultural trends as characters change locations. Ogola's *I swear by*

Apollo and Macgoye's *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* are also interrogated in terms of how they are used to deconstruct myths related to gender and power. Lastly, Ogola's *Place of Destiny* and Macgoye's *Chira* provide a basis on which the two authors' visions with regard to myths on gender can be explored.

Ogola and Macgoye locate their writings in a basically common cultural context – the Luo community. Though their texts shift from the rural Luo community to multi-cultural urban set-ups, there is constant reference to traditional Luo practices and adherence to the community's mythology that gives their work a unique Luo touch in the selected texts. Ultimately, they seem to bring forth an agenda of multiculturalism that destabilizes the received cultural concept of myth and gender. An analysis of the workings of myth in their fiction enables a comparative examination of their personal influences (such as perception of culture and religion), thus evaluating aspects of myth and gender that are common within their discourses.

This study focuses on selected novels by the two authors, ignoring other genres in which they have published. The novel has been chosen because it is considered a suitable form in presenting gender experiences due to its ability to focus on narrow confines of a particular relationship thereby creating an intimacy between the reader and the characters. It is perfectly suited to telling not just complicated expansive stories, but also the focused, quiet and the most intimate ones. The authors are also able to present clearly the innermost fears of characters and their reaction to the gender issues that affect them. From the novels, it is then possible to understand the ideology that determines gender identity by examining how male and female characters in the texts relate. The novelistic form is also preferred due to its ability to move freely from the particulars of history to the universals of human experience, allowing the author to

probe the human condition more profoundly, in a plausible way that is potentially more convincing than the historical account. The novel can then be said to be more realistic as the authors are able to “create truth by narrating” persuasively, and, through the use of myth and oral tradition, invoke African realism into their work. The invented story serves to usher the reader into the most important realms of reality through the deliberate rhetoric powers of fiction.

The two authors are compared with regard to their approach to relevant Luo myths concerning gender. This is done by examining their ideological construction of gender stereotypes through character analysis. The selected works are also examined for the strategies they use to foreground the ideologies regarding gender, and how they treat myths created with regard to men and women.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in theories of mythology as espoused by Roland Barthes (1972) and in the conception of gender performance as presented by Judith Butler (1990). Their ideas illuminate the understanding of how gender relations are created and function on the basis of myth. Although there are momentary references to Carl Jung’s (1980) ‘archetype’ in describing the cultural construction of gender, the study does not take a psychoanalytical perspective. Rather, its approach majorly focuses on Michel Foucault’s (1992) genealogical conceptualization of power: how it exposes the discoursing of myth and gender in the texts under study. Butler (1990) defines gender as:

The repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts, an imitation of the dominant conventions of gender, within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being (p. 43-44).

Through discourse, we examine the interface between what is regarded as natural and mythological with regard to gender in fiction. The three theoretical approaches are conflated to bring out the influence of myth on gender and power concerns: how gendered individuals perform gender within mythic imaginations and construction of culture, which in turn defines gender itself and assigns 'normalized' behaviour and traits. In essence, myth is used to determine gender, and gender performance is based on myth.

Roland Barthes (1972) describes myth as a mode of signification that implies a particular ideology. According to him, the ideology is treated as if it was a natural condition of the world, yet it is a human-made perspective conveyed through discourse. This means that myth is a creation of ideology viewed as a fact and, as such, it is a powerful tool used in the construction and appreciation of gender identities. According to Barthes, myth removes history from language, making it appear natural, absolute or eternal. It arrests language by reducing a complex phenomenon into a few traits taken as definitive. By nature, myth simplifies issues, stripping away any form of critical thinking in order to exploit and thus bring out the desired sentiment. This is because myths are constructed to provoke or appease our emotions. In the construction and determination of gender identities, myth then becomes a useful tool for propagating gender ideologies. It is a powerful tool that assigns traits by giving a description of specific expectations of each gender.

In the same light, Chandler (2006) argues that the power of myths is that they 'go without saying' and so appear as though they do not need to be deciphered, interpreted or demystified. This is because myth operates on a belief of what is said to be truth – though this truth is constructed in discourse. Barthes (1972) also emphasizes that myth

is considered a fact. He explains that a person who consumes myth does not see it as myth, but the image as the presence of the essence it signifies. In many societies, gender identities and gender roles are considered factual, and are not questioned. Societies tend to create myths in order to implement social values, as well as to persuade people that a particular ideology is the truth. It is thus important to appreciate the necessity to demystify the nature of myth used as a powerful determinant in gender and power discourses. Barthes' understanding of myth allows for critical evaluation of representations and meanings, motivations and distortions behind a message/myth.

In view of this subjective nature of myth, Butler (1990) argues that gender subjectivity should be viewed as a history of identifications, parts of which can be brought into play in given contexts and which, precisely because they encode contingencies of personal history, do not always point back to an internal coherence of any kind. The set of repeated acts that Butler describes becomes natural with time – also reflected in Barthes' argument concerning the nature of myth – hence providing natural reasons that make myth appear to be a statement of fact or truth. This places myth at the centre of gender relations because gender is a mythical construction, a repetitive performance of traits believed to be the essence of the particular gender. Gender attributes are interrogated as to whether they really express a fact and, if not, the power that expresses it in discourse making it appear as a statement of fact becomes a subject of investigation as well. Butler views the body as an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation, which is described by considering not only what constitutes meaning but also that through which meaning is performed or enacted.

Butler (1990) also states that gender is an act that brings into being what it names. Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, meaning that there is no gender identity that precedes language. This is because “Identity is a signifying practice, and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings” (Butler, 1990, p. 145). It is language (sets of acts) that describes one’s identity by way of mythical constructions. Analyses of such performances and descriptions reveal a complex working of gender-power discourses within the texts.

Butler’s arguments on gender performativity emphasize that gender is constructed through its repetitive performance. She explains that to become a woman is to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of ‘woman’, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically determined possibility. This is a creation of space for linguistic structures to construct the self. Butler argues that gender identity is not stable – a performative accomplishment that the mundane social audience (including the actors themselves) come to believe and perform in the model of belief. The performance of gender is not mechanical, but is a practice of improvisation, which is done with or for another, even if the other is imaginary (Butler, 2004). As such, gender is not owned because it is beyond oneself.

Similar to Butler’s view, Simone de Beauvoir (1974, p. 38) also claims that ‘woman’, and by extension any gender, is a historical situation rather than a natural fact. She argues that one is not born; rather she becomes a woman whose acts are constituted from the phenomenological tradition. She comments that a body is a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation. De Beauvoir further points out that gender must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements

and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. It is then clear that the concept of gender is a cultural imagination, a mythical construction with which the gendered body is 'induced' to conform, and, over time, seems to become a fact determining and defining the particular gender. As Butler (2004) observes, gender identity is initiated and compelled by symbolic power, which governs the formation of an enacted femininity appreciated as the norm. The construction of gender is such that it compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness so that cultural fictions (myths on gender) are alternately embodied and disguised under duress. Consequently, the woman is compelled to act within the 'norm' in order to qualify and remain a viable subject (as a woman). In the same way, a man must act masculine.

From the African perspective, gender is appreciated also as that which is performed in compliance with a specified expectation of either masculinity or femininity. The definition of gender in Africa is a function of both feminism and masculinity, each working to define and enhance the other. African feminism, according to Bádéjò (1999), for instance, entails a complex and complementary relationship with masculinity, in such a way that there is no contest of power, but rather mutual obligations of each gender:

African feminism embraces femininity, beauty, power, serenity, inner harmony and a complex matrix of power ...it is always poised and centred on womanness. It demonstrates that power and femininity are intertwined rather than antithetical. African femininity complements African masculinity, and defends both with the ferocity of a lioness while simultaneously seeking male defence of both as critical, demonstrable and mutually obligatory. African feminism is active and essential to the social, political, economic, cultural and evolutionary aspects of human order (Bádéjò, 1999, p. 94).

Contrary to misconceptions of African feminism as that which positions the African woman in the place of victim of male domination, there is a complex working of power

in the relationships. This concept of African feminism encompasses mutual relationship of myth and power, which are essential in defining gender relations. Although this study is anchored in Judith Butler's theoretical conception of gender performativity, it appreciates the African feminist perspective as well, considering the shifts in gender-power relations from the exclusive traditional African perspective to the contemporary conceptualization of what gender relations entail.

Butler describes gender relations as a function of power. She alludes to Foucault's (1992) limited attempts in the search of truth of authentic sexual identity in genealogy. In her preface to *Gender Trouble* (1999), she explains this limitation, and highlights other factors Foucault considers in exploring complex framework of gender ideology thus:

To expose the foundational categories of sex, gender, and desire as effects of a specific formation of power requires a form of critical inquiry that Foucault, reformulating Nietzsche, designates as "genealogy." A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin. The task of this inquiry is to centre on—and decentre—such defining institutions... (Butler, 1999, p. xxix).

Foucault (1972) uses genealogy to trace and investigate the complex and shifting network of relations among power, knowledge and the body, which produce historically specific forms of subjectivity. He challenges the commonly held assumption that power is an essentially negative, repressive force that operates purely through the mechanism of law, taboo and censorship, claiming that in the pre-modern societies, power was centralized and coordinated by a sovereign authority who exercised absolute control over the population through threat or open display of violence. He acknowledges that power in modern societies is a fundamentally creative rather than repressive force; and

that modern regimes of power operate to produce subjects who are both the objects and vehicles of power. For him, power can be said to create knowledge in the sense that particular institutions of power make certain forms of knowledge historically possible. It also creates knowledge since institutions of power determine the conditions under which scientific statements come to be counted as true or false (Hacking & Hacking, 1999). This suggests that the production of 'truth' or myth is inseparable from the technologies of power. Foucault's genealogical critique does not consider origins of gender, nor a genuine/authentic sexual identity, as essential. Rather, it investigates the politics of power behind the creation of such sexual identities, and the causative elements that categorize gender.

Foucault (1979) looks at power as exercised rather than possessed, as circulating throughout the social body rather than emanating from the top-down, and as reproductive rather than repressive. Gaventa (2003) also explains this view of agency, noting that, for Foucault, power is neither wielded by individuals nor by classes nor institutions. He sees power as dispersed and subjectless, as elements of broad strategies without individual authors. In this case, power may not be a preserve of particular subjects. He points out that rather than wielding power, subjects are discursively constituted through power, although their actions may contribute to operation of power. He adds that power is ubiquitous and appears in every moment of social relations – hence the operations of power are present in everyday social interactions but keep shifting positions and forms.

Foucault's views on power play thus enable us to examine the complexities of gender relations in the light of shifting centres of power in discourse:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart (Foucault, 1979, p. 100-1).

Foucault's contention that the body is the principal site of power is very instrumental in the exploration of social control of men and women through their bodies and sexuality. He describes two dimensions of power relations: power over bodies (power relations having immediate hold of the body – where the body is masked, trained, tortured, forced to carry out tasks, perform ceremonies and emit signs). The second dimension is the body's own power (where the body opposes power over bodies, appearing as a source of revolution). The incorporation of power operates through language and signs. Out of Foucault's questioning of fixed essence and his relativist notion of truth, feminists have sought to create a theoretical space for the articulation of hitherto marginalized subject positions, political perspectives and interests. This space provides us with the opportunity to evaluate the complexity of myth as a means of determining gender and power relations.

These three major standpoints, namely Barthes cultural view of myth, Butler's ideas on gender, and Foucault's ideas on discourses of power, form the theoretical basis of analysis in this study. The ideological perspectives inherent in the theories illuminate how Macgoye and Ogola present myths on gender and power. Barthes emphasizes discourse in creation of myth while Butler emphasizes performance in gender. These perspectives guide the examination of how Ogola and Macgoye approach the issue of mythology in the (de)construction or description and performance of gender, and enable

an interrogation of their points of concern in contesting the created myths on gender represented in fiction.

1.8 Literature Review

In the review of related literature, the study focuses on previous studies carried out on the concept of myth and gender. It specifically critiques studies related to the nature of myth, deconstruction of gender myths, and examination of the authors' visions of gender. It appreciates most of the studies conducted on myths and gender power relations. However, while recognizing that the concept of gender has been acknowledged as a cultural construct, it appreciates that there is little focus on the nature of myth that constructs gender. The study also evaluates some research already done on myth and gender, though without much attention to the language of myth that enables the formulation as well as deconstruction of gender identities. While building on the studies done on the concept/nature of myth and gender, this study focuses particularly on how they are worked out in the selected writings of Marjorie Macgoye and Margaret Ogola.

1.8.1 Nature of Myth in Gender Construction

The concept of myth has been defined and described variously by scholars. Lincoln (1989) holds that myth is an ideologically weighted narrative about figures or events from a remote past that shapes contemporary ideologies. He acknowledges that, by nature, myths are both true and untrue; and that they are distinguished from other narratives by their peculiar effective quality or narrative potency that carries ideological matter in disguise. This is what elevates myth above ordinary speech and aligns it with the rhetoric matter of sacred narrative. As such, mythical narrative requires a collective investment from its author and audience that elevates speech and story to the status of

a myth. This study prefers to use the demarcated term “myth” in an attempt to accommodate the various accounts that can qualify under this loose assemblage, examining the nature of ‘truth’ or ‘falsehood’ in myth, and how in its very nature is employed in gender description.

Lincoln (1989) further suggests that myth is a form of speech that is ‘false on the whole, but still having some truth in it’. He observes that the shift in the conceptualization of myth occurs in conjunction with the shift from orature to literature. Thus, when a myth is written, the immediacy of its effect diminishes as it becomes susceptible to analysis and interpretation at the intellectual level. The emphasis on oral transmission of myth not only applies to the mythical narratives, but also ideologies transmitted in discourse. This is because myth is believed to be true without question, even when the idea behind it seems uncertain. If it is written, it would provide an opportunity for further interrogation, challenging belief in myth. Segal (2015) also argues for the persuasive nature of myth in spite of its uncertainty. He observes that a blatantly false conviction might seem to have a stronger hold than a true one, for the conviction remains firm even in the face of its transparent falsity. This intricate nature of myth emanates from its fluidity regardless of whether it is truthful, factual or fictitious. By analysing myth within gender discourses, this study attempted to interrogate how myth has influenced gender roles and identity despite its uncertainty.

Baumbach (2009) in her article entitled ‘The Knowledge of Myth in Literature: The Fascination of Mythopoetic Space and William Drummond’s *The Statue of Medusa*’, attempts an investigation of the possible connection between literature and myth. In the study, she reckons that ‘while being rooted in oral tradition, myth is contingent on its translation into other media, primarily art and literature, to preserve and perpetuate its

imagery as well as its “knowledge”, which becomes retrievable in different cultural, geographical, and temporal space’. She further opines that ‘the understanding of mythological elements that appear in art requires their re-embedding into a literary dimension where they become “readable and decipherable” (Baumbach, 2009, p. 2). From this observation, Baumbach argues for the significance of literature not only as constituted by, but also as a constitutive element for the communication of, myth. In agreement with Baumbach, I acknowledge the invaluable role of literature in the construction and communication of myth. This thesis explores how literature/fiction, in its creativity, expresses the connection between myth and real-life experiences, making it a plausible reality through fiction. However, it considers the malleability of such texts in representing ‘reality’ since the texts are products of culture.

Bennet and Royle (2016) voice their reservations concerning reliability of literary texts in expressing reality. According to them, if one considers texts as representing reality, he/she simply overlooks ways in which texts are already part of that reality. They argue for the need to consider ways in which literary texts construct reality, and thus create our worlds. This study takes the Barthesian perspective, which explores myth as a language, a form of communication, and as a message. In this case, I explore how literature as a vehicle and an object for communicating myth (considered as reality) adapts to the changing cultures with time. This is made possible by the construction of characters and events, which, put together, makes myth decipherable/readable.

Anand (2013), in his article entitled *Resettlement of myth in the African literature through the Works of Achebe*, argues that the myths in Achebe’s works are not of themselves political; they are in some senses inactive until and unless motivated by context. According to him, such myths are always motivated or set in motion by

political context, and do not exist except theoretically. He points out that myth is nothing but a concept or belief until and unless it is brought into a particular discourse such as political, sociological, religious, cultural, among others. This study appreciates Anand's observation on the nature of myth expressed through the literary discourse, although it argues for the thin line between belief and truth. The study attempted to establish ways through which myth itself constructs truth, which is practiced as unstable aspects of culture.

The uncertainty of cultural aspects conveyed through myth has been observed in gender description as a way of disadvantaging the female gender. While acknowledging lack of proper historical basis of myth, Bamberger (1974), in her article *The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society*, explains:

Rather than replicating a historical reality, myth more accurately recounts a fragment of collective experience that necessarily exists outside time and space. Composed of a vast and complex series of actions, myth may become through repeated recitation a moral history of action while not in itself a detailed chronology of recorded events. Myth may be part of culture history in providing justification for a present and perhaps permanent reality by giving an invented "historical" explanation of how this reality was created (p. 267).

From Bamberger's explanation here, we get the suggestion that, although myth does not necessarily present a historical reality, it can create a reality out of repetitive recitation in discourse, which in the end determines how people relate. This is a crucial part in the formation of cultures as well as justification of aspects therein. In this case, the study illustrates how myth creates culture, by examining its fluidity as portrayed through Macgoye and Ogola's fiction, which in a way debunk existing myths on gender, seemingly establishing new myths and by extension new cultures.

Okpewho (2009) argues that myth is a type of tale that stands midway between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’. He also acknowledges the existence of firm structures of binary oppositions in myths that, according to him, collapse in the face of much evidence. Such evidence could be documented as plausible historical facts, which Okpewho acknowledges in reference to Levi-Strauss who “in a number of publications has gone to great lengths to suggest that history and the subjects of social anthropology (i.e. myth, totemism, etc.) are united as efforts by man to comprehend, within a neat and limited structure of units of ideas bearing transversal relationships with one another, the perplexing range of realities around him” (p. 54). I also agree with what Levi-Strauss (1963) proposes: that all myths consist of the same underlying structures whose elements may oppose and contradict one another while other elements mediate and resolve those oppositions. In acknowledging the role of myth in deciphering social and historical reality, this study considers the relationship between myth and history, and the role fiction plays in elucidating the interface between the two.

If indeed myths have the same underlying structure, as Levi-Strauss (1963) argues, it is then possible that they can present admissible facts about society in a comparable way. The presence of mythical and legendary narratives in societies, for instance, is a presentation and preservation of the history and philosophy of a people, reflecting their values and aspirations. Imbo (2002, p. 39) notes that the facts of life are always interwoven into a background, and it is only against this background that facts become identifiable as facts.

Halpe (2010) observes that reading myth in postcolonial fiction calls for critical recalibrations that negotiate and expose ideological foundations while remaining conscious of the function of myth as a vehicle for collective and individual belief

systems. Criticisms against the use of superstition in African literature, for instance, emanate from the colonial/western/European ideology that was totally different from the African philosophy. It is notable that the colonial experience in Kenya introduced new gender perspectives and subtly broke the powers of inferiority and superiority between male and female that were traditionally held. This experience resulted in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to as the rhizome – mutation of culture in different directions, characterized by “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (p. 7). Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome representing history and culture as “a map or wide array of attractions and influence without specific origin or genesis, for a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things. It resists chronology and organization, instead favouring a nomadic system of growth propagation.” This implies that what has been and what is to be is not fixed. In this sense, the resulting culture is dynamic and the fluid nature of gender perceptions calls for an understanding of the cultural structures and histories that lead to its construction. Ogola and Macgoye’s fiction has illustrated this kind of cultural dynamism. It is notable that besides all these changes, certain aspects of African culture are persistently recognizable. The survival of African philosophy can only be attributed to the power of African mythology, which continues to sustain and influence cultural ideology.

Halpe (2010) acknowledges that the idea of myth as a false speech is often set in counterpoint to the notion of myth as elevated sacred narrative by postcolonial authors. He further observes that the postcolonial reader is caught in the tension between the construction of myth as an oracle or riddle, and the accompanying suggestion that

mythical pronouncements are also nothing more than fiction. Since literature (fiction) reflects reality, there seems to be a contention over myth as fact or fiction; whether myth tells the truth or, as an ideological creation, is an end in itself. The nature of truth in fiction is a question of belief that is characteristic of myth, and that kind of truth is created in fiction. Mboya (1997) observes thus:

The reality imitated by literature is neither stable nor commonly accessible. It is a highly subjective, sometimes culture-bound concept. What one person or culture perceives as actual and true may be unrealistic to another person or culture, or even the same person or culture at a different time (p. 6).

Mboya rightly acknowledges that one's perception of reality is influenced by culture – in this case, myth, as a lens through which we interpret and create culture – to a large extent. The analysis of how literature can then be read and interpreted using myths, and the reliability of such approach is deemed very essential in this study. This is because literary authors use fiction to assert realities or truths in the universe. In this regard, the study seeks to interrogate how the authors highlight these truths, and how their fiction affirms them or interrogates their validity.

Halpe (2010) further describes myth as functioning by invoking a kind of articulation that is akin to sacred, oracular speech, but which must be uttered in “local” tongue. The specificity of language in myth is significant since it carries a cultural mark, which is embedded in the actual language of the culture within which it is created, and how it is communicated in context. This is in line with Barthes' argument that myth is created by the manner of communication, which ultimately creates an ideology. As vehicles of collective communal narratives, myths represent the culturally formed narratives on archetypal processes. As such, they are always readily ideologically coded and invoke the power of archetype in service of collective socio-cultural practice and belief

systems. Ideological concepts such as gender can thus be understood better within the spectrum of myth and in the context that actually formulates it. By comparing Ogola and Macgoye's presentation of gender archetypes, it is then possible to understand the ideologies underlying gender construction, thus describing the nature of myths within the Luo community that form the background of their fiction.

Different cultures have myths through which they achieve or acquire their desired identity. These myths are often used to ascribe power to one gender at the expense of another. Kuria (2001), for instance, observes that customary traditions among the Luo seem unfavourable to the woman. He points out that, among the community, one of the issues that keep recurring is the phenomenon of wife inheritance. He acknowledges that some argue that it is for the purpose of ensuring that the children left behind have someone to care for them. Another argument is that without it, women would lose property previously owned by the husband, since inheritance laws would not allow a woman to inherit her husband's property. This ideology is, however, challenged by Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye through their construction of female heroine characters. The assumption that women are always victims of male dominance is interrogated in this study, providing an opportunity to view the woman as independent of the gender ideology grip. Matters relating to inheritance as a preserve of the female gender are interrogated in view of the changing circumstances and times.

Kuria (2001) also examines how authors engage in an exposition of the Luo cultural activities that affect women. The practice of paying and receiving dowry, for instance, is widely practiced and affects women negatively since it reduces women to mere commodities to be haggled about, with dowry prices determined without their consent. Kuria, in his observation of an interview with Grace Ogot, concludes that marriage

among the Luo qualifies a woman for leadership position. He however fails to attach similar significance of marriage to a man, probably because leadership is presumed natural to men. He correctly observes that the reduction of women's issues in Africa (as some feminist readings of African literature seem to do) into oppositional binaries, e.g. male/female, agent/victim, traditional/modern, speech/silence and many others, is grossly simplistic and inconsistent with the reality on the ground. It would readily appear as though men are the villains while women are victims – thus the need to look into 'women's issues' in order to advocate for their liberty from patriarchy, as well as to interrogate 'men's privileges' in the patriarchal set-up. This study does not consider 'women's issues' in isolation; rather, it attempts to interrogate gender relations (with regard to both men and women) in light of the existing myths reflected in the literary texts under study, in order to establish whether the authors affirm or debunk them.

In his study, Kuria also notes that one of the most frustrating aspects of the nature and position of women is that, although they are constructed by society as inherently inclined to adhere to social rules and regulations, the society nevertheless designs structures and means of coercing women to accept their lot. This assertion implies that, more often than not, women's performance of gender is predetermined by already existing structures, which seem fixed. The study appreciates that, although gender description and identity is a cultural construct, myths about gender are temporal since the culture that determines a myth is also dynamic. In this case, expectations of gender performance by males and females are not fixed and are bound to change with time, leading to significant shift in gender identities. Kuria comments that, although Marjorie was not a Kenyan, she serves as a good beginning point to debunk the myth of African women as submissive, silently suffering, apolitical and bearers of a false consciousness.

Though submissiveness is required of women in patriarchal systems, Kuria rightfully observes that a number of women in Marjorie's fiction are more assertive and begin to occupy the public space. This is consistent with Kolawole's (1997, p. 51) argument that the myth that African women are free and need not struggle for self-esteem is as dangerous as the myth of African women's total effacement and invisibility.

Apostel (1981) also views myths as part of a way of life that set precedence and models for human actions, but they do not seek to explain them on a rational basis. Myths use images, philosophy and concepts that embody beliefs and are generally accepted without question. Apostel associates myth with the mysterious and illogical. It is interesting that, despite their mystery, myths are widely believed and revered in many societies. The acceptance of these beliefs determines the appropriation of power by men over women, and suppresses the power of women's bodies, or possibly vice versa. The study sought to interrogate the use of myth as a tool of dominance or oppression, by examining how characters as subjects are willing, or rather helpless, yet ironically endowed with the power to change their predicament.

1.8.2 Role of Myth in the Construction of Gender Stereotypes

Many scholars acknowledge that gender is a cultural construct; and that gender construction is based on culturally defined gender roles. In describing gender role ideology, Pastor (as cited in Ungaretti & Etchezahar, 2013) observes that it is a historical construction whose meaning is derived from each culture or construct, and is the substrate upon which different meanings are given to sexes. He observes that, in this way, societies pigeonhole women and men into stereotypes that seem immovable, building belief systems about masculinity, femininity and, consequently, the type of activities and distribution of occupations that are appropriate for each sex. Going by

this explanation, different cultures create myths (gender stereotypes) and attempt to maintain them, also determining their roles. This study examines how culture, as fictionalized by Macgoye and Ogola in the selected texts, significantly stereotypes gender identities presenting them in form of archetypes. These archetypes are interrogated with regard to the role and aim of such myths, and the changes that occur in the fictional world of Ogola and Macgoye.

Lionett (1997) describes literature as a discursive practice that encodes and transmits as well as creates ideology. As a mediating force in society, it structures our sense of the world, since narrative or stylistic conventions and plot resolutions serve to either sanction and perpetuate cultural myths, or to create new mythologies that allow the writer and the reader to engage in constructive rewriting of their social contexts. Shahnaz, Fatima and Qadir (2020), for instance, acknowledge that children's literature transfers social values that are imperative in determining their social identities. Literature thus becomes an effective tool for perpetrating ideology based on particular social contexts. The novel is a persuasive tool that can create truth by narrating and making an ideology seem truthful. Thus, a novelist is able to creatively manipulate language to construct or represent 'truth'. In this study, the focus on cultural context (Luo myths) was informed by the assumption that the selected writers' understanding of the context within which their creative work is based determines their construction of character identity, roles and relationships. This in turn becomes a portrayal of how myths influence gender identity and performance in society.

Viana (2017) describes the Marxist conception of ideology, which is considered a systemization of false consciousness – an illusory thinking system. She argues that ideology is a systematic way of false consciousness produced by the ideologist. The

power of the ideology of gender lies in the way it encompasses fundamental cultural and social values relating to the interactions between men and women, as well as the force of history underlying its evolution. The historicity and cultural variations found in the construction of gender relations points to the fact that these are changeable. Gender ideology is thus seen as a fundamental term for analysing women's issues and society as a whole.

The study is particularly concerned with how gender ideologies have been used as a tool of subjugation of female gender, enhanced by patriarchal culture. Marlina (2015) acknowledges the significant role of myth in every culture as it can render the multiplicity of experience, explain the behaviour of the physical universe, and describe nature and society. She also quotes Hourigan's (1994, p. 1) assertion that myth is the most potent means by which perceptions, values and attitudes are transmitted from one generation to the next. This study examines the role of the family as a socializing agent, and considers the function of myth in socializing boys and girls in accordance with their gendered identity and roles. Similarly, the study recognizes Kaneh's (1998) argument that "The African woman's act of writing is simultaneously the creation of women's identities and a transgression of boundaries" (p. 14). It also considers Ogola and Macgoye's portrayal of patriarchy and how it influences gender identity and roles, and examines it with regard to myths related to gender and power.

In examining patriarchal systems, I agree with Mandal's (2017) argument that masculinity is a fiction and that for a woman to be related to a man is to participate in the authenticating of this fiction. In this thesis, I analyse how Ogola and Macgoye, in their fiction, portray the African feminist perspective, allowing women to aid men in their performance of masculinity. Mandal further notes that sexual relationships are by

implication based on a kind of emptiness and falsehood. He relates this to the link between signifier and the signified in de Saussure's (1966) formulation of the linguistic sign. This relationship implies the indispensability of one gender in the formulation of the other. This study recognizes the role of each gender not only in the construction, but also in the deconstruction, of gender stereotypes.

1.8.3 (De)construction of Gender Myths

Dhanappriya and Samundeeswari (2017) describe myth and mythology not as simple, innocent stories about old gods and goddesses, but as symbols and images that bear political, social, historical and cultural meanings and codes. This implies that how we make sense of ourselves and our environment is encoded in myth. Myth is a powerful language through which we communicate, understand ourselves, relate and interpret our cultures. Dhanappriya and Samundeeswari further acknowledge that feminist thinkers and writers have used myths to lay bare the reasons, means and consequences of the systematic oppression women have suffered in history. In so doing, they have tried to multiply the myths or rewrite them to enable women to speak their genuine experience through female characters. This observation seems to imply that feminists attempt to exaggerate gender experiences in order to foreground the challenges faced by the female gender. If myth provides for hyperbolic presentation of gender relations, as they suggest, then there is a concern on how truthful or reliable myth is, since in its own nature it is believed to express an unquestionable truth. In this regard, it accords an opportunity to interrogate the role of myths in (re)presentation of gender issues, and judge whether and why there could be any attempts of exaggeration in order to highlight the plight of the female gender. In recognition of this, the study acknowledges that myth

can be used as a tool for cultural manipulation in order to place one gender at an advantage over another.

Cornwall (2005) argues that feminist attachment to certain ideas about women and about what is needed to improve women's lives should be analysed in terms of the affective power of the deeply held beliefs about women that are encoded in gender myths. She emphasizes the emotional qualities of myth, arguing that myth does not arise solely from intellectual processes; it sprouts forth from deep human emotions. She describes it as the expression of emotion - emotion turned into an image. Cornwall seems to suggest that the emotional part of manhood or womanhood plays a key role in constructing the particular gender identity, so that one feels like a man or a woman. She argues that myths are narratives that do more than tell a good story. In her view, myths are composed of a series of familiar images and devices, which work to produce an order-of-things that is compelling because it resonates with the affective dimensions of values and norms.

Felluga (2015) also comments on Butler's questioning of the belief that certain gendered behaviours are natural. To Felluga, an individual's learned performance of his/her gendered behaviour is an act of sorts, a performance that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality. Butler's notion is that an individual hardly constitutes themselves. She points out the role cultural myths play: determining gendered acts as determined by language and convention. While many mythical narratives have been a reference point in determining gender identities, Imbo (2002) argues that "The story is always an invitation to ponder and circumvent limitations in a people's bedrock theories of human nature, responsibility, moral agency, language, subjectivity, and indeed modernity" (p. 42). In this case, Imbo calls for a careful scrutiny of all forms of

discourse – whether the oral narratives or any other imaginative stories that convey gender ideologies in traditional and modern contexts. He notes the limitations inherent in and the need for a critical evaluation of these ideologies.

It has also been argued that myths offer a basis for the formation of stereotypes. According to Bar-Tal (1996), stereotypes are a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people (personality traits, attributes, intentions, behavioural descriptions). Images from stereotypes are often stable and contextualized (Moore, 2003). In the traditional African context, men and women had specific roles defined by culture. Despite the fact that men were considered privileged, as is the case in any patriarchal society, it is notable that women nonetheless played an integral role in African societies, both modern and traditional. They are responsible for the upkeep of the household, agriculture, reproduction and the upbringing and discipline of children. Therefore, women have consistently shaped the cultures and societies in which they live over the years. Cultural, religious and political movements have had significant effect on women with regard to their roles. In describing myths on gender and power, this study examined how Ogola and Macgoye assign particular roles to their male and female characters, and how the characters transcend cultural expectations on gender.

It has been observed that gender roles have tended to shift over time. African women in the past, and to some extent the present in some areas, were responsible for household chores, tilling land, harvesting, caring for animals, keeping the home in order, feeding the family, caring for the children and so on. From Bar-Tal's (1996) argument, such stereotypes may not be sustained due to the changing trends in society. As Moore (2003) observes, there is need to rethink about the context in which stereotypes are created, taking cognizance of the fact that changes occur with different cultural

interactions. Moreover, Fonchingong (2006) notes, “With the onset of the feminist movement and the attempts to reconstitute the distorted image of the female gender, most male writers are revisiting their earlier approaches by presenting women in an all-rounded perspective” (p. 144).

Though this study focuses on gender discourses from female-authored works, it acknowledges gender not as an exclusively women’s issue but as a universal concern. The study recognizes this gap created by cultural dynamism and seeks to understand how Ogola and Macgoye describe gender myths in their fiction, while examining how they debunk the same myths as they present changing trends in the society. Cornwall (2005) also underscores the need to look at different domains of discourse that coexist within any single cultural setting since cultural identities are no longer fixed. Shifts in identity and power within and across the new landscapes of colonial Africa, for instance, gave rise to new configurations of masculinity as ‘traditional’ male identities were contested. Martin Harris (1993), in his article *The Evolution of Human Gender Hierarchies: A Trial Formulation*, argues that cultural determinist strategies (cultural materialism) require us to reject vague, subjective, and hypothetical sex differences, such as innate aggressiveness, brain hemisphere dominance and innate intelligence differences. He observes that these differences are related in the most consistent cross-cultural features of the division of labour by sex. New world views in the colonial and postcolonial Africa (depicted in the fiction by Ogola and Macgoye, among others) problematize the idea of specific gender identities demarcated by sex. Tsaioor (2013) also comments that the colonial and imperial enterprise played a decisive and critical part in the (re)construction of African social and cultural histories and with enduring

repercussions. The colonial experience resulted in a shift in world views concerning gender roles and identities, introducing a different value system to Africa.

Appiah (1993) attempts to debunk the myth of the 'African world' in the 19th century saying:

To speak of an African identity in the 19th century – if an identity is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology – would have been to give airy nothing a local habitation and a name (p. 174).

This assertion confirms that there is no definite African identity since there is no specific mode of evaluation that can be said to be absolutely correct. Similarly, gender identity cannot be absolute. In his article entitled *Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*, Newell (1997) observes that gender images and ideologies constantly shift to account for their changing status. This has led to emergence of new perspectives that interrogate, reformulate and analyse inherited popular codes. Newell looks at the impact of social changes in society and how the society responds to them. He interrogates how gender images are rewritten in Literature, pointing out that they are not static since they change with time. Kandiyoti (1988) also opines that conceptualizing gender as a process, as one of several ways by which humans create and perpetuate social differences, helps to deconstruct the myth of gender as a product of nature, while underscoring its power dimension. In agreement with these views of gender construction, this study focuses on how Ogola and Macgoye, in their selected texts, construct and reconstruct gender images in the light of changing trends within the Luo culture.

Bruce (2010) appreciates that concepts of maleness and masculinity are linguistically and culturally constructed, making them malleable and capable of shifting over time. He acknowledges that culture and environment shape these concepts, giving rise to multiple aspects of masculinity and maleness, which may exist simultaneously within any social construction. Those aspects a society favours become a privileged version of masculinity that provides a framework suggesting a hierarchy of masculinities in which one form would be idealized as hegemonic, thus receiving social privilege over other forms. Connell (2005) also acknowledges that mass culture generally assumes that there is a fixed, true masculinity that exhibits signs of discipline and power. This idealized form of masculinity, therefore, defines it, and determines how it is performed.

Bruce (2010) observes further that men seek to obtain a level of manly respectability that would grant them social recognition and authority. He points out that men can function within the social structure in a manner that allows them more power to dictate how they might be perceived. Thus, the ease with which these discursive identities can be manipulated calls into question the instability of the seemingly established masculine authority they strive to locate within their history and socio-cultural context and subsequently seek to mimic. This is because the masculine components of these sought-after identities would appear the central aspect by which these individuals believe they will achieve social validation. However, the fluidity with which these figures seem to adjust their presentations of masculinity challenges any essentialist idea of masculinity as a fixed concept. There is need to reconsider the archetypal images of masculinity and femininity, which the study interrogates through the selected works of fiction. This is done in recognition that notions of maleness and masculinity are themselves by-products of the socio-cultural framework within which they exist.

Barret (2001) defines hegemonic masculinity as a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated. This masculine image is thus an ideological construction, whose identity embodies more favourable hegemonic masculinity of the period it exists, while its characteristics are constantly shaped and reshaped by an ever-changing culture. The idealized form receives more and more attention, becoming a myth that embodies the concept of masculinity. This study endeavours to explain how such myths enhance masculine constructions through the structures of power surrounding masculinity at the expense of the feminine gender, and highlights changes in gender perception with the passage of time. As Barret observes, masculine identity shifts with time – its status is temporal – as it is influenced by cultural dynamism. In the endeavour to examine Ogola and Macgoye's feminine and masculine identities, the study evaluates how the changes in culture shift concepts of masculinity, making its performance either counterproductive or obsolete.

Odiemo-Munara (2010) acknowledges that from early history, women in East Africa engaged in various forms of resistance through the written and spoken word. According to him, they sought to collapse a custodianship that ensures the woman's limited participation in the public sphere. For instance, they organized themselves and protested over socio-cultural and economic exploitation. Lihamba (2007) also reiterates the assertion that colonialism enhanced the marginalization of the colonized women by 'reinforcing and extending some of the worst elements of African patriarchy'. Odiemo-Munara and Lihamba's observations imply that women have continued to suffer under the patriarchal African traditional rule, as well as in the present. This then begs for a critical analysis of the nature of gender ideologies that have persisted over time, and

how they have been perpetrated in spite of the changing culture. The study explores Ogola and Macgoye's fictionalized forms of gender agency, seeking to empower the female gender by debunking myths that have been instrumental in their subjugation.

Wabende Kimingichi's (2000) *Moulding a New Image: Gender Perspectives in Margaret Ogola's the River and the Source and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's Coming to Birth* is an evaluation of women characters in relation to their flexibility to the changing culture alongside the evolution of a new nation, Kenya. The critic argues that "Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye build characters that break out of the community barriers that block their progress and venture into fields that are generally thought of as a male domain" (Kimingichi, 2000, p. 86). Women are viewed as pioneers of change, probably because traditional customs and myths work against them, often restraining them from accessing opportunities for self-development. As the characters develop, they gain new insight into their situations and find alternative ways of self-emancipation.

Jose (2014) also examines Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny* and *The River and the Source* as presentations of women's emancipation, pointing out that men are insufficiently represented in the texts. While it is true that Ogola foregrounds female characters, men, despite being in the background, evidently have a significant influence over the female characters' actions. The ideology of male domination and women subordination can thus be questioned by a careful scrutiny of the construction of male and female characters.

In her thesis, entitled 'Reconstructing Kenyan Women's Image in Coming to Birth', Barasa (2008) evaluates how Macgoye explores Kenya's postcolonial socio-political

dynamics and their influences in the reconstruction of individual women's identities. She looks at how socio-political changes influence the formation of identities and choices of individuals in society through the example of Paulina. She also considers the strategies women employ for their individual emancipation within a society dominated by patriarchy – especially interrogating the construction of the institution of marriage and motherhood. However, Barasa mainly considers the political situation as a major determinant in the acquisition of characters' new identities that can be understood in terms of the political shifts and conditions that give rise to them. She fails to interrogate how the ideologies (cultural or even religious) drive the construction of these identities.

Barasa (2008) argues further that it is the political spaces and developments that initiate new definitions for individual characters in society. She considers women's images as closely linked to political developments in acknowledging the influence politics has on characters in their inexorable attempt to realize their potential in politics and general life. It is however notable that Paulina still holds on to her culturally defined position as a woman, and is passive in politics – which, as the novel seems to suggest, is men's domain. The changes occurring in characters' lives partly result from political changes, but are majorly determined by new ideologies brought about by colonial culture, which are further examined in this study. Mboya (2003), in reference to *Murder in Majengo*, also observes that men are active players in politics, noting that their involvement is an opportunity to gain power. Their desire for power and control stems from the mythical expectations under scrutiny in this study. At the same time, Mboya notes that women are not sucked into the arena of power. Lois remains far removed from the arena of power. He notes, "Even among 'the common people', the women are underdogs". This explains why the majority can only survive by prostitution'.

Avvocato (2014) investigates how Macgoye's female characters' identities are fashioned from different perspectives and how women's choices and reactions to historical, cultural, personal changes and challenges shape their identities in colonial and postcolonial Kenya. She notes that women writing in Kenya represents women's criticism of a number of discriminating forces stemming from customary traditions, colonial, and postcolonial practices – as a form of contestation and resistance. However, Avvocato's analysis of these forces does not focus on myth/ideology as the determinant of gender identity. She observes further that Kenyan women's life stories, both private and socio-historical experiences gain a new depth, being depicted and retold from a new and more authentic perspective. She acknowledges that though history does not help as a mere framework made of crucial dates and events concerning historical figures, all the main characters' stories are merged within the colonial and national story of the country. History plays a pivotal role as far as women's emancipation is concerned, by setting changes that shape and transform the novel's characters, and by designing for them new opportunities and modern spaces wherein to prove themselves. Avvocato here focuses on the role of history, which truly has significant influence on gender identities over time, but does not consider the power of myth in creating or enhancing certain identity/status desired, a gap that this study endeavours to fill.

Mboya (2003), in his study, observes that a woman's hope is not part of history; therefore, she is not an active participant in history. He acknowledges however that the woman cannot escape history; so, her life will make intersections with history. Mboya's argument is limited to placing a woman's experiences in the context of historical events, and how these events affect her, but fails to consider the socio-cultural (mythical) contexts that are of a greater significance in the construction of gender and identity,

which Macgoye explores in her works. Contrary to Mboya's view, the study takes Barthes' post-structural stance that there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate and disappear completely. Thus, unlike the historical perspective, this approach acknowledges the instability of myth, since the concept of myth is not historical.

In his thesis, entitled 'Character Transformation and Socio-Historical Awareness in the Novels of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye', Tawo (1997) argues that history does not impact homogeneously on both men and women. He appreciates the progressive transformation of Paulina in *Coming to Birth*, as her husband Martin retrogresses. He argues that the key statement in the novel is change - and that the author, as an advocate of subtle feminist ideology, subverts repugnant socio-cultural structures that militate against women's progress. He notes that Macgoye sets out to undermine cultural practices that inhibit women from achieving their full potential as citizens. He cites the marriage of under-age girls as a symbol of traditions with acceptable as well as repugnant social institutions that include customs, social taboos and overwhelming chores imposed as women's duties. Tawo, however, notes that in the same context, the father-figure, brother, boyfriend, uncle and husband reign supreme – as symbols of social oppression. He gives the example of Abiero in *Victoria* at fifteen, and Paulina in *Coming to Birth* at sixteen who are coerced into marriage arrangements. It is the father figure that arranges marriages behind their backs. He sees the institution of marriage as an avenue to settle family problems, giving the example of the role played by Abiero as a 'sacrifice' married off to an old polygamous Otieno known to have lost his manhood. However, Tawo's study does not examine these traditions as a possible tool for power and control; rather, they are simply aspects of culture that are accepted as the norm.

Unfortunately, this happens in the context of a culture in which childless marriages have no place.

Lindholm-Csanyi (2007), in her thesis entitled “*The Powers of the Weak*”: *Representations of Women’s Power in Kenyan Literature*, comments:

The main ideological function of Macgoye’s novel is to undermine patriarchal political theory by creating space for the female subject. She has succeeded in declassifying the oppressor-victim dichotomy to demonstrate that agency and subordination are not mutually exclusive, to show that the oppressed are potential agents who can change their lives and affect others’ in radical ways. In many respects this complexity is encompassed by the novel as she disconnects powerlessness and inferiority, portraying the heroine as endowed with strength and wisdom. The writer remodels the victim status tactfully, without highlighting the insurgent character of her heroine, and creates a smooth transition from an oppressive situation into a sphere of deliberate decisions and persistent actions (p. 36).

This study appreciates Lindholm-Csanyi’s argument with regard to gender and power play in Macgoye’s works, but considers this in the context of myth that guides the author’s construction of the victim or heroine status of her characters. Language creates and shapes reality.

Jerop (2015), in her thesis entitled ‘Liberating the Potential of Kenyan Women in Margaret Ogola’s Novels’, explores avenues that women can engage in society to reverse beliefs and attitudes that counteract equal opportunities for them. She observes that Ogola’s novel *The River and the Source* tries to correct the fallacy that conformity is an important aspect of traditional life and that any girl who attempts to upset societal norms does so at her own risk. However, Ogola’s female characters, beginning with Akoko, according to Jerop, defy these myths, finding space for self-expression as they assert their presence. Jerop notes that Ogola does not disassociate her heroines altogether from traditional Luo practices and culture. Rather, she depicts the ways in

which her female characters separate themselves from cultural practices that are harmful and that limit their potential for liberation and independence. She argues that, through the novel, Ogola is contesting against traditional beliefs and patriarchy. This study builds on this and further examines how the authors contest myths on gender, by interrogating how gender ideologies can be used to propagate patriarchal agenda that their female characters are fighting against.

Rinkanya (2015), in her paper "*She Will Never Be a Doormat*": *Ideal Female Characters in Margaret Ogola's Novels*, observes that Ogola constructs her female characters in a chain of model personages, whose success in life is based on the set of values defined by Akoko, the legend in *The River and the Source*. These characters are able to survive cultural barriers and, as Rinkanya notes, Ogola establishes a trend of heroines who draw their strength from Akoko, among other exceptional women, all through her novels. The reality of their struggle against patriarchy, their self-determination does not always meet significant support from their male counterparts, yet they themselves support their men where necessary. Rinkanya's paper examines how women stand up to fight for themselves and their families. This study appreciates the power of women's bodies implied here, but also critiques possibilities of myths that continue to side-line women, while placing uncompromised expectations on them. Thus, the motivation that keeps the women going, their uniqueness and the power of womanhood is examined.

Mwangi (2003), in a paper entitled 'Gendering Genre: Issues of Feminist Identity and Subversion of the Epic in Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*', argues that in the novel, there is great tension between the genders and that the text focuses on the problematic war of the sexes. He observes that there is a gender war in the text, in which

women win, implying that there is a deliberate effort on the part of the author to push the feminist agenda. He observes: “Multiculturalism is predicated on feminism and is encouraged only when it is for the benefit of the womenfolk.” In other words, he sees the intrusion of other cultures working to the advantage of womenfolk, while destroying some patriarchal aspects of African culture. He observes a kind of deflation in the stereotypical association of men with invincibility and women with cowardice, commenting on Akoko’s sense of bravery and independence as opposed to Odongo and Opiyo’s lack of self-assurance, yet they are expected to offer Akoko security on her way to Kisumu since they are men. This study appreciates Mwangi’s observation of gender stereotyping, but also to interrogate the power behind such formation of stereotypes, which is in myth. He also notes a form of subversion of the norms and values by women, highlighting Akoko’s accommodation of the cultural opposite when she allows Awiti to marry a man from Seme, considered a foreigner yet her lineage is essentially pure. He points out that the author deflates patriarchy and cultural purism, seemingly suggesting that if traditions are the breeding ground of misogyny, they should be eradicated. This provides a basis for interrogation of the deployment of myth, by examining how Ogola contests the existing myths on gender in the texts under study.

1.8.4 Authors’ Vision on Myth-Gender Relations

Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye’s presentation of gender concerns has been studied by many scholars, who acknowledge these authors’ commitment to the plight of women in their fictional works. Like many gynocritics would argue, since they are women, their works have often been considered as championing for the recognition of the position of women and their participation in society. This is often argued on the basis of the writers’ concerns in their texts, and the nature of characters they construct.

Nnaemeka (1998) points out that women's literature is an attempt to construct knowledge and search for the truth and that these are the property of no specific gender. Although many women's writings are seen as sympathetic to the female gender, it is only proper to observe that neither do women relegate male characters in their work to the background much more than male writers do to their female characters. Literary works by female writers are often quickly judged as presenting some gender ideology where women are victims of male dominance. This is probably due to the authors' own experience in the cultural set-up to which they belong, but one cannot conclusively argue that one gender is more truthful or objective than the other. The women authors under study in this case are viewed as committed to representing the reality, and the nature of this reality is what is under investigation. As Chinweizu and Madubuike (1980) argue:

The function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assumes a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings and not to preoccupy himself with his puny ego. Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory upon the artist (p. 252).

Chinweizu and Madubuike emphasize the need to consider any literary writer as situated within a specific social context within which he writes, and to which he has a level of social commitment.

Besides the social commitment that writers have to the social context of their writing, it is prudent to acknowledge that every writer's experiences and, consequently, attitude to life affect their presentation of this reality in one way or the other. Moi (2002) argues that:

The extreme naturalism/reflectionism as advocated in *Images of Women in Fiction* has the advantage of emphasizing the way in which writers constantly select the elements they wish to use in their texts; but instead

of acknowledging this as one of the basic facts of textual creativity, reflectionism posits that the artist's selective creation should be measured against 'real life', thus assuming that the only constraint on the artist's work is his or her perception of the real world (p. 44).

Her observation is that such a view resolutely refuses to consider textual production as a highly complex process with many different and conflicting literary and non-literary determinants (such as historical, political, social, ideological, institutional, generic, and psychological, among others). Moi further notes, "Instead, writing is seen as more or less faithful reproduction of an external reality to which we all have equal and unbiased access and which therefore enables us to criticize the author on the grounds that he or she has created an incorrect model of the reality we somehow all know." Moi's criticism of this general perspective is that it fails to consider the proposition that the real is not only something we construct, but a controversial construct. Thus, literature should not be critiqued with objectionable ideological assumptions, and confused with failing to give an authentic expression of real experience, or being "true to life". In the current study, Macgoye and Ogola's fiction is examined as a possibly true reflection of the society they represent, not simply as women authors but also as members of society, so they have a vision for their society.

Female authored novels have been argued as offering self-images, patterns of self-analysis and general insights into the women's world in a more personalized way. As Aidoo (2005) posits, "women writers write about women because when we wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, we see women" (p. 163). In narrating their stories, women bring into focus femininity, and so highlight power differences between men and women. Feminist activists have thus pioneered intellectual revolution built on sexual politics aimed at stamping a new order of gender relations – replacing a tradition that is masculine and domineering. Gender studies have focused on reshaping

masculinity, building feminine value or exclusion/inclusion of the female voice in the literary canon. Studies on female authored novels not only focus on women but also provide a critique on the general ideology of gender as a feminine concern.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) underscores the fact that “African women writers should be committed to their third world reality by offering readers the right African perspectives” (p. 64). She argues that writings of women are truly feminist due to their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women in society. Women writers endeavour to create images of women as they see them, and are also partly informed by their own experiences as women. It should be noted that though the current study focuses on women writers’ works, it is not entirely about the image of women. Rather, it gives a perspective of women to gender issues in general, considering how men and women relate without necessarily being sympathetic to the female gender. This is in the light of Ogundipe-Leslie’s view of the contribution of women writers as significant to society, seeking to challenge historical, cultural and mythic barriers in a bid to represent women in proper perspectives.

Wasamba (2010) acknowledges that Macgoye’s perspective enables critics to reflect on all aspects of the author’s creative works as diverse expressions of one writer. He points out that a unique perspective emerges from her works, which readers, literary critics, researchers and scholars should be exposed to. He also submits that one area that requires further research is a comparative study of Macgoye’s vision as a writer of European descent, and that of other European writers. Contrary to Wasamba’s proposition for further research, this study views Macgoye’s comparison to other female writers from Luo community as more significant since it illuminates her ideology concerning the cultural background within which she writes. Thus, it focuses

on selected works of Macgoye and Ogola, in order to comparatively examine their perspectives on the nature and construction of gender ideologies.

Odhiambo (2006), in an article entitled “Writing Alternative Womanhood in Kenya in Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source*”, argues thus:

Ogola’s text seeks to project Kenyan women as capable of not only telling their own stories but also of claiming their rightful place and identity in the broader national life. The several female protagonists in the text representing different historical periods in Kenya’s history symbolically articulate a kind of womanhood in contemporary Kenya that projects its own societal agency and identity. In the process these characters rewrite the persona that has been allocated to women in post-colonial Kenya’s national story (p. 235).

Here, Odhiambo examines the kind of womanhood presented in the novel, from the perspective of a woman finding space in a male-dominated society. He acknowledges that gender representation in Ogola’s novel is progressive, and that consistency with history provides for a projection of the future which could be a representation of the authors’ vision on gender concerns. This study builds on this construction of manhood and womanhood, considering the motivation behind these gender identities. It eventually examines the author’s own vision concerning gender identity bringing forth ideas on gender agency for the contemporary society.

In an essay entitled “The Female Writer and her Commitment”, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) points out that “an African woman writer has three possibilities: to tell about being a woman, to describe reality from a woman’s point of view and lastly a third world woman”. She believes that telling women’s experiences from a personal point of view will give a true reflection of women’s experiences concerning issues they grapple with in society. In so doing, she believes, female writers can rectify the distorted image of African women as depicted in some literary works. She argues that Macgoye

has departed from stereotypical portrayal of women by creating complex and multidimensional characters in the Kenyan society. This complexity in character construction signals a departure from the culturally predetermined modes of gender performance, since the characters are faced with life-threatening situations that challenge gender as a priority mode of determining and describing human relations. The authors thus take us to a point where there is a felt need to reconsider and evaluate whether gender is a significant parameter of human relations in the modern society.

1.9 Methodology

This study took a qualitative approach; hence, a textual analysis was done on the primary texts that were the source of material for analysis. The methodology involved a close reading of the selected primary texts alongside other supporting materials that provided relevant information on the contexts of the texts under study.

Asghari (2015) calls for precision and sensitivity in gender studies since this field of study is not generally covered within the framework of a special discipline. Methodological pluralism in the study of women (in this case gender in general) is therefore necessary, as it promotes the use of new modes of inquiries such as focus groups, content analysis, observation techniques, participant observation and field research. This particular study, however, focused mainly on content analysis through a critical and close reading of the selected primary texts in so far as they demonstrate the use of myth in determining gender-power relations. The two authors under study were compared with respect to their presentation of myth in terms of character construction and the literary strategies employed to foreground the concept of myth and gender. The study also employed a contextual approach in the study of myths that determine gender and power. As such, the relationships between characters of different genders, their

position of social influence and the beliefs that motivate such relationships were studied within their cultural context.

The study appreciates the interconnectedness of myth, gender and power discourses which are the theoretical standpoints guiding the study. Davies and Gannon (2009, p. 318) explain how post-structuralist analysis focuses on discourse and the discursive regulatory processes. They analyse the process of gendered subjectification, pointing out Butler and Foucault's explanation as "historically specific processes whereby one is subjected to the discursive regimes and regulatory frameworks through which gendered individuals and their social contexts are also, and through the same processes, constructed" (Butler, 1992; Foucault, 1980). The study deployed this feminist poststructuralist strategy to make visible, analysable and revisable, the binaries male/female. The strategy was also deployed to display how power relations rationalize gender differentiation.

This research was largely based on library resources, as well as a wide reading of other materials from journals, newspapers, and the internet. It was centred on the study of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth, Chira and Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*, as well as Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source, I Swear by Apollo* and *Place of Destiny*. The focus was on how the authors use language to (re)present and interrogate myths around characters which are constructed by society and consequently situate them in particular positions of symbolic power. In order to understand the motivation behind the actions of individual characters (how they perform gender), other influences emanating from the society and the prevailing circumstances were taken into consideration.

The study was undertaken in the context of culture as expressed in the selected texts. The perspective this study took is dictated by the cultural set-up of the Luo community, which is paramount in the construction of myths, while being cognizant of the fact that such myths are continually constructed and keep shifting with time. Culture is viewed as a positive dynamic process that may be expressed through myth. The study, therefore, approached the understanding of myth from the point of fiction and fact, and tried to unravel the points of intersection between the two; particularly as far as the construction of gender and power relations is concerned.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURE AND FUNCTION OF MYTH IN MARGARET OGOLA'S *THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE* AND MARJORIE MACGOYE'S *COMING TO BIRTH*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the nature and functions of myth in the construction and performance of gender. In an attempt to understand the nature of myth and the power therein, the chapter analyses the language of myth used in construction of gender identities. It explains how Ogola and Macgoye use language as a tool to construct a way of appreciating the world's social realities, particularly gender discourses. The chapter evaluates how they use language persuasively to authenticate the indigenous African concept of gender while at the same time discounting the permanence of these "truths". In so doing, we are then able to describe the nature of myths in Macgoye and Ogola's fiction that influence gender power relations.

The discussion in this chapter specifically focuses on how Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* and Marjorie Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* portray the nature of myth regarding gender power relations in the context of the Luo culture. I interrogate how this fiction attempts to relate to the real world, invoking aspects of Luo culture, as well as religious and historical references. I take the assumption that myth attempts to construct these 'truths' about gender; so, I seek to decipher how these 'constructed truths' reflect the facts of life, which are fictionalized in Ogola and Macgoye's texts. Therefore, the chapter focuses on the mythic imagination of major gender concerns, and how they play out within their changing cultural and historical contexts.

2.2 Interface between Myth and History

The common understanding of myth is that it is a narrative which is believed to express a society's origin as well as its religious and cultural practices which is traceable to the past. In this study, the description of myth is majorly drawn from Barthes' (1972) conceptualization of myth as a form of language, a message, generally language in discourse. However, this does not discount the idea of myth as historical narrative since history is a linguistic construction. The reading of the texts under study explains the relationship between myth and history: whether myth is history or history is mythic. Ogola and Macgoye invent characters and events that correspond to history, though the events and characters are not history in themselves. In *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth*, the authors creatively explore the interconnectedness between myth and history, reworking myths that expose the ideological foundations from which mythical narratives emerge as socio-cultural responses to historical moments. This creativity indicates that myth, as a language in discourse, is able to construct admissible facts that are not necessarily history. Their linguistic imaginary alludes to the traditionally held mythic narratives, which they explore insofar as it determines gender relations.

Margaret Ogola and Marjorie O. Macgoye, in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth*, respectively, portray the image of Africa as a rich combination of myth and history, with their major characters embodying the essence of the history, or battling it, or somehow having a relationship with it by means of the fantasy (mythic) character. Akoko and Paulina, the protagonists in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* respectively are located in a patriarchal context, characterised by gender discrimination entrenched within the Luo culture. The account of their experiences is eventually akin

to an emancipation narrative; the authors trace the stages of growth with various aspects of social change leading to the empowerment of these women. Ogola constructs an exceptional woman in Akoko, ideal and adorable in almost all aspects, and situates her within a rigid Luo culture that disadvantages the female gender. *The River and the Source*, epic in its gesturing and posturing, confers upon Akoko a potentially mythic character and characterization. Consequently, Akoko's character reveals the nature and the role of myth in foregrounding the gender agenda way back from the pre-colonial history. The woman is bestowed with so much potential, but is limited by cultural regulations based on her gender. Akoko's legendary character, however, does not correspond to any known historical figure, but her experiences represent many women who participate in the struggle against patriarchy. Ogola's mention of historical moments, such as the First World War during which Akoko's son is killed (P.60), situates these events in a known historical past that validates the gender considerations of that period. The various standpoints from which these events are narrated also make this fictionalization of history mythic, thus proving the thin line between myth and history. The knowledge of this relationship also appreciates the role of literary discourse in the construction of myth and history.

Although Mboya (1997) describes *Coming to Birth* as a historical novel, my argument is that while Marjorie constructs history in fiction, she also interweaves history with myth. I acknowledge that although there is a connection between the two, myth cannot be history, neither can history be myth. Both exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship: history may as well be speculation just as myth is, since it is based on unwritten material as a source. While Marjorie recounts actual documented historical events through her narrative, the language she uses is bound to give different possibilities making those

events appear mythic. *Coming to Birth* either convinces us about the historical facts by taking us closer to the events through portrayal of actual day-to-day experiences of characters in the milieu, or gives us a sneak peek at the author's own ideology revealed through her creativity. The juxtaposition of Martin and Paulina's experiences as a couple with the story of the Kenyan nation at the brink of independence gives us a way of understanding the world from a different perspective. Through this, the author creatively diverts from the grand narrative of independence history and political ideologies in Kenya, and shifts our focus towards her gender concerns located within the same historical and political discourses.

I argue that myth on the other hand can construct history since it has a way of working out situations, connecting events to construct a plausible story as if it were reality. My interest in the relationship between myth and history has to do with the role myth or history plays in gender construction and performance. Myth has its basis in history, and/or becomes the actual history of a people that helps them understand themselves. The common understanding of myth as a religious kind of narrative stems from the fact that the traditional African society (similar to many other societies) has mythic narratives that explain their existence and beliefs, traceable to the past. Besides the history of the society expressed in the novels, the authors also express the history of the struggle for gender equality as a struggle against rigid structures entrenched in myth. Akoko's narration of the Luo myth of origin in Ogola's *The River and the Source* (p. 81) expresses the value attached to such myths. They are believed to be true and form the basis for the society's religious beliefs, social organization, gender relations among other societal aspects.

Ogola and Macgoye situate their fiction within the history and culture of the Luo people, who have traditional myths and legends that explain their existence. I am convinced that studying their gender concerns requires a holistic approach, and I agree with Filomina Steady's (2005) proposal that gender analysis should aim to incorporate "a historical perspective, a holistic perspective, multidimensionality, multiple time frames, multiple levels of analysis, multiple identities and realities, relational and dynamic contexts, comparative methods, oral history, life history and so forth" (p. 321). This approach gives more insight into complex local knowledge and normative systems that constitute gender and power relations.

Akoko and Paulina (in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth*, respectively) are brought up in a cultural context with well-defined gender roles passed through generations as myth. As Lyotard (1992) points out, these roles, narrated and observed by all, have an inner connection between related events. It is a way of making sense of history through consideration of a succession of social systems rather than isolated historical events. Through this continuity, myth gives women a place in history. Although their experiences may not be documented in history, we appreciate their role from sources believed as true. Barthes' argument that myth is a type of speech chosen by history can be interrogated in light of the discourses within the Kenyan independence period that have been registered in the two novels.

Akoko, in *The River and the Source*, and Paulina, in *Coming to Birth*, are constructed as characters growing and changing with history. Their portrayal resonates with what Halpe (2010) describes as "a pseudo-scholarly exploration of the permeable boundaries between history and fiction" (p. 78). In this case, the authors elaborate the relation between historical narrative and the origin of what is regarded as truth without proof.

Reference to documented historical figures, such as Jean-Marie Seroney and Chelagat Mutai in *Coming to Birth* (p. 110), and events, such as the First World War in *The River and the Source*, (p. 60) endears readers to their literary presentation of historical material. By allowing fictional characters to engage in historical events and interact with historical characters in the text, the authors provide a connection between myth and history, thus providing alternative and critical point of view to their issues of concern. The mention of Chelagat Mutai's engagement in politics places the Kenyan woman in politics, which indicates the entry of women into the male dominated political space.

The novels demonstrate the way myth becomes a frame for historical material, a structuring principle that attaches elevated significance to certain kinds of narratives. Ogola's reference to the Luo myth of origin exposes the internal ideological projects at work in mythical frame. Rather than the archetypal nature of myth, Ogola exposes its mundane genesis and evolution into a discourse of power that is charged with socio-cultural and political potency (Halpe, 2010, p. 88). The instability of myth shifts focus from the archetype to other characters that attain mythical status in turn as they respond to emerging circumstances. The Luo myth of origin explains the position of men and women in society. Akoko partly narrates it as follows:

... Were is a great spirit. He saw that the world needed more than spirit forms. So he created Ramogi and his brothers who were men. Man has a form which is spiritual. Were sent the men he had created to various parts of the world to settle in it... of the children of Ramogi many great brave men have arisen. They are called thuondi the brave ones. These men of renown include Lwanda Magere... (p. 81-82).

The main discourse in this excerpt is the interpellation of patriarchal ideology that is entrenched in the historical myth and religious beliefs of the society. The myth indicates that Were, a spirit, needed men (I note that Ramogi and his brothers were all of male

gender). This validates the unbalanced gender-power relations that elevate the men, who are celebrated as heroes in this myth. The women mentioned in the narrative, such as Nyar Namm, are also powerful but they are mentioned only with regard to the children they bear.

The interconnectedness between myth and history thus assigns a significant function to myth: the construction and maintenance of the traditional society's history. Myth, as Barthes points out, is propagated orally and is believed to express the truth. Macgoye and Ogola's work illustrate how myth is the major source of the history in existence today. Ogola, for instance, describes the function and significance of narrating myth as follows:

... Akoko started to recite the history of the people of Ramogi. This was not just a pastime but a bounden duty – for the history of the tribe could only be transmitted by mouth from generation to generation, else how can you know where you are going unless you know where you are coming from? Therefore, whenever an elder was alone with a young person, he or she always recited the history of the tribe or clan. (p. 81).

Such a story is regarded as myth since there is no evidence concerning the events therein. Nevertheless, the 'truth' expressed in this myth permeates through generations and gains acceptance as the truth concerning the unknown past. While Lincoln (1989) associates myth with beliefs that are demonstrably false, one cannot downplay the role myth plays in shaping our understanding of culture and experiences within it. This then becomes the construction of history through myth. As Ogola points out in the excerpt above, narrating myth in the traditional Luo society was so significant with regard to its function of understanding one's past in order to know where one was going. This statement illustrates the kind of truth that myth is believed to convey, such that there is a huge possibility for such concerns expressed in myth to be actualized in the future and later becoming a credible source of history.

Having established the interface between myth and history, my concern then is how Ogola and Macgoye grapple with such myths to highlight their gender concerns. From the foregoing, it can be argued that history created by myth establishes culture. Consequently, it is from this culture, traceable down the history of the Luo, that Ogola and Macgoye interrogate their gender concerns.

2.3 The Language of Myth

My argument in this thesis is based on Barthes' idea of myth as a language, a form of communication, a message. My concern is: what kind of language is myth? How do the authors under study manipulate ordinary language to communicate, construct or deconstruct myths regarding gender? How does their use of language endear readers to the Luo gender myths they highlight in the novels? Finally, is there a special way through which the community handles or communicates myths?

Reading myth in the texts calls for a critical examination of everyday language or discourses that convey meaning, whether verbal or visual. Barthes' (1972) argument, that "...myth can be defined neither by its object nor its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning" (p. 110) reveals the intricate nature of myth. His introduction of the third element of the sign, as an addition to de Saussure's signifier and the signified relationship, brings a new dimension that expresses the symbolic nature of myth. Ogola and Macgoye do not portend a special language for myth, but reveal how ordinary language can be used in a special way to communicate myth in such a manner that is deemed to be the truth. One of the ways myth is effectively communicated is by use of symbolic language.

The persuasiveness of the language of myth is a function of the symbolic meaning it conveys. The Luo culture is rich in oral literature (orature) materiality that Ogola and Macgoye explore in describing the myths on gender and power. Macgoye infuses oral literature in her description of the rituals performed in different circumstances, similar to Ogola's description of Akoko's naming ceremony. Proverbial language, allusions and symbolic representations enhance selective communication to a preferred target. The death of Paulina's father is approached with ritual slashing of branches from trees, singing fragments of old praise songs, weeping and other forms of mourning, which makes it a natural way to express one's feelings. There is use of allusions made by the old people in a familiar pattern that enables mourners to express their feelings.

Macgoye expresses the symbolic nature of myth further through the description of the funeral of Paulina's father.

At her father's funeral, she remembered, the oldest uncle had been concerned about the breaking of the roof-pole, to show that the house was now without a head. They had decided to leave it because they could not find any young boys who knew the role they should play in the ceremony. But now in the empty house there was, so often, no lack of children, and the house of promise remained empty. Would it, after all, have been different if Martin had come for the funeral, to fulfil her rights? And yet, if Okeyo had been his son, would he not still have died? (p. 85-86)

The roof-pole is a symbol of the presence of the head of the house. In the event of his death, the breaking of this pole implies that the house has no head, and the wife cannot take over that role. Ironically, it appears that this ritual is fading in meaning and that the attempt to stick to such a myth may not be achieved. On the other hand, Martin is expected to be part of the ritual, but the author's use of rhetorical questions interrogates the validity of such rituals that may no longer make any difference. Martin's is metaphorically referred to as 'the house of promise' with the hope of propagating life; ironically, the house remains empty due to their childlessness.

Focusing on the discourses that exist within Ogola and Macgoye's novels under consideration, what may be identified as myth and what can be left out is a function of their language in use. Through their characters, they engage in gender discourses considering the challenges of patriarchy as they highlight the milestones achieved by women with time. Barthes (1972) emphasizes the significance of such discourse in myth, arguing that anything can be myth, provided it is conveyed by discourse.

One of the issues interrogated by Ogola and Macgoye is gender identity: what womanhood entails. Identity is a product or creation of language, which is able to create attitudes and self-image. *Coming to Birth* and *The River and the Source* indicate how women are socialized into womanhood: what Butler (1990) terms as a sort of performance that one learns to perfect over time. Paulina and Akoko learn to be 'women', and attempt a good performance of this 'act' that qualifies them as 'women'. There is an ingrained mythical image of womanhood, which is a form of language that defines a woman, and in turn compels women to comply with this definition. Jung and Jaffe (1989) also acknowledge myth as the primordial language natural to psychic process and that no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery. The naturalness of this language is a form of power that compels one to comply with the societal expectations of womanhood.

The River and the Source and *Coming to Birth* explore the concept of womanhood from the Luo cultural context. While Ogola traces the growth of her protagonist from the precolonial rural to the modern urban context, Macgoye directly moves her protagonist from rural to urban, exploring her reaction to urban life as opposed to her rural/traditional orientation. Their description of events and circumstances explain what it means to be a woman, and what one must do to become a 'real' woman. Paulina and

Akoko are pitted against rigid cultural structures that linguistically construe the ideal womanhood that must be attained. Myth constructs an ideal womanhood that every woman strives to achieve. Their bodies are compelled to conform to what is historically known as the idea of womanhood described by Butler (1990). Each of the women eagerly looks forward to getting married and having children. Fonchingong (2006) also echoes this, observing that “a woman’s honour and dignity often consist in her strict adherence to idealized norms of wifhood and motherhood” (p. 138).

Language constructs such myths through which women and men’s bodies are induced to become (from Barthes’ description) a cultural sign, materialize oneself in obedience to a historically determined possibility. This is a creation of space for linguistic structures to construct the self. Ogola and Macgoye exploit these linguistic structures in constructing womanhood or manhood through their description of how men and women attempt to perform their gender as defined by culture. Martin’s aggression versus Paulina’s timidity, for instance, indicates the ideal gender-power relations within the patriarchal system. The authors use language creatively to indicate what it means to be an ideal man or woman in the society. Such language use, as Barthes describes, is “myth which arrests language by reducing complex phenomenon into a few traits taken as definitive”, so that timidity is a sign of womanhood while aggression is naturally masculine. Myths thus determine how gender and power relations therein may be conceptualized/defined.

Ogola gives a symbolic description of a woman who comes back to her father’s house after she is married as a ‘migogo’, which explains that a woman has no place in her home once married: “Such a woman became a migogo whose chief appearance would be at funerals and would have absolutely no say in her former home, marriage being

such a binding thing. To abandon one's marital duties for good or bad reasons was a very serious matter" (p. 15). She is only accepted as a 'visitor' with limited freedom, which is meant to discourage women from challenging patriarchal authority. Marriage is a permanent engagement, regardless of the prevailing circumstances. Paulina also prefers to bear with Martin's beatings than the shame of having him send her back to her parents. Foucault acknowledges that power could be regulated through control of the conditions in which "knowledge," "truth," and socially accepted "reality" are produced (Erikson & Murphy, 2010, p. 272). The production of knowledge, truth and reality is a linguistic function. The purported truths about gender dominance that constitute ideal manhood and womanhood can be contested, but since the production of this knowledge is entirely patriarchal, the language creates 'truths' about gender, which is manipulated and considered natural with regard to that particular gender. These myths make women like Paulina accept their lot and suffer without challenging the oppressive patriarchal authority.

The stereotypical description of gender identities by Ogola and Macgoye is so natural that the characters seamlessly fit in. Women are expected to be timid, submissive and dependent. Myths describing these traits, according to Barthes, remove history from language, making particular signs appear so natural, absolute or eternal. In the traditional culture as described in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth*, the society is keen in maintaining what is known to be ideal manhood and womanhood. Such myths are often not questioned, though Barthes acknowledges that through myth, people are plunged into a false nature which is a constructed system. While Paulina in her naivety attempts to fit into this description, Akoko breaks out of this structure of

awareness, giving an alternative definition of womanhood. Ogola describes the perceived ‘naturalness’ of gender and the ‘accepted’ discrimination of women thus:

If it was hard for a boy to get an education – it was well-nigh impossible for a girl. The purpose of female existence was marriage and child bearing – and by the same token to bring wealth to her family with the bride price. In fact a poor man with absolutely nothing to his name except some daughters had a guaranteed wealth if they could hang on long enough to come of age. If education was not necessary for boys, it was superfluous for girls... (p. 129).

Ogola and Macgoye also describe the Luo culture, examining the concept of gender and power by highlighting the motivation behind relationships in discourse. Their use of language exposes the beliefs that hold the society, such that what is communicated is understood by its members. *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* emerge from a tradition of storytelling, which uses myth, folk narrative and inter-textual references to other forms of Luo oral tradition, and which the authors deploy as strategies to express their gender concerns. Myths on gender roles and expectations are communicated through proverbs, superstitions, narratives and other forms of imagery. Gender myths in the texts therefore are expressed in a special way, or rather, the myths find a way of expressing themselves as the authors narrate experiences in their stories.

Ogola and Macgoye deploy these strategies differently. While Ogola deploys more of proverbs, folk tales, and rituals, Macgoye directly describes superstitions, those myths that sanction behaviour. The two authors express their gender concerns creatively, exploring myth as a metalanguage, turning language into a means to speak about itself by repressively concealing the construction of signs (Barthes, 1972). Their understanding of Luo cultural beliefs illustrates how cultural signs, though not hidden, get distorted in their meaning. Though Macgoye and Ogola’s writings represent the same culture, it is evident that their interpretation of the same circumstances and myths

varies. Barthes further explains that unlike signifiers, myths are not arbitrary. They contain a kind of analogy that motivates them. The differences noted in Macgoye and Ogola's cultural interpretation relates to their varying cultural and religious orientation. Perhaps in an attempt to understand and integrate into the Luo culture, Macgoye is more sympathetic to the culture, letting Paulina attempt to fit in rather than openly challenge cultural myths.

The distortion of cultural signs is given an easy getaway when Macgoye describes Paulina's attempt to perform her gender in a cosmopolitan setting, where Luo myths may not count and transgression of such myths do not attract grave consequences. Superstitions are easy to discount in such setting, thus giving us an opportunity to critique Paulina's lack of aggressiveness in fighting for her rights as a woman. At the same time, Martin's aggression becomes completely misplaced. Holmes (2007) observe that "The unemployed working-class men are no longer able to 'be men' in the same ways as their forefathers. They have had to readjust their notions of how to be masculine, which were previously based on them being the 'breadwinner'" (p. 57). Holmes further observes that such men being unskilled, unable to get regular work, and perhaps dependent on women's wages may fashion their identities in a form that remakes aspects of hegemonic masculinity in the context of poverty. They perform their masculinity through violence and aggressive heterosexuality as they try to conform to hegemonic masculine standards, while protesting and lashing out against a world over which they have little control. The author's description of such circumstances validates Martin's performance of masculinity (although he has a low paying job) through aggression, in his attempt to assert his position of power in the family. The meagre salary he earns barely sustains his family. Ogola, on the other hand, places Akoko at

the cradle of culture, thus foregrounding her anti-patriarchal agenda through Akoko's aggression and self-assertion.

2.4 Myth and Gender Discourses in Marriage and Family

Ogola and Macgoye's gender concerns relate to myths that are mainly located in the family context. As a social unit, the family is the socializing agent inculcating attitudes and norms from generation to generation. Most of the events and themes highlighted in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* relate to marriage and family relationships. The authors focus on family as the key player in the appropriation of myths that influence gender and power play. Oyewumi (1997) argues thus:

Gender is the fundamental organizing principle of the family, and gender distinctions are the primary source of hierarchy and oppression within the nuclear family. By the same token, gender sameness is the primary source of identification and solidarity in this family type (p. 2).

Ogola and Macgoye explore gender myths as part of the discourses within the family context that function as a key tool of propagating culture. This is achieved through the use of language that Barthes (1972) describes as having been "worked out so as to make it suitable for communication" (p. 110), that is, to achieve the desired purpose. In the course of child upbringing, as illustrated in the texts, language is the major tool with which the child is cultured by influencing his/her thought processes, social organizations and general societal relationship. Narrating myth serves as a social reminder, a source of cultural truth since, as Barthes further points out: "...All material of myth presupposes a signifying consciousness that one can reason about them without discounting their substance." (p. 110) The authors demonstrate how this is done efficiently by parents and immediate family members, and then the entire society. They explore how culture structures human relationships, thereby highlighting how culture influences discourse by way of shaping one's thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values, identities

and general interaction within society. This is achieved by the very nature of myth: that it is sacred and cannot be questioned.

The River and the Source and *Coming to Birth* demonstrate the infusion of myth in everyday life and practice by family members within the society. Gender roles are enacted in the family context as children get socialized according to the culturally determined roles and responsibilities expected of each gender. Rituals performed at every stage of life are dictated by cultural myths which are observed strictly. In *The River and the Source*, for instance, Ogola highlights the role of myth at Akoko's birth and naming (p. 11-14). The text illustrates the significance of myth in holding the family together, especially uniting the living and the living dead. She uses ritual language to invoke myths that connect the living and the dead; through child naming ceremonies. Akoko's naming is a way of remembering her grand aunt who is supposedly responsible for her persistent cries. The naming ceremony involves elaborate rituals done at death, aimed at appeasing their spirits and maintaining relationship with the living. It is also a way of ensuring continuity of life since one is believed to live on in spirit through the newborns who are named after them. This is why the role of women as procreators is given much significance. By giving life, they ensure this continuity.

Myths also point out the place of gender in the performance of rituals and practices held by members of society. The elaborate rituals performed from the point of marriage, for instance, point out to gender roles that are clearly tailored by the Luo culture. In Akoko's case, all marriage rituals and the entire process are initiated by men. The choice of a partner is determined by Akoko's father; on the other hand, Chief Owuor sends his trusted men 'joroche' to spy for his wife-to-be. Women simply have to

appear and be seen; actually, they are expected to be shy. As the narrator of *The River and the Source* recalls:

In a little while Akoko walked in, in the company of her mother. Traditionally the girl at this point should have been the picture of demure shyness, her eyes fixed firmly on the floor, her hands held together in front of her mouth. Not Akoko. She walked in; steps measured, head held high, hands at her sides. Her head swiveled around a bit and then her gaze rested on Owuor. Let him see what he was getting. (p. 24)

From this description, the author highlights the non-participation of a woman in her own marriage. She is to follow the decisions made by the men who are exclusively engaged in the negotiation. The expectation that a woman should be shy at this point also implies that she would hold on to the same position and not participate in any decision even after marriage. Through Akoko's defiance of this expectation, Ogola highlights such myths that are gender discriminatory and need reconsideration. Butler (1990) sees such fixed roles and expected modes of behaviour by women as "a fantasy, a set of internalized images and not a set of properties governed by the body" (p. 331). They are, according to her, "a set of signs internalized, physically imposed on the body and on one's psychic sense of identity". Ogola illustrates how this set of signs imposed on women is tailored to enhance patriarchy that limits women's potential. Akoko challenges this fixed identity, providing an opportunity for a unique marriage experience described thus:

Owuor experienced an indescribable sensation. What happened, of course was that he had fallen deeply and irrevocably in love. Since that was not considered particularly important for a successful marriage, he did not understand or appreciate what was happening to him and that it would change his entire life and outlook. (p. 24).

Ogola's exploration of the idea of love as an issue that is not given importance in a family brings forth the concept as a necessary factor in gender consideration. Love

acknowledges and gives place for a woman's voice in the family, which was traditionally unheard of.

Macgoye's consideration of the same issue in *Coming to Birth*, however, takes a different trajectory. While she appreciates that women are limited in their roles within the family, she also uses Paulina to illustrate how women are somehow helpless victims of culture which is an oppressive form of power over them. Paulina is so naïve and submissive to Martin. She is married off at a young age to her father's convenience. She carefully observes all the cultural expectations as a wife, never questioning her husband and having to bear with his unreasonable beatings that myth has it as 'a sign of love'. Her greatest frustration is her failure to have a child.

The authors indicate procreation as a significant role of the family that ensures a link between the living and the dead. This role is specifically given to the woman who, primarily as a procreator, is expected to get married and bear as many children (especially sons) as possible. Ogola interrogates this myth by allowing Akoko to flourish in all aspects save for the three children she bears. Her mother-in-law is unhappy about this, claiming that Akoko must have bewitched her husband not to marry another wife. The mother-in-law is desperate for more grandchildren, and Akoko as a wife seems to have failed in this duty.

From both texts, the authors underscore the crucial role of women in family, especially myths around childbearing or childlessness. These myths are portrayed as the major factor behind any woman's sense of fulfilment or failure. Macgoye also brings out the issue of child bearing as a significant factor for successful marriage. Like Ogola, she raises her concern over the myth that expects women to fulfil this duty, failure of which

makes the marriage almost null and void. Marriage for Martin, is supposed to make him a complete man; but for Paulina, she eagerly looks forward to giving birth to a child that would make her a real woman. She bears other challenges bravely but her childlessness weighs her down.

Macgoye also argues for the value of children in the Luo society as giving identity to the woman. Child bearing is so significant that if a man is suspected to be sterile, the woman is advised to secretly get children from another man. This is aimed at protecting the name and the family line of the man. The daunting effect of childlessness to a woman is revealed as Fatima ridicules Paulina:

‘Oh, you have come, and you are the wife of the house?’ continued the voice.

‘Yes, I am Mrs. Were,’ announced Paulina, glorying in the foreign name that had once sounded so odd.

‘Oh yes, Mrs. Were,’ tinkled the voice, ‘and you are the mother of who?’ and with a peal of laughter he was gone, the ravishing face, the high, brittle voice, as it sounded to Paulina, and sickly sweet smell. (p. 34).

This conversation also underlines a myth about children, especially their importance in giving identity to a woman. Besides Paulina’s achievement of marriage (being referred to as Mrs. Were), she also needs identity as a mother. Paulina’s exposure to Christianity counters Luo myths that encourage discreet promiscuity and leads her to resist advice to conceive a child by another man. When she eventually has a child with Simon, she and Martin never get the opportunity to enjoy the happy marriage and parenting they have looked forward to. Instead, Macgoye illustrates the ability of a woman to raise a child by herself, and have a sense of fulfilment. This confirms the observation by Stoeltje (2015) that marriage and reproduction are given a high value in African

societies, placing women in an ambivalent position: highly regarded for their reproductive potential but the target of male control for the same reason.

Ogola and Macgoye also raise their concern with respect to myths that discriminate children in a family based on their gender. They acknowledge that the Luo culture values the boy child over girls. As women writers they champion for the cause of the women showing the challenges they go through in the struggle against rigid patriarchal structures that begin right from the family. While Akoko's father expects another son, bragging of receiving 'another rock of my sling', the information that the baby is a girl invites another rejoinder that 'A home without daughters is like a stream without a source'. This highlights the unacknowledged significant power of women. Women, as I have mentioned before, are a source of continuity of the family owing to the role of procreation ascribed to them. Through Akoko and Paulina, the authors demonstrate that a woman can be successful in other ways besides procreation, as a pillar for their families. The authors use these fictional narratives to debunk myths that undermine women's determination and agency. Akoko's name lives on for generations because of her strength and resilience that sees her family succeeding in the face of transition that destroys traditional structures. Paulina, on the other hand, metamorphoses from the timid and overly submissive woman to an independent lady who later gives shelter to her estranged husband. Akoko also decides on a suitable husband for her daughter, and later on plays a key role in her granddaughter Awiti's marriage – a role that was exclusively men's. No one at this point doubts her wisdom. On the other hand, Paulina is very instrumental at the point of her father's death, performing duties which traditionally should have been her brothers'. The two women in this case are portrayed as progressive, indicating the positive potential of women, which is a feminist agenda.

Another significant role of myth in the family and society in general is the provision of hierarchies that determine relationships and enhance order. Myths embody symbolic power, which Bourdieu (1977) explains as accounting for the discipline used against another to confirm that individual's placement in a social hierarchy. He posits that symbolic power includes actions that have injurious implications such as gender dominance, through misrecognition of power relations situated in its social matrix. The exertion of symbolic power over individuals ensures that they conform to their socially determined gender hierarchy. Martin appropriates his patriarchal-given power through aggression and physical violence to silence Paulina's 'justification for failing to perform her duties as a wife'. This form of gender dominance is injurious to their relationship, but makes Paulina more creative in fulfilling her expected duties to some extent. Eventually, she learns to exert her own power to counter hegemonic power in the myths she has so reverently held onto, when she decides to leave her matrimonial home and start life again as an independent woman.

Akoko, on the other hand, responds to the power of patriarchy by exercising her own power that counters the culturally constructed symbolic power. Her confident self-presentation, justification or authenticity, hard work and a sense of independence out of her self-generated wealth positions her as a player in the anti-patriarchal strategy of power. The difference in approach to the struggle against patriarchy is evident in character construction that constitutes myth: Akoko as proactive and Paulina who is compelled by prevailing circumstances. As Foucault (1979) explains, this relationship illustrates the way in which power of bodies (women's own power) and over bodies (patriarchal order) is played out, with myth at the centre. It operates by way of belief that the existing structures and norms cannot be challenged, thus making women like

Paulina victims of patriarchy. The language of myth makes such belief so real and attracts reverence, but Macgoye illustrates how the body's own power can counteract such beliefs. Kurtz (2005) has commented that:

... It is difficult to read *Coming to Birth* as anything other than a distinctly feminist story, at least in the broader sense that it explores a woman's experience manoeuvring through and eventually overcoming, in however limited a fashion, the constraints of a profoundly patriarchal society (p. 131).

The story of a woman overcoming the constraints of patriarchy in *Coming to Birth* is the same story of feminine self-assertion and authority witnessed in *The River and the Source*. I argue that Ogola and Macgoye are concerned with exposing myths that enhance patriarchy, and how they are discounted as linguistic constructions that may not retain mythic status as they get challenged with time. *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* illustrate how such myths are proven obsolete, as Akoko and Paulina successfully break patriarchal barriers. The authors debunk gender myths, showing how such myths cease to hold as women gain new knowledge.

2.5 Myth, Gender and Agency

Ogola and Macgoye's feminist project aims at giving women the capacity, or creating conditions that enable them to transcend their culturally defined roles and positions. The new access to technologies of power (through education and other forms of empowerment) thus emancipates them from myths that enhance hegemony. Their fiction illustrates gender-power relations indicating on one hand the power over bodies in which case power relations have an immediate hold upon the body, which they invest, mask, train, torture, and force to carry out tasks, perform ceremonies and emit signs (Foucault, 1988). In their narratives, women are the objects of power as the victims of patriarchy while at the same time vehicles of power which are rarely asserted, but often

transferred to male authority. On the other hand, they also illustrate how the body's own power opposes the power of bodies, emphasizing the need to empower women to fight against patriarchy. They underscore education and religion as key factors in gender equality and empowerment.

While myth is associated with beliefs that are demonstrably false (Lincoln, 1989), they play a major role in shaping our understanding of culture and experiences within it. The introduction of Christian religion and formal education offer Akoko and Paulina an alternative worldview that appreciates or rather is considerate to the female gender, often suffering under patriarchy. Ogola and Macgoye point out education and religion as the major sources of female agency. Provision of alternative knowledge that education and religion offers goes a long way in setting women free from cultural bondage that compels them to be aligned to such 'false' beliefs that may appear natural and true. Lincoln (1989) has observed this about myth: "the often repetition of the 'same authoritative story' can lead to establishing certain forms in society and maintaining these 'regular and accustomed forms' in it" (p. 25). These stories/myths have some form of power that compels individuals to behave in certain 'acceptable ways'.

Ogola illustrates Akoko's journey to Kisumu (described as epic) as a journey to freedom from patriarchal authority. The journey is an eye opener and the knowledge she gains gives her impetus to stand her ground even before the establishment of the colonial government in Sakwa. Ogola also uses her later relocation to Aluor Mission as a major turning point to the women. It is in Aluor where they find a new religion and formal education. Formal education equips one to perform any task regardless of gender. Macgoye also highlights Paulina's exposure to Christianity, her homecraft training, exposure to politics while working for Mr. and Mrs. M as her significant points

of empowerment. Ogola and Macgoye illustrate that women can be empowered in the absence of men, since the peak of Akoko and Paulina's personal growth is in their widowhood and separation respectively. They show that women can construct alternative identity in the absence of men, critiquing myth as a basis for self-reflexivity, self-recognition and concomitantly a sense of self-worth. They point out that one can only find meaning and value of life by understanding these 'truths' and aligning themselves to them. Education and Christianity offer a critique to traditional myths thus providing an alternative way to gender-power relations. Traditional myths express the culture's worldview: that is, people's conceptions and assumptions about gender and power, thus manipulating its working in the society. Ogola and Macgoye bring out gender as a very significant aspect that determines individuals' placement in society.

Ogola and Macgoye also present Christianity as an alternative to the traditional culture and religion which does not offer solutions to the challenges faced by women. As a poor widow with only one surviving child, Nyabera, in *The River and the Source*, finds solace at Aluor Mission where she seeks possible answers when she faces a lot of challenges and painful experiences which render culture irrational. Together with her mother, they imbibe Christianity in the manner that Levi-Strauss (1955) explains as mediating among life's extremes such as life and death, whose cruelty Nyabera has experienced. Levi-Strauss separates the individual from the community's influence as the one behind myth patterns. This is revealed in Akoko and Nyabera's individual decision to desert their way of life and embrace the new religion.

In the same manner, Paulina, in *Coming to Birth*, is enticed to Christianity and is committed to its practice. She finds solace in the newly found faith, hoping that her commitment would keep her from the challenge of childlessness and unstable marriage

she is facing. Challenging circumstances lead to the desire for a new way of coping with the unfading new reality. While other women find alternative ways of having children, Paulina has faith in God. Macgoye describes this state of desperation:

... One woman Paulina knew paid over everything she earned to a medicine man who promised to bring her a baby, but they got transferred to Machakos and moved away before Paulina could ever find out whether the medicine worked. In any case in Machakos, people said, there were even more medicines. She had not thought of buying any herself. After all they loved one another and she had nearly persuaded Martin to confirm their marriage in church, so she had no doubt that it would be fruitful. (p. 29).

Macgoye expresses her belief in the Christian faith as a solution; portraying how Paulina's unwavering faith is not hampered by her childlessness despite her desperation. The author shows the reality of this desperation among women leading to the exploration of myths purported to give possible solutions. One holds on to what appears practical in an attempt to find solutions to challenging situations, shifting back and forth in belief. The women attempt a middle ground where they practice Christianity but can also go back to their traditional ways. Levi-Strauss (1955) also argues thus:

... On the one hand, it would seem that in the course of a myth, anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable relation can be met. With myth, everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between the myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: if the content of a myth is contingent, how are we going to explain that throughout the world myths do resemble one another so much? (p. 429)

Paulina's imbibing of Christianity is with the hope that her desire to have children can be met, although from Levi-Strauss' argument here, there is a possibility that the Christian faith may yield similar results. This notwithstanding, Ogola and Macgoye esteem Christian values so much so that they express repercussions of transgressing from the faith. Paulina believes that her miscarriage could have resulted from her sin of

hanging on to her unblessed union with Martin, and hopes that their church wedding would sort this out. Every instance when Martin is unfaithful, and in her moments of temptation, she keeps twisting the ring as a reminder of the marriage covenant she has made with her husband. Holding on to her Christian faith, she refuses to yield to her in-laws' proposal to bear a child by someone else, since culture allows, but this does not stand the test of time as she eventually gets a child with Simon while in Kisumu. Macgoye here shows how Christian religion, like African culture, is all about belief and may not necessarily be the grand faith. The cultural versus Christian beliefs are myths that are competing for expression, and one chooses what suits or works best under particular circumstances. As such, Christian values do not completely replace Akoko's traditional way of life but there is a way she blends both. During her granddaughter Awiti's betrothal for instance, this is Ogola's description of the event:

The day finally arrived and it was a day as full of beauty as the day in which Owuor Kembo of Sakwa, in full battle regalia and a leopard skin loin piece had come to pay suit to the great chief Odera Gogni of Yimbo for the hand of his daughter Akoko Obanda. Yet some things were different. A stone's throw away was a church with its tall steeple bearing a cross at the top – a symbol of the new and different way of life, yet in some ways reminiscent of the reverence once paid to Were – the god of the eye of the rising sun who had guided the people. Further along was the school – the place of learning without which one was as a blind man in a strange house... (p. 145-146).

According to Akoko, the day is comparable to her own engagement ceremony, but the context has a remarkable contrast. The presence of the symbolic church building nearby is an indication of a new way of life, though it appears Christian rituals are comparable to those performed to Were. The marriage negotiations are done according to the cultural expectations, with close male relatives brought in to participate. It is noted that some of the expected ways of 'chik' regarding this event have not been observed to the letter. Mark Sigu's uncle who is the spokesman laments:

My nephew, Oloo son of my late brother Sigu, came to me and said: “Father, I have found a girl and I want to get married.” Now, I am a reasonable man and I know the ways of Chik, so I asked him: ‘Son, one does not just find a girl in the air. One sends a jawang’yo to go and spy a girl and find out her antecedents and character. Is she a thief or a witch? Is she lazy or shiftless? Might there be consanguinity between you and her? Who is her mother and father?’ I tell you my brothers, that I was flabbergasted to hear none of these things had ever crossed his mind... (p. 146-147).

This is a concern that has arisen due to changing values in society. From Sigu’s further introduction, this mishap in the process of marriage is justifiable as he is described as a man of learning and a soldier who has fought for the white man in distant lands. His formal employment as a clerk in Nakuru is an assurance that he is able to provide for his family, as well as an explanation for his different approach to life. Awiti’s uncle, on the other hand, also appreciates this change. He explains how Awiti and her mother came to settle in Aluor:

... The girl has grown up in Gem because her mother being a widow and having converted to Christianity decided to settle here, which is a good thing because now she is like a light for the rest of us. She is highly educated and a teacher of children. So your son will be bringing a light to your home – an educated woman. He is indeed a very lucky man. (p. 147-148).

Christianity is appreciated by Awiti’s uncle because of the benefits that have come with it. He appreciates Elizabeth’s education as light that will benefit the family. Christianity in this case is appreciated for its convenience in sorting out other issues of life. As time goes, the Christian faith seems to dwindle when individuals are able to find scientific solutions to challenges in life so that Christianity is no longer a matter of convenience. Myths about divine intervention to issues such as health are displaced by other myths that front scientific interventions to the otherwise superstitious beliefs inviting spiritual solutions.

As the story in *The River and the Source* unfolds, religious myths become more dynamic and problematic. Christianity does not prevail as the dominant religion which is practiced without question, but the author examines its practicability in the rapidly changing scientific world. Christianity, as understood by Akoko and Nyabera, is a solace to their troubled lives as widows who have lost their most valued children and possessions. During Vera and Tony's time, Christianity affords them a deliberate choice not to have children.

Gender discourses also take a different trajectory towards the end of the novel, since there are equal opportunities accorded to both men and women. Aoro and his wife, Wandia, both study medicine. Wandia, a medical doctor, proposes marriage to Aoro, something unheard of. Tony joins priesthood and Vera joins Opus Dei as a non-marrying member. Therefore, Christianity offers and validates other alternatives to the traditional myths on gender-specific roles and expectations.

Through the narratives in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth*, the authors progressively trace the stages of growth of women, as they gain voice challenging patriarchy. Myth (as a discourse of domination as well as counter-discourse in debunking such structures of domination or ideological hegemonies) has been appropriated by Macgoye creatively as she interweaves political discourse with gender concerns in the context of family. The story in *Coming to Birth* begins when Paulina is newly married, young and naïve. As the story unfolds, she goes through situations that propel her to mature and become independent. The myths around womanhood and marriage compel Paulina to submit in her marriage without questioning Martin's authority, hence such myths are in themselves a body of power over Paulina. On the contrary, Ogola constructs Akoko as outright independent minded and a go-getter right

from birth. This attitude indicates another form of power: the body's own power in opposition to power over bodies. As Foucault (1972) writes:

Where power is dispersed it still operates against resistance, it works at specific times in specific places on subjects who return its pressure. And just as in judo one's opponent's resistance is turned to one's advantage (a possibility that permits feints and ruses), the pressure back in power relations rapidly crosses and re-crosses sides (p. 134).

Akoko has to fight against the Luo culture, which is set to disadvantage her as a widow with no rights especially since she has no male heir. Her brother-in-law, Otieno, is very eager to inherit her in order to access her wealth. The power play keeps shifting focus from Akoko to the forces of patriarchy. While Akoko's widowhood makes her vulnerable to the power of patriarchy, the myths behind Luo culture empowers Otieno who claims all rights of a husband. This power shifts once again as Akoko seeks help from the colonial government that later discounts traditional myths on power and control, and establishes a new form of government that does not recognize traditional chiefdoms.

Ogola uses Akoko's uniqueness and boldness to challenge patriarchal order. Her strength and courage is reiterated in her future generations, as a motivation to 'positive revolutionary force'. Lincoln's (1989) view of myth as a mode of discourse that may be employed in revolutionary slogans is proven on her account, when her own father, Chief Odero Gogni utters the proverb 'A home without daughters is like a stream without a source'. This statement ascribes value and power to female gender. Through this character, Ogola voices her desire and need for revolution, giving inspiration and an excellent example to women's leadership. Using Akoko, Ogola portrays the (de)construction of the meaning of womanhood through myth-making. She becomes a

legend that is alluded to in her future generations, a reference that accords acceptance to women's strength and leadership role.

Besides the significance of education and religion, Ogola and Macgoye also indicate the need for women empowerment in the field of politics and leadership. Politics offers an opportunity for women to voice their concerns and participate equally with men. *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* illustrate the role of myth in reinforcing restrictions regarding performance and privileges given to women in politics and leadership in general, which follow certain taboos and superstitions that are strictly adhered to. Such social procedures and prohibitions are closely linked to myths regarding taboos and performance of rituals as well as gender privileges. Foucault and Bernauer (1981) also observe that the tightest prohibitions in society are related to politics and sexuality. Ogola and Macgoye show a number of taboos that are tailored to restrict women in the areas of politics and sexuality. They demonstrate how the 'sets of acts', which Butler (1990) talks about with regard to the expectations given in form of 'dos and don'ts', are tailored to achieve a desired end in defining ideal men and women. Prohibiting particular gender from participating in every opportunity is a way of exerting 'power over', denying them the power of knowledge that comes with participation in different forums.

The River and the Source and *Coming to Birth* illustrate that political discourse is a men's territory, while women – though equally concerned with their families' welfare – are left to wallow in ignorance, fully occupied with the responsibility of having to meet the immediate basic needs of the family by engaging in household chores. Women are prohibited from joining the forbidden speech of politics and sexuality, which Foucault (1972) observes as a form of division and rejection. Later on, in *Coming to*

Birth, it is only Chelagat Mutai who is in active politics together with other men. She is arrested with Seroney and becomes a heroine to women who seem interested in politics for the first time. Her inhibition becomes more productive as her story is shared among women admirers. At the time, Paulina works for Mr. and Mrs. M who are engaged in political campaigns; politics still appears as a men's domain. Men's thought processes are therefore depicted as more outward looking while women are domestic. Foucault sees discourse as that which constrains or enables writing, speaking or thinking; what he terms as 'discursive practices' that work both in inhibiting and productive ways, implying a play of prescriptions that designate both exclusions and choices.

Political discourse in *Coming to Birth* is exclusively men's affair while women, as recipients of prescriptive information, act as guided by the men. Macgoye highlights the myth that a woman's space is private, within the homestead, and domestic; while man's space is public and open – unrestricted. Macgoye illustrates this jurisdiction in *Coming to Birth*, showing how Paulina spends her time within the confines of her household and only engages with friends who are equally disempowered. On the contrary, Martin and his circle of men friends are always out there seeking new ideas, closely following the country's politics and are privy to information that is connected to their fate. Foucault and Bernauer (1981) posit that in every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a number of procedures. Men are privier to political discourse than are women. There is emphasis, once again, that a woman is not safe on her own at some places. Since women's domain is around the homestead, dealing with routine household chores, their knowledge of the

outside world is through the eyes of men. They gather information from hearsay as

Paulina exemplifies:

... In spite of all the beautiful things in the city there were scandals and quarrels among elders, the city council, Martin said. And in Uganda there was trouble too about the king and Parliament. And trouble over Suez where big ships used to come and bring the things for Martin to sell in the shop. There seemed to be no end to what one was supposed to learn and to be interested in (p. 29).

Paulina's naivety is revealed in her conversation with Rachel as she asks her about the lights and barbed wire in the city:

... Well, for emergency. Surely you know, child, that there is fighting going on. And though there is not a curfew for us' – she stopped to explain what a curfew was: the day would come for Paulina to remember that talk and how innocent she had been – 'there are times and places the Kikuyu cannot go without a special pass, and guards to see they don't. So you see a woman on her own must be... careful. Now do you know what kind of district this is?' (p. 8)

Macgoye uses Rachel's explanation here to accentuate the extent to which gender myths deny women access to power. The curfew is a double tragedy for women, who must then keep off certain places by all means. The phrase '... A woman on her own must be... careful...' (p. 8) implies that women should always be shielded by men, including the information they receive. This restriction denies women the opportunity to gain first-hand information regarding what is going on.

Ogola's *The River and the Source* on the other hand advocates for the empowerment of women demonstrating that women can also have information and possess power that comes with it. For instance, she allows Akoko to participate in leadership or decision making but in subtle ways. She describes the Chief's opinion in this matter thus:

How could he tell them that since he married his wife, he had profoundly lost interest in other women? She was unafraid of him, and spoke candidly on almost any subject. She also had an acerbic but witty tongue, which unless she was angry with him, rarely ever failed to make him laugh.

Besides her advice on most matters was sound and he formed the habit of going over to her hut after the evening just to hear her talk. (p. 30).

Although the Chief is expected to keep women out of important matters of the village, Chief Owuor not only confides in Akoko but also takes her advice. She is the source of happiness to the Chief. Ogola points out that myth that women cannot engage in politics or leadership is debatable, hence pushing forward the agenda of equal participation of each gender. The notion about men as more knowledgeable and naturally endowed to lead is subject to disputation, since the political discourses they readily access locate them in positions of power unlike their female counterparts. Gender stereotypes are constructed to give an impression of the real – so that patriarchy has all mechanisms in place that makes it appear so natural for men to take leadership. This is what Butler (1990) distinguishes – the reality of gender as opposed to appearance/naturalization based on a series of cultural inferences. She however acknowledges the unreliability of cultural perceptions that makes this reality problematic, noting that the naturalized knowledge of gender is a changeable and revisable reality. This is why given the opportunity, women like Akoko prove their exemplary leadership that is commensurable to men.

Due to myths that uphold patriarchy, women's leadership is not publicly acknowledged in the Luo traditional set-up fictionalized in *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth*. It is however noted that women, though not always allowed this privilege, can make important decisions. Women do not occupy the political space; so, their knowledge is limited. They often receive censored information aimed at enhancing masculine power over them. This is in concurrence with what Hacking and Hacking (1986) observe in the scientific field as well, that power creates knowledge in the sense that institutions of power determine the conditions under which scientific statements

come to be counted as true or false. Access to information determines the knowledge one has and enables him/her acquire the power that comes with it. It then seems natural for men to be in the political front as they have more access to information. Martin, for instance, is able to read and access information, making his response to political discourse completely different from Paulina's. Macgoye describes:

At home, preparations for elections continued. People were asking about conditions under which the new system of 'primary elections' would be conducted. Commentator after commentator advised a political stocktaking, pressed the public (like Philip Ochieng' in the Sunday Nation of 20 July, which Martin certainly read from cover to cover and Paulina absorbed in a different way, for skins were becoming very thin in Kenya just then, very sensitive, reacting to hints and protective grease and red ochre of custom) to 'face squarely the real problems of tribalism, corruption, and economics problems whose very existence it needs the brilliance and candor of a Tom Mboya to gloss over successfully.' (p. 82).

Martin keenly follows political discourse from knowledgeable political analysts while Paulina and majority of women rely on instincts and rumours. In finding a suitable replacement for Mboya, for instance, it is demanded that someone who knows the truth concerning persistent, sensitive problems must be of exceptional brilliance like Mboya, so as to be able to deal with contemporary problems. This concurs with Foucault's assertion that the production of truth is inseparable from the technologies of power. Who 'knows the truth' has to be someone informed on proceedings that relate to the discourse of the time: politics surrounding contemporary problems. It is also likely that the production of these 'truths' is a manipulative construction aimed at achieving a desired political end. Foucault and Bernauer (1981) assert, "In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a number of procedures" (p. 52). Here, Foucault and Bernauer compare appropriation of power to the linguistic concept of discourse in the context of political action. Discourses surrounding politics are forms of procedures that empower and forbid;

control and censure what is communicated as 'truth'. The qualification of a suitable replacement for Mboya is a myth of exclusion, a way of enhancing 'othering' and keeping women (who are less informed and assumed to be less brilliant) out of political power.

Political discourses can thus be described as tailored to appropriate power of men over women. Leadership at different levels, beginning from family to community, is placed on the shoulders of men, who then make decisions regarding major issues including those affecting women. Women have little voice, and with the help of the masculine-tailored culture allow men to exercise power over them. As Van Dijk (2015) observes, there are various ways that power dynamics produce and are produced by dominant or hegemonic discourses through the construction of meaning, knowledge and ideology. These discourses tend to be conceptualized and widely shared as patterned ways of thinking and expressing aspects of reality such as gender, race, and human rights among others. The concepts of ideology, meaning and knowledge in gender disposition or performance, if constructed or produced by hegemonic discourses as myths that guide society's outlook, may then be manipulated constructions of gender power relations to privileged male dominant ideologies.

2.6 Conclusion

Ogola and Macgoye's concerns relate to emancipation of women from patriarchal order, and their narratives indicate women being empowered and breaking gender barriers. *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* illustrate their gender concerns that continue to be enhanced by myth. Social changes happening in society bring about varying approaches to gender and power issues. The family is the major socializing agent that ingrains gender myths in the minds of all players, especially women whose

roles are within the home. As women, Ogola and Macgoye highlight the plight of female gender within the home, expectations on procreation roles, home keeping among other duties that preoccupy women denying them opportunities for empowerment. They indicate education and Christian religion as the major forms of empowerment that break myths which are often manipulated to determine or limit gender roles.

The authors' placement of women in the historiography of the nation is also a statement that women are not limited by traditionally held myths that situate them within the household predominantly for procreation and taking care of the households. They show that women are a significant source of power that can be utilized in political, economic, academic and spiritual spheres of life. Gender roles are therefore redefined since myths that constitute gender identity and roles are contestable. In acknowledging the power of myth, they underscore the function of language as a powerful persuasive tool that is used to communicate myths which are in turn used to control behaviour. Just as there is a symbiotic relationship between myth and history, the linguistic construction of myth indicates a thin line between fact and fiction, such that myths (presumed as fiction) have symbolic power that produces gender identities. Ogola and Macgoye use their protagonists effectively to indicate that gender equality is achievable and desirable. A change of mind-set in religion, education and political ideologies go a long way in discounting myths that limit gender.

CHAPTER THREE

DECONSTRUCTING GENDER MYTHS IN MARGARET OGOLA'S *I SWEAR BY APOLLO* AND MARJORIE MACGOYE'S *VICTORIA AND MURDER IN MAJENGO*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how Ogola and Macgoye, in the novels *I swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, respectively, use narrative strategies to debunk/ (de)construct gender myths as perpetuated by traditional gender role, marriage and family and sexuality. It further interrogates how the authors champion religion and education as major forces that catalyse a paradigm shift from tradition to modernity. The authors focus specifically on the significance of location and culture in justifying the paradigm shifts in people's attitudes and conceptualization of gender and power concerns. Ogola and Macgoye's attempt to redefine family is examined by illuminating new perspectives that counter traditional concept of family. Within this conceptualization is the changing reality that destabilizes myths on roles and responsibilities of men and women, that is, division of labour by sex within family and society at large, against changing social trends.

In so doing, the chapter examines modernity, particularly the influence of location and culture, as factors that deconstruct gender myths. The concept of modernity, that is, myths behind modernity, relationship between traditional African and western/modern cultures, is examined in light of how it influences gender and power play. We consider the different approaches Ogola and Macgoye, in *I Swear by Apollo*, *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*, respectively, give to challenges of life supported by a new culture and modernity in a new cultural space provided by modern contexts.

3.2 Deconstructing Mythic Conceptualization of Gender

In *I Swear by Apollo and Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*, Ogola and Macgoye, respectively explore the possibilities of gender relations, deflecting from the norms that define gender in the patriarchal society. My reading of these texts confirms a paradigm shift in the definition of gender, and the roles and responsibilities attached to it. I further align with Butler's (2004) argument that:

To claim that gender is a norm is not quite the same as saying that there are normative views of femininity and masculinity, even though there clearly are such normative views. Gender is not exactly what one 'is', nor is it precisely what one 'has'. Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes (p. 42).

Butler here suggests a wholesome consideration of what gender entails, so that myths associating gender to 'what one is', giving unquestionable 'truths' about gender, need to be re-evaluated. In *I Swear by Apollo and Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*, Ogola and Macgoye, respectively, create circumstances that necessitate a shift from traditional gender norms, to the consideration of the actual process of normalization that may discount the very norms. As Butler (2004) further argues:

Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. Indeed, it may be that the very apparatus that seeks to install the norm also works to undermine that very installation that the installation is, as it were, definitionally incomplete (p. 42).

My examination of how Ogola and Macgoye deconstruct gender myths is in appreciation of the dynamism that exists in the cultural construction of the concept of gender itself; the production of the 'gendered self' and how prevailing situations undermine the binary of the feminine and masculine.

Ogola and Macgoye in *I Swear by Apollo and Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* reconsider Luo myths that traditionally regulate gender relations in the family, society, religious and political circles. Macgoye's description of how myths limit Abiero's self-discovery back in the village, and the (re)construction of her new self as Victoria in the urban portrays many alternatives otherwise denied by traditional gender myths. These myths are discounted by emerging trends in modern society. Similarly, Ogola's description of the functioning of a multi-cultural family under the leadership of Wandia in *I Swear by Apollo* provides an opportunity to re-evaluate gender myths that form gender identities in the traditional Luo set-up. I first appreciate the drift away from the view that gender roles and norms are deemed natural and tied to sex. However, I acknowledge the argument by Butler (1993) that the category of 'sex' is normative from the start, so that 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is also part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs; that is, whose regulatory force is made as clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls.

In *I Swear by Apollo and Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*, Ogola and Macgoye illustrate the power of women's bodies to break away from the 'normative' and the forces that demarcate and differentiate them thus denying opportunities for self-optimization. Ogola and Macgoye's contestation of myths that attach specific roles and responsibilities to particular gender is fictionalized by considering the man and woman at home and in the marketplace. Ogola's women in *I Swear by Apollo* are academically and financially empowered and located in the professional marketplace, thus shifting them from the position of dependence that is traditionally expected of a woman. For instance, Wandia and Vera's professional prowess locate them in positions of authority

and independence, and their actions are neither questioned nor controlled by the men around them. As Butler (1990) argues, 'sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, so that becoming a man or a woman in the cultural ideal requires compulsion often achieved through myth. Myth regulates practices that ensure this materialization takes place. These developments that empower women necessitate a reconsideration of myths that describe the cultural ideal of what gender entails.

I acknowledge Ogola and Macgoye's use of language to discount the linguistically constructed manhood/womanhood. They reconstruct the ideal gender, re-evaluating cultural myths and highlighting new possibilities. Social change necessitates reconsideration of the concept of womanhood that appears mysterious, as Butler (1990) observes:

To be a woman within the terms of masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men... For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency of a female 'object' who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place of authority of the masculine position (p. xxviii).

The deconstruction of gender thus becomes a question of power; a contestation between male and the unexpected female agency that responds to the patriarchal power over them. Through the success of Wandia and Vera's profession, Ogola gives voice to women both at home and in the marketplace. Macgoye also articulates the potential of women in the business and political space by empowering Victoria who controls many men. Ogola and Macgoye thus use their writing to explore how female agency prove traditionally held myths null and void, simply functioning to enhance unjustified power over women. They do so by empowering women thus giving a sense of independence. They show how myths are tailored to deny women opportunity for progress, and the false notions about femininity entrenched in community discourse. Such myths have

nothing in relation to being male or female, but are artificially constructed power discourses that regulate gender relations. Foucault (1972) acknowledges this:

The univocal construct of sex is produced in the service of social regulation and control of sexuality, it also conceals and artificially unifies a variety of disparate and unrelated sexual functions. It also postures within discourse as a cause, an interior essence which both produces and renders intelligible all manner of sensation, pleasure, and desire as sex-specific. In other words, bodily pleasures are not merely casually reducible to this ostensibly sex-specific essence, but they become readily interpretable as manifestations or signs of this 'sex' (p. 18).

Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo* and Macgoye's *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* offer a critique on myths about marriage and family, and how it influences gender perceptions. Traditionally, marriage is a rite of passage that one must undergo to be socially accepted. The ritual is so elaborate and has cultural significance. Every man/woman looks forward to it in order to gain acceptance. However, Abiero's marriage (in Macgoye's *Victoria*) is one of convenience; it is motivated by social and economic factors, much less by myths given much significance in *Coming to Birth*. This marriage is partly motivated by her father's failure. Macgoye describes this in *Victoria*:

...Abiero's father had not been very far-sighted. The cows just died. The crops rotted too. There were hungry days. And after all she was over fifteen... (p. 10).

Her family is in dire economic crisis, and she seems to be the available remedy for sacrifice. Macgoye indicates that she is not otherwise bound to marry at her age though.

Her mother's attitude is different:

... Her mother would have liked her to help at home a bit longer – in those days girls did not marry so young because there was no need for modern fear that they would disgrace themselves if left too long. But something had to be done, and there was not much fun at home either, with many of the boys slipping off to Kisumu or even further in search of work. Some stayed in the army or away in the plantations and did not come back for a long time... (p. 10).

The attitude of Abiero's mother indicates a shift from myths that require girls to marry as soon as possible. She however supports this marriage because of poverty and other kinds of social pressure. On the other hand, marriage is not a priority for men who are more eager to search for work in the urban areas.

Macgoye describes a society whose customary marriage allows polygamy. Unlike in Paulina's case (in *Coming to Birth*) where her approval as the first wife is not required, Anyango (in *Victoria*) is the one seeking a junior wife:

...when a message came from Gem that Anyango wanted a junior co-wife to keep up the respect of her house, and when negotiators came and the talk went on hour after hour, she was pleased... (p. 11).

Kuria (2001, p. 29, 80) expresses Kabira and Ogot's description of polygamy as oppressive to women and their view of cultural tradition as serving the interest of men who have the power to apportion love to each of his wives. While this may seem to be the case in *Coming to Birth*, *Victoria* illustrates that women have the power to decide when they need a co-wife and take part in identifying one. As Macgoye fictionalizes, this is still within the Luo cultural tradition in *Victoria*, but the myths become more and more fluid, allowing for other ways of working out marriages. Interestingly, in *Coming to Birth*, Martin's offer to buy Paulina a sewing machine is interpreted as '... a gift to sweeten the first wife for the arrival of the second' (p. 46). This is an indication that, according to customary marriage, polygamy is permitted but the first wife's approval is not always required. More often, the second wife is not welcome since, in Paulina's case, it is occasioned by the first wife's failure to meet her expectations in marriage. In *Victoria*'s case, women have become active participants in the marriage process.

Ogola, in *I Swear by Apollo*, goes beyond cultural boundaries witnessed in the earlier sections of her earlier text where characters are keen on cultural puritanism and marriage happens only within the community. By focusing on the multi-ethnic marriage and family of Dr. Aoro and Wandia Sigu, Ogola shows how this marriage works in the face of myths and fears witnessed in the earlier text. Through John Courtney, we are also exposed to life in Canada in comparison to Africa – especially critiquing Courtney’s attitude to the African concept of extended family and the value of children. The introduction of different scenarios that lead to a variety of families and gender roles necessitate a deconstructionist view of gender.

Ogola also interrogates the myth that a woman gains acceptance and identity through marriage. She acknowledges the value of children in giving identity to a woman. While she does not disapprove conventional marriage, she gives an alternative of successful single life. Aoro and Wandia’s marriage thrives, depicting love and friendship as a key player in this success. The idea of love is strange during their grandmother Akoko’s time. Through this, they discount the myth that love is not a necessary ingredient in a successful marriage. Macgoye, on the other hand, presents Abiero’s marriage once again as a matter of convenience for both her parents and herself. She willingly runs away from the harsh life of Kano, but ends up in a loveless marriage to an old man. She describes the harshness of life in her home in Kano as “...always hungry, always suffering from either drought or flood ... the same flat floor ringed with foreign hills and the lake behind, threatening to swallow you...” (p. 9).

Ogola and Macgoye deconstruct myths that purport that marriage is a rite that gives fulfilment and social acceptance. Instead, *I Swear by Apollo*, *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* present the idea of marriage not necessarily as an ideal, but an option that can

be approached differently. First, they demonstrate that there are new ways that men use to woo women and vice versa, as opposed to the traditional marriage negotiation rituals. While social, political, religious and economic factors play a crucial role in the decision for marriage and the choice of a marriage partner, Ogola and Macgoye give another perspective. Every individual's decision is made according to their unique prevailing circumstances. The eagerness for marriage dwindles with time as men and women get so engrossed with careers and struggles for survival.

In Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo*, Johnie Courtney is so preoccupied with his studies and profession that he does not seem to notice the girls around him who try to attract his attention. His fulfilment is in career achievement rather than getting married, as was the case in the traditional society. Alicia's choice of a fiancée is met with criticism by family members as he does not meet the threshold of a good husband for her. The man seems to be full of prejudices for women, and finds it difficult to acknowledge Wandia as the professor while her husband is simply a doctor. He is too patronizing for the family's liking. He talks too much and likes to dominate – a show of masculinity that is outdated for the Sigus.

As witnessed in the earlier texts (*Coming to Birth* and *The River and the Source*), Macgoye and Ogola highlight the African sense of value of children as a fulfilment in marriage. Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo* presents Prof. Wandia as an accomplished woman, both professionally and within her family. Ogola underscores the fulfilment she gets from her motherhood, better than her professional prowess thus:

...PROFESSOR WANDIA SIGU, long serving chairperson of the Department of Pathology and a forefront authority on diseases of the blood, was known to her neighbors simply as Mama Danny – a title she cherished more than any other and which simply meant 'the mother of Danny' (p. 17).

While motherhood is valued, Ogola does not overestimate its significance. She illustrates that in the modern society, one can still find fulfilment in career and religion. Through Wandia, she proposes a balance between career and marital/parental responsibilities, portraying a woman as well endowed with the power to excel in both, as opposed to the traditional idea of engaging simply in homemaking and child bearing. On the other hand, Vera (although unmarried), finds fulfilment in her career as an engineer, and her dedication to Christianity as a member of the Opus Dei. She finds another family in the church and the services she offers to humanity give her fulfilment.

Through these characters and events, Ogola engages in an inquiry about the concept of an ideal family, just as Macgoye does. There is a departure from the traditional concept of nuclear and polygamous family as the ideal, to exploring possibilities of adoption and single and foster parenting. These new possibilities then discount the expectation of men and women to enter into marriage, and the pressure to have children. As Ogola and Macgoye's characters become more knowledgeable through exposure to Christian religion, education and urban contexts, traditional myths become more unstable. This creates a kind of contest, traditional myths being displaced in the way Foucault (1972) describes as pieces of knowledge attaining truth status over the course of history, and power legitimating itself through truth, hence people shaping themselves by producing alternative truth. As witnessed in Macgoye's *Victoria*, for instance, such production of truth also leads to a paradigm shift from myths that define roles and responsibilities of men and women within the family. Women such as Victoria can stand alone and through history prove their capability as household heads. Through Abiero, Macgoye also shows how myths attaching significance of children as an assurance of continuity in family lose value. Although she is eager to have a child, the old man (her husband)

having failed to give her one, the possibility of her pregnancy betraying her makes her to not only run away from her marriage but also abandon the otherwise valued baby. There is also another case of a child left in a taxi, which could be seen as Macgoye pointing out a shift from myths that attach so much value to children. In this case, children may be regarded as a burden, a shame or inconvenience due to the responsibility that comes with parenting.

I note at this point that while Ogola and Macgoye deconstruct gender myths in their writing, there are also new myths constructed in the post-independence dispensation that inform the setting of *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*. There is a kind of cultural hybridity, so that some of the traditional values are kept to some extent. The different cultures coexist, each of them somehow finding space to express itself. Macgoye indicates that while modernity may change one's view of life, there are cases of ambivalence in response to unique situations. For instance, Abiero in *Victoria* does not bear with the suffering in her dysfunctional marriage, but cannot go back to her parents either, feeling ashamed of failing in her marriage. Despite having conceived, as expected of a married woman, she feels guilty and fears the baby may betray her for having cheated on her husband with a fisherman she has fallen in love with. Through her, Macgoye points out that besides having a baby, one needs love, friendship and acceptance for marriage to succeed. She shows a shift from myths that attach much value to children to the extent that one does all it takes to have one. Unlike Paulina in *Coming to Birth*, who holds on to Akeyo who is born out of wedlock, Abiero in *Victoria* considers her baby a burden and would rather abandon it at the hospital and start a new life altogether. It is rather ironical that when she gets pregnant later on out of her

prostitution, she feels so proud and carries herself with dignity regardless of her known occupation that has led to the pregnancy.

I also recognize that while deconstructing myths regarding gender within the family set-up, Ogola still celebrates some aspects in the African concept of family, especially as she portrays it as inclusive and close-knit. She focuses on the role of women in raising strong families that are able to weather the storms of life. While she moves away from the traditionally accepted polygamous set-up, she illustrates other ways through which the extended family stays together. Right from *The River and the Source*, she celebrates strong families showing how Akoko successfully raises a successful generation. As the story continues in *I Swear by Apollo*, she focuses on Wandia's unmatched strength in raising a large family, and acknowledges strong ties within family, albeit the cross-cultural marriages witnessed. At the centre of the success in family is a woman, Akoko, seemingly succeeded by Wandia as a source of inspiration for all.

By fronting women in the revolutionist agenda, Ogola and Macgoye illustrate the power of women's bodies as a positive reaction to the power of oppressive traditional culture. Frye (1983), in her feminist studies, argues that "... the exclusion of men insinuates that women have control over access; hence it fosters the assumption of power" (p. 104). Although it can be argued that Ogola deliberately does away with her male characters in *The River and the Source* to provide an opportunity for women to thrive in the patriarchal society, her agenda in *I Swear by Apollo* does not appear to be any contest between genders. I also note that the absence of men may not fully explore the power and potential of women. I appreciate that in providing men and women with equal opportunities in *I Swear by Apollo*, she illustrates that men and women can

achieve anything in life, thus showing how families can be strengthened through gender complementarities.

3.3 Location and Culture

Ogola and Macgoye deploy location and culture as a strategy that enhances deconstruction of gender myths. Macgoye's shift of her character, Victoria, from the rural (escaping the wrath of transgressing cultural expectations) to the urban as a space of new possibilities gives her a sense of newly found freedom in Majengo, Kisumu and Nairobi. This is an acknowledgement of the fact that modernity influences characters' perspectives on gender issues significantly.

Ogola's placement of Aoro's family in the city also offers a different outlook to gender issues. Thus, the setting is significant in critiquing gender myths as it validates considerations of the social, economic and political environment. Lindholm-Csanyi (2007) acknowledges the period in which *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* is set as "... The historical time when the country's independence was gained and the main political and socio-cultural changes took place" (p. 9). These changes are significant in gender considerations after independence. She further observes that "...Due to the dismantling of traditional social institutions, women were left in an even more vulnerable and ambiguous situation, with new burdens and responsibilities" (Lindholm-Csanyi, 2007, p. 9).

These changes are best illustrated in the modern/urban setting. In these settings, gender-based responsibilities are not fixed, rather, characters attempt new strategies, that de Certeau (1988) describes as those "...everyday pursuits...", which may constitute more than just forms of resistance but as he argues "... only in the local network of labour

and recreation can one grasp how, within a grid of socio-economic constraints, these pursuits unfailingly establish relational tactics, artistic creations, and autonomous initiatives” (p. ix). In a sense, the initiatives (such as business and prostitution for Victoria) created by women as a strategy for survival is an indication of autonomy from the cultural myths that would otherwise restrict them from trying out such ventures. Their aim is not an outright resistance, but initiatives geared towards day-to-day survival.

Ogola and Macgoye in *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo*, respectively, portray cultural shift by changing their focus from rural setting and locating their characters in urban cosmopolitan setting. The movement of these characters is a matter of necessity: as is the case of Aoro’s family in *I Swear by Apollo* as professionals working in Nairobi, and Victoria in search of a new life. They adapt to the new environment the way Lindholm-Csanyi (2007) has commented that:

The Luo have a close connection with cities due to the prevalent practice of migration for work. In this way the effect of modernization is more influential among them than in rigidly traditional tribes like Samburu or Masaai (p. 11).

The novelistic form offers a holistic description of the contexts: from physical, social, spiritual, economic and political aspects that affect characters and their response to circumstances. Their earlier texts discussed in chapter 2 have connections with the rural setting that critiques Luo cultural puritanism with regard to gender relations. *I Swear by Apollo* is purely set in the city, while *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* shifts from rural, semi-urban and urban setting. The essence of this setting is the cosmopolitan nature it offers and its impact on culture which they embrace and consequently how it influences gender myths. Appadurai (1996) has defined culture as:

...The naturalized organization of certain differences in the interests of group identity based on difference; through the historical process, and through and in the tensions between agents and structures. It is a process of naturalizing a subset of differences that have been mobilized to articulate group identity (p. 14).

By locating their characters within cosmopolitan settings, Ogola and Macgoye present contexts that make traditional gender myths irrelevant or rather questionable. As Appadurai has pointed out, culture is a function of naturalized subset of differences. The urban setting removes the sense/feeling of exclusion and is more accommodating to different kinds of cultures that somehow coexist hence establishing culture that is less rigid. Ogola and Macgoye's characters, therefore, offer us an opportunity to examine the working of Foucault's (1972) conditions of the production and manifestation of truth. The novelistic form in essence creates and elaborately describes this reality, enabling us to analyse the working of regimes of truth which is characteristic of every society. According to Foucault, the rules which determine what a subject can say about certain things depend on the question of truth and falsity. Through the novels, Ogola and Macgoye show how things that were considered to be true cease to be, thus such myths that decide what is true about particular gender are contested in a plausible way in the development of their narratives.

This is exemplified by Ogola in *I Swear by Apollo* in the way she seems to move away from Appadurai's idea of group identity as a cultural formation. Although she is interested in the functioning of a family unit, her narrative focuses on individual characters, their fears and failures, successes and general response to life issues. The urban setting is more personal/ individualistic than communal. The characters themselves, though part of a family, seem to be in a world of their own. Alicia, for instance, is described as an introvert, who seems vulnerable yet powerful in her silence.

The ambivalence witnessed in characters who struggle to belong to two worlds makes them feel lost. Alicia's brother, Johnnie, wishes he was black when his coloured skin makes him attractive to women. This should be enhancing his masculinity through sexual conquest. These two siblings have a desire for identity. Aoro Sigu's family identity – mixed race, English speaking – provides a different setup altogether that does not allow for group identity but individual focus and struggles. At the same time, group identity functions in this family by focusing on the function of the particular (Aoro and Wandia's) family as a unit, as opposed to the wider Luo culture. Butler (2004) comments on what Lacan observes as "...that which is universal in culture is understood to be its symbolic or linguistic rules, and these are understood to support kinship relations" (p. 45). Ogola illustrates that there is no universality in culture but individuals adapt to ways of life that are relevant in their contexts. The symbols that would otherwise enhance group identity, including linguistic aspects lose the essence of their power as myths contained therein are displaced by new myths.

Ogola's focus on Aoro Sigu's family that is composed of mixed culture and race, yet functioning well as a unit is therefore opposed to Lacan's concept of the collective unconscious which embodies rigid cultural myths. Butler (2004) further explains that "In structuralist terms, it establishes the universal conditions under which the sociality, that is, communicability of all language use, becomes possible. This move paves way for the consequential distinction between symbolic and social accounts of kinship" (p. 45). Despite the cultural differences between Courtney of Canadian origin and the Sigu family, he is more at home in Africa and embraces the extended family as his own.

Ogola therefore presents what Mbembe (1992) describes as the post-colony characterized by a plurality of sorts, with multiple identities which are transformed and

put into circulation. This is also presented in Macgoye's *Victoria* and *Murder in Majengo* where characters are placed in contexts that are multicultural thus traditional myths do not hold. I hereby note that although the traditional cultural myths are largely destabilized in the urban cosmopolitan contexts, there are other aspects of culture that are persistently ingrained in the psyches of characters.

My argument is also that gender identities in the postcolonial scenario as witnessed in *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* are not a contestation or domination of cultural myths that in the words of Foucault are forms of 'power over'. Rather, it is a discourse of other forms of power that come into play, allowing cultures (such as European/African, Luo/Kikuyu among others) coexist within their spaces. These forms of power are evident in the texts under study in the sense that while European culture infiltrates Africa, some Europeans (such as John Courtney in *I Swear by Apollo*) also celebrate certain aspects of African culture such as love and unity within large African families that he describes as full of warmth. Ogola describes John Courtney's feeling:

... His coming to Africa had revived his spirit. Its youthful nations and peoples and their wholesome and simple approach to life, despite all kinds of calamities was invigorating. Best of all, to nest within the bosom of the African family was to know the source of the strength of the African, which daily gave him the courage to face the knife-edge struggle for existence. (p. 138-139).

Courtney's admiration of the African culture is mainly centred on the function of the family unit. Ogola places the woman at the centre of the family, describing her as the source of life. In this case, Wandia is the one behind the success of Aoro's family. At his point of departure, Courtney comments: "...I hope that whatever else disappears or is eroded by modernism, the African concept of family will remain..." (p. 139). This is

an illustration of the beauty in the African concept of family which is unfortunately at risk of erosion by new concepts that come into being. Aoro observes:

But you realize that as in all other places the family here is fighting a rearguard action for its survival. It appears so much easier to be, not merely nucleus, but entirely individualistic, to care for no one except yourself and your comfort. More and more people are willing to sacrifice the sense of belonging, and moorless, swim through the sea of unencumbered freedom (p. 139).

From Aoro's comment above, Ogola acknowledges the disintegration of the traditional African concept of family with modernism – moving from extended to nuclear, then to individualism. From the African perspective, the family is expected to share in their joys and troubles. However, these good traits are dwindling fast. Aoro notes with regret: “and it takes a foreigner to come and remind me that the most valuable, the most vital thing we Africans possess is our families” (p. 140).

I Swear by Apollo and Victoria and *Murder in Majengo* illustrate how myths behind modernity and the relationship between indigenous African and western cultures influence gender and power relations. These myths are kinds of narratives created in one's psyche, that define who a person is; and which Butler concludes as those attributes given to a person, a set of secondary narrative effects. In *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, Macgoye interrogates how the post-independence modern Kenyan society treats women. Like Ogola, she privileges women with the aim of offering a counter-narrative to recent history, giving a woman writer's perspective on how women grapple with challenges of modernity. Both texts highlight themes around issues such as infidelity, prostitution, marriage and courtship, inter-ethnic marriages, and religion. Women's place and role in society is largely in their psychic (as powerful myths), and their (re)actions are dictated by these internalized and naturalized 'realities'. They point

out how perception of gender differences is a mythical construction worth reconsideration.

The modern society poses challenges to women that are different from their earlier struggles against oppressive gender myths. Power operates at different levels in these spaces to enforce culture alternately. Macgoye and Ogola display discursive form of power that Foucault describes as not wielded at all. Instead, it is seen as dispersed and subject-less, as elements of broad 'strategies' but without individual authors. As different individuals with varied cultures converge in the urban, some of their individual myths are displaced and new myths are formed with the new culture that is deemed more accommodating within the new demands of urban life. Women such as Macgoye's Victoria and Ogola's Wandia find space in the marketplace as they engage in business and career respectively. The power of women's bodies that was initially transferred to men in the patriarchal society (as in the case of Macgoye's Abiero) finds an opportunity for expression in the urban, a context not controlled by cultural myths (with a new identity as Victoria). It is important to note, as Barthes (1972) argues, that myths appear and disappear; each alternately acquiring mythical status. Macgoye underscores the power of myth from her description of Victoria's reaction to urban life. Traditional myth is so real to her that it finds space to assert itself in the multicultural modern society. In spite of being miles away from home, superstitions still challenge her decision to engage in prostitution although it is her only option for survival. The power of myth operates at different levels in these spaces to enforce culture alternately.

In view of this, I acknowledge that the accommodation of new trends does not necessarily displace old systems in place, but rather there are ways in which both find space within which they complement each other. In his *Culture and Colonization*, Aimé

Césaire (1988) also points out that in the new African culture, there will be new elements, modern elements; elements borrowed from Europe. However, he also believes that many traditional elements will live on in this culture. Césaire refuses to yield to *tabula rasa* temptation, together with the belief that any future African culture will totally reject the old order. He acknowledges that Africans, whether Christians or not, intellectual or illiterate in their great majority, still consult divinities and diviners when they have health problems or when their business is in a mess. Although he appreciates that western ways are good, Césaire notes that one runs back to his/her ancestral roots when things get off hand. Though Ogola and Macgoye's characters embrace a new way of life, they still hold on to traditional beliefs. Victoria, for instance, understands the permanence of marriage which she abandoned. She however finds confidence because she believes she was 'bought back', (p.15) culturally accepted as a way of redeeming/ freeing a girl from a marriage in case it does not work. In this case, the two authors do not completely dismiss the Luo culture with regard to gender consideration.

Ogola and Macgoye downplay the function of myth in the formation of gender identities in the post independent urban setting. Chandler (2006) describes the function of myth as basically to 'naturalize culture', making dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely natural, normal, self-evident, timeless, obvious and 'common sense' – and thus objective and true reflection of the way things are. In deconstructing gender myths, Ogola and Macgoye go against this kind of 'naturalization' of culture, introducing us to a place and time when culture ceases to be natural. The city in itself is a totally different cultural space with multiplicity of identities. There are physical and metaphorical cultural spaces, which are created by

such factors as religious practices, food, social networks such as schools, hospitals, among others. These factors contribute to the formation of amorphous identity. The presentation of Aoro and Wandia's family in *I Swear by Apollo* is in itself an embodiment of cultural hybridity that accommodates multiple identities. Their religious orientations and beliefs are also varied but they coexist harmoniously.

Ogola and Macgoye's interest in the place of a woman in the family context plays out well as they discount myths that traditionally relegated women to the background. Their work shows how the combination of religious, social and economic factors and how they are used create specific cultural spaces which are unique and have invisible boundaries, each culture expressing itself indeterminably. Inasmuch as the African concept of family is celebrated in *I Swear by Apollo*, Ogola notes the danger in racism and tribalism. Wandia observes:

It cannot for a moment be assumed that the African concept of the family has no major drawbacks. For example, the tribe as a concept of a larger family is something that will haunt Africa well into the third millennium. Many people believe that though you should be good to your family and by extension your tribe, other people of other tribes or races don't matter that much and are frequently to be looked down upon with contempt and even with hostility... (p. 140).

Ogola uses Wandia here to propose a greater challenge than gender hierarchy facing the contemporary African family. She not only gives voice to a woman, but through Wandia she also shows the concern of a woman towards family. She shows the practicality of woman leadership in the family which is visionary, with the possibility of handling national issues. Women like Lois and Vera in *Murder in Majengo* possess willpower to change the order of things. In a society where women are considered sexual objects for men's pleasure, they manage to manoeuvre Obonyo's tricks, displaying their integrity and determination to prove this myth wrong.

Macgoye locates Lois in a very challenging environment ridden with moral filth, but, through education, she provides an opportunity for her to change her circumstances. Lois' ability to adapt and survive in the harsh circumstances attests to what Goddard (2003) points out; that in response to global change, people create new opportunities and conditions, and in their responses, they are influenced by both gender and age. He acknowledges the complexities involved in the constitution and performance of agency, reflected in strategies of accommodation and adaption he proposes as responsible for new institutional arrangements. In an attempt to emancipate herself from the immorality that surrounds her, Lois finds herself in a precarious situation with her mother arrested and having to lie about her relationship with Mr. Obonyo. She has to survive by all means. Goddard proposes that gendered discourses are deployed to convey new meanings, a new sense of place and time, confirming or challenging the ideas of 'tradition and 'modernity'. Considering the circumstances surrounding Lois, she has to take up a new self-image and live a morally upright life in an environment that readily labels her a prostitute.

Ogola and Macgoye use cultural spaces (which I also consider as spaces of power) to illustrate their influence on one's mindset about others and oneself, and show how gender myths lose value. Through movement of characters from the rural to the urban, the authors illustrate the dynamism of culture: those sets of practices that change and redefine themselves from one generation to the next; creating a new future while redefining the past. For Victoria, the city provides a cultural space of many possibilities. It provides a new identity of 'city women' who go beyond their culturally defined roles to meet the immediate needs of their families. These spaces can also be described as spaces of power – where the authors express power of myth/culture over women and

vice versa. By enabling women to live independently in the urban spaces, Macgoye dismantles gender hierarchies that position women as subjects to male domination. Through Victoria, she illustrates how women exercise power and control within their households and further exercise sexual conquest over men.

3.4 Gender and Sexuality

Sexuality is a matter that is subtly handled by many African writers, since it is riddled with myths and taboos. The concept of sexuality lacks precise definition as it varies with historical contexts over time. In this study, I consider it as the way people experience and express themselves sexually. That is, their biological, erotic, physical, emotional and social or spiritual feelings and behaviours. The subject is handled with precaution in the texts under study, since sex is considered private. Ogola and Macgoye's concept of sexuality resonates with Foucault's (1977) argument that discourse on sexuality focuses on the productive role of the married couple, which is monitored by both canonical and civil law. Matters to do with sex are expected to be privately handled within marriage.

Ogola and Macgoye do not shy away from addressing the issue of sexuality especially as they relate to the female subject. With the social change witnessed in the postcolonial society, there are other forms of sexual relations that necessitate conversations around sexuality. Social change occasioned by modernity among other factors appreciates human sexuality outside myths that describe what is considered the 'norm' within marriage. Foucault (1977) also observes that at some point, society ceases discussing sex lives of married couples, instead taking an interest in sexualities outside marriage: in the 'world of perversion'. Myths surrounding sexual relationships in the postcolonial

situation thus become more and more fluid, as new cultures infiltrate African culture.

Tamale (2011) points out thus:

Sexuality and gender go hand in hand; both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central, crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies. They give each other shape and any scientific enquiry of the former immediately invokes the latter. Gender provides the critical analytical lens through which any data on sexuality must logically be interpreted (p. 16).

I appreciate Ogola and Macgoye's presentation of gender concerns as a question of power relations created and sustained by myths. They portray sexuality as one of the ways through which gender is expressed. Discourse on sexuality is justified in their texts by the deployment of a narrative strategy that justifies the expression and appreciation of female sexuality. Ogola for instance, in *I Swear by Apollo*, describes the sensitivity of a girl maturing to puberty and beginning to experience her sexuality.

She describes Lisa thus:

“Lisa you have grown into such a pretty girl,” Vera said looking at her. From anyone else Lisa would have spluttered with fury, but Vera looked like the kind of person who only uttered what she meant. The pretty miss looked down shyly. This was a sensitive subject for she had started puberty looking like a scarecrow with a bad case of pimples. One day the kind of thing that happens to the Lisas of this world happened to her. A boy – a huge hulk of a rugger player, the kind with a big body and not too massive head – followed Lisa home. (p. 51).

The narratives as exemplified above bring out the acknowledgement of women's sexuality. The recognition of feminine beauty coupled with the girl's discomfort due to her physical changes mark an ambivalent approach to sexuality. Myths around sexuality make women shy away from freely exploring what their sexuality entails. Tamale (2011) identifies how such factors as highlighted in the narrative affect gender relations and interpretation thus:

Things that have an impact on gender relations such as class, age, religion, race, ethnicity, culture, locality and disability – also influence the sexual

lives of men and women. In other words, sexuality is deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems (p. 16).

Lisa's feeling of embarrassment is a case of self-doubt mixed with excitement. Her femininity is finally noticed. Although the interested boy is described in otherwise masculine terms as '... a huge hulk of ruggier player ... with big body...', Lisa is still embarrassed to acknowledge her sexuality at this time. As Tamale puts it, there are many factors surrounding her exploration of sexuality, so that she feels she may attract wrong people or at the wrong time.

Macgoye, on the other hand, uses Victoria's experiences to illustrate the challenges facing women in the postcolonial period. As Robertson (1993) observes, "Colonialism facilitated prostitution as women in the urban were excluded from employment, except for being occupied as maidservants. Some women, for lack of other responsibilities, engaged in prostitution in Kenya too" (p. 44). Macgoye's narrative explains the circumstances that drive Abiero into prostitution. In her desperate situation, the woman who rescues her is a caring prostitute. Recognizing this trade as a source of livelihood she begins to appreciate this new dimension of her sexuality:

She submitted dutifully as she had been taught, more like what she had experienced with the young fisherman, but different again, since it regarded her only indirectly. Soon she got used to it. The provocation was not difficult for her, as she revolted from the whole humdrum experience of her marriage. To be wanted was a pleasure. To draw from Sara the cash for a new dress, a bottle of hair oil, ear-rings, was a delight. She began to talk to the men... (p. 24).

Victoria's new self-discovery enables her to play out her sexuality and empower herself as an independent woman. This transformation in Victoria resonates with Foucault (1998) who also challenges the commonly held assumption that power is essentially negative, repressive force that operates purely through the mechanism of law, taboo and

censorship. Victoria's repulsion of myths and taboos that constrict her sexuality and her eventual discovery of that sexuality empowers her devoid of any act of domination or coercion. She becomes more conscious of herself and appreciates her body and womanhood. This power is constituted through knowledge, the acceptance and understanding of 'truth' behind sexuality. As Foucault (1998, p. 63) further argues, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. Myths ascribing power to specific people under specific circumstances do not hold as regimes of truth pervading society keep shifting.

Ogola, in *I Swear by Apollo*, approaches sexuality differently. She is more concerned with the aspect of morality so that women do not consciously or deliberately express their sexuality with the intention of exercising power over men. It is the power of femininity that she celebrates. For instance, she describes Alicia as follows:

Though she was reserved and withdrawn, men were attracted to her in an irresistible but paralyzing sort of way – as if they must destroy themselves in order to achieve actualization, like the final ecstasy of a moth in a flame. They flocked her door, rather her vicinity, but then remained tongue-tied, racking their brains as to what to do or say next in the face of such passivity – she seemed to generate no currents whatsoever and met every proposition with a slight amused smile and a look which conveyed nothing more than an emphatic recognition of another soul in its value of tears. To know her would be to know all the joys and sorrows of manhood, and that woman, though so obviously accessible, was not only unknown, but was essentially unknowable (p. 12).

Alicia's expression of her sexuality only makes her more mysterious to men, who gain more interest in her. The more mysterious, the more inaccessible, the more she gains power that attracts men helplessly towards her. Butler (1990) reiterates Beauvoir's explanation that "To be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men" (p. xxiiiiv). Her otherwise helpless

passivity is so powerful that it renders men speechless. The mystery behind her passivity is so powerful in a paralyzing way that is described as destructive to men.

Unlike Macgoye's Victoria who uses her sexuality as a means of survival, Ogola's women are independent. Their sexuality is within the moral standards she advocates. The women in *I Swear by Apollo* appreciate their sexuality and are fully in control of their circumstances. Ogola's female characters such as Alicia and Kandi engage in relationships leading to marriage.

In her representation of sexuality, Macgoye portrays poor and middle-class women who attempt to get out of their sexual relationships that result from their struggle for survival. Although she does not necessarily advocate for prostitution as a means of livelihood, she presents it as a possible alternative for survival in an environment that is so difficult for women. She shows that these women do not rejoice in their prostitution due to the myths surrounding the trade. Such women are shunned:

‘In my country a Malaya cannot go home.’
 ‘But I am not a Malaya. I am married. My husband is old and unkind to me. Also he is not very much of use as a husband. Therefore they must buy me back. But I was properly married. They received the cow of virginity for me.’ (p. 25).

Although Victoria's explanation of her circumstances seems justifiable, it is unfortunate that women are responsible for challenges of sexuality within a marriage. No one would easily understand Victoria's predicament. This is a challenge facing many women, and Macgoye explores it in order to illustrate how women suffer silently and are condemned for their sexuality.

Macgoye's engagement with the issue of prostitution gives it a different outlook. Through Victoria, she illustrates how women can use prostitution as a stepping stone and move ahead to earn honest living, thus celebrating the power of womanhood. Senkoro (1982) acknowledges that many African literary writers avoid addressing the issue of prostitution because it provokes universal condemnation and is imbued with taboos. Such myths/taboo keep pushing women further and further, so that they hardly find a way of expressing themselves and end up losing their self-esteem. Victoria's later life as a business woman is respectable. She gains a positive self-image as a successful businesswoman and would rather forget her old self. Her decision to start a new life (just like her daughter Lois) shows the good intentions of many women who cannot access any other kind of empowerment but use what is at their disposal to survive in the patriarchal society. The change of her name (from Abiero to Victoria) indicates her new identity: a new woman free from cultural restrictions limiting her self-discovery and potential.

Ogola and Macgoye also show sexuality as not simply addressing sexual relationships, but touch on a wide range of issues, including pleasure, the body, dress, self-esteem, gender identity, power and violence. As Tamale (2011) further explains:

... It is an encompassing phenomenon that involves the human psyche, emotions, physical sensations, communication, creativity and ethics (p. 17).

Ogola's characters have more alternatives of expressing their sexuality. She illustrates that one does not experience womanhood or manhood exclusively within sexual relationships. Vera's decision to remain single in spite of having been in a relationship that would have led to a promising marriage indicates the power that one has to decide his/her sexuality. The same case is expressed in Fr. Peter and later Fr. Tony. The family

accepts their decision and look up to them because of their success. There is no ultimate truth concerning the ideal sexuality. Foucault in Rabinow (1991), says this about truth:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (p. 291).

As Foucault puts it, the politics of truth are aimed at exerting power and control for the benefit of some and at the expense of others. Ogola and Macgoye express a possibility of various forms of sexuality that can be freely experienced without being intimidated by myths that construct ‘truth’.

Ogola and Macgoye use narratives in *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, respectively, to highlight experiences of women in the postcolonial/ modern world. They portray how women play out their power in different ways. I acknowledge that women encounter more challenges especially with regard to acceptance due to their gender. As Bhabha (2004) reiterates, cultural, historical and racial background always hinder transformation to the new. This is true of Victoria. She wants to forget her old self as Abiero, but the arrival of Lucas Owiti and his claims of rights for care by Victoria is a thorn in her flesh. He not only reminds her of her past, but makes Victoria live through it over and over again. Lucas demands for work from Victoria, with so much confidence as he claims Victoria is obliged by virtue of her marriage:

‘Odero – is he a big man, then? Still, he cannot give people orders.’
 ‘No, but you have an obligation, he says.’
 ‘What obligation?’
 ‘You were married there.’
 ‘Yes, but I was bought back. The marriage is gone, long ago. Nothing remains of it.’ (p. 15)

Such kind of demands results from the belief that once bride wealth has been given, a woman belongs to the husband's clan and must respond to their bidding. Victoria's challenge to this 'right' resonates with Mazrui's (1993) criticism of the significance attached to the practice. Mazrui comments:

But even Africa's bridewealth is not really benevolent sexism unless it increases the power of the woman over the man or the power of the bride's family over the husband. More often than not, bridewealth gives the husband more power after the payment has been made. This practice strips bridewealth of all pretense of benevolence (p. 88).

Ogola shows that through self-awareness, women can be freed from myths about marriage which comes with many obligations. In the new-found freedom, women are able to reinvent themselves and express their sexuality without fear instilled by cultural myths that denounce such discourses. Sexuality is a power discourse that challenges gender myths as women and men grapple with unique day to day challenges in the modern world. Inasmuch as the African concept of sexuality portrays women as sexual objects, Ogola and Macgoye do not portray women as objects rather than subjects of sexual power. Abiero for instance is ready to fulfil her marital expectations but the old man who is her husband fails in his sexual obligations. This frustrates Abiero who seeks love and finds a way of expressing her sexuality outside the dysfunctional marriage. This seems consistent with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) description of hegemonic masculinity as that which is defined by physical strength and bravado, suppression of vulnerable emotions such as remorse and uncertainty, economic independence, authority over women and other men, and intense interest in sexual conquest. Macgoye uses Odhiambo's failure to fulfil his conjugal duty to shift focus from the celebration of male superiority, showing possibility of failure by men. At the same time, Abiero's 'rebellious' attitude is an expression of women's sexuality; a form of power over men, rather than object of exploitation by men.

Ogola and Macgoye also highlight their concern for morality in society and indicate how gender influences matters relating to morality. I note that the concept of morality in itself is ambivalent, with every society determining what is considered moral or immoral. Every society can determine what counts for morality, etiquette, religion and law. In a way, morality is not in every code of conduct raised by society, but that which is generally acceptable and meets certain conditions deemed rational. The authors highlight matters of morality that relate to gender but may transcend sexuality. As pointed out earlier, Macgoye uses prostitution (which is considered immoral) as a stepping stone to a future life of integrity and success. She however invalidates myths that relate women's expression of sexuality to immorality, as she shows how women use their sexuality to deal with life challenges and attempt to emancipate themselves from such predicament. Lois (in *Murder in Majengo*) has learnt to accept her situation and attempts to get out of it. She says:

Why shouldn't I upset anyone I please? Do you think I have to mind my manners with a houseful of Majengo tarts? And I am a secondary student. Victoria explained to me a long time ago that I had to keep my distance from them. I don't blame her for what happened in the past, but that's not the way I want to live or the way she wants me to. Victoria knows times are changing – you wait and see. (p. 113).

Through Lois, we see the determination of women to make things right. Lois finds herself alone in a harsh environment with a myriad of challenges for the teenage girl that she is. Her ability to conquer is an indication of the power that lies within. She rejects several offers for sexual escapades in exchange of the money she so desperately needs to pay her school fees. Living in a brothel in the absence of her mother, her ability to manoeuvre through the hurdles illustrates how women can maintain moral standards.

Lois' determination to live a different life from her mother's is an indicator of hope that such a label of a prostitute will not follow her. She has to compromise her integrity by

lying about her relationship with Obonyo, her benefactor. This concurs with Barry's (1996) claim that the inherent immorality of prostitution destroys the dignity of all women. The introduction of her teacher, Ms Vera Willet, to the scene is a short reprieve for her, as she temporarily takes up the role of a maid while Obonyo's sexual interest shifts to Vera. Ms. Willet's dignity is already compromised by virtue of being a woman. Ms. Willet begins to understand the myriad of challenges Lois is trying to cover under her lies, and she is determined to save her.

Women are able to win the trust of powerful men and have become informants aiding their criminal activities. Victoria's sexual power enables her interact with influential politicians such as Wasere who need her help to escape prosecution. Feminine power, in Victoria's case, is not limited to her ability to attract men but also her acquired skill of extracting money from them. Victoria for one had hidden Wasere and arranged for his escape. The brothel turns out to be a place not only for sexual escapades but also a hiding place for criminals as well as a centre of power for women. Victoria becomes more and more powerful and dependable as "the eyes and ears of a whole urban district and had great men briefly at her beck and call..." (p. 58). The information Victoria possesses empowers her, besides her sexual encounters. She remembers these times as 'her days of power'. She however does not regret her decision to start a new life altogether. She ponders:

Did any of the men she had used in the days of her power really know who she was? Did they know why she was like this? She had cut herself off from the old identities... (p. 59).

At the same time, women engage in criminal activities to gain more and more power, 'using men in their power'. Victoria is also said to have procured a dead man's identity card for a young man who had recently come out of prison and finding it hard to get a

job (p. 59). Yet, she experiences the strongest sense of potency when her pregnancy begins to show. In this, Macgoye celebrates motherhood as the most valuable expression of the power of womanhood. While Victoria's pregnancy results from prostitution, her decision to keep and value it is a representation of holistic view of feminism, implying that women should strive to preserve their womanhood regardless of their circumstances.

Ogola, in *I Swear by Apollo*, also deals with moral responsibility, focusing on the failed parenting by John Courtney. Johnny harbours bitterness. She illustrates the damage this irresponsibility can cause. Johnnie laments: "But why doesn't he come just once to see us? It is killing me. It has probably killed my sister already" (p. 28). Ogola shows how Wandia has managed to cover up this missing link. She is so reasonable in her guidance. Her strength and wisdom is contrasted with Courtney's seeming lack of concern for his children.

'You are a man now, Johnny, and it is unworthy of a man first of all to make such rash judgment without bothering to get sufficient facts; for example, he could be dead. Secondly, I think you are having a rather unmanly attack of self-pity.' She was a very understanding and gentle person, but she was known to absolutely loathe whining and whiners – she dealt with such persons with a curtness bordering on rudeness. She herself possessed the tensile strength of steel and had the peculiarly feminine virtue of durability to an extraordinary degree. (p. 29).

Ogola's narrative strategy in *I Swear by Apollo* focuses on individual characters in relation to the rest. She dedicates each chapter to specific characters, describing their innermost feelings and experiences. She portrays the western understanding of African sexuality and through Courtney illustrates the impact of myths on sexuality in the context of a mixed-race relationship. Commons (1993) says this concerning African sexuality:

Rather than being a characteristic of African cultures, sexual obsession was a reflection of the repressed sexuality of the British. By describing the African as a lascivious beast, the Victorians could distance themselves from the 'savage' while indulging in forbidden fantasies. More importantly, by laying the blame for lust on women alone, colonizers made themselves blameless for their own sexual relations with African women (p. 4).

From this description, Commons shows how myths on sexuality are created to label Africans as savages while the British continue to exploit them breaking all taboos that forbid such sexual engagement with 'savage' subjects. In the same manner, Ogola's focus on John Courtney's life reveals the circumstances that led to the disintegration of his family. The resentment his son harbours against him is due to the reasonable labelling of him as blameless, yet he abandoned his children when they needed him most. Ironically, he is utterly destroyed by his love for Becky, rather than hatred for her. In spite of her carefree attitude, he describes Becky as "the beautiful woman who had made him want to make his home". The kind of love he had for Becky is unique.

Ogola describes:

He had loved her perhaps more than one should love another human being, with his entire being. But in his heart he had suspected that she really did not belong to him or to anyone else for that matter. She was one of those people who belonged entirely to themselves, for the simple reason that they could, apparently, only love one person and that person was basically their own self. (p. 98).

This description of Becky's self-centeredness should absolve Courtney of irresponsibility for his family. He loved her in a kind of self-destructive way. Ogola shows that, besides Becky's betrayal, Courtney loved her and wanted to take his parental responsibility. She describes:

Without bitterness, he could still remember the pain of her betrayal and the casual way in which it had been done, but nothing could really justify the way he had abandoned his children. He had wanted to come – oh how often he had wanted to come, especially when he had heard that she had died, and in such a terrible way too. But somehow his relationship with

her had left him feeling like a maimed bird – with only one wing and therefore unable to fly. (p. 98).

Courtney's love for Becky is so strong that it makes him helpless, though he wants to take responsibility for his children. Ogola describes his feeling 'like a maimed bird'. This form of imagery describes the power of women's sexuality – how it can strip men of their power making them desperately in pursuit of women. When he comes back, Courtney hopes to correct his past mistakes and reclaim his position as a father. I take note of the role Sybil plays in this reconciliation. Ogola proves wrong myths that show women as enemies of themselves. Sybil appreciates Becky's exotic beauty without jealousy although she is not as beautiful, and encourages John to reconnect with his children. She is very welcoming and supportive of the duo. She encourages Courtney:

... You will have to go and see the children, if you can call them that. Try to bring them back with you if they are willing. I would love to meet them. (p. 102).

Becky and Sybil are described as different; the former preoccupied by her sexuality and the latter her creativity and art. This notwithstanding, Courtney finds his life complete with the women who are conveniently undemanding.

Ogola concludes the novel in a kind of a narrative closing formula indicating a life lived 'happily ever after'. The ultimate success in achieving a strong family, Johnny and Alicia married and living happily, with their father and stepmother back in their lives. All these are shown as the effort of Wandia, the legendary woman. The strength of the women in the text cannot be underestimated, and is the driving force behind the success and unity of the family.

3.5 Conclusion

The postcolonial situation in Kenya, as expressed by Macgoye and Ogola in their texts, poses many challenges that necessitate a re-evaluation of gender myths to avail equal opportunities for men and women. Having gone through a season of physical, social and emotional turmoil, Africans find a new sense of identity out of their desire for freedom. Alongside this, gender roles have been redefined, yet at the same time it is evident that some aspects of traditional culture still persist. By shifting their characters from rural to urban setting, Ogola and Macgoye allow for a new way of life, while their characters are still conscious of traditional myths that remind them of their cultural roots. This illustrates the fluidity of myth with regard to the nature of postcolonial cultural identities. In the novels, they demonstrate Foucault's argument that power is not wielded at all, but is expressed in various ways, each body being a potential vehicle of power.

I Swear by Apollo is Ogola's project indicating her desire to achieve morality in family and profession, a desire for love, dedication and genuine concern and understanding of one another. Her focus on individual characters goes beyond personal/private lives to their profession. While she portrays women of excellence, she shows that gender is not a matter of contest, but appreciates the strength and contribution of womanhood in achieving a desirable all-inclusive society. By handling her characters individually, she shows the need to consider the prevailing situations and thus become considerate, not passing judgment on one's acquisition of ideal manhood or womanhood. Through the text, Ogola shows the value of humanity and morality as more significant than gender considerations.

Macgoye, on the other hand, focuses on reconsideration of sexuality, also absolving women from myths that brand them evil with regard to their social orientations especially prostitution. She indicates the ability of women to rise up from the place of being objects of power, to becoming vehicles of power and earning respect in society. From the two authors, it is clear that gender myths have been maliciously appropriated against women, but they have managed to extricate themselves and start a new life altogether. They are shown as capable of total independence, focus, leadership and success at the level of family and society. They illustrate that traditional myths have been rendered powerless by many factors such as location, religion, education and other forms of empowerment that accords women opportunities for self-discovery outside the confines of myths that defined their being.

CHAPTER FOUR

**RETHINKING MYTH AS A DETERMINANT OF GENDER-POWER
RELATIONS IN MARGARET OGOLA'S *PLACE OF DESTINY* AND
MARJORIE MACGOYE'S *CHIRA***

4.1 Introduction

This chapter interrogates myth as a means of determining gender identity and performance. It does so by rethinking/considering new ways through which contested gender myths can be interpreted in view of the modern society. It also attempts to examine the lenses through which mythic interpretations are made; and how such points of view present ambivalent ideologies concerning gender. Considering this problematic (re)presentation of gender relations, the chapter examines Ogola and Macgoye's fictional expression of ambivalent scenarios as well, where modernity (attempting to contest gender myths), meets with tradition (where cultural myths are revered).

The chapter examines how Ogola and Macgoye grapple with the problematic representations of gender relations in a background of Christian and Luo traditional religious beliefs that are in contest. At the same time, modern science and technology have taken centre stage attempting to provide solutions to life threatening terminal illnesses such as cancer and HIV/AIDs, which subvert traditional gender relations, permeating social, economic, political and religious aspects of life. All these spheres present the possibility of a new outlook to the essence of life, in recognition and appreciation of social change that initiates the necessity to rethink gender myths.

I therefore reflect on the dominant myths deployed to establish gender hierarchies as presented in not only in *Place of Destiny* and *Chira* by Ogola and Macgoye respectively, but also provide a retrospect on the authors' presentation of the same in

the texts discussed in chapters two and three. Such a reflection authenticates the two authors' vision on gender relations, as it enables us consider how new myths are deployed to re-imagine, destabilize, debunk and unsettle gender myths that subordinate one gender over the other. Ogola's *Place of Destiny* and Macgoye's *Chira* specifically seek to answer such questions as: How do gender myths perpetrating gender differentiation permeate through social, economic, political and religious spheres of life from traditional to modern society? What other forms of social pressure or new myths displace traditional gender myths? What new approaches to gender-power relations do Ogola and Macgoye envisage in their writing?

4.2 Re-thinking Gender: The Dilemma of Gender Identity and Roles

My reading of Ogola and Macgoye's *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, respectively, resonates with what Mallan and Mallan (2009) observe as dilemmas that arise from the contradictions and tensions between traditional gendered subject positions and new gender relations, and the dilemmas that emerge with respect to sexual difference. These contradictions necessitate consideration of other possibilities or alternative ways of reading myth in the novels. The novels, located in a modern society with changing cultural trends, highlight the authors' thoughts on gender signification and performance in view of the emerging cultural trends. My focus is on how the authors exemplify the problematic representation of gender-power relations within family and the marketplace. Butler's politics of rethinking performative re-signification challenges normative determinations of gender. She maintains that:

A commitment to identity, one which considers the content of categories such as sex, gender and sexuality to be self-evident and unambiguous, will inevitably deny the complex reality of people's lives and the impure histories of political struggle (Butler, 1990, p. 19).

Butler acknowledges the ambiguity that undoes fixed gender roles and identities constructed by myth as obvious/unquestionable truths. The present-day realities are ridden with complexities owing to different circumstances that demand flexibility in their approach. Myths perpetrating fixed gender identities and roles no longer hold due to their inadequacies in addressing contemporary/emerging trends of life.

Ogola and Macgoye in *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, respectively, present scenarios that necessitate a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles and pre-determined identity. Their novels highlight consistent marginalization of claims on gender identity, which have been historically formed and narrativized as myth which, as Barthes (1972) points out, appears and disappears yet informs gender-power relations all the way to the present society. There are significant connections between the past and the present cultural thought, enhanced by different forms of mythic expressions. In *Chira*, for instance, Macgoye constructs Samuel as a character who is conscious of his culturally ascribed identity although his cousin Gabriel finds his rather passive character impractical. Ogola's old Magu also performs the aggressive version of masculinity, which necessitates his family to devise ways of bearing with his excesses. The language used in the novels constructs situations that necessitate individuals to act in rather unusual, but creative ways.

I recognize the significance of myth in linking the past and the present, and reiterate Tsaaio's (2013) argument for critical discourses of myth through history, linking the past with the future. He asserts his personal engagement with myth thus:

I playfully engage myth and the mythic in the African imagination not as an end in itself but as a means to foregrounding its interminable and indeterminate intersections with modernity. In some regressive critical discourses, myth has been constituted as a frozen and monumentalized cultural event which bears no relevance to the historical present. The

critical strategy here is to re/present myth as a cultural stasis which belongs to prehistory. However, myth participates in active and dynamic dimensions in re/engaging and re/visioning present and future history, even as it is rooted in past history. In myth therefore resides the presence of the past in the present and in the future. This is what endows myth with dynamism, freshness and currency in the relentless kinesis of history (Tsaaior, 2013, p. xix).

The African imaginary, as relates to critical gender discourses is created and presented in the fictional text in a way that portrays dynamism, which Tsaaior describes as interminable and indeterminate. I also acknowledge what he identifies as active and dynamic dimensions of myth, linking the past with the present and the future as endless and uncertain. This explains my engagement in a deconstructive analysis of the literary presentation of such concerns, which points out possible creative approaches to gender concerns.

In my reading of *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, I locate a critical voice that deconstructs the grand narrative of traditional gender roles and identities, presenting some underlying, emerging facts which castigate the appropriation of such myths that are responsible for gender differentiation. The novels are located in a modern society with unique challenges ranging from social, economic to spiritual matters. Macgoye's Gabriel is struggling to meet the demands of urban life, as well as fulfil his responsibilities as the family's breadwinner. Ogola's Mama Igana also has to bear with a life of destitution having gotten pregnant and lost her opportunity for a better life. The authors highlight these realities in a way that enables us as readers ponder reflexively on the practicality of gender myths which limit individuals' engagement with them. Narrating fiction, therefore, is a complex process that does not simply reflect the reality of life. In the process of this reflection, the author contemplates on the implications of that 'reality' and acts on it sometimes by creatively providing suggestive overtures.

From the narratives, I interrogate myths narrated to enhance gender differentiation and rigid/ structured identities within family and the marketplace. The presentation of unique challenges facing the modern society necessitates varied approaches to gender-power hierarchies, in order to allow for men and women engage in practical ways of tackling them. Consistent marginalization of gender identities narrativized and entrenched in traditional cultures results in some setbacks in the contemporary society. Ogola and Macgoye demonstrate this challenge in their narration of the events in *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, respectively. From the events in their fiction, there is evidence of significant connections between the traditional past and the present; demonstrated through verbalization of myth. Of a greater significance to this study are the gaps witnessed in the attempt to appropriate traditional gender myths in the contemporary society.

The connections between the past and the present, however, do not simply portend challenges with the presence of myth, but point towards the tendency of myth to permeate through aspects of social life, not just as destructive but also in a creative way. The mutational/fluid nature of myth in itself is retrospective, as new myths counter older ones in an attempt to explain the current scenarios. Amor, in *Place of Destiny* (p. 19), for instance, reflects on her childhood experience where she and her sister would be allowed to rest only on Sundays because her mother was a Christian. The rest of the days were without rest for the girls who had to juggle between school work and endless house chores. Meanwhile, their brothers were lazing in the cattle grazing fields. She describes the kind of work assigned to men as ‘real work’ as myth has it, regardless of how unproductive it may seem. Women’s labour was not recognized, however essential and creative it was. This kind of myth is challenged/ destabilized in the narrative when

women end up as responsible and successful career personalities, while some of the men become miserable despite their gendered sense of entitlement to privileges. Such a scenario presenting instability of myth then is challenging, as myth becomes insufficient, just as language is limited in giving an accurate interpretation of gender concerns. Butler (2004) argues for the need to evaluate gender myths thus:

... To a certain extent, sexuality establishes us as outside of ourselves; we are motivated by an elsewhere whose full meaning and purpose we cannot definitely establish. This is only because sexuality is one way cultural meanings are carried, through both the operation of norms and the peripheral modes of their undoing (p. 15).

Butler's argument points towards the power of myth in the creation of a gendered self -characterized by lack of concrete awareness of the self. The power of myth that constructs the particular gender and its identity supersedes the individual's present realities thus undoing the same ideally constructed gender. The individual is placed under duress by the myth he/she cannot fathom but which is deemed to make cultural sense. Macgoye describes such a scenario in *Chira*:

In some ways, father gave an example of traditional living. His food was always served first. Women in the house, whether related or not, scuttled to obey his orders. Only his age mates could suggest a course of action to him. But since no one crossed him, this example did not give any safe guide to the limits of his authority. (p. 35).

Gabriel's father, in this case exercises obscure authority since the strict observation of myths that presents normative gendered behaviour denies him the chance to exercise this authority.

As indicated in the earlier chapters, Ogola and Macgoye focus on the role of family in socializing individuals to their culturally determined gender roles and responsibilities. In my reading of *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, I recognize the authors' engrossment with the functionality of family in the contemporary scenario. Of particular interest is

parental responsibility; the archetypal essence of fatherhood and/or motherhood which is deconstructed in light of the challenges of contemporary life.

Ogola conceptualizes family as a unit, with a man (father/ husband) as the head. She explores how men perform this culturally assigned role, and the implications of their performance. Her presentation of Igana Mago's grandfather (in *Place of Destiny*) who is an extremist patriarch is an indicator of the archetypal African manhood, an outright dictatorial ruler of his household who exudes his masculinity in its excesses. His wife is completely lost in the shadow of his power. The contrast described illustrates a clear demarcation of gender roles and identities:

Perhaps things would have been different if her mother had shown some spine in at least trying to regulate the balance of power within the family. However her father was the ultimate despot, the absolute and unquestioned monarch. He was not only above the law, he was the law itself. Her mother on the other hand was a timid mouse at the periphery of existence whose use had ended with her capacity to bear children... (p. 11).

The contrast provided in this description indicates the extremes of gender differentiation. While the patriarch wields absolute power over his family, his wife is the object of his masculine aggression. My observation here is that myths assigning power to men are manipulated to enhance masculine authority, albeit most times being excessive. The author's comment on the necessity of balance of power gives impetus to my argument: for a functional and successful family, balance of power is mandatory.

The father performs his masculinity through extreme aggression, which unfortunately becomes detrimental to his family. 'Restrictive masculinities' and their associated norms are often rigid and promote inflexible notions and expectations of what it means to be a 'real man'. His insatiable desire for money makes him humiliate his potential

son-in-law. He despises the young man because he is poor. Waling (2019) observes that:

Individuals who successfully live up to hegemonic ideals enjoy more power in society, thus generating a power imbalance between men and women and among men themselves (p. 2).

The imbalance of power in this case not only denies his daughter an opportunity for marriage but also becomes an insult to other forms of masculine expression.

Macgoye's men display their leadership differently. Life in the village is more of communal while in the city, men prefer to keep their wives away in the village due to the socio-economic constraints that characterize city life. The expression of patriarchal authority witnessed through Ogola's old Magu, who is the epitome of patriarchy is challenged by the prevailing economic conditions in Macgoye's Chira. Macgoye uses these conditions to justify the men's failure to perform this kind of archetypal manhood. Lack of economic power, for instance, strips Gabriel of his patriarchal authority as he shifts his attention away from his family and focuses on his own survival. He is unable to go home on several occasions (does not even manage to attend Josefina's burial) due to financial constraints:

Gabriel heard of Josefina's death when Rachel wrote to ask him for new shoes for school. He sighed. Of course, they had had heavy expenses, burying Sammy and getting what treatment they saw fit for him... (p.51)

I also point out the contribution of women to the imbalance of power, by supporting hegemonic ideals. The kind of support here may be a result of unconsciously performing gender myths that normalize feminine subjectivity to male dominance, as well as general acceptance of ingrained mythic ideals of African femininity. The African perspective assigned the role of childbearing to women, which is a biological

function, but the women themselves get fully engrossed in this responsibility as their duty at the expense of any other. In the context of the narrative, in *Place of Destiny*, such myths are consequential in their restrictive nature.

Ogola communicates the need for women to rise up and engage in the balance of power in order to have effective, functional families. Continued upholding of 'status quo' in the interest of 'peace', as suggested by traditional gender myths, has grave consequences. In this case, the old woman (Mrs. Magu) carries some blame for failing to regulate power in her family. Ogola highlights a necessary paradigm shift: women need to be active participants in providing leadership, power and control in the family. Her eldest daughter also does not make things any better. Ogola describes:

Her oldest of the three was a girl who had perfected the art of survival by causing no ripples and being as invisible and as inconsequential as a shadow, but she lived a quiet but rich life within herself, far below the surface where no one could find it and destroy her slowly growing sense of self... (p. 11).

Macgoye's women in *Chira* do not attempt to challenge patriarchal authority and power. She constructs majority of her women as dependent of men, and seem to be satisfied with their duties as housewives, girlfriends and mothers. The consequence of women's detachment or rather absolute submission to patriarchal authority is underscored:

Only once did Otish remember his mother attempting to argue. This was over the necessity of taking her sister's child, who was visiting them, to hospital. But in fact the child's elder brother arrived in time unexpectedly and took her away, so the battle was not fought out. The child died the next month. (p. 35).

This unfortunate incident of negligence costs a life, yet Otish's mother does not assert her position with regard to the wellbeing of her sister's child in her custody. A man's word is final regardless of its consequences. This finality is not necessarily true and

Butler argues that identity categories assigning such authority are fictional products of these regimes of power/ knowledge or power/discourse (Butler, 1990, p. xi).

The myth of money (wealth) and power attracts women to men, regardless of their awareness of other relationships (formal or informal) the men are in. Many of them, for instance, stick to Rocky, who is not only polygamous but is also known to have many girlfriends, including his secretary. The women are not as aggressive and progressive as Ogola's female characters in *Place of Destiny*. They appear satisfied with having a man who looks after their welfare. Since the women are mainly dependent on men for provision, there is no much confrontation and any interest in leadership monopolized by men.

Ogola's *Place of Destiny* critiques the extremes of patriarchal authority by presenting conflicting scenarios of failed and achieved masculinity. Despite the seemingly successful exercise of power and control of the old Magu's family, the result is pathetic: the family ends up disintegrated. This is an illustration of failed masculinity (excessive power and control in this case is counterproductive). It is also an expression of the different forms of power expressed in different ways that should be recognized. As Foucault (1972) posits, power is everywhere. The assumption of absolute power is a fallacy, challenged by the showing up of countering forces which may be momentarily suppressed. The women for instance exercise power of their bodies to counter the dominant patriarchal authority in a subtle way. Igana Magu's first daughter (as described in Ogola's *Place of Destiny*) has withdrawn to herself in a way that appears as a weakness on the surface, paving way for patriarchal authority to take charge. This myth of absolute patriarchal authority is not entirely true: in her 'submission' she gains indestructible power leading to her self-discovery and peace.

Macgoye also expresses the kind of power women exude in a subtle way, albeit their limited empowerment. Their performance of womanhood, in the guise of ‘the weaker sex’, provides them the opportunity to exercise the power within them. Discourses around wooing women for marriage, and the mystery of motherhood construct myths that in a way elevate womanhood. While the author appreciates power in the unknown essence of womanhood, there is also power in secret knowledge conveyed through myth. Macgoye puts it:

... It was secret knowledge in Sam’s mother that made her feared and so often favored. It was money hidden away that had enabled one uncle to qualify quietly as a land surveyor and marry a hospital nurse, no less. There was some power in those people that they kept to themselves, heedless of your admiration. The Ethiopian neighbor always served a boiled egg when eating with strangers, to avert the evil eye. It symbolized something impenetrable, the yolk enclosed within like a baby not yet showing in his mother’s womb... (p. 10).

From the above excerpt, Macgoye illustrates that myths about the unknown connote suspicion – so much that one must serve boiled egg to avert evil eye (p. 10). Such forms of knowledge contained in such superstitions create the truth, although Foucault (1972) admits that such ‘truth’ is neither true nor false – in other words, the created truth is myth. It is believed that the surveyor has successfully married a nurse because he has money. Yet, this is a myth comparable to the eating of boiled egg believed to avert evil cannot be proved as effective, though generally believed and practiced as the truth. The use of symbolism (egg) in this case reflects the mystery and the protective power of a woman.

Macgoye also indicates the inconsistency of gender myths in the contemporary urban society. While some men in the modern (urban) world would love the privilege of marriage accorded by tradition (where women serve their husbands by performing household chores among other ‘wifely duties’), there are other concerns that come with

it. Women are becoming more inquisitive, intruding and demanding. She expresses this concern further:

“But if she stays there all day in a tiny room, what does she do? She knows just what is in my pockets. She asks why I’m late home. She gets upset if I spend a night out. She wants clothes for the baby and sugar to make tea for the neighbors. Suppose the child cries all night or messes up the bed...” (p. 8-9).

Macgoye’s presentation in the discussion above demonstrates a challenge to the traditional myth of marriage, where a wife is said to have ‘gone to cook’. Traditionally, this duty of preparing meals is primary for every wife (p. 8-9). In the modern context, however, Samuel expresses yet another counter-myth. There is an implication of women’s power over men in marriage – a way of control by women that he describes as ‘...hanging over your shoulder and telling you to do this or that’ (p.7). This is an indication of modern women who are able to assert themselves and speak out their rights – and they are viewed as a threat by men. Power and control within family in the cosmopolitan urban setting is not a men’s preserve. Men are clearly not comfortable in this new arrangement. This attitude results from the socio-economic pressures of urban life. Samuel comments:

“Well, Otish, this is your place, eh? Your *simba*. In the town you can really feel you’re going it alone, man. Too bad to have to cook for yourself. On the other hand, it is good no one’s hanging over your shoulder and telling you to do this or that.” (p. 7).

From this comment, Macgoye brings out the irony of marriage/family commitment for the urbanites who are struggling to make ends meet. Samuel’s traditionalist perspective makes him a bit reserved concerning any responsibility that is deemed as feminine. This conversation suggests another counter myth of marriage as a burden and a possible infringement of freedom enjoyed by bachelors. From the traditional perspective, marriage frees men from other duties; so, men look forward to it. I identify two

conflicting myths here: marriage as a convenience, and marriage as a responsibility. Individuals are in dilemma concerning marriage engagement in the city. Life in the village (which I consider more traditional) is communal and one does not necessarily have to bear the burden of family welfare alone. Marriage is communal as well. Obura, for instance, cannot bring his wife to stay with him in Nairobi and says this about it:

“That is so. I could kick my room-mate out, of course. But what about my dad? He wanted mother to have some help at home, you see. And he felt I wasn’t looking after my share of the ground. What sort of marriage would he call it if I took her away?”

“What sort of marriage would she call it if you leave her there? This is not the traditional way.” (p. 70 - 71)

There is a clear moral dilemma between sticking to the traditional way and accepting the change that has come with modernity. Obura is torn between respecting traditions and moving on with life as it comes. He recognizes that his wife does not solely belong to him; she has a responsibility towards his father as well. This belief also frees him from individual responsibility of catering for his wife’s needs.

4.3 Economic Power as an Antithesis of Masculine Image and Responsibility in Margaret Ogola’s *Place of Destiny* and Marjorie Macgoye’s *Chira*

Connell (2014, p. 9) in recognition of the diversity of masculinities highlights that men are not a homogenous group and masculinities are not a ‘fixed historical entity’. Connell’s comment implies some underlying awareness that masculinity has various shades; the European perspective expressed through intelligence, quick wit, power and action. The African perspective, Connell describes, was characterized by stupidity, dullness and inertness, total lack of power and apparent unreliability. These two perspectives of masculinity are illustrated in Ogola and Macgoye’s *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, respectively. While Ogola’s men exhibit traits of the European model,

Macgoye's Samuel and Otieno exemplify the African version with evidence of passivity to some extent. The men do not play out their masculinity so openly as compared to Ogola's male characters. In this case, Macgoye expresses doubts on the authority of men over women.

In recognition of the changing times, Macgoye presents men who are struggling to meet the demands of life. Due to economic challenges, coupled with religious beliefs that confront traditional myths, she illustrates how men who are the breadwinners in their families grapple with the obligation to meet the needs of their families. The men in Macgoye's *Chira* are preoccupied in finding work and earning money to support not only their immediate but also extended families.

Ogola also uses her narrative in *Place of Destiny* to highlight the construction of masculinity based on one's economic status. She portrays how myths on masculinity require men to wield power and control, which is facilitated by wealth. Men play power on themselves, with the desire to become more masculine through acquisition of power and control. In Ogola's *Place of Destiny*, money is a tool used to gain/enhance power which can be exerted against men or women. Igana Mago's teenage father for instance is humiliated when he shows up to take responsibility of the pregnancy, just because he is a 'nobody'. In this discourse, myths on economic power supersede biological parenting. Ogola describes:

... but he being a young man of some reasonable amount of mettle had taken his miserable life into his hands and had traveled a considerable distance to take responsibility for the action of his one errant spermatozoon. The girl saw him coming through her window and while her love for him surged again within her (for which woman does not love a brave man) she feared for him – a fear which was soon confirmed by the sound of the fierce exchange coming from the sitting room. This was soon followed by the sight of the boy fleeing from the compound with the gardener and the cook, both armed to the teeth with the various

implements of their previously peaceful trades, in hot pursuit. Her father, from his vantage point on the veranda, meanwhile vented his spleen by hurling a string of unprintable epithets at the boy's retreating back – prominent among which were those related to the boy's penurious state in life and his general lack of financial substance (p. 11).

There are two myths on masculinity in conflict here: courage and responsibility versus aggression and wealth. The second version seems to override the first in this case: Igana Mago's grandfather takes pride in his wealth, and in his aggression humiliates the courageous responsible young man. The decision by the young man to flee is not necessarily an indicator of fear or defeat. Although he understands the gravity of his defeatist demeanour, myths of power and wealth are so real in this context. The old man prominently mortifies the boy for his poverty. He is momentarily enthralled by the whole incident, having used his workers to emasculate their fellow man, chasing him away like a dog.

Ogola celebrates the first version of masculinity: courage and responsibility as opposed to the idolization of power and money. She describes how the girl's love for her courageous boyfriend surges on her sight of him, and confirms in her authorial intrusion: '(for which woman does not love a brave man)' (p. 11). She celebrates love, bravery and responsibility as necessary components of a successful family. She critiques the commoditization of women, who should ideally get married to rich men to maintain status quo and the glorious family name. The girl is said to have refused to procure an abortion not only because she had truly loved, but also as a way of 'grim rebellion towards her upbringing where everything was only valued for utilitarian and material reasons and the one true God was money' (p. 11).

This extreme materialism as an image of masculinity is questioned. I engage Butler's (1990) interrogation of the extent to which an individual can assume to constitute oneself to question extreme materialism as an image of ideal masculinity. In considering the extent to which actions are determined for individuals, I recognize the significance of their place within language and convention. Symbolic order plays a key role in enhancing forms of subjectivity: a linguistic creation of the systems of signs and conventions that determine what is perceived as reality. Igana Mago's mother's rebellion towards her upbringing where money is idolized above all else is justified by rethinking the efficacy of the parallel between love and money.

Macgoye's presentation of Samuel, Gabriel and Obura in *Chira* also underscores the significance of economic power as an expression of masculinity. Gabriel expresses the pressure on him to cater for his siblings and parents. Much as his parents are not very demanding, he feels the pressure out of this obligation, and opts to avoid going home as much as possible. Gabriel and Samuel can barely afford to meet their responsibilities, and consequently have 'delayed' taking wives and assuming family leadership. This notwithstanding, they are still expected to be responsible for their extended families' welfare.

Marriage, for both Ogola and Macgoye, is something to look forward to, but Gabriel in Macgoye's *Chira*, considers the burden it implies having a wife in Nairobi. At the same time, the women in Nairobi are eager to find husbands. Macgoye's description in *Chira* portrays family financial obligations as falling entirely on the man; wives are only there to take care of household chores. Due to economic challenges in the city, men depict an escapist attitude: they neither want to participate in domestic chores, nor the responsibility of taking care of wives. Although Macgoye does not emphasize

commitment to marriage the way Ogola does, the need for a girl is evident – not really marriage. There is a general desire for sexual conquest and avoidance of responsibility among men. She describes:

If he could afford one of the full-blown women who did not mind being seen, that would be a different matter. And getting married, building a house at home, sending money regularly and having children brought up whom you would see only on an occasional visit that was not to be thought of yet. (p. 21).

This description reveals intricacies related to expectations, roles and responsibilities of men in the context of economic challenges. Macgoye's description implies a displacement of myths attaching primary significance to marriage, as the realities of economic challenges, coupled with many demands and men's responsibilities for their extended families take centre stage.

I argue that money and power may be deleterious to gender relations within a family if not properly handled. From Ogola's narrative in *Place of Destiny*, it is evident that the old man's relentless pursuit for and misuse of money and power is destructive to his miserable family. Towards the end of the novel when he comes to see his grandson Dr. Igana, he is described as '...rather stooped, sad and hard-bitten old man...' This kind of appearance is a clear indicator that '...he has paid heavily for whatever sins he has committed in the span of his life'. He seems to be in denial as 'He oozes bitterness, defeat and impotent anger from every pore' (p. 187).

The old man is regretful, yet there is still a tone of pride in his confession. He says:

“I know my son Magu has told you a lot of nonsense,” spits out the old man. “But believe me all my wealth is the fruit of my ingenuity and hard work, and my ability to out-think my opponents and rivals. I may be good at nothing else, but I know money and how to make it work to one's advantage...” (p. 189).

From the old man's tone here, there is little indication of remorse. He still finds pride in his actions that have led to what he considers success for a man. He uses money as a tool for power and control, and he has clearly manipulated its power for his own desired end. In expressing his masculinity, it is a reference point in competition to outdo his rivals and exercise his power over others. His insatiable greed to be a man of power and substance by performing his masculinity is comparable to Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, who goes to great lengths to earn titles. He has to kill his favourite adopted son, Ikemefuna, against his wish, to safeguard his image not to be considered a coward and consequently lose the title he has worked so hard to earn. He has also earned respect out of his hard work and general display of masculinity (including unreasonable aggression against his wives and adopted son). Similar to the old man in Ogola's *Place of Destiny*, things indeed fall apart for him.

As mentioned before, Macgoye's female characters are less confrontational to masculine power and control. Instead, they yield to patriarchal authority:

“...But Josefina's father was furious with Mama Samuel, and said she was not to set foot in his homestead again. I think he was right, not because he is my own kinsman, but because a wrong has been done, whatever name you call it by. And even the mother of the girl, Mama Samuel's own sister, did not try to oppose her husband. She had suffered enough grief without having to put up with the harsh voices and the little secret packets as well. It was enough.” (p. 57).

I observe some reluctance to find the truth behind Mama Samuel's crime here. More significant is her sister's complacency towards her husband's judgmental attitude and hostility towards Mama Samuel. From Macgoye's description, she is avoiding the 'harsh voices' and the 'little secret packets'. She understands well the power of myth conveyed in such discourse and the futility of any attempt to exonerate her sister from claims of evil involvement. In this case, gender myths which elevate men as the

unquestioned decision makers have the power to strip off feminine power to challenge patriarchal authority.

Ogola and Macgoye in *Place of Destiny* and *Chira* respectively interrogate the role of myths in gender-power relations determining identity and performance of gender. Their narratives are about individuals facing sickness and imminent death so in retrospect critique the relevance of gender considerations in such scenarios. Barthes (1972) says this about myth:

However paradoxical it may seem, myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear. There is no latency of the concept in relation to the form: there is no need of an unconscious in order to explain myth (p. 121).

The idea that myth distorts implies a possibility of manipulation of myth to suit one's desired end. In the patriarchal societies fictionalized in *Chira* and *Place of Destiny*, the authors demonstrate the necessity to reconsider the nature of gender considerations in view of how myth positions men and women. While Ogola uses a female protagonist (Amor Lore) to explore female gender struggles and exploits, Macgoye shows the struggle of men to meet their obligations. Ogola places her female characters at the forefront as the ones championing gender equality at the marketplace, often depicting them as bravely overcoming the hurdles placed by myth on their way to realizing gender equity. Macgoye on the other hand does not portray women as potential vehicles of power; rather they are passive objects of power while the men actively face and many times also attempt to escape life's challenges.

The novel *Chira* begins with Samuel meeting his cousin Gabriel Otieno in Nairobi where he has gone to see his mother who is admitted in hospital suffering from a mysterious illness. Besides this discourse on disease and myths around it, Macgoye

brings on board discourses on gender identity and performance in response to such challenges and contexts. Gabriel is mesmerized by Samuel's passivity in spite of such difficult times. Macgoye describes:

Gabriel was wakeful not because it was particularly cold or uncomfortable but because of the events of the day. He could not quite understand the passivity of Sam's life, reabsorbed in the slow processes of the homestead after getting to Form Two. He could not make out what was really wrong with his aunt or what kind of medicine she was demanding from her paternal home. Sam himself, a visitor giving status to the host, was an intrusion of the home- world in this temporary resting place where people from different communities moved in an enforced intimacy, paying respects to one another's mothers, passing one another's doors circumspectly, wary of the younger womenfolk, receiving the indiscriminate reverence and requests of the children... (p. 9).

The contrast between Samuel and Gabriel's view of life reflects the existing tension between traditional conservative and the modern pragmatic approach. Samuel's care-free attitude is perceived as rather irresponsible for a man. While Gabriel should enjoy the privilege of being a host, the arrival of his cousin is an inconvenience in his little personal space. The urban cosmopolitan context also presents an 'enforced intimacy' which on one side makes for all cultures to coexist, but on the other intrudes on individuals' privacy. This kind of enforcement of urban culture complicates individuals' adaptation of modern culture and retention of their individual identity.

Macgoye's portrayal of this kind 'enforced intimacy' justifies the necessity of evaluating gender myths which associate fulfilled womanhood or manhood with family roles and responsibilities. Mackie, Moneti, Shakya and Denny (2015, p. 11) argue that norms of masculinities can be understood as collectively shared social norms and social expectations about what men and boys do and what they ought to do.

She demonstrates the need to evaluate circumstances surrounding an individual's decision to start a family. There is a shift from the traditional view of family that Macgoye expresses in *Coming to Birth* – where individuals are keen in starting a family as evidence of fulfilled manhood and womanhood. Mackie *et al.* (2015) further observe that some of the social practices that hold social norms in place are the approval or disapproval of others, which may include sanctions such as labelling, gossip, intimidation or violence. Although these forms of social control vary from forceful to emotional strategies, the main idea is how repetitive social practice of what is believed to be true of either gender has the power to hold the social fabric of the society. The changing trend in fatherhood roles in *Chira* is occasioned by prevailing circumstances that necessitate separation of families. As shown from the description above, there is a heavy responsibility falling on men – building a house at home, sending money regularly – while women do not seem to carry such a burden. Men are out there (in this case Gabriel is in Nairobi) trying to find a livelihood but can hardly fend for himself. For Macgoye, marriage is a step one looks forward to, but is only barred by the prevailing economic reality.

4.4 Efficacy of Gender-Power Balance in Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny*

I point out Ogola's presentation of two counter-narratives to elucidate the practicality and efficiency of balanced gender-power relations in the contemporary society. Besides the story of Igana Mago's background, the major narrative in the novel is Amor Lore's journey of sickness and her ultimate death. Within this story of pain, endurance and love, Ogola presents balanced gender-power relationships both in the family and the marketplace.

Ogola's fictionalization of a modern woman through Amor Lore in *Place of Destiny* projects her vision of gender equity in society. She locates the woman in a place of partnership with the man. The woman is clearly not a helpless subject, although Ogola appreciates that from the cultural background, this is not her expected place. Her husband, Mwaghera, acknowledges that she has changed him significantly – particularly due to her sense of independence. He says:

In such a relationship, I suppose it would be entirely possible for a man, especially an African man, born, bred and raised to expect dependency to the point of subservience in a woman, to feel excluded or un-needed. I may have suffered from this syndrome for a short while, using my work as an excuse to absent myself from the dynamics of family life in order to hurt and annoy her for being so independent. I soon realized however that that which she needed from me, which only I could give, was key to her well-being and was necessary for her deepest sense of who she was. I have therefore made it my sacred duty always to make her feel special and cherished. It has been rewarding in that the one place where I am confident that I am the absolute potentate is within the realm of her heart. There I have no doubt that I hold complete sway. (p. 136).

Essentially, Ogola indicates a convergence of traditional and contemporary myths on gender identity and roles. This implies that myths are ever present. Mwaghera here still holds on to the traditional ideology that a woman should be dependent on a man. However, he realizes that a woman simply needs to be loved. Within the seeming independence of a woman is a strong desire for self-assurance and identity affirmed by a husband's love. In this case there is no contention concerning roles and responsibilities of men and women since these duties may overlap. Barthes (1972) accounts for such dynamic nature of myth thus:

...There is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, and disappear completely. And it is precisely because they are historical that history can very easily suppress them (p. 120).

In acknowledgement of Barthes description of the indeterminate nature of myth, I recognize Ogola's representation of this fluidity in the novel, as she allows Mwaghera

shift back and forth with regard to his position as a man and the practicality of his marital relationship. She uses Mwaghera's reflection above to acknowledge the power of the cultural myth of men's superiority that permeates even in the modern context, while appreciating the modernist view of life that allows for gender complementarities. By pointing out that there is something a wife needs that only the husband can give, such realization casts away fear of negative gender-power play or competition within a family. It also gives assurance that the position of power a man so desires is secured within such considerate and symbiotic relationships. Both genders need each other.

At the same time, Ogola recognizes the leadership role provided by a man in a family/marriage relationship. In contrast to the failed aggressive masculinity demonstrated by the old Magu in the parallel narrative presented in the novel, the ideal relationship that accords leadership comes with responsibility – the husband/ father is there to give support. The Amor that has all along appeared so strong and independent is now broken and needs the emotional support of her husband. She ponders: 'Why is that man never there when I need him?' (p. 26)

Ogola uses the two parallel narratives (Amor Lore's and Igana Mago's) to illustrate the consequences of unbalanced gender-power relations within a family. Amor's family thrives in spite of sickness and death, because there is mutual love and responsibility among all family members. Igana Mago's family fails because the old man (the family patriarch) is the centre of power who wields all authority. From this parallel, Ogola exemplifies how relations of power are constructed and maintained by granting normality, rationality and naturalness to the dominant half of any binary, and in contrast, how the subordinate subject is marked as other, as lacking, as not rational. She

suggests the necessity of keeping family welfare above any individualistic desire for power and control.

Ogola fictionalizes the displacement of myths that elevate male superiority from her construction of determined female characters. Right from *The River and the Source*, *I Swear by Apollo* and *Place of Destiny*, she illustrates a seemingly naturalized responsibility of women in the affairs of their families, which corresponds to their traditional role as homemakers. The feminist struggle to emancipate women from this traditional role in this case seems unpredictable, as myths assigning gender roles still have power to ‘naturalize’ the performance of gender. Barthes (1972) explains this immortality of myth:

One believes that meaning is going to die, but it is a death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment. The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment. Above all, it must be able to hide there (p. 118).

From the narrative in *Place of Destiny*, Ogola illuminates this kind of waning of the power of myth; the instability and insufficient potency in myths that privilege male gender as ultimate heirs of their families’ estate. In her first novel, *The River and the Source*, Ogola indicates inheritance solely intended for the male child, while girls are limited to playing their subordinate role within the home as they wait to be eventually married off. Akoko is at pains to ensure the inheritance of her grandson is safeguarded, since her daughters cannot partake of it. In *Place of Destiny*, Ogola demonstrates the new scenario where gender myths allocating inheritance solely to the male gender as untenable. Igana Mago’s only son has not managed to keep a family nor children who

would have been the 'legitimate' heirs of his father's estate. In his confession, he explains his predicament:

... My father was, and still is a very twisted sort of person and started mistreating my wife's older son – the one she came with when she married me – a nice young boy really – as far as I was concerned. Now my wife loved that boy a lot and did not take kindly to his being treated like a second-class citizen. One day my father pushed the boy because he refused to give his baby brother some toy that he had conjured up with his own ingenuity because he had none while his brother, who was only two, had a roomful of expensive toys which he was forbidden to touch though he was older and would have made much better use of them. He fell, and as bad luck would have it, he broke his arm. All hell broke loose when his mother heard his wails of agony (p. 183).

The description of irresponsible fatherhood given here explains the consequences of thoughtlessly performing masculinity as stipulated by gender myths in the society. The younger Magu, for instance, is emasculated when he allows his father to have control over his family while he watches from a distance. From his attitude, Ogola underlines the danger of irresponsible fatherhood, one that is self-seeking instead of being futuristic. His description of the occurrence portrays emotional detachment as well as lack of involvement in his family's affairs, because of his low self-esteem and drunkenness occasioned by his father's overbearing attitude. Hooks (2000), commenting on such behaviour and attitude, says:

Most men find it difficult to be patriarchs'. She adds that 'Most men are disturbed by hatred and fear of women, by male violence against women, even the men who perpetuate this violence – so they find it easier to passively support male domination even when they know in their minds and hearts that it is wrong (p. ix).

From this failed fatherhood, Ogola presents motherhood as a counter narrative of leadership role. Magu's wife is not timid but demonstrates not only the power of motherhood (the ability to not only conceive and bear children) but the protective power of motherhood. This is a form of power that gives Magu's wife the audacity to challenge patriarchal power over her:

My father tried his usual bluster when my wife declared that she was leaving with all her children. By this time both my mother and I had rushed up and were trying to calm her down, but she was beside herself – what with all the mistreatment the older boy had already received and my father’s constant abusiveness towards anyone not strong enough to defend themselves (p. 183).

When the wife is accused of having married Magu because of his wealth, and the old man insisting that she can go but cannot take away the children, she challenges him with frightening truth: “And what makes you think they are your grandchildren anyway? Your son is sterile and couldn’t father a child if his life depended on it...” (p. 183). This confession, as described by Magu above, is like a death sentence. The myth is that manhood entails the ability to sire children. This is so dire in the African context, so much that sterility is equated to death.

Magu attempts in vain to convince her to stay, claiming fatherhood over the children. This brings forth a complex issue on parenthood: that which places women at the place of power with regard to procreation. Ownership of children, and consequently the right to family progression and inheritance, is not the preserve of men. He confesses:

Sterility in a man is worse than death in all Africa and it is a fact that women have found a subterfuge from time immemorial to cover up the shame of it all for their husbands. Anything just so one can be called the father of so and so. One must however tread carefully around a woman who wields that kind of sword over a man’s head... (p. 184).

Magu’s comments show the value attached to fatherhood in the African context. Of significance here is the role women play in enhancing masculinity in the African context: they go to any lengths to protect the image of manhood/ego of their husbands by giving them children through any possible means. Ogola highlights how men emasculate themselves, while women boldly protect their interests and those of their children. Igana Magu’s wife scornfully comments about him: “You fool. Why do you

let your father treat you like a dog? Even if you can take it, I can't have it anymore" (p. 184). The role of women in holding the family together is underscored here.

Failure to secure paternity over the children is described as having left him devastated. Ogola explains: "I knew then what it was like to be one of the living dead" (p. 184). This statement points out the value of children to a man; as well as the importance of self-image and value children accord a man. Issues to do with children are more emotive than wealth; the ability to sire children is a weightier matter in the display of one's manhood. The comparison of this state to a 'living dead' is a pointer to the invaluable role of fatherhood in enhancing masculinity. This role, however, does not override the role of motherhood. Both parents are equal partners in bearing and raising children.

Similar to the events in *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo*, Ogola ascribes success in family functionality and progress to women in *Place of Destiny*. Amor Lore is portrayed almost in the same legendary image of Akoko and Wandia in the two novels respectively. She displays unique courage and astute leadership. Amor seamlessly complements her husband's leadership in his absence. The success of this complementary role is portrayed in the triumph of the family in the face of the challenge of sickness and death.

Ogola dramatizes the outcome of imbalance of power through the parallel narrative of the Magu family in *Place of Destiny*. The result of this family disintegration is devastating. The younger Magu explains:

My wife left and never returned. Even though my father urged me to remarry, I was most reluctant to undergo such embarrassment ever again.

We both gradually sank into a fitting state of chronic misery – with my father drinking like a fish and me smoking like a chimney. My mother

moved around like a wisp of a ghost only kept alive by the hope of one day seeing her lost grandchildren. A decade and a half passed in this state of semi-suspended animation ... (p. 185).

Through this narration, the author allows us to experience the emotional trauma the entire family goes through. The injury caused on Magu's ego makes him reluctant to remarry, while his parents have missed the opportunity of seeing their precious grandchildren. Rigid gender myths which encourage this kind of aggression, and the resultant depression on individuals are narrated by the author to make us rethink the appropriation of such myths in performing gender roles. The end does not justify the means. Okpewho (2009) says:

... The ideal procedure in mythmaking is for the narrator to empathize as much as possible the experiences that he transmits; he persistently claims that interlocution with the world of his tale which he tends to grudge his audience (p. 88).

Ogola portrays an image of women who are independent and responsible. Women are more concerned with family than their own self-image or ego. Amor's daughter, Imani, for instance, decides to work her way up on her own, in her personal journey of self-empowerment. She narrates:

Imani calls once a month to let us know that she is alive and well. She has never asked for financial or any other kind of assistance. She does not call more frequently lest I imagine that she is crumbling for a combination of loneliness and poverty, teachers' salaries being what they are. She knows that I'm a great believer in giving children their freedom to discover the world of reality as soon as they possibly can. And what is a greater reality than having to make your own money, and then God forbid, having to spend it all by yourself on all your fondest needs, your every want and your wildest desires – all without parental interference of any kind? (p. 66)

Through the narrative, the author deconstructs the grand narratives of gender differentiation and identity within family and the marketplace. The presentation of unique challenges such as poverty and disease facing the modern society necessitates

varied approaches to gender-power hierarchies, in order to allow for men and women engage in practical ways of tackling them. The consistent marginalization of gender identities narrativized and entrenched in traditional cultures brings major set-backs in the modern society. From the events in the novel, there is evidence of significant connections between the traditional past and the present; presented through verbalization of myth.

In *Place of Destiny*, Ogola brings out the expression of masculine ego which, according to Jung (1980), results from cumulative experiences of all previous generations; a form of psychological inheritance, sharing a similar brain structure and responding to similar situations in a similar way since such responses are inherited. True to Jung's argument, it is interesting to note that Mwaghera, in spite of his exposure to other cultures as an educated and well exposed professor of History, still harbours such gender myths that make him feel threatened by his wife Amor's financial independence. Through this character's self-reflection, Ogola shows the need to shift from such myths and to objectively consider the prevailing social reality. Mwaghera reflects:

But I eventually managed to shed this pre-historic approach to marriage especially when I realize and accept that for her, making money is not a power-game and neither is it primarily the game for her. The real game for her is running a competitive business while the passion in her life is ensuring the well-being of those she holds dear (p. 136).

From this reflection, Ogola also demonstrates how new myths, new approaches of gender-power relationships displace the old myths of male supremacy. In the world of Mwaghera, as portrayed in this fiction, there is a level of acceptance of gender equality that allows for healthy competition in the interest of everyone involved.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, Ogburn focuses on the role of family and marriage relationships in highlighting myths influencing gender-power play. Her first novel (*The River and the Source*) demonstrates how the family is a socializing agent to the culturally ascribed gender roles and responsibilities. At the same time, the novel portrays limitations or challenges brought about by such myths which majorly enhance male superiority. My reading of *Place of Destiny* in this chapter gives an alternative outlook of gender-power relations in marriage and family. As Ogburn indicates in the excerpt above, there is the recognition that a marriage relationship is not primarily about positions of influence. Through Mwachera's confession, all players focus on ensuring the well-being of those held dear. Therefore, the need to ensure each partner is empowered to realize his/her potential for the interest of the entire family is placed on the forefront.

Ogburn also indicates a paradigm shift from myths that assign collective identity to focus on individual objective experience. From the excerpt for instance, Mwachera singles out Amor's unique trait; pointing out that for her, making money is not a game. While Ogburn would validate Mwachera's fears in the narrative (from traditional gender myth which advocates male superiority), she allows us not only to appreciate the dynamics of culture that calls for adaptation, but also allows us to appreciate the reality of the power of such myth. Amor also ponders about her achievements and challenges she has faced and how these experiences have shaped her identity. She explains:

This is not just because I have had deep and fulfilling relationships, nor is it because I have made money from a successful though stressful career. Certainly it is not because I have known both the joys and the occasional anguish of motherhood. Especially as my own mother assures me – with some rather unholy glee, particularly when I'm not being docile, obedient and subject to her every whim – that the various elements of my diverse brood are exactly the way I was at their age. Nor have I had a good life

because I have known how to confuse who I am with what I am or worse, what I have. (p. 18).

What Ogola lists here is what would otherwise be considered as parameters for success in the contemporary society that were my point of focus earlier in Chapters Two and Three. In this retrospection, Ogola evaluates the importance of human relationships, success in career and family. She also points out the significance of being able to distinguish, in her own words indicated above, knowing "... to confuse who I am with what I am or what I have". Self-image, self-worth is thus considered with other's opinion of who one is. Butler (1990) acknowledges that the identity of women, as the subject of gender politics is problematic. Being a woman or female is a troublesome kind of signification as it is a relational term which connotes subjectivity. Butler (1990) argues that:

There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of 'the subject' as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women (p. 1).

Ogola uses Amor Lore's self-awareness to interrogate myths on women subjectivity. In her case, Butler's questioning of the viability of the subject as a candidate for liberation is best illustrated. She does not need to be liberated in any way. Her self-awareness frees her in the mind, making her more independent. Her husband also understands his role in making her a fulfilled woman: to make her feel special and cherished. Amor is contented and celebrates her womanhood, in spite of the glaring stereotyping of women. Ogola thus emphasizes on knowledge of the self, particularly the self-assurance that comes with a celebrated identity.

4.5 Reconsidering Inconsistencies in Gender Myths Relating to Morality and Humanity in Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny* and Macgoye's *Chira*

Butler (2004) interrogates the essence of humanity in relation to gender discourses. She acknowledges that as a community, we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies. She argues:

I would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life? (p. 17-18)

Ogola and Macgoye's *Place of Destiny* and *Chira*, respectively, are narratives of pain and suffering which reveal aspects of morality and humanity in society. Their fiction reflects on the implications of myths regarding socio-cultural, economic and religious realities which attempt to uphold status quo and patriarchal order. The two novels present narratives of suffering: physical, emotional and economic challenges. Out of all these, the authors describe how individuals grapple with life challenges and the response of those around them. Macgoye's *Chira* is basically a story of men and women attempting to live normal lives amidst the tragedies brought about by the 'wasting disease' popularly known and interpreted as 'chira'. Besides this pandemic is the social pressure of urban life amidst struggle for survival in challenging economic times. Ogola's *Place of Destiny* is also a story of pain and suffering from poverty and disease.

Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny* focuses on family as central unit in society. The novel interweaves the narrative of destitution and struggle for survival by an unnamed woman, only known to be Mama Igana (later revealed to be Warigia) born to a wealthy family, alongside a story of successful family and career progression of Amor Lore. The author narrates experiences of the two women, describing the challenges they go through and their strategies for survival. Igana Mago's mother's life is full of pain and

suffering due to rejection by her father. The author does not give her a name at the beginning of her story – an indication of her ‘worthlessness’. Her story opens the novel, with the author narrating her predicament as a consequence to her transgression – getting caught in the transgression of immorality by getting pregnant. As I have argued in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, Ogola highlights the value of morality and indicates that transgression has consequences. From the beginning of the novel, the author gives ‘a prelude of things to come’ (which is the title of the chapter), foregrounding the ultimate end of Igana Mago’s mother who has been forced into prostitution for survival. She alludes to the Bible, quoting the scripture: ‘For this reason, the prostitutes enter the kingdom of heaven before you’ (cf. *Mt* 21:31).

This allusion castigates myths that are punitive and judgmental towards the vulnerable women. Ogola highlights the nature of interpretive bias that is quick to condemn women as irresponsible prostitutes while men are free to explore their sexuality as a celebrated expression of their manhood. Ogola describes Igana Mago’s grandparents’ response to his mother’s predicament as follows:

Her mother was speechless with terror, a not unusual state of affairs. Her father was simply beside himself. This despite the fact that it was common knowledge that he had several mistresses and was himself a renowned member of that caricature of fatherhood, the Sugar Daddy club that was responsible for the material well-being of several school girls of not more or less his daughter’s age. (p. 10).

This description highlights inconsistencies in myths determining gender identity and relationships between men and women. Since she has become pregnant, Igana Mago’s mother is labelled a ‘prostitute’. Ogola points out the irony of such myths that are judgmental, pointing out clearly that the crime here is ‘getting caught’, with the evidence of pregnancy. Men in the sugar-daddy club do not take responsibility for their actions because they ‘never get caught’, and because they have the power of money

with which they can not only get away with any misdeeds but also find many willing girls who become victims of their sexual exploitation. Such willingness, as illustrated in the novel, results from the destitution of many women who are simply trying to survive. The author further narrates:

He on the other hand was an accomplished predator in the heartless marketplace for purveyance of tender female flesh. Yet he held her guilty but himself blameless. (p. 10).

Ogola's narration of the circumstances leading to the predicament of women witnessed here is moralistic, as she clearly describes what passes as moral or immoral, and the repercussions of transgression. The irony in this case is that men go scot-free of any judgment, while women are seen as 'prostitutes' regardless of the circumstances surrounding their involvement in the trade. Distinctions between morality and immorality are all functions of myth, which indiscriminately justifies gender-instigated attitudes towards actions of men and women.

This kind of variance is also witnessed in Macgoye's *Chira*. The myth 'chira' downplays the consequences of irresponsible/sporadic sexual escapades witnessed in the text. There is no escalation of consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviour/individual responsibility for action. Samuel and Josefina's illicit sexual relationship which leads to their infection with HIV/AIDS is downplayed by the myth 'chira'. While their sexual relationship is rumoured and known, the discourse around their predicament is the myth of possibly eating of 'red fish'. Such discourses in a way help individuals 'get away' with their sins. Samuel confesses:

"...It's true – only for God's sake don't tell my mom or your mom – when I was living at my auntie's I did have a go at Josefina, just like they say: my mother's sister's daughter, my own sister as near as may be. They say they know I did it but they still maintain in public that I didn't, so if I confess they would lose face, you see. No, she didn't get pregnant. And I

did tried (sic) to be careful. But, don't you see, it's not natural – *chira, chira, chira.*” (p. 50).

As mentioned earlier in reference to Ogola's *Place of Destiny*, it appears transgression happens only if one 'gets caught'. It is also evident from such kind of judgment that only women get caught. Macgoye's scenario presented here complicates this moralistic myth: HIV/AIDS is not gender-discriminatory. Although Josefina may have been lucky not to get pregnant, the infection with HIV/AIDS presents a worse scenario. In this case, the girl is not the only victim: both are infected and eventually succumb to the disease. However, while Samuel falls sick obviously with the disease, the society is quick to absolve him by constructing other myths around his condition. Public discourses are tailored to protect the image of a man while women are easily condemned as immoral. The discourse around Josefina's death is condemnatory. Mama Fibi says: 'But if there is chira, the girl is already open, is it not so? And these days what girl...?' (p. 56).

Macgoye fictionalizes how myths, appearing as 'truths', can be manipulated to advantage one gender at the expense of another. Discouraging myth can construct certain 'truths' which bear grave consequences. Mama Samuel, for instance, blames her sister for not performing a cleansing ceremony when Josefina began to grow sick. It is known to some elders that Samuel brought the disease (misused the girl) but his mother insists she will bring proof. Myth has no proof, and Macgoye, in her authorial intrusion, expresses: "I do not know what kind of proof she wanted to bring – a medicine for swearing or perhaps a person possessed by spirits to give a testimony. No one could understand it..." (p. 56-57). This reflects the elusive nature of myth, what Lincoln (1989) refers to as a 'false belief' that may have some truth in it.

While Ogola takes on the moralistic tone, Macgoye's attitude towards morality/immorality appears complacent. In *Chira* for instance, there is no individual responsibility for one's actions as such. Actually, there are no clear-cut myths highlighting any demarcation of what is considered a transgression and what is not. Having located most of the action in Nairobi, a locale where traditional gender myths are losing grip on individuals, Macgoye portrays rather casual relationships which do not appear so consequential. Unlike Ogola, she does not focus much on the functionality of marriage relationships. Consequently, casual sexual relationships appear as the norm, with individuals savouring moments of pleasure albeit the grievous consequences of HIV/AIDS dubbed '*chira*'.

Ogola and Macgoye also highlight various forms of social pressure occasioned by modern life which carries with it many expectations. In acknowledgement of Foucault's (1975) proposition of manipulation of legitimate power to dominate, exploit, criminalize and punish, I also observe the power of culture over the people, which in essence seems to criminalize and punish individuals in view of their adaptation to modern life. Otieno, in *Chira*, is quite overstretched having to show some care/concern for his sick aunt and cousin – for this is expected of any man in his culture. However, life in Nairobi is taking a toll on him (especially due to economic challenges). All these factors notwithstanding, he has to meet the obligations of taking care of his relations.

Similarly, Ogola, in *Place of Destiny*, points out non-sensible criminalization of motherhood when Igana Mago's mother is disowned by her father and later exploited by her aunt, on account of having a baby out of wedlock. In spite of her sense of responsibility, she ends up a destitute in the streets. Myths that bedevil child bearing out of wedlock subject her to so much suffering and rejection, while the father of the

child goes scot-free. The need for moral obligation in parenting is apparent from the outcome of this criminalization. Igana Mago's mother dies and no one can even trace her grave if ever she was buried. The success of her son, Igana Mago, as a doctor puts the family in a moral dilemma: while they need him back as a member of the family, they lack moral authority to do so. Having behaved inhumanly towards Igana's mother at the time he needed her most, it is not easy to convince him to join the family now that he does not need them as much as they need him.

Ogola highlights the reality facing mothers who are battling with life challenges in order to afford the basic necessities for their children. Many of them resort to prostitution as the last option for survival. By narrating the circumstances that drive Igana Mago's mother to prostitution, Ogola seems to absolve her from any harsh judgment against her actions, although she does not advocate for the trade. She draws our attention to the necessity to critique discourses on sexuality against cultural backgrounds of myths that consider it a taboo. Macgoye also acknowledges such taboos: "Oh, shut your mouth," protested the woman walking beside him. "These are not the things to talk about in public. Embarrassing, I call it." (p. 33).

Despite the tenacity of such myths, Ogola foreshadows how such 'taboos' are detrimental to women, who not only face the challenges of motherhood, but are also denied opportunities for self-empowerment. The girl's dreams and future career opportunities are simply destroyed because of the pregnancy. Her education ends abruptly and she is met with hostility both at her home and at her aunt's place where she is treated like a slave.

Margaret Ogola also presents us with an opportunity to further interrogate these gender myths relating to humanity by focusing on the family/marriage as an institution. She uses her narrative to illustrate the fluidity of myths that define marriage. On the one hand, it has become a space for asserting patriarchal authority and gaining economic power. On the other hand, it is a place of companionship and comfort, where the need for each partner is apparent in the face of life's challenges such as sickness. The image of the Magu family is contrasted with Mwaghera's in order to illustrate the significance of humanity in exercising authority at the family level. Igana Mago's mother's childhood and upbringing is narrated in a more detailed way, to give us a feel of what it means to grow up as a woman both under a male chauvinistic father and in an individualistic society.

The myth that money answers everything is countered by the incongruity presented in Igana Mago's confession towards the end of the novel. The old man has gone after money and fame at the expense of his family's welfare. His personal weaknesses are downplayed by his pride and apparent success resulting from material possession. He does not display any value for human dignity. In his attempt to shower gifts to his son's 'biological' child, his outright mistreatment and discrimination against the older sibling affects the mother who eventually decides to quit the marriage. Amongst wealth, fame and children, she makes a moral decision: she chooses her own children as opposed to her father-in-law who is only interested in safeguarding his wealth. She is accused of being a whore having borne the first child outside wedlock, but she confidently confesses the other children do not belong to the family as well:

“These are not your son's children. Their father is my older son's father. I wanted to spare your son shame but this family is cursed. No one can help you. I will be leaving immediately with all my children. Keep your money and see if it will buy you children...” (p. 184).

Myths on morality are brought to the fore: the society is quick to judge women as immoral and that men do them 'favour' by giving them a better life in marriage. Through the presentation of this dilemma where wealth is pitted against offspring, it is evident that there is irrevocable value of children that cannot be quantified. Ogola also highlights the value of children as an issue almost affecting Akoko in *The River and the Source*. Men are willing to do all it takes to have children who they seem to regard as more valuable than the mothers who bring them to life. In fact, the value of women is pegged more on motherhood than wifehood. Magu is humbly seeking to make restitution if only he can keep the children but his pleas prove futile because his wife can no longer withstand her father-in-law's excessive aggression.

The role of women in enhancing men's masculinity is underscored in this episode. Magu's wife admits that she has engaged in the 'immoral' act in order to spare her husband the shame of being branded as 'not man enough' due to his sterility. The woman is presented as a protective figure, protecting both her husband and children. This is a case of reversed roles: where Mago has failed to protect his family from his unreasonably aggressive father, his wife has protected the children and their 'father's' image/ego. She confidently acknowledges the accusation against her and is unapologetic since the end of her actions has justified the means. Thus, the question we are left to ponder is: what is morality/immorality? The failure to protect innocent children and secure their future is an expression of lack of moral conscience. It is worse than the 'immorality' of getting pregnant by a different man with the aim of protecting the image of one's husband. The dilemma presented by this scenario makes us rethink gender myths, specifically the necessity to re-evaluate restrictive demarcations of gender roles and responsibilities in the interest of humanity.

4.6 Conclusion

Gender and power discourses are rife in the contemporary society with regard to the challenges of life facing individuals. Ogola and Macgoye use fiction to illustrate the need to reconsider the place of gender myths and their practicality in the face of life-threatening challenges. They point out the need to shift from communal conception of gender (fixed identity/archetype constructed by myth) to a place where humanity is placed at the core of existence. As discussed in this chapter, socio-cultural, economic and religious realities challenge myths which still permeate through the contemporary society. Gender identity and roles therefore need to be redefined.

Place of Destiny and *Chira* by Ogola and Macgoye respectively are narratives of suffering, struggle for survival and resilience. From the novels, life is given a subjective rendition of suffering due to rejection, sickness and poverty. These factors point out the necessity to re-evaluate the essence of life in relation to gender considerations. The authors are alive to the reality of tradition and contemporary issues, and they creatively manoeuvre their imaginative representation of gender-power relations in a practical way. Okpewho (2009) explains:

...it has become clear that, however deep the regard he feels for the tradition and however strong the urge to preserve it, the contemporary African writer can scarcely resist the desire to incorporate certain elements (ideas, techniques etc) of the modern culture into the material of an old tale if only as a way of stressing the immanence of the old ways. Conversely, however concentratedly he looks at the problems and needs of contemporary society, the writer does endeavour to hark back at traditional mythology even if to show up its inadequacies within the modern context (p. 215).

From the foregoing, I conclude that myth tends to define or influence our day to day lives. Due to its fluidity, people seem to consciously or unconsciously modify myth to fit into their new experiences. Ogola and Macgoye are concerned with the practicality

of gender myths in the contemporary society. *Place of Destiny* and *Chira* highlight the detriment of gender-power imbalance in family while also showcasing the efficacy of gender-power balance. In this case, the authors present the need to re-evaluate inadequacies of myth as a mode of conceptualizing gender-power relations. This is because the contemporary society presents scenarios which may render them obsolete hence displaced by new myths which come into play.

The chapter has also illustrated how myth in its fluidity and instability transcends its own created binaries and redefines relationships. The authors underscore the need for humanity and morality in relationships. Money and power, on the one hand, are an expression of masculine authority, but their misuse, on the other hand, can also lead to the negation of masculine identity. In this case, the authors elucidate the unreliability of myth in defining gender roles and identities, celebrating humanity above gender concerns. Their fictionalization of pain, suffering and imminent end of life accords us the opportunity to rethink the place of gender. From their fiction, gender should be secondary to humanity. They celebrate fulfilling relationships in which individuals seek the knowledge and love often provided within the family context.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

5.1 Conclusion

This chapter offers a general review on the critical discussions undertaken in the earlier chapters of the study. Since the thesis was concerned with a critical analysis of the nature of myth within gender discourses as presented by Ogola and Macgoye in their selected fiction, the chapter presents findings on how the authors engage with myth as a determinant of gender identity and performance. Besides the examination of the nature and functions of myths that inform gender construction in the texts studied, the research also sought to interrogate how the authors deconstruct gender myths. It further explored the authors' visions in respect to the mythic and gender imagination in the texts.

The first objective of this research was to examine the nature and functions of myths that inform gender construction. In analysing the nature of myth, the study was guided majorly by Roland Barthes' mythological ideas, which in essence explain the nature of myth and its function in discourse. Essentially, Barthes describes myth as a form of communication, a message. In this analysis, the research focused on the ways in which gender ideologies are communicated/perpetrated by way of belief. It also looked at the nature of the message communicated – the kind of gender ideologies perpetrated by myth, which tend to elevate one gender at the expense of another.

The findings of this research indicate that myth and history are inseparable. Rather, they operate in a kind of symbiotic relationship. One of the major functions of myth is to construct and maintain a society's history. The narratives in the novels fictionalize ideological responses to historical moments/ events, and in the process expose the

interconnection between history and myth. The struggle for gender equity is a generational one, and as shown from the findings, it forms part of the nation's history. As the authors give a historical account of the nation, they foreground gender struggles within this grand narrative: the emancipation of the female gender from rigid patriarchal structures. The construction of 'epic' characters such as Akoko in *The River and the Source* endears readers to their gender and the struggle for emancipation way back from pre-colonial times. This mythic narrative is representative of the actual gender struggle by many women at the time.

While fiction (*The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* exemplified in this research) can construct characters that are epic in their gesturing and posturing, the infusion of actual historical characters creates a point of convergence of myth and fact, making the fictional narrative admissible as a historical material. Within these narratives, the authors are able to give women some space in the otherwise male-dominated career and political space. Fiction thus becomes an avenue of (de)constructing gender myths, by creating situations that highlight their fluid nature and how in this nature can be manipulated to enhance desired ideologies. Cultural/mythic narratives are deployed as ideological projects to highlight gender-power discourses, and perpetrate gender ideologies.

Using Barthes' theoretical standpoint, which considers myth as a language, the study confirmed the symbolic nature of the language of myth. Findings indicate that myth uses language in a special way to communicate the message in an endearing manner. Ogola and Macgoye use proverbs, allusions, similes, metaphors and symbolism to communicate the message conveyed by myth. The authors also manipulate plot in their constructed stories to create events that are realistic, presenting admissible truths.

From the novels, it is evident that language is deployed in a special way to construct identity. Gender identity as defined by culture is based on the archetype, whose image/identity is described only by language. Using Butler's ideas on gender performativity that describes gender as an act of sorts: a performance, the study considered how individuals work towards achieving mythic identities of manhood/womanhood. The study confirmed that in performing their assigned gender roles, men and women's actions are motivated by an ingrained image of the archetype – which is a mythic construction defined by language. Culture propels individuals to achieve this desired end, myth acting as a form of power that compels them to comply with the societal expectations of manhood and womanhood. In other words, myths determine how gender-power relations are played out in society.

The study also exposed the significant role of myth in marriage and family. It demonstrated how family is a key player in the formulation and appropriation of myths that influence gender power play. Findings indicate that parents use myth to socialize children to their gender roles and identities by influencing their thought processes. As Barthes describes, myth is sacred - it operates by way of belief. Myth operates in such a way that people believe that the existing power structures and norms cannot be challenged. In this case, it is a powerful tool parents use to shape thoughts, beliefs, values, identity, and determine general interaction within the family and society in general. The study noted gender-based discrimination of children in the family, where boys are celebrated and accorded privileges sometimes at the expense of their female counterparts.

It was also discovered that myth provides hierarchies that determine relationships and enhance order. In patriarchal societies, myth elevates men as decision makers while

women remain subordinate. In other words, myths are tailored to enhance patriarchy and limit women's potential. Although symbolic power may encompass actions which may be injurious to social relationships, the circumstances created compel women to be more creative and assertive in response to the patriarchal power over them. Women overcome barriers placed before them as cultural myths lose grip on them. They are transformed from the helpless victims of patriarchy as they discover the power inherent in them, and become successful agents of change.

With the kind of progressive attitude illustrated by Paulina and Akoko, the authors indicate that women can empower themselves as they manage to generate their own wealth, develop confident self-presentation and thus challenge the patriarchal order. The narratives illustrate myths/ culture as a form of power over bodies, with women as objects of power (victims of patriarchy) but are also vehicles of power rarely asserted but often transferred to their male counterparts. Education and Christian religion expose the workings of these forms of power, allowing women to transform their own mindset, dealing with myths which have subjected them to self-pity, self-hate and resignation to their fate as subordinates. True emancipation of women involves their own recognition and willingness to be set free from 'false beliefs' encoded in myth, by exposing proven alternative ways of life instead of sticking to the 'acceptable ways' dictated by culture.

From the second objective, the study considered how Ogola and Macgoye use their writing to deconstruct myths perpetuated by traditional gender roles, marriage, family and sexuality. It was evident that the authors champion religion and education as major factors that catalyse paradigm shifts in attitude and conceptualization of gender and power. These factors led to a redefinition of family based on new perspectives that countered the traditional concepts. Guided by Butler's perspectives presented in

‘undoing gender’, the study considered how the authors created circumstances which pointed out the need for a shift from traditional gender norms to the actual process of normalization that may discount the very norms.

The findings recognize the dynamism inherent in the cultural conceptualization of gender, how the ‘gendered self’ is constructed, and the determination of the binaries of masculine and feminine. It concludes that the power of women’s bodies enables them to break away from the normative forces: the myths that limit their potential. The invention of science and technology enables men and women engage in varied professional fields, and women can also exercise authority and independence. Deconstruction of gender myths is therefore a contestation of patriarchal power and unanticipated female agency.

The study also identified location and culture as a major player in the (de)construction of myths regarding gender-power relations. The urban setting is a space of convergence of different cultures resulting in the displacement of the rigid cultural myths and the creation of new myths. Ogola and Macgoye go against the naturalization of culture with the shift in time and place. They demonstrate how new contexts provide amorphous identities and hybrid cultures within these spaces of power.

Discourse on sexuality was also found to be restrictive to the female gender. There are many challenges facing women in the contemporary society, which the authors fictionalize in an attempt to exonerate women from victimhood. Despite myths castigating the expression of female sexuality, such challenges compel women to disregard the ‘implications’ such as being condemned and ostracized as a ‘malaya’. The societal myth of ideal/ normative sexuality is that which leads to marriage. Due to

prevailing circumstances, women engage in other sexual relationships including prostitution as a means of survival. The authors point to the need for considering circumstances such as the motivation behind individuals' actions before making any harsh judgment. Mothers need to provide for their children at all costs, and need to be supported rather than condemned. Sexuality is a power discourse within which women can reinvent themselves as subjects rather than objects of power. The authors also present various ways in which women can make a choice of what to do with their bodies/ sexuality. These include marriage, celibacy and prostitution. Any choice is justified, although prostitution is portrayed as circumstantial. In all these scenarios, regimes of truth create myths which castigate some forms of sexuality and validate others.

Having considered the nature and function of myth, and how the authors use fiction to deconstruct the myths regarding gender, the third objective of the study was to explore Ogola and Macgoye's vision on gender myths. It appreciated the problematic representation of gender-power relations on account of the fluid nature of myth. In spite of the historical marginalization of gender identity, roles and responsibilities, the fluidity of gender myths calls for a re-evaluation of predetermined claims. Such grand narratives are contested by the gaps witnessed in an attempt to appropriate gender myths. Some gender concerns are not answered by traditional myths, neither education nor Christianity. Myth in its fluidity retrospect on these situations and as a language, finds new ways of expressing itself.

In the modern world where equal opportunities are available for all, women become successful just as men. Women can engage in business and profession without challenging men's position. There is need for a shift from gendered positions of power

and control, to focus on family responsibility as the ultimate challenge. Parenthood and family leadership must be exercised with responsibility. The expression of aggressive masculinity is injurious to family peace and prosperity. Manipulation of gender myths to enhance masculine authority is only destructive and leads to family disintegration. The study points out the continued performance of gender myths that normalize feminine subjectivity to male domination as a contribution of women to the imbalance of power in family. For functional marriages/ families, women need to rise up and engage. They should be active participants in providing leadership, power and control needed to enhance order. Gender myths which elevate men as decision makers have the power to strip off feminine power to challenge patriarchal authority. Men also may be held hostage by the power-play among themselves, owing to the ever-present fluid myths defining their masculinity. There is need for a shift from self-centred focus on masculinity to the overall good of the family.

Generally, Ogola and Macgoye are comparable in their progressive sense of experimenting and embracing 'new' cultures. They both explore relatively new cultural territories they delve into by marriage and their involvement in the marketplace. Macgoye's endeavour to fit into the Luo culture softens her approach/ view of the society's gendered cultural practices. In this case, she is less confrontational but rather more accommodative of traditional cultural practices.

Ogola on the other hand, having experienced restrictive Luo cultural myths from childhood narrates the detrimental restrictive patriarchal structures in *The River and the Source*, while exploring other possibilities as a result of encounter with other cultures. She is more assertive in her desire for agency to get women out of the rigid Luo cultural structures. She therefore plunges into the competitive world of professionalism,

irrespective of gender, race and culture. Her narratives in the three novels studied justify this paradigm shift as she creatively and imaginatively weaves her way through intricate traditional culture and its rigid structures. She illustrates the fluidity of myth and the need for agency. She empowers her women characters through knowledge of modern/ new ways, as she exposes them to formal education and employment, as well as Christian religion, which she presents as her major tools for gender agency.

Although there are slight variations in the fictional narration of gender myths from Ogola and Macgoye's perspectives, I conclude that both have a common ground as their ultimate vision is ostensibly for a functional society devoid of gender-based discrimination. From a critical reading of their works, they seem to suggest that women simply need to be given the opportunity and suitable environment where they can explore the power in womanhood. As such, women need to discover themselves and exploit their latent potential. Men on the other hand need to be free from myths appearing as 'privilege' but are apparently burdensome. The two female authors also seem to be suggesting that Myth is a manipulative tool of power and control and as such any gender considerations need to be realistic so that one gender is not advantaged at the expense of the other. Gender-power balance works for the common good of the society, particularly when morality and humanity is upheld.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Study

Mythology can be used to study politics of power in Kenya. Studies on biographies of leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga should be studied to understand their mythic imagination of power and generally the politics of nationhood and political power therein. The same can also be done on the works of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

Mythology can also be used to study inter-ethnic perceptions which are rooted in assumptions that amount to mythology. This can be done in literary and the social science fields.

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