

TALE OF KASAYA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RESILIENCE

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DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree at any other university.

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APPROVAL

This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as the university supervisors.

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on Eva Kasaya's autobiography, *Tale of Kasaya*, which was aimed to identify and then discuss the various ways that Kasaya develops the theme of resilience. The book was published in 2010 by Kwani Trust. The study was motivated by the fact that Kenya has recently witnessed a resurgence in life writing from people of different social status, including politicians, career civil servants, and businessmen. While these have generally attracted critical readerships, Eva Kasaya's *Tale of Kasaya* stands out for its simultaneous uniqueness and academic neglect. It is unique because it is written by a former house help; yet it has not, to this researcher's best knowledge, attracted any academic focus at this level, despite winning the *2011 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature*, in the Youth Category. Therefore, this study sought to fill this gap of neglect from the lower cadre by focusing on the relationship between style and the theme of resilience and the question of autobiographical authenticity. The research report begins by outlining some of the theoretical and structural characteristics of autobiography, and then provides a detailed literature review. It then focuses on the themes of resilience and authenticity. The findings are that the writer documents a number of difficult experiences that she underwent during her life as a housemaid, and shows that she overcame all those challenges with the help of some well-wishers. It seems to be the writer's argument that although challenges in life are normal, the temptation to surrender is a common thing that only the most focused individuals can survive and prosper. Therefore, people should aim to be more determined because along the ways may come a saviour of sorts, and that although some people may be malicious, some are not.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Narrating the self continues to be one of the most highly charged genres in the contemporary society and although the genre of autobiography has been for quite sometime dominated by prominent personalities such as Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father* and Wangari Mathai's *Unbowed* to mention just a few, the "down trodden" are coming up and are telling their own stories. Among the earlier writings in this latter category include Esther Awour's *My Life as a Paraplegic*, John Kiriamiti's *My Life as a Criminal* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. Kasaya's narrative falls in the latter category.

A former house-help, Eva Kasaya tells her story of how she survived many trying moments as she served many families as a househelp in a manner that many Kenyans can relate to. In her autobiography, she narrates about herself as well as giving her readers a discourse of the Nairobi City space and thus makes her biography a story of self as well as a critique of class distinction through the actions and events which happen to the individuals and also show how social and economic conditions determine a person's place in the society.

This study takes cognizance of the fact that Eva Kasaya's story elucidates a case of "double marginalization"; one, being a woman and two, a house-help. Many African communities are patriarchal in their social set-ups. The woman in these communities is relegated to a peripheral position by traditional norms which confines her matriarchal gender status and role to the background, while positioning the patriarchal role of the man on the forefront. In any undertaking, the male is normally the hero and the focal point, while the woman only serves to facilitate his success. Uwakweh (1998:9) confirms this when she says:

Gender identity and its exclusionary potentials for the female are deeply rooted in the fabric of traditional and modern African societies. Gender determines women's status, roles in the domestic/private spheres and the levels of their participation in political/public spheres. A creative writer does not write in a vacuum, he/she reflects, corrects and influences the society.

Tale of Kasaya is not just a story about the self, it makes a statement about the society's attitude towards house-helpers and about women as well.

Micere Mugo (1978:34) comments on impressions created on the mind by the writer. She cites Rider Haggard's "Gagool" in *King Solomons Mines*, as having influenced her image of an African woman in old age and how this figure of Gagool haunted her for a long time. "It is only recently," she says, "I have got over my dread and fear of old black women." Micere's sentiments are reflected in my study in terms of the impact Eva Kasaya's autobiography will have on its readers.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o also comments on the fact that the writer has the power to create an impression on the mind of the reader placing him/her in a very significant position. He underscores the role of the writer in society:

A writer is trying to persuade us, 'to make us view not only certain kind of reality, but also from a certain angle of vision...' Seen from this light, the product of the writer's pen both reflects reality and attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality. The persuasion can be a direct or indirect appeal through influencing the imaginations, feelings and actions of the recipient. (Ngugi, 1978:4)

The writer's persuasiveness is of particular interest to this study due to the influence the story may have on other house helps and other women who might have undergone harassments and intimidations including sexual abuse in the hands of cruel and treacherous men.

Ngugi Njoroge (1978) also takes an insightful look into literature as an image forming force. He reiterates that: "Literature, whether for children or adults, incorporates powerful image forming forces." Njoroge further argues that literature can "either boost or destroy image and dignity of a people." (40). However, his work does not examine how these literary works are presented, which is the focus of my study. His writings, however, gives us some insight into the role of the writer and the power of the written word. This is reflected in my work in terms of the statement Eva Kasaya's story makes on her society and how it influences the society. We get the understanding that what one reads forms an impression on his or her mind.

The term “autobiography” a person’s life story written by themselves. Scholars have offered more nuanced definitions of autobiography. For instance, Philippe Lejeune (1989) initially described the genre as the “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (4). However, looked at critically, this definition implies that in order for the reader to recognize a book as an autobiography, they would need to have extensive knowledge of the author’s life to know if the story he/she has written is a true account of their lives. Elsewhere, Eakin also critiques Lejeune’s definition by stating Lejeune does not clearly distinguish between autobiography and the autobiographical novel (Eakin 1989: viii-ix). Lejeune’s definition, therefore, is somewhat limiting, though helpful for our purpose.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

House-helps play an important role in society, where their services are much sought after, especially in urban centres, yet they are rarely appreciated. Exposing what sort of a society we live in, Eva Kasaya writes her autobiography giving a photographic portrait of her life against a backdrop of the unequal and controversial Kenyan society. Since the auto-biographer paints events without distinguishing between major and minor ones, he/she blasts own life out of the continuum of history and out of the era. The image portrayed is thus a photography of their minds, community and history seeking the forgotten and the neglected.

This study, therefore, analysed *Tale of Kasaya* by first, qualifying the events described as autobiographical and then scrutinized the book as an autobiography of resilience before outlining strategies used in establishing the authenticity of the tales.

1.2 Objectives

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To identify the characteristics of autobiography present in *Tale of Kasaya*.
- ii) To interrogate the theme of resilience in *Tale of Kasaya*.
- iii) To outline strategies of constructing authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*.

1.3 Hypothesis

This study was guided by the following assumptions:

- i) *Tale of Kasaya* fits within the boundaries of the genre of Autobiography;
- ii) *Tale of Kasaya* is an autobiography of Resilience;
- iii) *Tale of Kasaya* constructs and deconstructs Authenticity.

1.4 Justification of the Study

Since the study is dealing with painting the image of the self, I chose *Tale of Kasaya* because it is a unique autobiography. Firstly, most autobiographies are written by those who have risen to prominence; the famous, mighty and “over-achievers” telling their stories of success. I singled out *Tale of Kasaya*, since it is an autobiography that was written by the author, Eva Kasaya, when she was a house-help; a low-ranking personality in Kenyan society, and almost thought of as “a nobody” at that time. And even now, she mirrors the resilient struggles of the underdog in society and the downtrodden women and hence represents a marginalized group; the house-helps. The author, Eva Kasaya, therefore, gives voice to a group of people, mostly girls, who are abused, silenced and disenfranchised. Secondly, though scholars have looked at autobiographies, *Tale of Kasaya* has not been subjected to any critical analysis and yet it is a very relevant book addressing serious issues of abject poverty and human rights abuses.

1.5 Literature Review

Godwin Siundu in his article (2011) “Beyond Auto/Biography: Power, Politics, and Gender in Kenyan Asian Women’s Writings” reads autobiographical works from three Kenyan Asian women writers in order to show how gender lenses can reveal different versions of national political and cultural histories. Noting that history and autobiography have been male dominated domains of intellectual debates, Siundu argues first,

that Asian women writers strategically subvert existing cultural representation of the entire community in the male-authored literature and, secondly, that these works demonstrate a paradoxical tension in which women writers simultaneously disavow male-centred histories of the community while drawing on those histories to further the interests of their lot. Hence, based on these works, one notes in women-authored auto/ biographies only a marginal, tentative departure in the reading of

historical events in which the Kenyan-Asian community is implicated. This, in his view, is due to the discursive interpellation of women as doubly marginalized members of a community determined to claim its place in a country that is witnessing resurgent forms of ethno-racial self-affirmation. (2011: 118)

His ideas are relevant in discussing the subversion made by Eva Kasaya in her book in order to highlight the problems of the marginalised house helps and also radicalised the perception that autobiographies are for the high and mighty.

Eva Kasaya's *Tale of Kasaya* is a relatively new book on the literary discourse scene and no one prior to this study had written any critical work on it apart from numerous review of the book found on several blogs on the internet and by Kwani? Publishers, themselves. Therefore, this study sets the pace in as far as pouring criticism on the book is concerned. It is our appeal that more people analyse critically the book to make it more visible because it tackles serious issues affecting our lives today.

1.5.1 The Nature of Autobiography

The issue of which text is an autobiography and which one is not is a major concern in any attempt to study an autobiography. Some writers produce autobiographies which are too ideal to be true while others write fiction purporting to be autobiographies. Ideal indicators of what an autobiography include whether the work is authored by the subject of the work, whether it addresses the question of selfhood, and whether it balances facts and fiction to tell a credible story. In view of all these, Lejeune offers this widely quoted definition:

An autobiography is a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality...there must be 'identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist' (Lejeune 1982: 193).

Laura Marcus, a critic of autobiography notes that, the concept of 'intention' has persistently threaded its way through the discussions of autobiography (Marcus 1994: 3). His study guides my study in interrogating the 'intentionality' which will help the reader in making out the truth value of the text since the author is behind the text, and thus controlling its meaning.

The question of truth cannot be ignored when one sets out to read an autobiography.

Dyer argues that:

An honest self-portrait is extremely rare because a man who has reached the degree of self-consciousness presupposed by the desire to paint his own portrait has almost always also developed an ego-consciousness which paints himself painting himself, and introduces artificial highlights and dramatic shadows. (Dyer's Hand 96).

His argument guides my study in interrogating the experiences Kasaya selects to include in her autobiography and the ones she fails to include and the impact her selections have on the kind of a picture she paints. Benjamin says:

The auto-biographer, unlike the chronicler who "recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones" ("Theses" 254), blasts his life out of the continuum of history, out of the era, while "remain[ing] in control of his powers" (262). The image—a fragment arresting time, a reminder of the important in our life—helps him abandon what he calls the whore: "Once upon a time" (262).

Georg Lukács suggests that the essay and the portrait overlap in their forms of representation of the *life* of a man, or rather its illusion or impression. (Benjamin, "One-Way Street" 89). His argument imply that an autobiography is like writing photographically involving self-displaying. Related to this, Barthes insists that every photograph "testif [ies] authoritatively to the existence of what it displays" (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 87–89 – Reflections on photography). Eakin also describes this strong, direct link with "the world" as the defining feature of autobiography, which "is nothing if not a referential art" (3).

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Any scholarly work has to stem from a functional theoretical framework that helps the researcher to analyze data. Equally, any constructive criticism must proceed from a specific framework. A literary theory, according to Georg Lukács, is the body of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of literature. This implies that it is a literary theory that guides a literary study. In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" Northrop Frye says that the function of a criticism is basically "to mediate between the artist and his public" (Davis and Schleifer 542). This study was guided by the autobiographical and feminist theories.

According to Anne Sheley, different women relate to power structures differently, because the women come from different racial and class backgrounds. This is why African critics have viewed western versions of feminism as quite removed from local, African experiences and thus only remotely valuable as reading tools of African literature. This has led to an emergence of more strands of feminism, including Alice Walker's womanism, and Afro-centric readings that give credence to Kimberle Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality that suggests that women's experiences meet, interface, and divert from each other depending on positions of class, gender, race, and geography. In general, feminist criticism seeks to distinguish the female experience from the male experience. Feminist critics draw attention to the ways in which patriarchal social structures have marginalized women and male authors have misrepresented women in their portrayal of them.

Part of the interventions that women writers make undoing the damage of such marginalisation of the female gender is to retell stories of their own experiences from a woman's perspective, and to demolish the myth that there is a hierarchy of genders. In other words, the woman writer may consciously or otherwise erode the persuasive power of the ideologies of patriarchy by affirming the autonomy of a woman and fellow women, and by celebrating women's achievements even when faced with great challenges. It is against this background that one should understand works by women, including barely educated ones such as Eva Kasaya because what they capture as their experiences is beside the point of their limited education. As we indicate above, Eva Kasaya's autobiography addresses the theme of women's suffering as they struggle to fit within exploitative machineries of patriarchy and capitalism. Although the work is a personal story of resilience, it has a wider relevance because the themes and even language of expression are widely relevant to many more people.

Also noting that *Tale of Kasaya* is an autobiography, this researcher used autobiographical theories that examine the relationship between an author's work and their lives. Specifically, autobiographical theory helped this study in making statements about Eva Kasaya's life. *Tale of Kasaya* mirrors her experiences in the Kenya society.

1.7 Methodology

The study was based on a close reading of the auto-biography *Tale of Kasaya*. This was followed by an intense library research on the literature written, which is connected to autobiographies and especially biographies of resilience.

I conducted research on the internet from scholarly websites, watched Eva Kasaya's interview with Jeff Koinange on K24 TV Channel and also interviewed Eva Kasaya to get more information about her background and her motives for writing the book; and also in order to establish the authenticity of the text as embodying the autobiographical truths. Lastly, I consulted my supervisors a lot, including my fellow students and other friends who voiced their opinions on varied issues within the study.

1.7.1.Scope and Limitations

This study focused only on *Tale of Kasaya* by Eva Kasaya. Though the said text has several issues that can be discussed, the study limits itself to interrogating the theme of *Resilience, Authenticity* and *Tale of Kasaya* as an *Autobiography*. However, related texts may be referred to where necessary to provide extra-textual evidence to complement the primary text.

1.8 CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter I: Introduction

This section takes into account the general information on autobiographies and especially autobiographies written by women and marginalised groups, given that Eva Kasaya belonged to both categories. The section also highlights the literature review of scholarly works concerning *Tale of Kasaya* and further explores the synopsis of the text in question before outlining the objectives of the study and the statement of the problems under investigation.

Chapter II: Aspects of the Autobiography in *Tale of Kasaya*

This chapter assessed *Tale of Kasaya* as an autobiography to establish whether it fits the description. This was done through defining and comparing its characteristics in line with characteristics inherent in an autobiography.

Chapter III: The theme of resilience in *Tale of Kasaya*

This chapter examines the theme of resilience in the *Tale of Kasaya*.

Chapter IV: Authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*

Authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*

This chapter looked at the truthfulness or authenticity of events in tales described by the narrator/author who is also the main character in *Tale of Kasaya*. The strategies used in this case range from understanding the silences evident, verifying the historicity of some events, interviewing some of the characters mentioned and establishing the elements of subjectivity and journey motif used.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This chapter forms the overall conclusion offering a summation of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 ASPECTS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *TALE OF KASAYA*

2.1 Introduction

An autobiography draw pictures about the self. It therefore collects the experiences of the autobiographer together with the community the narrator/author comes from. It records rituals and practices of remembering all of which contribute to the preservation and relay of memory. The experiences remembered thus depends on the purpose of the remembering or the motives why remembering is done. Some writers, such as John Kiriamiti in *My Life in Crime*, produced autobiographies which were seen by some commentators to be too ideal to be true, while other writers including James Baldwin in *Go Tell it on the Mountain* render their own stories through fictional characters. Still, other writes like Vladimir Nabokov in *Lolita*, yet produce fictional works re-presented as if they were autobiographies of real character. Aware of all these possibilities, this chapter interrogates the ‘faithfulness’ of *Tale Kasaya* to the genre of autobiography.

The slippery nature of autobiography has made it difficult to offer a firm definition of the genre. Basically, ‘autobiography’ is derived from three Greek words meaning “self,” “life,” and “write.” Therefore, autobiography is a form of writing in which the writer narrates their own experiences from their subjective positions. In *Inside Out*, Stuart Bates defines autobiography as “a narrative of the past of a person by the person concerned” (Bates, 2). Linda Anderson concurs with Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as “[a] retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (Anderson 2). In Eva Kasaya’s story, Bates definition of autobiography as a genre is manifested because Kasaya the writer is also the subject of the writing. The narrative is a portrayal of Eva Kasaya's beliefs, struggles, achievements and life events as she retrieves fragments of her past. She reconstructs herself through the narrative which purports to represent that very self.

Eva Kasaya reconstructs her life beginning from 1978, when her parents were farm labourers in a coffee plantation in Thika, a town in near Nairobi. The autobiography also captures the family’s return to Kerongo Village in Western Kenya, where Kasaya

was enrolled in school. She would abandon her studies only a few years later because of inability of her parents to raise the required amounts of school fees. Unable to cope, Kasaya relocated to Nairobi at the age of sixteen, where she sought and secured employment as a house-help in various households for a period of ten years. She describes explicitly the period of her childhood to adolescence and continues all the way to when she becomes a house help and finally a tailor. She takes her readers into a journey through time and space and gives details of her life experiences as she journeys to Nairobi to seek for a better life. For Eva Kasaya, moving to Nairobi, the city of opportunities, was an eye-opening experience where she encountered pain but also experimented with decision making, including pursuit of personal pleasures.

Two strands are identified in Eva Kasaya's narrative: one relates to the reader-writer intimacy as espoused by Lejeune in *Autobiography—Theory and History of Literature*, while the second refers to subjective self-portrayal through narrative. Lejeune also thinks that "the work must implicitly state itself to be an autobiography in order to be included within the genre" (Anderson 3). *Tale of Kasaya*, by Eva Kasaya states itself an autobiography right from the title. Written by Eva Kasaya herself, the narrative reconstructs her life through memory. The title *Tale of Kasaya* provides proof of the validity of the work as an autobiography through its authorship. This assertion is echoed by James Olney who views autobiographers as "Authors who have authority over their own texts and whose writings can be read as forms of direct access to themselves" (Olney 1972: 332). Borrowing his idea, it can therefore be argued that *Tale of Kasaya* possesses an Autobiographical pact by honouring the signature, which is acknowledging that she owns and is responsible for the story which is ideally her life. Her name appearing on the cover of the text is a kind of a stamping of authority and putting her signature as a sign of identity. The author's name in the autobiography is a signifier of identity and it contributes to the autobiographer's replication of the real. According to Jennifer Muchiri, "The name itself is a kind of guarantee: it assures the reader of the authority of the writer to tell her story and promises that the reading public will find the narrative credible" (Muchiri, 31). Eva Kasaya's story reflects not only her life but also elucidates the life form of the community she hails from. The "I" in the story captures both the narrator / author and her community. She narrates how people from her village moved to Thika to look for work in the plantation. She writes:

Elkana Kagavera, the foreman was dad's neighbour back in Kerongo. A lot of people came from Maragoli to look for work, and Elkana hired them. So there were many Luhya families at Hatwara, but most of the families were Kikuyu. (Kasaya 12)

This narration gives the readers a glimpse into the community Kasaya hails from and their lives, making her autobiography a story about the self as well as a social commentary. Autobiographies thus collect the experiences of autobiographers together with the community that the narrators/authors come from.

Earlier in the book, we are thrust into a poverty-stricken neighborhood where hope is the lifeblood. Eva Kasaya describes life in Thika in the coffee plantation. She describes their household which is a representation of the other coffee pickers:

...Filling a bucket with coffee berries took two hours and paid only five shillings. Dad was paid only eight hundred shillings a month. Mum would divide the money. A portion of the money went back to Kerongo to build the house and take care of the shamba. We were poor but we were healthy, and health is what a family wished for most...Mum used firewood to cook in a makeshift kitchen outside our house. In the morning we would take tea; though sugarless at times, it had plenty of milk. If there were any leftovers from the previous night we would have them in the morning. (Kasaya 17)

Later on in the story, she would describe Nairobi and life in the city, giving the readers the city from a house help's eye and perspective. Eva Kasaya's story is thus both a deeply personal story and an emblematic of the greater society. She begins a soul-searching journey into her life against a backdrop of a society in which one's gender and social class can mean life or death; a society where class can make so much difference to how one is viewed. Her being a house-help and poor assigns her an inferior position and status in the hierarchical social setting. She is supposed to take orders without questions including when her salary is delayed. Most of her employers treat her as a third-rate material that can be used and cast away. Some of the employers sent her to fetch water late in the night, not caring what would happen to her. Young girls who are her employer's relatives, give her instructions and order her around, but she cannot object because she is a house help; low in rank. Some employers would even lock her up in the house every day when they left for work and would lock up all the food in the fridge to ensure she does not access it while they are away.

Eva Kasaya's writing is thus an exploration of the meaning of identity in the society; the class to which one belongs determines his/her identity. Eva Kasaya employs subtle shifts of settings between her rural home in Kerongo and urban life in the city of Nairobi. She is able to recreate with graphic realism a picture of life as it is with all its beauties, imperfections and ironic twists artistically giving a glimpse into the face of both human and social reality. Her story puts into practice the theory of 'locating the self' as stipulated in the writings of Janet Frame. According to Frame's theory, autobiographies should first be analysed from perspectives of identity categories such as gender, race, and nationality. Eva Kasaya's narrated self is in the context of an autobiography, demonstrates that the narrated self of autobiography is, to a large extent, instructed in society. Through the narrative, Eva Kasaya also portrays the ills in the society through her friend Dotty. Though Dotty helps her achieve her dream of going to Nairobi, she does not conform to her lifestyle. Her willingness to avail her body for financial favours reflects the infectious decay of societal morals because this habit sways Kasaya as well. For example, when both girls tell a lie to the train officials that Eva Kasaya's parents had not given her money for fare, the reader is forced to lay blame on Dotty for tricking Kasaya to snick from home and undertake an arduous journey to the city. The reader is also compelled to convict Dotty corrupting Eva Kasaya with lies because evidently, Dotty is perceived to be the evil one who leads an infectious, carefree and recklessly licentious lifestyle.

Another characteristic of an autobiography is the connection between the personal and the public. The personal in this case relates to Eva Kasaya's life as an individual, her psychological state, her family life and baggage and her aspirations as brought out in the text. The public, on the other hand, is the social environment that surrounds her in her journeys: her employers, her neighbours at home and friends who help her, and in the larger context the society that she is fighting so determinedly to succeed in. This makes *Tale of Kasaya* a social commentary. The narrative provides a graphic picture of a society ruled by selfishness and cruelty, which is vented mostly to the less fortunate members of the society.

Eva Kasaya's determination to succeed leads to the unravelling of shocking revelations about the society. When she arrives in Nairobi, Eva Kasaya shows us some of the unexpected and seemingly contradictory aspects of city life. For instance, she reveals

that skyscrapers, glamour, beautiful women, affluent life among other aspects considered to define the city are not the only aspects of city life and that there is much more simmering in the city of Nairobi. She describes Kibera as:

We had gone a short distance when I stepped on something slippery; I looked at my shoes and saw faeces. It was sickening but I didn't tell anyone and continued as if nothing had happened. The only faeces I had stepped on before was from a cow...On either side of the path were mud houses not a meter apart. Some were joined in a long row...the roofs were rusted and several were almost falling. Between the houses I saw a child defecate in front of a woman selling vegetable and fried fish. The woman continued tying the vegetables in bundles as if nothing was happening. (106)

This gives a glimpse into Eva Kasaya's shocks and disappointments at the opposite outcome of her high expectations about life in the city. The incident also shows her determination to move on despite this negative turn of events. She is clearly tormented, yet it is striking how determined she is to succeed. Her life in Nairobi is difficult. Working as a house help for ten years, she goes through physical and psychological torture in the hands of different employers who are mostly unscrupulous, merciless and abusive. Most of the employers did not pay her well for her chores. She does not know the actual depth of her misery until she meets Renate. Through her, Eva Kasaya discovers that she was exploited by her employers. This revelation made her to start questioning why her employers had exploited her. She then discovers that the only way to relieve her excruciating pain is to write down the harrowing experiences she had gone through and narrates her story describing her dissatisfaction with most employers.

Eva Kasaya presents the issues of rights of house helps with passion. As she unravels the past, she shows "an assortment of psychological problems", which manifest themselves in her narrative. The text reveals characteristics of fragmentation usually associated with psychological problems. When she started writing, she discovered on reflection that she had been unjustly treated; she deeply tries to adjust herself to the realities prevalent in a harsh society. She says, "when I started writing, I became aware that it was the first time I had renewed my life in depth from childhood to present. Previously, I had done in bits thinking of sections of my life as necessity dictated" (Kasaya 180).

Eva Kasaya's autobiography suggests alternative ways of understanding society and the ongoing societal dynamics. The narrated self in *Tale of Kasaya* is located in time and space. Smith (2010), in his study *Autobiography: Theory and practice* says:

An autobiography is many things: on one level, it is the compilation of disparate and fragmentary episodic memories into a coherent linear narrative as well as an indeterminately proportioned compound of remembered experience as individually felt or perceived, combined with externally verifiable historical events.

Eva Kasaya mentions real places, events and even dates in her narrative. She begins her story by placing her audience within a time in history. She commences by stating the following:

In 1986 we moved from Thika to Kerongo where we had a small shamba and a newly built house. Only mum, my two sisters and I moved. Dad stayed behind. Mum felt it was time to settle in the village and teach her children Maragoli as we spoke Kikuyu, the common language in Thika. Dad had come to Thika in the early 1970s as a coffee picker at the Hatwara plantation. (Kasaya 11).

This gives clear details which can be verified and giving her narrative some truth value, since one can check and verify the records of Hatwara tea pickers in 1970 and find Eva Kasaya's father's name as one of them; among other details.

Autobiographies are strands of history and hence *Tale of Kasaya* provides us with an opportunity to dialogue about issues and moments in history such as the lives of the Hatwara coffee plantation workers in the 1970s. In her narration about Hatwara, Eva Kasaya gives details of the insecurities that surrounded the workers families in the plantation. Examples include the death of Rihamba, a young girl whose mother sent her on an errand from which she never returned; she would later be discovered dead in a plantation. She had been defiled and murdered her.

Tale of Kasaya is written from the first person singular perspective, which is fitting because an autobiography is usually a story one narrates about oneself. Kasaya being the writer and the subject of narration, tells her story using "I", "me", "we", "my" and "mine". Readers thus experience the events in the narrative through her eye knowing only what she knows, thinks and feels about any given experience; thus making the autobiography subjective.

2.2 Autobiographical Subjectivity

Autobiographical works are by nature subjective. The narrator recalls memories depending on what he/she wants the public to see. Hence, some autobiographers may avoid some incidents which may be ‘harsh’ or deemed ‘not for public consumption’, but which may occasionally result in misrepresentation of facts. Autobiographical subjectivity thus relies on recollected personal experience, identities and personal autonomy. Kasaya somewhat seems to be alive to these variables, because her experiences are reflected in her work.

Further, it is clear from *Tale of Kasaya* that Kasaya’s experiences and how she views the world are influenced by her upbringing. The story is thus interpreted from Kasaya’s point of view. Her identity, experiences, and memories all influence the person we see in the story reflecting from the start with a value system that she embraces and that shape her routine thoughts and actions. This offers a more definitive interpretation of who Eva Kasaya is and why she writes the way she does.

Tale of Kasaya is an autobiography written by an ex-house, help. She writes her autobiography as a marginalized person seeking to be heard. A degree of subjectivity in this case is expected since she will tend to justify her actions and trivialize others in order to gain the public’s sympathy. Where the self is the subject, truth is normally less objective. Joe Smith in “Autobiography: Theory and Practice” quotes Cockshut’s (1984) view that “the last thing any person, however truthful, learns to treat with perfect fairness is the self” (23). When Kasaya narrates her story, she seems to be ‘perfect’. Most of the people around her make mistakes, but not Eva Kasaya. Most girls get spoilt but not Eva Kasaya. When they make a journey to Nairobi, her friend Dotty is the one who engages in frivolous sexual intercourses with men to get fare—again not Eva Kasaya. It is not very easy to believe that Dotty could engage in sex to get her fare to Nairobi then also engage in sex to get fare for Eva Kasaya. That Dotty offers her body repeatedly to an amorous man for the sake of Eva Kasaya is not so easy to believe. Eva Kasaya also narrates how Dotty spoilt so many girls by enticing them to sleep with boys in exchange for money. And coincidentally, she is the only girl whom Dotty took to men and who refused to succumb to their seduction and amorous advances to sleep with them. When a story is told from a subject’s point of view, objectivity is difficult especially where the self is the subject.

Tale of Kasaya also shows how personal disposition and social circumstances influence one's experiences. Eva Kasaya was ill treated by most of her employers, and when she sits down to recreate the memory about them, the autobiographical voice is inevitably going to be subjective and biased. This is seen in her tone when she is narrating about the employers who mistreated her:

One night I saw some women passing outside with jerrycans, and I followed them to see where they were going to get water. We were about to cross the main road when we saw men shouting and running towards us. There were streetlights, and as they came closer we saw they were waving pangas. One woman said, "Eh! They are going to kill us..." We didn't wait for her to finish before we started running. I dropped the jerrycans and ran as fast as I could back to the house. I told Edith about the men chasing us, but amazingly, she didn't care. "You know what, I wanted water," she said. She was more worried about water than my safety. (128).

The subjectivity in Kasaya's story leaves the reader fully absorbed in the plights of house-helps and young girls. The house helps/girls/maids end up being exposed to all sorts of torture, mistreatments and sexual exploitations.

Tale of Kasaya explores the question of female subjectivity. In the book, the woman character is subjected to the injustices of patriarchy. Thus, Kasaya speaks for the woman, in a genre dominated by men, and speaks for the poor and underdogs in a field dominated by the wealthy elite. Kasaya undergoes particular experiences based on her identity as a woman and as a house help which she commits to memory. These experiences affect how she narrates her story. She describes the things that have happened in her life as a woman, as a house help and as coming from a poor background. Since it is a self-searching exercise taken on by Kasaya herself, it makes a statement on the subjectivity in relation to her work as an autobiography. Although we need not take the author's view as the final or most authoritative, it is nonetheless a useful perspective on the author's intention. Nevertheless, an autobiography can somehow escape this fate by not only framing the self, but the surroundings too. It is this framing of the surrounding as part of the picture that shapes a work as an autobiography. The core of Eva Kasaya's autobiography lies in how she creates the self through her surroundings. She places herself in Maragoli, clear enough that one can actually trace the place. She writes:

On either side there were rocks of all sizes and lizards sitting on them. There were smooth rocks and my sister and I would sit on them for the fun since we had not seen so many rocks. They looked as though they had been planted in the land. Others were cracked, and we were afraid when passing near them, thinking a snake could be hiding in the cracks. Sometimes there would be big rocks in the middle of the path, and it was difficult to climb over them while carrying luggage. At one point we passed through a huge rock—the largest we had seen—and mum told us here is where the first Maragoli originated.

The landscape gives a picture of Kasaya's surrounding, so clear that one can even trace the places. She gives a picture of the morals of the society. Few autobiographers deal explicitly with sex; since they always want to paint a picture they would like their readers to have of them. Eva Kasaya describes Dotty sleeping with different men, a reflection of what young girls do. Her sister, Orisa, only sixteen years old and in class seven gets pregnant, apparently impregnated by one of her teachers. However, Eva Kasaya is careful enough not to mention any of these 'sex escapades' in which she is involved. Sex is a subject that people do not want to talk about, hence it ends up being painted as ugly especially where people fall victim to rape, exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases and families breaking up. Eva Kasaya gives us Orisa's case as an example. She writes:

Angela commented on how Orisa had not been eating and Orisa snapped at her. Angela continued not bothered, saying Orisa was very harsh lately and how when she cooked, she didn't want anyone around her. Mum was suspicious, and she grabbed Orisa and started touching her stomach. Orisa was pregnant. Mum was depressed. She had never told us about sex or relationships. When I started experiencing my periods, it was Angela who explained to me what it was and what I had to do. Since I didn't have money to buy cotton wool she advised me to cut off a small piece of blanket and use it. Our conversation with mum had one way or another something to do with food. (Kasaya 65).

Orisa and Dotty's cases explain what young girls are capable of doing in the absence of adult/guardian/parental guidance, protection and care as well as how lustful and amorous men can exploit young girls. Orisa is apparently impregnated by her school teacher:

Everyone ate except Orisa. Angela commented on how Orisa had been eating, and Orisa snapped at her. Angela continued, not bothered, saying Orisa had been very harsh lately, and how when she cooked, she did not want anyone around her. Mum was suspicious; she grabbed Orisa and started touching her stomach. Orisa was pregnant. She was only sixteen, and mum was so depressed. She had never told us about sex or relationships...in class seven there was this teacher that had come to the

school. We were told the teacher slept with her, and there was a case. (65—66).

The policeman, who helped Dotty and Eva Kasaya to secure a comfortable place in the train ends up having a sexual intercourse with Dotty, making it look like he did not help them after all since Dotty bought the tickets using her body. Eva Kasaya narrates:

There was one big fat policeman who kept checking on us, and I thought he was very kind. He brought us some rice and beans to take, and then he told me I looked tired and should rest. I remember thinking that not all policemen were bad. After supper, I was cheerful and spoke with Dotty for a while then fell asleep. I don't know for how long I had been sleeping when I heard the bed shaking. I was in the top bed, and it continued for a while. Suddenly there was silence and the shaking stopped. I heard the sound of a zip and the officer's voice saying he would come back after an hour. The door opened and he told Dotty to lock up. After an hour the policeman came back, and they had sex again. (Kasaya 98).

Clearly, Kasaya does recreate her recollection with brutal honesty, even when casting a friend in bad light, thus enhancing a sense of autobiographical subjectivity. According to James Buchanan in his article "A Theory of Truth in Autobiography", 'truth':

in autobiography depends on the observable historical record of a person's life. The less attractive the observed life, the more 'truthful' is the autobiography. This result does not require differential standards of honesty among autobiographers. It does depend on the presupposition that there exists a common value scale along which lives may be judged, and upon the common directional bias toward the 'good' in all autobiography.

We can, therefore, assess her willingness to cite less attractive episodes in her life that might lower our affinity for her as a testament to the fact that she is less truthful as expected but her story is no less credible as a captor of what she underwent. Eva Kasaya includes dates in her narrative, making the audience to believe her memory-narrative and judge it as historically factual. However, this does not guarantee truth-value since all narrated experiences revolve around a subjective recollection of the self. As Freeman opines:

Put in the simplest of terms, in autobiographical understanding there is no object, no 'text,' outside the self... the phenomenon that is ultimately of concern — namely one's personal past — must itself be fashioned through *poiesis*, that is, through the interpretive imaginative labour of meaning-making (Freeman 11).

Though Eva Kasaya includes ascertainable historical facts in her work, there are indicators of erratic memory with observable lapses. Indeed, Freeman argues that “‘Memory,’ in this context, becomes a curious amalgam of fact and fiction, experiences and texts, documentary footage, dramatizations, movies, television shows, plays, shows, fantasies and more” (Freeman, 22). The point of any memory-narrative is to create a subjective “truth” based on the memory of what happened to one self. Thus, we believe Eva Kasaya’s subjective truth as the truth since she brings it out from her life which she knows better than anyone else.

2.3 Autobiographies and Order

Autobiographies are concerned with issues of order and how the ordering impacts on the autobiographical value of the text. Eva Kasaya arranges her memory narrative in the order in which the events occur. She starts ordering right from her acknowledgements and writes “I was born into a struggling family, and my parents not only worked hard to look after me but went on loving me even when I slept hungry” (7). She starts from birth and arranges her story in the order in which the events occurred. She begins the story “In 1986 we moved from Thika to Kerongo where we had a small *shamba*”(11). Issues of order in autobiographers go a long way to interrogate the selection of the experiences the autobiographers include in the narrative and how this selection impacts on the sincerity and the truth-value of the text. The ordering of the events makes sense of the same events in Eva Kasaya’s life and communicates an important personal statement about her life. Though she laments about the mistreatments she went through at the hands of her employers, she gives credit to those who were kind to her, like Nancy, and to those who helped her, like Dotty. Eva Kasaya, thus, ends her story on a positive note. Despite all the hardships and disappointments, she endured to the end and finally achieved her dream of becoming a tailor. This brings out her resilience, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Autobiographers sometimes embellish their narratives. Morgan (2002) writes, “In a given autobiographical moment, a narrative speaks a subject into a position within a moral order, and simultaneously arranges historical events as a movement towards a moral endpoint.” (17). Eva Kasaya reconstructed history by not only telling her audience the plight of the house-help at the hands of most employers in the Kenyan

society, but also provided a moral lesson that with endurance and determination one can still survive and make it in a harsh society.

2.4 *Tale of Kasaya* as an autobiography of truth

In reading Autobiographies the question of truth and sincerity always emerge. Autobiographical truths are constructs and products of imagination, therefore are contestable, since they are based entirely on the writer's memory. Memory is an unreliable source of information. Roger Porter and H.R. Wolf state that “Truth is a highly subjective matter, and no autobiographer can represent *exactly* ‘what happened back then,’ any more than a historian can definitively describe the real truth of the past” (Porter and Wolf 5). Bates argues that “even the most accurate autobiographies have fictional elements” (Bates 7-10). He continues that “There is, in fact, no dividing line between autobiography and fiction” (Bates, 9). A close reading of *Tale of Kasaya* reveals some fictional elements. For instance, Eva Kasaya’s confessions are somehow questionable. There are instances of memory slips that make her story incredible. For instance, when she narrates that Mama Jimmy “paid her seven hundred shillings and then shortly afterwards she states that Mama Jimmy paid her Six Hundred Shillings.” (135).

Since Autobiographies are products of imagination and reconstruction of one’s history, fictionalization is sometimes possible W. H. Auden says:

An honest self-portrait is extremely rare because a man who has reached the degree of self-consciousness presupposed by the desire to paint his own portrait has almost always also developed an ego-consciousness which paints himself painting himself, and introduces artificial highlights and dramatic shadows (Dyer’s Hand 96).

Eva Kasaya paints an explicit picture of other peoples’ ills, but when it comes to her own self, the ‘silences’ are too loud. Apart from contradicting herself in several instances, she is conspicuously quiet about some things, for instance the money issues cited above.

2.5 *Tale of Kasaya* as a tool of self-evaluation and Introspection

Many authors use their autobiographies to reflect on their lives and experiences, sometimes diminishing or embellishing those experiences when necessary. Kasaya seems to embellish some aspects of her life, such as her strengths, influences that

moulded her, as well as her sufferings, while diminishing her weaknesses, failures, and mistakes. She orders the narratives in a manner that justifies her actions and attracts the public's sympathy. She portrays herself as an innocent victim of circumstances, which made her to do some wrongs such as sneaking from home, running away to Nairobi and staying for months without her parents knowing her whereabouts. Porter and Wolf argue that "the author depicts truths about himself through his experiences and the way he or she describes them. The way in which the writer illustrates past events says much about 'who he thinks he is'" (Porter & Wolf, 5).

All the same, Kasaya examines her past and admits making some errors, such as sneaking out at night when her parents were sleeping to go for village funeral night dances; leaving her father's house to work as a house-help without her parent's permission, among others. These errors in judgement are common mistakes that some people would not admit doing openly. She writes:

Around 8:30 PM after supper when my parents had gone to sleep, I sneaked out and went to Dotty's place. The window of the house was low and small, and by holding the sides, I could pull myself through it, head first without my parents who slept in the next room hearing a thing. It was something I had done before. My sisters and I sneaked in and out through the window to go to funeral dances. (Kasaya 87).

Though Eva Kasaya does not deny past mistakes, she justifies her actions to the reader. When she sneaks out of the house at night while her parents sleep and go with Dotty to some boys at night, she justifies that it was because she needed a job so badly. After the first incident with Dotty having sex with a boy and match-making for her, Eva Kasaya should have known the kind of a girl Dotty was and kept off her company; but instead she continued following her to more sexual escapades with men and other dangerous schemes. She tries to justify this by stating that it was because she desperately wanted to get to Nairobi. Moreover, when she leaves home to get employed without informing her parents, she justifies that it was the anxiety and excitement of getting a job.

Quigley says that a "related but not identical narrator and protagonist" are useful in self-justification because of "the ability to treat the self as other...creat[ing] the occasion for self-regard and editing...[because of] the distance between self-now and self-then" (Quigley 107). Eva Kasaya seems to always blame circumstances on other

people for her problems, establishing herself as “an experiencer or recipient of actions”. She narrates the events in such a way that she only grudgingly takes responsibility for the outcome of her decisions; she creates a critical distance between the facts that she describes and the subject (herself) of the description.

This is why autobiography as a form of introspection that relies on memory is fallible. William Maxwell says:

What we refer to confidently as memory—meaning a moment, a scene, a fact that has been subjected to a fixative and therefore rescued from oblivion—is really a form of storytelling that goes on continually in the mind and often changes with the telling. Too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things so that they conform to this end. (As quoted in Quigley, 193).

The narrator has used the “I” to refer to herself in the story as well as the women in the society who often find themselves in such predicaments. They always realize when it is far too late to back out or they continue being in the situation because they have no option. In a way, the narrator/author seems to justify women who engage in sex like Dotty to secure favors from men.

In a world where the genre of autobiography is reserved for the elite, Eva Kasaya dares the field and foregrounds the stories of women’s predicaments. She portrays women as victims of male oppression physically, sexually, emotionally and psychologically. Dotty only gets favors from men after they engage in sexual intercourse with her. In order to get fare, which Dotty and Eva Kasaya needed to enable them to go to Nairobi, Dotty had to have sex with one of the boys in the house where she and Eva Kasaya sneaked into at night. Later on, when they were starved in Kisumu and asked for sugarcane, the men asked them if they will accept to exchange sex for sugarcane. When Eva Kasaya and Dotty finally manage to explain their story and are allowed in the train and even given a first class, we later on learn that this was not for free as Dotty had to offer herself for sex to the policeman who helped them.

As a house-help Eva Kasaya is constantly trampled underfoot by her bosses because of her lack of good formal education which works against women as implied in *Tale of Kasaya*. Lack of good formal education lowers the self-esteem of house-helps and leaves them submissive and subservient. Eva Kasaya does not question even when she

is given soiled undergarments to clean although it is unhealthy and impolite. Her low self-esteem and low class position and rank in society makes her do the filthy work subserviently. This reflection and hindsight is important to her because it is a form of assessing her moral strengths in the face of adversity especially when pitted, although unfairly, with Dotty. It is like psychotherapy where examining past events gives one insight into the present. As a take-home message therefore, Eva Kasaya discovers the dictum that one's past cannot necessarily define their future. That the future is always open to all; no matter where one is coming from.

2.6 How *Tale of Kasaya* conforms to characteristics of autobiography

An autobiography is a 'coming of age story'. Eva Kasaya is initiated into adulthood through knowledge, experience and understanding. *Tale of Kasaya* is an attempt for her to define and understand herself. Although cast in the voice of an adult, the autobiography recounts her childhood experiences from Thika to her home in Kerongo and to her present status. Kasaya retells her experiences of deprivation in various parts of the narrative, exemplified below:

“I covered myself and was drifting off to sleep I felt someone touching me, hands reached for my pants, Patrick tried to rape me, Patrick followed me and warned me that if I said anything he would go to the police. I was scared, and I said nothing.” (Kasaya, 113)

Eva Kasaya takes us through a journey to her home in Kerongo a village in Maragoli, western Kenya. She delves through the historical background of her culture. As the family convoy passed a big rock, the largest she had never seen, she learns that the ancestors of her people, the Maragoli originated from there. The big rock had caves where Maragoli, the forbearer of Maragoli people had lived.

Eva Kasaya thus takes a journey, from innocence to experience. She makes an effort to understand herself. She journeys to Nairobi to seek better opportunities. When her journey starts, she is naive and even when the employer does not pay her for her chores, she does not demand for her pay; she waits patiently for a pay that most of the times did not come. She moves from one job to the other, and experiences exploitation and sexual harassment but does not give up. She is resilient to the harrowing vicissitudes of life that circumstances often places in her way. She writes her story as a way of

expressing her feelings about life. Eva Kasaya's writing her story thus thrusts her into a rich symbolic life.

Eva Kasaya's writing is a symbol of a voice. At the time she puts ink to paper, she is no longer the naive girl who was mistreated by her employers, but has now acquired a new voice and carved out a space for herself in the world where millions of people can listen to her voice through her narrative. Her writing symbolizes her coming of age. In the beginning, she went through hard times with painful experiences, suffered in solitude and without telling anyone. She could not even tell her parents that she was going to look for a job because she did not have a voice. She just sneaked out every time she got a job, but currently she is speaking to the whole world. This is to show that she has matured. She takes her freedom from her employers and graduates to become a tailor. The tailoring business enterprise represents liberation from dependence to independence. Eva Kasaya states that she had been through a lot experienced hard times. But after she realized her hope of independence and freedom, she states, "that my story hadn't started that all that I had gone through, I was about to start my life, tell my story. And so I started" (183)

It can also be inferred that Eva Kasaya in her book, *Tale of Kasaya*, speaks for the voiceless. Her story symbolizes a voice not only for Eva Kasaya herself but all the house-helpers at large. She is able to express their desires and feelings. Her experiences as a house-girl serves as an alert to a society that largely turns a blind eye to the plight of house-helpers. Though an autobiography and Eva Kasaya's personal story, *Tale of Kasaya* has big themes that can fill the landscape of her story,. These themes include interpersonal relations, family relations, poverty, betrayal, promiscuity, gender, sex, power, sexual exploitation, place of the woman/girl child and harassment by employers, education, class warfare, and rape, among others. It can also be deduced that her narrative handles themes often side-lined by other writers such as effects of poverty on young girls, thus pointing to the problems that continue to tear the society apart today. Because of the themes that emerge in Eva Kasaya's personal story, the narrative is capable of speaking to practically any audience, because it is infused with so rich themes and yet depicts a simple plot, written in a simple language and displaying a character that is true to life.

Autobiographies can be therapeutic both for people suffering from traumatic memories and for readers. Eva Kasaya started questioning why she went through the very painful and traumatizing experiences. She realized there were some people who were unjust and cruel to her. She says “I started writing more with greater intensity, including more details. Although at first it was painful, I felt relieved to get them out in the open (181). In earlier times, Eva Kasaya had suffered quietly, all the time, but when she later opened up and told her story, she got amazing strength. In the face of ruin and disappointments, she recollected herself and constructed her narrative which she told Wanjiru and David, symbolically giving her a voice and peace from the sufferings she had gone through stoically with fortitude. The writing seems to put all her misfortunes in the past and gives her a new beginning. Thus, her story acts as a medium of healing that ventilates her deeply engrained sorrows emanating from serious maltreatment at the hands of her employers and the society she lived in. The story, therefore, helps her inscribe her life to the consciousness of her society and the world.

2.7 Assessing Kasaya’s Autobiographical Motives

In reading an Autobiography, the question of intention/motive often arises. Intention or motive always has a wide bearing on the truth-value and sincerity of a story, since when someone sits down to write about himself/herself, it seems natural to wonder why, because without intention the whole business of writing becomes unintelligible. Autobiography is about remembering, and re-imagining personal history, which makes the question of who is remembering and why the remembering is done important. This makes truth contestable, since autobiographical truth is a truth reconstructed. However, this truth can be supported by use of para-textual material such as letters, photographs, diary entries without which the writing would be as good as fiction. Para-textual evidence makes memory recreated rather than just being retrieved, and is therefore more authentic.

The question of why Eva Kasaya is writing this story is unavoidable as far as defining her work as an autobiography is concerned. Is she seeking atonement through confession? Or is she writing as a house-help who is part of a marginalized group that is striving to be heard? The answer to this question is found in the tone of her voice. A close reading of Eva Kasaya’s story clearly reveal an attempt to seek the public’s

sympathy for her and the women who find themselves in such situations. In an event where one seeks sympathy, exaggeration and self-justification is expected.

Most Kenyan fiction writers and some autobiographies by prominent persons (as most autobiographies are written) have focused much of their attention on justifying their lives in the process giving an unrealistic picture of the society. Eva Kasaya uses a fine brush and paints the society as it is, with all its ugly class distinctions and the unbearable social conditions in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. She writes:

Before I went in I asked to use the toilet. Dotty pointed to a structure made of rusted iron sheets about fifteen metres from the house. It had two doors. One was for the toilet and the other for the bathroom. When I got inside the toilet I realized how narrow it was since I couldn't manoeuvre myself properly. The roof was quite low and if I stood straight I would touch it. The piece of sheet separating the two had large holes and one could see the person in the other room. Both the toilet and the bathroom were built on top of a drainage trench, on the floor were placed two trunks of wood each about twenty centimetres. They were slippery. One stepped on the wood and emptied in the space between them. The drain was about fifty centimeters and would fill up quickly; tenants had to wait for the rain to come so that it would wash the refuse away. This would be my first place of work in Nairobi. (107)

Eva Kasaya's story paints the background of her portrait well - examining the lowly figure as a representation of the urban space and its class distinctions. Told in the first person, *Tales of Kasaya* puts the reader in the turbulent world of house-helps. The picture is painted with the freshness and simplicity of an impressionable village girl who finds herself in the city with distinct class orientations. Like most house-helps will testify, circumstances beyond their reach, mostly poverty back at home, lead them to take up such lowly paying menial jobs – which is what many house-helps in Kenya can relate to. Eva Kasaya does not paint her picture in a vacuum; she paints it against the backdrop of her society giving her readers a glimpse into the way society views the woman who has influence on literature. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o observes in *Homecoming*, "Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society" (quoted in Cook and Okenimkpe, 19). Ngugi's observation implies that the literature of a people emanates from the people and is used to perpetuate their beliefs. From this understanding, *Tale of Kasaya* reflects what views a society upholds. Her story plays the role of the society's mouthpiece. Chinua Achebe in his essay "The

Writer and His Community” says, “...the writer and his society live in the same place.” This means that one’s immediate social environment influences what and how they write. For instance, Eva Kasaya’s story gives a picture of how the society portrays house-helpers.

We can therefore conclude that her motive for writing was to expose the pathetic conditions house-helpers live under coupled with lack of human rights in homes they serve and how hopeless their lives become, especially under oppressive, exploitative and unscrupulous employees.

Eva Kasaya’s other motive for writing can be said to be psychological. Confessing traumatising events either verbatim in public or through writing, is a form of psychotherapy in itself.

2.8 *Tale of Kasaya as a Literary Work*

Autobiography is not just a story of the self; it has continued to assert itself in the discipline of literature making its literary construction just as important as the construction of the self it represents. Eva Kasaya’s narrative can boast of literary value. It uses description elaborately to bring out a clear picture that she is painting.. Her reputational voice in her narrative neither condemns nor finalizes her sufficiency. For instance, she says “We were poor but we were healthy and health is what a family wishes for most” (76). Her attitude in the phrase “Nairobi is the place to be” illustrates the perception and striving of contemporary rural Kenyans. This perception often spurs rural-urban migration in search of a better life. Eva Kasaya describes places and people so vividly that one can even trace and find them.

It can also be opined that Eva Kasaya’s story is not just a reconstruction of memory, but she has big themes, which she often handles like other writers. For example, Nancy’s house is a woven tale of betrayal, promiscuity, hidden agendas, sexual exploitation, and tangled relationships which points to the problems that continue to tear the society apart today. Nancy’s husband makes sexual advances at Nancy’s house-help in the very same house where Nancy is present and sleeping. Dotty who engaged in sexual relationships with any man is rumoured to be HIV positive. Hence, Eva Kasaya’s thematic treatment makes the narratives capable of speaking to practically any audience; so rich in theme and yet with plot and character so grounded in the

present and ultimately, timeless, contemporary with language so simple and easy to follow.

Poverty as a theme becomes the subject of her narrative. She invites the reader to see poverty as she experiences it. She says:

All of us went to bed at the same time since mum would blow out the flame of the only lamp, made of cup-size tin and a wick. Our house was divided into two by a pair of old beds, mum and dad slept on one side while the rest of us were on the side, mattresses were made of nylon sacks stuffed with grass. (Kasaya 18)

She guides us into her personal history to an extent that we can almost look through her eye. Despite her abject poverty, she searches for a place in society, a place she will get money, feel secure and guarantee of some income.

The narrative is structured around the journey motif to recount Kasaya's life from childhood to adulthood, from the moment her father is sacked to join them in their home village of Kerongo in Maragoli to her emergence as an adult in Nairobi. Her father's loss of a job as a sole bread winner and his sojourn back to the home village is a turn of events that makes the family's livelihood go from bad to worse. One of the consequential ripple effects the family experiences is lack of school fees for the children. The tale of childhood innocence is shattered. Eva Kasaya does not make it to high school, and as a young teenager she desires to get a job. She encounters and is bemused by other girls who work in Nairobi and talk well of life in the city. She therefore aspires to join their liege and experience their kind of life. This triggers the beginning of her journey to the "city of opportunities" to get a good life.

After taking the risk to move to Nairobi, Eva Kasaya discovers that life in the city is not "a bed of roses." However, despite the hard life she encounters in the city, she does not give up in life; she says, "the desire to prove I was not a failure pushed me. Nairobi was the place to be, and it is there I would make money to help my parents and become polished" (92). These journeys/movements afford Kasaya a discovery of her identity through the various experiences she undergoes.

The discussion above show that Eva Kasaya's book, *Tale of Kasaya*, qualifies as an autobiography. It is literal, which means the use of language and literary devices like imagery have been employed. It has subjectivity, which is a major component in autobiographies. This subjectivity is realised when everything is told and seen through the eyes of Eva Kasaya. Furthermore, the Tale of Kasaya has motives which, among others, involve the need to show the world what house-helps go through so as to call to action the public empathy and sympathy with a view to advocate for positive change that would improve their welfare and especially the welfare of girls from poor families. Moreover, the Tale of Kasaya has autobiographical truths; most of the episodes are truthful and were verified during the research. The Tale of Kasaya also incorporates the journey motif which is a popular aspect of autobiographies: a kind of coming of age journey that ends when Eva Kasaya is about to quit the profession because her fortunes have improved.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE THEME OF RESILIENCE IN THE *TALE OF KASAYA*

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theme of resilience in the *Tale of Kasaya* is discussed. Resilience is, according to American Psychological Association,

an individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity. Stress and adversity can come in the shape of family or relationship problems, health problems, or workplace and financial worries, among others. Resilience is not a rare ability; in reality, it is found in the average individual and it can be learned and developed by virtually anyone. Resilience should be considered a process, rather than a trait to be had.

In this study, therefore, this working definition of resilience will be used so as to limit the scope of the word. Eva Kasaya faces a myriad of problems ranging from lack of education, internal conflict, instability, poverty, social upheavals and gender discrimination. Some of these challenges are a consequence of unequal power structure, class structure and, gender subjugation.

For Eva Kasaya, stress and adversity came in the shape of financial discomfiture, lack of education, gender discrimination, among others. She faces difficulties but rises above them. Though only thirteen years old when she drops out of school and begins her life-searching journey, she navigates her way around crises and balances negative emotions like anger (when her mother had spent her savings meant for exams registration on food, which would have seen her repeat standard seven) with positive ones (like the momentary joy she experiences when she is paid her salary and she wanders off to town to eat her favourite meal—French fries, or “Chips”). Her resilience, however, is a process, rather than an inherent trait.

Tale of Kasaya traces Kasaya’s journey from living in fear and abject poverty to her eventual independence as a tailor. Her story “unfolds a model both of and for human beings who are threatened by social disorder and by a loss of connection with themselves, with the others, and with the world” (Lewis, 483-84). The book starts with the idea of struggling, “I was born in a struggling family, and my parents not only worked hard to look after me but went on to loving me even when I slept hungry” (Kasaya 7). The story then develops in to a strong urge to rise above suffering, “I also

hoped I would earn money in a job to help my parents and make those of my friends who would continue with their education to think that I was compensated even by not joining high school..." (Kasaya 70). Her fight to change her lowly status, begins just as an idea and is continuously sustained, though with difficulties.

Eva Kasaya's tone throughout the narrative highlights her tenacious character that prove central to the theme of resilience in the autobiography. She comes out as a strong character, facing off the vicissitudes in her life with fortitude and her poor background does not seem to stop her from fighting, unlike her sisters who seemed to be emotionally affected by their poverty. These qualities remain an important factor throughout the narrative. She seemed to have the ability to bounce back no matter the circumstances she faced. The neighbourhood, in which Eva Kasaya and her family lived, for example, is vividly described to convey the air of abject poverty and which could have easily affected the narrator. Instead she describes it with no resigned tone. She is positive even in the face of adversity and suffering. For instance, she describes their living condition as follows:

Mum used firewood to cook in a makeshift kitchen outside our house. In the morning we would take tea; though sugarless at times, it had plenty of milk. If there were any leftovers from the previous evening's meal we would have them in the morning; during lunch hour we ate porridge made from maize flour. For supper we had ugali and saga, sukuma or some wild vegetables mum picked from the farm... our house was divided into two by a pair of old beds. Mum and Dad slept on one side while the rest of us were on the other. Our mattresses were made of nylon sacks stuffed with grass... (Kasaya, 17)

Driven by her poverty, Eva Kasaya's suffering is the major plot of the novel as she struggles to survive and overcome daunting circumstances. She suffered as a house-help at the hands of employers, and yet, even with her limited education she was able to pen her experiences in *Tale of Kasaya*; and although she was aided in editing by Renate and Kwani editors, it is a great achievement considering that she only went up to primary eight. She tells Kiundu Waweru (in an interview published in *The Standard; August 21, 2015*), how she escaped her Kerongo Village home in Western Kenya with one dream, "to get a job in Nairobi and elevate her family from poverty." Although she abandons school and flees to Nairobi, Kasaya dreams big about the city. She elaborately describes Mary's life as a proof that Nairobi is a city of opportunities. In this respect, she writes as follows:

There was a neighbour who had not educated his children, yet Mary one of his daughters, was employed. It was said that she worked in Nairobi for a wealthy family. Once in a while she would come visiting. Her skin looked smoother and lighter than that of any other girl in the village. Her hair was neatly plaited...Girls would surround her and she would say life in Nairobi was the best there could be. (Kasaya, 71).

It is evident that Mary's description of life in Nairobi as utopian inspires Eva Kasaya, and coupled with the desire to overcome poverty and uplift her status in society she makes a decision to move to Nairobi. While in Nairobi, Eva Kasaya realizes the difficult challenges in the adult world of employment. The chapters vividly illustrate the characters of her employers, each pathetic in her own way. Two months later, following harsh treatment and no pay, Eva Kasaya leaves her first employer. She next secures a job in Kawangware, a poor neighbourhood, where she worked "for a woman who lived with her two teenage sisters", and do all household chores from early morning to late night. In light of these difficulties, she elected to move to another employer. This time round, she was fortunate to find humane employer who enrolled her for "a tailoring course at Don Bosco in Karen, Nairobi." Around same time, she "became friends with a neighbour, Renate Ritter, a German woman married to a Kenyan." When Renate heard Kasaya's story, she was moved to the extent of asking Kasaya "to write it down."

Though Kasaya was aware that she was being mistreated, the background she hailed from and her determination to overcome poverty pushed her to move on towards the fulfilment of her desires which was to achieve some sort of financial security in her life: a dream that called for moving away from the village that hindered her movement and curtailed her progress. Therefore, to escape poverty and develop as a full human being, she had to escape the village.

It is worth noting how Eva Kasaya, at only thirteen years old, did not resign to her fate but resolved to move to the city in search of opportunities that would change her life for the better. Though she takes advantage of opportunities that presented themselves at that moment, her decision to seek for a job is a sign of her own personality, since nothing and no one forced her to go out in search of a job. In fact, her sisters do not do the same thing that she did. Her resilience and strong character reveals itself in her refusal to resign to her fate and remain in the same predicament like her mother and sisters. She takes up a job as a house-help not because she likes it but because it gives

her an opportunity to fend for herself and her family; a huge psychological torture for a girl at 13 years, yet she does not despair.

Eva Kasaya's story explores the effects of poverty and urbanization. She depicts her coming of age as an idealistic who hopes to succeed in life despite the adversities she faces. The failure to join a secondary school and life's harsh treatment spur Eva Kasaya's development. She makes a bold but naïve decision to move to Nairobi and to an adult world at only thirteen. In Nairobi, Eva Kasaya struggles to retain her dream in the face of the society's complex adult roles which she was not used to. She has to play the breadwinner for her family, her father having been retrenched from the coffee plantation in Thika a while back and now at home in Kerongo village ensnared by the chains of poverty.

Eva Kasaya's path to adulthood is not straightforward, and is engulfed with several misfortunes. These misfortunes leave her in a state of deep anguish. Though she is not resigned to her suffering, she narrates some of these episodes with a bitter tone. For instance, when she had to dig the whole day in order to bring potatoes home for supper. She narrates:

One day Angela told me she was going with her friend to find a digging job in Luo land about six kilometres away. When she found me following them, she told me to go back home but I refused...We got to the first home and asked for work, but there was none. The second compound had work— weeding beans. I started to dig, and Angela went to the next house to see if there was work. I dug from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon, when the woman of the house asked me to come in for lunch. She had made sweet potatoes and tea. After lunch she asked me if I wanted to be paid in sweet potatoes or money. I said sweet potatoes....Going back home was climbing a mountain. By the time we got home I was finished. Mum cooked the sweet potatoes and we ate them with water. (Kasaya, 65).

This quote captures the predicament of the girl. This experience for a little girl of twelve is psychologically traumatic. We feel with the protagonists, a sense of defilement of her innocence through initiation in to adult roles. This symbolically shows that even as an innocent child she is not allowed a space to develop. She has to think or deliberate over where the next meal is going to come from. Every experience of her life is defined not by herself but by her social status. For Eva Kasaya, childhood was full of pain and struggle to put food on the table. The elderly seem to have succumbed to the weight of

social pressure, resigned to fate in the face of adversity wrought by poverty and transferred their adult responsibilities of searching for food to Eva Kasaya and Angela who had to walk round and dig for people to bring home potatoes or whatever they could find for the family to feed on. The realization that the situation was not getting any better pushed Eva Kasaya to take a step in order to help her family. To do this, she had to fight against the forces that hindered her progress, one of them being her residing in the village where opportunities were non-existent. She had to escape the abject poverty in the village and run to Nairobi, the city of opportunities.

In Nairobi, she matures in life as an employee, Eva Kasaya faces numerous difficulties and in her suffering, she struggles with both inward and outside forces which affected her psychologically. In her narrative, the effects of poverty on the psychological state of its victims are seen. She lives a life defined by fear. She is not able to question her employers even when they mistreat and fail to pay her. Though constantly subjected to abuse by her employers she perseveres, and even when she is sent out in the middle of the night to fetch water, in the risky Nairobi environs, she does not complain. She keeps quiet; evidence of a life controlled by fear and psychological torture, not deliberately by her employer but by poverty—she must hang on and even risk her life because any job that can give her some money is worthier than no job at all, worthier than even the life she is risking. She essentially becomes a passive object with neither ability nor right to answer back when she is abused. She is at first, too afraid to challenge or question the authority of her bosses, and therefore making herself invisible becomes the target and outlet for her frustration for sometime. However, eventually she has to do something and she shows her resilience when she resigns from her job and moves back to Adams for a while. Though Eva Kasaya feels wronged, yet she had initially so deeply internalized the traits of poverty, lowliness, nothingness and worthlessness that almost made her acquiesce and succumb to subservient status. Nevertheless, she came to a realization that she had been pushed to the wall and eventually mastered enough courage and came back fighting. Her autobiography is also her alternative way of fighting back and showing her resilience. In the narration, she testifies how most of the employers she worked for mistreated her and failed to pay her salary. Poverty and semi-literacy curtailed her life prospects and self-awareness. She developed what can be seen as an inferiority complex characterized by a low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness that is evidently displayed in her desperate actions. For example, when

these feelings overwhelm her, she reacts with irrational behaviour such as sneaking from home to go to seek for work in Nairobi without informing her parents and also moving out at night with Dotty in “search of fare to Nairobi”, among others. These dangers she subjects herself to without thinking portrays the sociological impact of her environment on her. Kasaya is sexually, physically, emotionally, and psychologically abused by some of the people who she encounters at her places of work, leaving her traumatised. Against these odds, she almost despairs in life. Her resilience, however, enables her to spring up and bounce from this complex and thus salvage her individual pride.

Being a female and a young girl poses more challenges for Kasaya, arising not only from the way society views women as inferior to men in socially conditioned identities. Her gender as a female, therefore, provides some chauvinists with the machismo edict to define who she is and how she should be treated: a sex object. Her second employer, Nancy’s husband tries to take advantage, considering her not as his employee who should be respected but as a woman who can provide for his sexual desires while his wife sleeps. Philosopher Michael writes that as sexual subjects, “humans are the object of power, which is not an institution or structure, rather it is a signifier or name attributed to ‘complex strategical situation’, and adds that because of this, “ ‘power’ is what determines individual attributes, and behaviours”(Foucault, 87). Hence, Nancy’s husband who sees himself as wielding power over Eva Kasaya constructs for her a label; being female which characterizes her as a sex object. But she fights resiliently these attitudes, which are embodied in his attempts to rape her.

Other than being seen as a sex object, Kasaya suffers from gender discrimination stemming from the fact that many African communities are patriarchal in their social set-ups. She narrates how her uncle treated them inhospitably simply because they were girls. She explains that:

Berisi was as bitter as a woman in labour pains. She often called us frogs, meaning my mother and us girls squatted while we urinated. There was no man in the house. Sometimes we wondered if they were our relatives (27).

In Kasaya's Maragoli ethnic community, a woman is relegated to a peripheral position, confined by tradition and gender to the background, while a man is put on the forefront. In any undertaking, the male is normally the hero and the focal point, while the woman only serves to facilitate his success. Pauline Owakweh confirms this in her article "Reconstructing Masculinity and Femininity in Africa War Narratives" when she says:

Gender identity and its exclusionary potentials for the female are deeply rooted in the fabric of traditional and modern African societies. Gender determines women's status, roles in the domestic / private spheres and the levels of their participation in political / public spheres. (Uwakweh 1998:9)

This gender identity however does not kill Eva Kasaya's spirit; she strives on. She does not only overcome her deeply stressful situations, but also comes out of the challenging circumstances with what Uwakweh (on the situation of society side-lining women during the Biafra war) refers to as "competent functioning".

Kasaya manages to rise above these confines of gender and poverty. Her voice in *Tale of Kasaya* is thus the voice of a person who has struggled to break loose the bonds of servitude and intimidation. The journey of self-discovery that Eva Kasaya undergoes is accentuated by her experiences and exposure to hopeless circumstances that threaten to overwhelm her. The conflict in the narrative is primarily internal. The struggle is mostly between Kasaya's desire to succeed and the forces that hinder her success. She is determined to succeed against all odds; she only rediscovers a sense of moral compass later in life. For instance, she regrets leaving home without informing her parents and also she sneaks out at night through the window, among other vices, but all in an effort to escape her poverty for a better life in the city.

Eva Kasaya's *Tale of Kasaya* also highlights the power of communication which symbolizes a certain voice that Kasaya gains after a long period of suffering and through which she expresses her actual feelings. The poor, semi-educated, thirteen-year old Eva Kasaya had to fight on her own to gain a voice for herself.

There are many factors that form her resilience. The primary factor in her resilience is having positive relationships inside her family. Though poor, she gets a lot of support from her family; for instance, her parents sacrifice their little conveniences for her. She narrates how her father and mother had wanted to sell their only cow to raise her

secondary school fees, but she declined. Her reaction to their offer further reveals her strength and reasoning power. She was determined not to let them sacrifice for her sake. She explains:

To purchase the cow, they had reared chickens, which they then exchanged for a goat; they exchanged it for a young cow. If sold, the cow would earn a maximum of two thousand shillings. Part of this money would have been used to purchase food for the family. The balance would have been barely enough to pay my school fees for one term at the local secondary school. (Kasaya 72)

Some scholars have identified ways in which poor families build economic resilience. For instance, Christopher B. Doob writes that “Poor children growing up in resilient families have received significant support for doing well as they enter the social world—starting in day-care programs and then in schooling.” He says this in the context of U.S.A of bridging the inequalities or differences in children from poor backgrounds, and how they need to be competent to survive in an unequal society. And this support and outlook also explains Eva’s resilience. Though Eva Kasaya comes from a poor family, all she lacks are material needs, since she gets enough support from her family. Her parents even sacrificed too much to ensure that they always put food on the table. She describes some of these painful instances such as when the mother and father went without food to ensure that the children ate. She writes:

Mum used to go and find some wild leaves and boil them for us.... If mum had Ombina approaching during meal times she would hide part of the ugali unlike before when she would welcome him with open hands. In the morning we drank black tea without sugar, and I noticed Mum and Dad served us but did not eat themselves. I could count Dad’s ribs without touching them....(Kasaya 64)

Other than her parents’ warmth, Eva Kasaya’s admiration for her neighbour’s daughter Mary, and Dotty’s assertiveness helped to spur her development. She describes her admiration for Mary’s as follows:

“I have seen Kanda Bongo Man. This is how he dances,” She would tell us then proceed to dance slowly, smiling and moving her hips in a circular motion with her hands on her head. At the end we would laugh and clap. When I thought of work, I thought of becoming like her although she never said exactly what she did, and nobody asked. The stories of her good life overshadowed everything.” (Kasaya 71)

Her strong character coupled with these admirations propelled Eva Kasaya to gather herself and move on despite the numerous difficulties she was faced with. Gradually, she gained strength and a voice. She eventually attains a sense of self-actualization through self-employment as a tailor, which also makes her somewhat economically independent.

Dotty, too, had a significant influence on Kasaya. The latter begins to model herself along Dotty; she had embraces her views and opinions naively. Dotty not only facilitates Kasaya's movement to Nairobi but also she shows her that it is all right to commit actions which others may call 'sin', if just to find your way out. They lie, they sneak, sells her body (Dotty), among other negative things that Kasaya manages to do under the tutelage of Dotty. She broadens Kasaya's perception of life and frees her from the poverty in the village and helps her get a job in Nancy's house.

Although Dotty does not appear to be the mothering and nurturing kind, she helps build Eva Kasaya's resilience and nurtures her emotionally. In helping her escape from the village, Dotty provided Eva Kasaya with hope and inspiration. Though things do not work out well for her in Nairobi at first, at least Dotty gave Eva Kasaya hope and inspiration, making her see that everything is possible however hard it looks; that you are able to get to Nairobi even without bus fare. Of course, the first impression of Dotty on the reader would be negative as she comes out as having loose morals; "going" with every man for financial gains and survival, and she is even spurned by her own parents. However, Eva Kasaya is able to see something 'admirable' in Dotty's character. Unlike Eva Kasaya, Dotty has a liberal attitude almost verging on anarchy as she refuses to be oppressed by the traditional course of the mores; she's a go-getter and curves ethics for herself in the world and also prescribes for herself what she wants to do and where she wants to be. Eva Kasaya quickly learns this attribute from Dotty and sneaks from home to Nairobi where her role is fashioned from a number of experiences. Though Dotty's sex life is sanctionable, she has other redeeming attributes, such as warmth and compassion. She not only appreciates Eva Kasaya but also helps her move to Nairobi and secures for her a job at her sister's place. She becomes a sister, friend and mentor to Kasaya.

In Kasaya's narrative, it seems most of her courage is built by female friendships; they equip her with social resilience skills. In turn, these stories allow her to cope with oppression and domination. Friendships with other girls and women provided her refuge in a world filled with poverty as well as male chauvinism and intimidation. The first person who helped kick-start Eva Kasaya's dream of having a job and earning money was Judy, a teacher at Mmazi School in Kerongo village. Several years back, she recalls:

The day after Christmas, Judy sent her younger brother to call me, and I went to see her. It was a Sunday and everyone was visiting the neighbors after church. She told me her aunt named Asaji, who lived near Maseno, needed a maid. I was to earn 300 shillings a month. For me an unimaginable amount...I was excited to find a job, my first job after school. (Kasaya72)

In Judy, Eva Kasaya finds sympathetic (though she could be opportunistic) ears and begins her journey towards finding a voice. Judy showed Eva Kasaya that inability to join secondary school is not the end of life, she could still do something to break away from poverty. After she had been recalled to the village to face alleged charges of theft from Asaji, Eva Kasaya had to find her way back to the city, and the help comes from Dotty. Later on when Eva Kasaya suffers at the hands of her employers in Nairobi she always fell in the arms of Prisca, her cousin, who also lived in Nairobi and who was always there for her whenever she needed emotional support. It can be evidently be opined that through friendship particularly with female characters, Eva Kasaya managed to gather strength and overcome her tough challenges. From Eva Kasaya's narrative, it can be construed that female friendship is a vital component for women in helping their fellow women adjust to the challenges presented to them by society. Moreover, Eva Kasaya's narrative also seems to underscore what Hyde Park said about feminism in his article "Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women's Movement" that:

We (women) choose to identify ourselves with the heritage and the future of feminism and socialism in our struggle for revolution. From feminism we have learned the fullness of our own potential as women—the strength of women. We have seen our common self-interest with other women and our common oppression. Having found these real bonds as women, we realize we can rely on each other as we fight for liberation. Feminism has moved us to see concretely what becomes of people shaped by social conditions they do not control. We find our love and hate focussed through our feminist love for other women bound by same conditions of hate and oppression that blinds us. A great

strength we find in feminism is the reaffirmation of values ideals of sisterhood; taking care of people, being sensitive to people's needs and developing potential.

Support and acceptance of other women is essential for girls such as Eva Kasaya to better their lives. This can be through women's teachings to mentor and support each other both psychologically and mentally.

The autobiography of Eva Kasaya represents the struggle to overcome and achieve dignity and financial security within the confines of a restraining poverty and discriminating social structures. Eva Kasaya's sharing of her experiences with the German lady Renate was an important encounter because it was Renate who encouraged her to write and publish her experiences. Thus, Kasaya slowly finds strength and courage within herself to tell her story. For the first time, Eva Kasaya has a voice of her own and a space in the world among writers giving her power to transform her life. This is a great opportunity and achievement for a standard eight drop out who at thirteen was already being tormented by unscrupulous employers. Indeed, Kasaya discovers her inner self, much to her delight.

Tale of Kasaya dramatically underscores the oppression Eva Kasaya experienced throughout her life history as a house-help employee. Being quite young, a woman and a school dropout, she would have a hard time trying to compete and survive in a world where education and good fortunes defined success. She had been silenced and dehumanised by some of her employers. She states in her narration:

When the food was ready she came to serve us, giving her three-year-old daughter more food than me. Jacky ate playfully. I wished I would have been given her share of food. I ate a bit, partly because I was shy. I did not appreciate their company and wished to be left alone. The driver was to eat in the car. (152—153)

During the unfolding course of the narrative, women and girls such as Mary, Dotty and Prisca become Eva Kasaya's role models. Thus, Eva Kasaya's story examines moments of female gender fraternity. In fact, Kasaya overcomes most of the hardships that she encounters because she is supported by other women such as her mother, Angela,, Prisca, and Dotty. When Eva Kasaya sees Mary (who did not go to school) achieve something in life, she learns that she too can succeed. She then decides to seek for a job

which she hopes would offer her financial independence. Sharing her story with another woman; Renate inspires her to put her experiences in writing. By writing down her experiences, Kasaya symbolically accepts and takes charge of her past; she does not just vent her frustration through anger, instead she reorders her pains of the past into meaningful lessons.

Though young, unschooled and naive, Eva Kasaya confronts her destiny with little to help her but courage and persistence. Hers is thus a narrative of an ordinary woman trying to hold things together in a difficult world; a narrative of the human struggle for dignity. At the age of thirteen, she is a bit naïve but does not despair. She leaves her village in western Kenya to search for a life in Nairobi on her own in the bustling, complex metropolis that is the multi-tribal city of Nairobi. As she enters the cosmopolitan city, Eva Kasaya knows little about life, or work and even less about the intricate city life. Her traumatic journey towards her maturity, which though takes several years, earns her freedom in the long run. Eva Kasaya suffered a cultural shock and she found life in the big city strange and very different from what she was used to in the rural area and especially Kerongo village. She is amazed by the complexity of life in the city. She describes her first station as follows:

The house had two bedrooms and a sitting room fitted with two sofa sets. At one end was a TV set on a wooden stand. On top of it was a framed photo. This was the first time I had seen a TV, I stared at it hoping to catch a first glimpse of Kanda Bongo Man. The floor was covered with a green carpet; it looked like they were stepping on a blanket so that they could feel warm. (Kasaya, 78).

She is also surprised to find out that in the city, people are individualistic and pass each other without greetings. She describes how on the way to drop her Boss' children to school, she would meet other girls escorting children to the same school. However unlike her, they looked clean and confident, wore tight trousers or short skirts and their hair was oily and neatly done. Whenever she met them, she would greet them but most of them would not answer, but even those who answered only did so with a grunt rather than a proper answer. Eva Kasaya was a child robbed off her youth.

Gradually, Eva Kasaya began to accept what life brings. She moves from one employer to the next and becomes increasingly responsible as a person even learning to seek for new employers from the bureaux. Her young, willing and open mind contributes to

her bouncing back to life when all hope seems to be lost. Though she is at first engraved in poverty with little formal education, Eva Kasaya struggles and becomes independent. She is able to support her family back at home with whatever little she earns.

Eva Kasaya's narrative articulates the place of women and the uneducated poor in the Kenyan society. It investigates how poverty and lack of education curtails women's prospects for freedom and success and explores their influences in the construction of individual women's identities. The suffering of Eva Kasaya captures the contestation between patriarchal dominance and women agency as presented in the narrative. However, she demonstrates the capacity to break from the fetters of social-cultural structures to achieve self-realisation. Her experiences demonstrate how socio-political changes influence the formation of identities and choices of individuals in the society and that women can fight for their individual emancipation within a society dominated by patriarchal dictates.

The resilience of Eva Kasaya also includes her capacity to successfully make sense of available resources, however limited. The story in *Tale of Kasaya* is a powerful statement about Kasaya's struggles against the adversity of inequality. Kasaya refuses to be defined by the society she lives in and decides to carve an identity for herself. She identifies herself as a progressive as indicated by her decision to defy her parents and run away from the village to become a house-help in the city. Though this may sound negative on the surface, but looked at deeply, it reveals inherent determination and strength of a character, which moved her to show that she was not ready to let anyone or anything stop her from achieving her goals. She explains, "I went home and discussed the house girl job with my parents, but they were completely against it. Mum said I was small, didn't know anything and won't be able to work." (71). Later on she would narrate how she sneaked out undetected in order to go to Nairobi. She writes:

Around 8:30 PM after super when my parents had gone to sleep, I sneaked out and went to Dotty's place. The window of our house was low and small, and by holding the sides I could pull myself through it, head first without my parents who slept in the next room hearing a thing....(Kasaya 87).

Though sneaking out without informing her parents, intentions of Eva Kasaya are essentially good. She explains, "I also hoped I would earn money in a job to help my parents" (70). However, she is too young and immature either to commit fully to her

chosen causes or to understand that her actions subjected her to grave danger. This psychological corruption gives us a new perspective on the oppressive effect poverty had on her; poverty had distorted her sense of perspective. That is why she drops out of school, instead of investing more time in school in order to change her family's fortunes. Her resulting attitude towards life thus becomes a mercurial combination of anger and fear coupled with determination to survive and succeed.

In this narrative, it is clear that forces almost completely beyond her control determine the experiences of Eva Kasaya. Because of the poor state of her family, Kasaya is vulnerable to exploitation. She narrates how a certain pastor named Ndung'u came to the village and started preaching. Eva Kasaya is one of those who joined the Pentecostal Church, went through her baptismal classes and was even baptized. But she did not enjoy the process at all. She felt she had been forced into it. Some of the girls had laughed at her and eventually she joined her father's church—the Orthodox Church, which according to her was more liberal than P.A.G. This engagement with the Church was obviously part of her efforts to find meaning for her life and fight her poor social condition. But unfortunately, her engagement with the Church merely turned out to be flirtatious and only a paying job could at least solve some of the problems she was grappling with.

The social divisions in the society where Eva Kasaya lives are more clearly delineated along lines of class. Subverting her destiny is Eva Kasaya's main struggle. Hence, in *Tale of Kasaya*, she struggles with her identity not knowing where or how to start. The society she lives in defines her identity by her poor background. She tries to search for a viable narrative of her life, for a way to make sense of her existence. She is traumatized by life and left with deep psychic injuries. On the one hand her narrative is a story of pain, struggles and suffering while on the other; it is a story of resilience and goals.

The autobiography of Eva Kasaya has thus become a tale of resilience. Resilience for her becomes an omnipotent force, defining and altering her consciousness and her life. In fact, it is not Eva Kasaya but the idea of resilience ingrained in her, which keeps her story alive. The story enters deeply into the ethical debates of suffering and resilience. It is a drama of struggles set against a backdrop of a naive but strong character with a

capacity to bounce back to life, whatever the situation. Thus, her voice is extraordinarily independent, putting focus of her narrative not on her experiences but her strong character and her point of view of the world. Her strength of character makes her ideologically authoritative and independent since she does not appear reluctant to tell her shortcomings in her journey to success, but instead shows them to readers through vivid, painstakingly detailed descriptions. She seems to want the readers to understand the difficulties associated with being house-help and the possibility of making it in a hostile world if you are determined. She takes the reader through almost two decades of her life within and outside of the city.

Social inequalities seem to play a big role in people's experiences. Money and power become the tangible tools of control and power. It is these psychological conditioning created by her class that Eva Kasaya struggles to fight.

Her mother's fears are about Eva Kasaya leaving home at 13, as well as about being lost in the unpredictable city life thereby losing her connection to her society and her own family; a connection that opens the first chapter of her narrative. The opening paragraph of chapter one begins with this connection to her people. She writes:

IN 1986 WE MOVED from Thika to Kerongo where we had a small Shamba and a newly built house. Only Mum, My two sisters and I moved. Dad stayed behind. Mum felt it was time to settle in the village and teach her children Maragoli as we spoke Kikuyu, the common language in Thika. (Kasaya, 11).

Eva Kasaya thus finds herself caught between what may honour her parents and what may provide a more prosperous future for her and her family. Running throughout the text is her quest to come to terms with the meaning of life. She struggles to achieve "wholeness" through a reconstruction of her destiny.

The impact of the psychic wounds inflicted on her due to what she went through had been so profound that its effects comes out in form of a crisis in Eva Kasaya's life. The crisis is manifested at the end of the story when she has acquired tailoring skills and accumulated some capital but she is still not sure of what to do:

All my life I had been under someone—teachers, my parents or the employers. There was someone always to make the decision for me...I was afraid of going alone into the city, I felt like hyenas were waiting

for me...I feared if I started a tailoring business it would fail because my money management skills were poor. (183)

It is this very crisis that basically informs Eva Kasaya's creative imagination in *Tales of Kasaya*; a tale highlighting the struggles for emancipation; a yearning, which takes the form of employment and freedom. Her story thus evolves out of her individual and communal experiences.

Tale of Kasaya creates an impression on the mind of the reader. The reader is persuaded to view house-helps sympathetically. Her story thus shows that being a house-help is not after all totally a traumatic experience; rather, a worthy job should one get a good employer. Though Eva Kasaya laments about the ill treatment she receives from different employers, she appreciates working for Wanjiru and David through whom she achieved her dreams of supporting her parents back at home and training as a tailor. She writes that every two months she would send her parents two thousand shillings with which they would purchase a sack of maize, which would last them through that period. She would save one thousand per month and still managed to make her hair every month and bought new cloths.

In *Tale of Kasaya*, one notes a constant motif of resilience. The narrator seems to insist that joining secondary school is not the final or absolute answer in any way to the vagaries of human conditions. She asserts that there are other ways for those who are not fortunate enough to join and continue their formal education through secondary schools. Being a house-help too offers an opportunity to put food on ones table if one finds a good employer. Towards the end of her narrative, she declares that she would prefer to be employed than face the uncertainties of life on her own.

Kasaya uses her story to suggest that one can create meaning from a troubled life. She does this by showing off her tailoring skills and hoping to stop working as a house-help and start up a tailoring business. Secondly, she has attained a voice and an identity and carved a space for herself in the world of writers. Throughout the narrative, Kasaya highlights positive values of society such as love, hope and, faith, as well as moderating ones such as pain and suffering. Her tone demonstrates an ingrained ability to be malleable coupled with a resilience that enables her to bounce back from stressful situations and circumstances that are placed in her way.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the struggles undertaken by Eva Kasaya to subvert and change her destiny and her sufferings. It also shows her ability to spring back from adversity. The chapter has interrogated Eva Kasaya's journey from a voiceless "object" to an assertive woman capable of making her own decisions and supporting her family. She begins with a sense of emptiness and sinks into desperation, however when it seems that all is lost, she struggles and recollects herself. It is the culmination of her quest to achieve that sustains her. The search for herself finally comes to an end; she "arrives home", but through a long winding, torturous and indeed arduous journey. She carves a space for herself in the world and gains a voice to tell her story. Her last statement in *Tale of Kasaya* was, "I had been through a lot but felt like I was now beginning my life. That my life hadn't started, that all that I had gone through I was about to start my life, tell my story. And so I started." (183).

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 THE AUTHENTICITY OF *TALE OF KASAYA* AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the truthfulness or authenticity of episodes in the book will be assessed. An autobiography is expected to be faithful to details of the author's life. Therefore, any inconsistencies and lack of corroboratory evidence to support major historical events in the text could lessen the validity of the story as autobiographical. To ascertain this fact, tools such as interviews, cross checking dates and historical happenings as well as interviewing some of the characters mentioned in the story and who are still alive and accessible have been used to support claims made in the text.

4.2 The Question of Authenticity

In reading autobiographies, the question of truth and sincerity always emerge. Autobiographical truths are constructs and products of imagination, therefore contestable, since they are based entirely on the writer's memory. Because memory is slippery, it makes truth also elusive. Thus, the term "authenticity" is used in this chapter to refer to the actuality of existence of sources themselves, rather than their factual correctness. According to Trilling, authenticity is "the state of being true to oneself" (1974, 93). This chapter analyses how authenticity is constructed in *Tale of Kasaya*.

According to Collins S.,

scholarly discussion of the genre has come to the conclusion that autobiography can never portray an entirely authentic picture of the author's life "After all, life—writing is filtered twice, first through the subjectivity of perception, and then through the writing process, as the narrative imposes a logic and causality on the text that was never there in real life. This means that autobiography is not a record, but a creation, and in order to distract readers from this artificiality, writers usually simulate authenticity in their texts in some way.

As an autobiographer, Eva Kasaya attempts to construct authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*.

4.3 Constructing Authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*

This can be understood from the perspective of the concept of autobiographical pact.

According to Paul John Eakin, autobiographical pact is

a form of contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life (Eakin1989: ix).

An autobiography promises to give the reader the writer's life story, which is why the concept of the autobiographical pact is a point of departure for the question of authenticity in autobiographies in general and *Tale of Kasaya* in particular. The reader thus expects *Tale of Kasaya* to give a true account of Eva Kasaya's life. She stages authenticity by trying as much as possible to give the readers her true self.

By way of her autobiography, Eva Kasaya invites the reader to look beyond her work as a house-help, the front region, and to discover the 'person behind the book', the back region. She gives her readers a glimpse into her private life both before she becomes a house-help and as a house-help. She narrates her early life in Hatwara coffee plantation in Thika as well as her life in Kerongo village in Maragoli and further provides a narration on how she finally became a house-help. In the process of providing these discourses, she gives the reader some very private aspects of herself. This 'breaking taboo' is regarded as an expression of authenticity because "it reveals something that is very private and thus part of the back region."

Kasaya openly talks about her 'rebellious' life as a young girl sneaking out through the window when her parents were asleep to go for night dances in the village during funerals as well as leaving her home to go and work as a house help without informing her parents, and not bothering to inform them after arriving at her place of work in the city. Not only were her moves dangerous for a girl of her age, but they also spell out disrespect for her parents. Reading such private and embarrassing revelations, the reader is convinced that Kasaya is open to scrutiny. This constructs authenticity in her autobiography. One example of these revelations is when she narrates:

Then Dotty opened the window quietly so it would not make any noise, and she jumped out. She said the grandfather was sensitive to the sound of the door and would wake up if he heard it creaking. I jumped out after her. I had no other options of getting bus fare so I went along. It was very dark and I felt my fear of the dark surface...Dotty knocked

softly at the door, and a boy let us in. There was another boy inside the house. As soon as we went in the boy who had opened the door took Dotty's hand and started kissing her. I was afraid and my body started shivering. The other boy came and sat next to me and started touching me...The boy started touching me again putting his hands in my private parts..." (Kasaya 89)

This graphic details of her observations and experiences suggest that Kasaya is truthful and that she is admitting the reader to scrutinise her private life. She admits that every time she left home she did not have the courtesy to inform her parents, she also admits that she was involved with boys in the odd hours of the night (though she does not say expressively that she had intercourse with the boys; it is implied). later in the autobiography, she looks back at this past and describes it in a disapproving tone, and therefore suggests that she has learnt from the folly of her youthful days.

Some of Eva Kasaya's experiences are based on Dotty's experiences. She reveals Dotty's past as a way of building the credibility of her narrative by casting it in a confessional tone:

Which is a first person style of writing that is often presented as on-going in diaries or letters, distinguished by revelations of a person's heart and dark motives. The first confession was written by St Augustine but it is Jean-Jacques Rousseau who turned it to a more secular purpose. (www.britannica.com)

Though she does not confess straight as having been involved with boys for money, Dotty's story seems to silently suggest this. The reader is like a tourist in Eva Kasaya's life, and she acts as a tour guide, steering the reader in the 'right' direction and revealing 'everything'. Some revelations are rather shocking to the audience, such as offhand comments like: "The boy begun touching my private parts" (89), or "I had no way of getting fare to Nairobi so I went along", or "the boy told me Dotty always brought them girls to have sex with for money and its during this time that the business thrived."(88) Most of these revelations refer to Eva Kasaya's sexuality, though she does not say it openly. The book contrasts two conflicting selves within her. This 'inner voice' lends authenticity to the text.

Applying the concept of 'staged authenticity' (which according to Erik Cohen in *Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism* is a negotiated rather than primitive experience: 54), *Tale of Kasaya* can be considered to be authentic. For Francis

Hart, “an autobiography or a memoir is the personal record of historic events and persons” (1970: 510). This can clearly be observed in the narrative *Tale of Kasaya*. The narrator invokes aspects of Kenya’s history by referring to the Kenya of the 1980’s with its cultural and political atmosphere. This renders the text more authentic as a Kenyan text. Indeed, some parts of the text even sounded historic. For instance, in describing life in Kerongo village, she says:

It did not help that the ligutu came in the evenings... They were looking for people who did not have KANU cards or had not purchased a stamp to go on their cards. The stamps cost twenty shillings, and if you had no stamp for that month, they carried away your table, your hen or your cock, or even your basins. They didn’t care if you were poor; they took everything you had to the sub-chief’s office. If you followed your hen after they had taken it and made a payment, the ligutu would return it to you... (Kasaya 46)

These activities were confirmed in the Kenya National Assembly Official Record (Hansard) page 76 of 1994, where honourable George Khaniri complains about poverty in his constituency of Hamisi, with citizens forced to buy Kanu cards by unscrupulous district party leaders.

Authenticity is thus staged using historical evidence. Kasaya being an ordinary citizen commenting on political developments such as Kanu and the *Ligutu* (representative of government) presents a degree of authenticity. She is seemingly showing the reader a balanced view of history, which further supports the claim of authenticity. Also the description of how Hatwara coffee plantation was managed and depiction of the Kerongo almost reads like a historical records. In describing Hatwara management she says:

The farm management provided free house to all the workers. Every family was also given a piece of land measuring about five meters by five meters on which to farm. One could take it or leave it. The senior employees didn’t accept the land, or took it and gave it to their junior colleagues. (Kasaya 16)

By referencing national histories, Kasaya shows an awareness of how the wider social and political dynamics impact on her life and the lives of the people that she interacts with as a matter of routine.

Kasaya also uses some aspects of style in order to accord her work a sense of authenticity. By using the ‘I’ narrator in *Tale of Kasaya*, the author places herself at the centre of the story as both its writer and subject. This is also the case because the ‘I’

allows her to use some of the experiences that she encountered as a housemaid. So the ‘I’ approach is what makes her narrative of mistreatment believable.

4.4 A Authenticity Based on Kasaya’s Point of Narration

Tale of Kasaya is rendered using a present-day narrator who reflects on a naïve and reckless past, and one in which she was exploited by some of the people that she encountered in her various jobs. By using the present-day narrator, she creates a remarkable distance between the experiences that she writes about and her understanding of those experiences, that creating a sense of objectivity in her presentation. The text is written in the first person perspective (first person narration). However, the way in which Kasaya criticizes herself, without portraying herself as a helpless victim of other people’s exploitative or overbearing instincts. This reflects a kind of self-reflexive maturity that also enhances the believability of the story. She is aware that although she bases her writing on her previous experiences, she ought to cast them in a way that respects that literature is a creative discipline that should nonetheless be believable. This conforms to Eakin’s view that “the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure” (1985: 3). So out of her numerous experiences of pain and suffering, Kasaya creates a work of fiction that is believable, yet again confirming Eakin’s argument that “the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of the present consciousness” (Eakin, 5).

4.5 Use of Local Language and Images as a Measure of Authenticity

Kasaya also uses of the local language and images. When describing their journey home from Hatwara, she uses Maragoli language for authenticity. *Isiongo nyadikira kie muriango*” (p 25). A Maragoli saying which means a water pot breaks at the doorstep). In describing her new home, she says ‘there was a fence made of *kinayo*.’” (25), When they arrived home she quotes her grandmother saying “welcome home *visukuru*-grandchildren” (25).

In *Tale of Kasaya*, to a certain extent, the author demonstrates her linguistic and cultural knowledge of the Maragoli as a way of demonstrating her regional and cultural authenticity. She engages in extensive description of places, time and events and even reveals private details about herself. But more and more, it becomes evident that the

authenticity gets questionable and the promise made the by the autobiographical pact is not kept. The autobiographical pact dictates that: the account should be “as frank and factual as the I narrator can make it.” (Lejeune, 22). There is a way in which such exposition amounts to building credibility, especially among readers who may be familiar with either the regions described or the language from which the indigenous words are borrowed.

4.6 Rethinking Authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*

Considering that any autobiography involves borrowing from actual experiences to create a story, questions are always asked on whether or how far an autobiography can be authentic. As such autobiographers employ various ways to construct authenticity. Using material evidence is one way through which autobiographers can construct authenticity since material evidence do not just record memory it reconstructs it. For Lejeune, autobiographies create a “referential pact in which are included a definition of the field of the real that is involved and a statement of the modes and the degree of resemblance to which the text lays claim” (1989: 22). Though Eva Kasaya presents details of her past, she fails to establish the ‘field of the real’ by including material evidence such as photographs from the past including of family members, schools, among others. This, essentially, works against the authenticity of the text. Although she frequently gives very meticulous descriptions of places and people, she opts not to give any material as evidence of ever knowing the said people or being in the said places which could go a long way to accord her authorial authority and credibility.

But a close look at *Tale of Kasaya* reveals a narrative is full of gaps due to Eva Kasaya’s continued demonstration of amnesia and her silences. She dedicates her autobiography to her son, a son who is not mentioned at all in the story. The very fact that she dedicates the book to the son implies that this son was already born by the time Kasaya was writing her story. Eva Kasaya who is supposedly telling the readers her entire life conspicuously fails to mention that she has a son in the story, or how, when and with whom she got the son. This casts doubt about the book’s authenticity. Throughout the story Eva Kasaya does not mention that she has a boyfriend or has ever engaged in any sexual encounter with any man; whether willingly or through rape. She presents herself as a victim who always managed to escape. She has obviously chosen the

events she wants the reader to see leaving out what she does not want the reader to see. This proves how inauthentic subjective stories may be. Thus, Kasaya's autobiography pushes against the boundaries of the genre. Stephen Spender notes that we "colour our past experiences with those present ones which give them significance, illustrating what we are and not what they were" (322). According to Cecil Day Lewis:

everyone, through the inner monologue that is his reflective commentary on experience, selects and subtly distorts the facts so as to make him more interesting or more tolerable to himself, in doing so he creates a personal mythology which, because it modifies him, does become representative truth. (243)

The view that all narratives are artificial can be observed in Eva Kasaya's autobiography, for instance when she employs contrived literary devices such as suspense. Such creative impositions may be for the reader's benefit, but they limit the text's authenticity. Kasaya also melodramatises her narrative, especially towards the end of the book. For instance, she says:

I had been through a lot but I felt like I was now beginning my life. That my story hadn't started, that all I had gone through I was about to start my life, tell my story. And so I started (Kasaya 183).

Besides being dramatic, some parts of the text read as though they were narrated by an omniscient narrator who has the ability to see through other characters minds. Eva Kasaya seems to know in details what took place in her absence; she reports the incidents as though she were present and even quotes the exact words the people spoke in direct speech. When narrating what happened after she left Mama Eddy's house Eva Kasaya sounds like a third person fiction narrator. She narrates:

Mama Eddie went first to see if the children were all right at their grandmother's. She then rushed with the three men who worked for her, Onyango and the two that herded her cows. She stormed into our compound saying; " You know Eva has gone"
... "Eva has gone and has stolen my one thousand shillings," Mama Eddie said.
Dad said I had passed by and given him money
"I have to look inside your house" Mama Eddie said.
Mum and Dad were in shock as Mama Eddie and her men went inside the house and searched through. (Kasaya 80)

When an autobiographer talks about something, which happens in his/her absence, it becomes difficult to narrate, hence they employ an authorial voice. Eva Kasaya in the above excerpt seems to know even what happened where she was not present and could even see through other people's minds, which sounded more like an omniscient narrator in fiction who can access the minds of all the other characters in a story.

Quite surprising is that Eva Kasaya records conversations from her early childhood without ever keeping a journal. This creates doubt as to how she could remember some of those details, and thus undermines the credibility of her narrative.

Structurally, *Tale of Kasaya* is divided into chapters. Each of the chapters bring out her influences and the mentors who especially help or influence her at every point in her life. For example, the earlier chapter recount her few years in Hatwara coffee plantaion in Thika, then her new home in Kerongo and shows how her mother's tolerance in the face of poverty and discrimination inspires her. The later chapters describe her life in the city. it is possible that these subdivisions undermine the credibility of the narrative because they fracture it, as suggested by John Mullan who states that "autobiography must explain; a novel can make a narrative out of gaps, fiction artfully omits." (Mullan 2007.)

Tale of Kasaya evidently omits some information. Although there are several references to the protagonist's sexuality, they are all vague. In an interview Cate Mukei (see the full interview in the appendix section of this study) had with her in 2014 Eva Kasaya reveals that she has a son who was then (2015) eight years old. Hence, confronting the audience with a son they have not interacted with in her life story prompts the audience to question why an 8 year old son in 2014 did not appear in a book published in 2012. When asked during the interview how she got the son, she reveals that during her trouble days, a certain pastor who pretended he could help her, took advantage and raped her. Whatever the case, one wonders why she did not include the rape story in her narrative if she was sincere. One is forced to ask why Eva Kasaya sneaks out with Dotty at night knowing so well the kind of a girl Dotty was. One wonders how they could be in a house; two boys and two girls; Dotty and herself, Dotty having a mission of them making money by exchanging their bodies for sex yet Dotty had sex with a boy in this very house and Kasaya did not yet the mission that took them

there was sex for money. Again one questions how Dotty could have sex to get money to pay her fare to Nairobi then again have sex to get fare for Kasaya. Kasaya writes that Dotty explained to her that that was where she normally took girls to have sex with boys for money. One then asks why Dotty took Eva Kasaya, who needed money for fare, to the 'business house' but did not engage herself in a sexual intercourse.

However, in the case of her sexuality, it is certainly understandable that she may not want to paint a negative picture of herself. But the text is supposed to record the life of Eva Kasaya as a whole, since these issues are certain to have played a role in her development. The narrator's sexuality is a very important factor in shaping her character. But a prerequisite of being representative is being 'normal'. Perhaps she left these gaps in the narrative precisely because they would have exposed her as 'not normal'. And by hinting at the existence of a back region, she is retaining her individuality while also fitting herself into a broader context.

It is a fact that her sexual life is half the story, but another suspicious area concerns her family. When she begins her life story, her family is constantly present; a close-knit family. It is so surprising how when Eva Kasaya becomes a house-help her family conspicuously disappears from the picture. She does not inform them when she is leaving 'for work', the readers are kept in the dark about their reactions, when she arrives at her work places she still does not bother to inform them about her whereabouts which is quite unlikely for one who has all along had a good and close relationship with her parents. Eva Kasaya narrates how Mama Eddy was able to trace her to Nairobi within a very short time and brought her back to the village. This prompts the readers to wonder how possible it is that all the times she 'disappeared' from home without informing her parents that she was going to look for work, her parents did not manage to trace her; we are not told of even an effort to try tracing her. Surely, any loving parent would not be comfortable when a child disappears and wait patiently for her return. At one point after having disappeared for several months while working for Mama Eddy, she appears home one evening and finds her father seated next to the house, she hands him twenty shillings and disappears again. The father does not ask her where she has been and where she is quickly off to. The father is just comfortable with her daughter appearing and disappearing. It is as if nobody bothers to find out where she is, they wait patiently for

her return. The reader therefore is made to feel that some information about Kasaya's family is missing.

The reader feels that she censors herself. When she begins her story, she gives us a picture of her background; a poverty stricken, struggling family. However, as the narrative unfolds Eva Kasaya seems to be the only one struggling in this family, whatever happened to the rest of the family is clearly a zone the readers are not allowed to venture into; thus leaving gaps in the narrative. The text's authenticity is also undermined because Kasaya leaves gaps in the narrative and thus making the work to sound like a novel. She has repeatedly shown in her story that her memory of past events is failing her, she contradicts herself in several instances, such as about her salary. Although she is trying to demonstrate her sincerity by quoting even the exact amount of money she was paid, in trying to prove that she can remember the details of what happened on that day, she gets mixed up and quote contradicting figures.

Thus, although Eva Kasaya expresses her sincerity, the material she is basing her sincerity on is flawed by such instances of memory failure. This ambiguity contributes to deconstruction of authenticity in *Tale of Kasaya*. Autobiographies collect the authors' experiences, and therefore records rituals and practices of remembering all of which contributes to the preservation and relay/transmission of memory. The experiences remembered depend on the purpose of the remembering or the motives why remembering is done. In reading *Tale of Kasaya* the question of intention/motive thus arises. This has a wide bearing on the authenticity and sincerity since when someone sits down to write about himself/herself, it seems natural to wonder why, since without intention the whole business of writing becomes unintelligible. Why then is Eva Kasaya writing her life story; exposing herself to the public? Is she seeking atonement through confession? Or is she writing as a woman and a house-help who is part of a marginalized group who is seeking to be heard? The answer to this question is found in the tone of her voice. A close reading of Eva Kasaya's story clearly reveal an attempt to seek the public's sympathy for her and the women who find themselves in such situations. In an event where one seeks sympathy, exaggeration and self-justification and censoring is expected, which poses a question on authenticity since truth founded on impartiality is less objective. Cockshut (1984) states "the last thing any person, however truthful, learns to treat with perfect fairness is the self" (17). Eva Kasaya seems

to justify her actions. She portrays herself as the innocent victim and emerges as the hero who suffers without bitterness, who bore it bravely and never revenged even though her employers mistreated her. It is human to get frustrated and explode once in a while, but not Eva Kasaya; she seems super-human and does not get angered by extremely bad treatments from her employers. Her self-justification begins when she tells us of her innocent beginning, keeping away from men even when her friend Dotty tried to influence her. However, readers find her tone too heroic, which seems suspicious. Coupled with this, is the story of the narrators son, being eight years in 2014 implies that the son was born approximately in 2005, which puts question marks on the innocence she paints. The picture she paints of herself is too ideal. As a house-help in Nairobi, other girls had boyfriends but not her; she is making herself the angel of the story and we question why everyone has evil ways except her. Autobiographies are products of imagination and reconstruction of one's history and as such fictionalization is sometimes possible. World critic Lionel Trilling argues that sincerity is "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (1974: 2) and that measuring one's sincerity calls for "a knowledge of the author's intentions and feelings which no one but the author himself could be fully aware of" (Cuddon, 831). However, one can arrive at authenticity of an autobiography by closely studying the author's attitude.

Autobiographies are concerned with issues of order and how the autobiographers select the experiences they include in their autobiographies and how this selection impacts on the sincerity and the truth-value of the text. A reading of Kasaya's story reveals that her selection of experiences to include in the story is quite 'selective'; she chooses to intentionally leave out some incidents. These silences impacts on the authenticity of the story.

Conclusion

It is possible that Tale of Kasaya does not pass the test of authenticity. Though the narrative stages authenticity in some ways, there are gaps in the story which hint at deliberate distortion of the overall narrative. This chapter has demonstrated that the experiences one selects to include in an autobiographical work impact on the authenticity of the text. The chapter has also demonstrated that what a writer chooses to leave out when writing an autobiography is just as important as what one includes in

the text; studying an autobiography therefore involves studying both the written and the silences in the text. This chapter also examined in detail how Eva Kasaya constructs and deconstructs authenticity.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 GENERAL CONCLUSION

This research report has interrogated *Tale of Kasaya* by Eva Kasaya as an *autobiography* of resilience drawing several conclusions. The first is that *Tale of Kasaya* is indeed an autobiography. Autobiography being a slippery genre, scholars have attempted to draw boundaries of the genre. The study has proved that the book fits within the set characteristics of an autobiography. The first is the definition. The study defined autobiography as “a narrative of the past of a person by the person concerned” and *Tale of Kasaya* explores this definition. The narrative reconstructs Eva Kasaya’s life from birth in Thika to her life as a house-help in Nairobi and finally a self-employed independent woman.

As discussed in this study, *Tale of Kasaya* provides proof of the validity of the work as an autobiography through its authorship. Eva Kasaya’s name appearing on the cover of the text is a kind of a stamping of authority and putting her signature as a sign of identity.

Another aspect identified by the study as fixing *Tales of Kasaya* within the boundaries of the genre of autobiography is the stylistic criticism of a work of art. The narrative identifies the self, through the first person singular perspective since autobiography is a person’s story where they are both the subject and the object.

Combining the narrative of the self with externally verifiable historical events as well as mentioning real places, then events and dates is another factor that the narrative uses to put itself within the boundaries of the genre. This goes a long way to give details, which can be verified, giving the narrative some truth-value as well as providing the readers with opportunity to dialogue about issues and moments in history such as KANU dictatorial activities in the early 1990s, in victimising people with no party stamps, among others.

Due to the above mentioned factors that include definition, authorship, events, places and dates among others, the research concluded that *Tale of Kasaya* fits within the boundaries of an autobiography.

The study was also concerned with assessing *Tales of Kasaya* as an autobiography of *resilience*. The study found out that the narrator had coped with tough times and that despite financial stresses, lack of education, gender discrimination and maltreatment in the hands of employers, she stayed strong and never gave up. *Tale of Kasaya* starts with the idea of the struggling, and develops into a strong urge to rise above suffering and to overcome daunting circumstances. Eva Kasaya struggled between her desire to succeed and the negative forces that hindered her success and because of her determination, persistence and resilience, she succeeded.

The fact that the narrative is an autobiography prompted the study to interrogate the *authenticity* of the narrative since some people purport to write autobiographies, and the reader would trust their tales as truthful accounts of what happened to them or what they achieved; but sometimes such stories turn out to be false thereby betraying the trust of the reader. The study found out that memory as a constructive mechanism, can sometimes be unreliable especially where the self is involved. Autobiographers thus try to construct authenticity. Eva Kasaya in *Tale of Kasaya* constructs authenticity in several ways. However, the study found out that in trying to construct authenticity in the text, Eva Kasaya partly deconstructs that very authenticity.

Eva Kasaya constructs the authenticity of the text through use of the first person narrative voice, ‘breaking of taboos’ to give the reader an access to the ‘back region’ which is private—giving her readers the true Eva Kasaya behind the book. The research noted that her sharing very private and embarrassing details of her life proves authentic. Just as in the photographic portrait, in Eva Kasaya’s story there is authenticity, suggestiveness, an allegorical connection since the narrative feeds on what has already been formed, created, lived, and experienced as intimate. She creates this authenticity by mentioning places by their names and naming persons impacting positively on the truth-value of the text. She recollects her memories while recording rituals and practices of remembering; all of which contributes to the preservation and relay/transmission of memory. Reading *Tales of Kasaya*, the readers witness a very complex investment in the authors’ choices that have to do with face-making, face-giving, and face-concealing in the choices of experiences she includes and those she fails to include. The text further stages authenticity by providing historical evidence as well as use of the local language and images such as

when the narrator recounts their journey to Hatwara coffee plantation in Thika and their life in Kerongo village in Maragoli.

The study found out that while constructing authenticity, several instances in *Tale of Kasaya* deconstructs the same authenticity. Such includes the lack of material evidence to support its truth. Though the narrator gives detailed descriptions, she fails to give any audio-visual material as evidence, which would have gone a long way to provide her with a strong stamp of authority, and rendered her tale irrefutable. Eva Kasaya further deconstructs authenticity by demonstrating lack of memory for certain glaring events, which become silent and by use of ‘selective memory’, which seem propagandist.

Finally, as mentioned earlier in my study, *Tale of Kasaya* by Eva Kasaya is a relatively new book and no one before this study had undertaken any critical analysis of the book apart from its numerous reviews, mainly found on several blogs on the internet and by the publisher of the book. Therefore, this study sets the pace in the critical analysis *Tale of Kasaya* and calls upon more people to come forward and critique the book further; this will enhance its visibility, since it tackles serious pertinent issues in the Kenyan society, which impact on the lives of house-helpers most of who are down-trodden and marginalized and yet they fill a gap by rendering crucial services to households and, by extension, to society.

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Appendix

In an interview published on the Arts Lounge of the Standard of 19th December, 2014

Cute Mukei interviews Eva Kasaya. Below is the transcript of that interview:

MUKEI: Is it true that your award winning book, *Tale of Kasaya* is about your past life experiences?

EVA: Yes. That is my life experience from 1995 to 2005 when I finally broke the ceiling. It is a story told from the victims perspective that I hope will encourage the heartbroken and those who are almost giving up in life.

MUKEI: Tell us a bit about your life...

EVA: My mother was a casual labourer and was my family's breadwinner. My father on the other hand was retrenched from a coffee farm and was too old and frail to work. My elder sister dropped out of school for lack of school fee, and so, after completing my primary education, I took up a job as a house-girl to help my family. I could not just sit and watch them suffer.

MUKEI: In the book, you speak about struggling to get to Nairobi...

EVA: I worked as a house-girl at a neighbour's house, but deep down, I always felt I could move and work in the city. I admired girls who worked in Nairobi since they looked polished and sophisticated. Whenever they visited the village, I would marvel at how beautiful their hair and nails were done. They spoke sheng, Swahili and even little English, which was quite intimidating. I just wanted to look like them. I always assumed they were being paid more money compared to my KShs 300 monthly salary in the village.

MUKEI: How did you finally make it to Nairobi?

EVA: It was not easy, but when I finally got a chance, all hell broke loose. My former employer followed me to the city and accused me of stealing KSh 1,000 (it was a lot of money back then). I lost my job in Nairobi and went back to the village. I suffered in

silence since all parents in the village warned their children (my age mates) to stay away from me because I was a thief.

MUKEI: How did you manage to get back to Nairobi?

EVA: It was by sheer luck. In the village, we never had luxuries like tapped water, which meant we had to go to the river. On this particular day, I met a girl who was in high school and was on holiday break. We engaged in small talk and I told her my dream of working in the city. She promised to help me, claiming her sister would employ. As far as I was concerned, she was godsend. My dream was finally coming true!

MUKEI: What happened next?

EVA: That night I sneaked out of our home and she took me to her male friend's house. We were almost raped by men, but luckily, a friend of theirs asked to Dj at an event. They locked us up and we ransacked their clothes and stole sh500. We ran to the station, but the money was not enough for both of us. The girl was forced to have sex with one of the conductors in exchange for my free ride.

MUKEI: Was there anyone in particular you were going to work for?

EVA: No, I was totally clueless but the girl had promised to take me to her sister's house.

MUKEI: Was that the beginning of your journey to stardom?

EVA: My employer never paid me a single cent even though she had promised to pay me 200 shillings. I worked for three employers before I finally got a job in Lang'ata where I was paid KShs 1,200. However, my new employer was alcoholic and would come home late. I remember we almost got robbed twice and cases of women being raped were very high in the estate. It was too much to handle and I quit the job. That is when I found out house help bureaus.

MUKEI: Were things any better with bureaus?

My first employer was cunning. I had shared with her my love for tailoring and she volunteered to open a bank account where she would deposit my salary to enable me enrol for a course.

But she was playing mind games. When I informed her I was leaving and wanted my savings, she became violent and even attempted to kill me using clothes hanger. She beat me up claiming I was ungrateful. I was saved by neighbours. Later, I landed a job with newly-wed couple who were very supportive. They paid me on time and I managed to save some money to enrol for the tailoring course,

MUKEI: What happened then?

EVA: I started a tailoring course at Don Bosco in Karen. I became friends with a neighbour, Renate Ritter, a German woman married to a Kenyan. She helped me write down my memories that were in 2005. In 2010, (sic) it was published by Kwani? In 2011, *Tale of Kasaya* won the 2011 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature (Youth Category).

MUKEI: Did this improve your lifestyle?

EVA: Yes. The award included a Kshs 70,000 cash prize, which I used to pay my father's hospital bill. I am happy he finally saw me succeed before he died in 2012.

MUKEI: Do you meet people who tell you that they are inspired by your story?

EVA: House helps who read the book are inspired and view it as a beacon of hope. I have met former house girls who congratulate me for my courage to write about my story. At least I told the story from a victim's perspective.

MUKEI: What are you currently working on?

EVA: I am based in Western Kenya where I work for an NGO that helps less fortunate women. I am their chief tailor. I have also written several children books that are yet to be published.