

**CONTESTING TRADITIONS THROUGH SELF-NARRATION IN GRACE OGOT'S
*DAYS OF MY LIFE***

TONNEY HILLARY ODHIAMBO

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DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

This research report is my original work and it has not been presented for examination or the award of any degree at any other university.

Candidate:

Tonney Hillary Odhiambo

C50/70464/2013.

Signature  Date 01/09/2015

This research report has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors:


First Supervisor:

Dr. Tom Odhiambo

Signature  Date 01/09/2015

Second Supervisor:

Dr. Joseph Muleka

Signature  Date 01/09/2015

DEDICATION

To God Almighty and Creator after whose image we all take, and whose love and kindness surpasses all understanding.

To the memory of my late mother, Elester Auma; for very few years you showed us love and protection whose value your absence denied us prematurely.

To Auntie Agnetter Oketch; for becoming the most wonderful replacement of your sister. Thank you, for you have been more than a mother to us.

To my late brothers, Calvince and Kerry; while you be gone, in life we retain a memory of the days you were with us.

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CONTENTS

DECLARATION AND APPROVAL	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CONTENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Definition of Terms	4
1.2 Statement of the Problem	5
1.3 Objectives.....	6
1.4 Hypotheses	6
1.5 Rationale.....	7
1.6 Literature Review	9
1.7 Theoretical Framework	13
1.8 Scope and Limitations.....	25
1.9 Methodology	26
1.10 Chapter Outline	26
CHAPTER TWO: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND CONTESTING TRADITIONS.....	29
2.0 Introduction	29
2.1 Locating Ogot’s Fidelity to Autobiography	31
2.2 The Autobiography as Literature	37

2.3 Contesting Traditions: In the Footsteps of her Father.....	43
2.4 Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER THREE: PROJECTING FEMALE AGENCY	56
3.0 Introduction.....	56
3.1 Self-Portrayal through Narration.....	58
3.2 Narrating Women’s Kenyan Empowerment Efforts.....	67
3.3 Narrating Female Agency in Ogot’s Semi-Autobiographical Fiction	76
3.4 Conclusion.....	87
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION	89
WORKS CITED.....	93

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of self-narrative to express dissatisfaction with traditions and how this expression of dissent allows the projection of female agency. This is a study of Grace Ogot's autobiography, *Days of My Life*, which examines how her life from the beginning has been one of attaining "firsts" in diverse fields from education, employment to political leadership, holding that her contests with tradition borrows from her upbringing. It is to this realization that the study begins by looking at a biographical account of her life. Noting that Ogot's life, including that of her parents, spans the duration from pre-colonial to the post-colonial era, the study relies on her self-narration as replica of the story of Kenyan women's development towards realization of fair representation in patriarchal traditional set-up. It is thus an attempt to find not only how women have been denied liberty by patriarchal arrangement, but also a study to find how women try to acquire this voice against a backdrop of male-dominance. Towards this end, the study is conducted from a feminist theoretical perspective, which proposes that societal arrangement privileges males at the expense of females. The study seeks to show how Ogot presents a narrative of female characters whose lives offer counter-narratives to the prevailing attitudes in her society, which is informed by male-dominance. Thus the study concludes that the need to liberate women is an all-involving and continuous process that should interest everybody irrespective of gender differences.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This section provides a brief biographical account of Grace Ogot to highlight her education, employment and leadership roles. The knowledge of Ogot's past will be instrumental in acquiring an understanding of Ogot the writer since a number of her writing displays aspects of her personality. In the end I argue that Ogot's contestation of traditions and advocacy for female agency are linked to the life she led while growing up.

Grace Ogot was born Grace Emily Akinyi in Butere, Western Kenya, on 15th May 1930. She did part of her primary school learning at Maseno Junior School between 1940 and 1941 before proceeding to Ng'iya Girls' School between 1942 and 1945 and later to Butere Girls' School. At Butere, Ogot studied for the Kenya Junior Secondary Examination from 1946 and did the examination which she passed at the end of 1948. Ogot then went to Mengo Medical School in Kampala, Uganda, to pursue a professional course in Medical Training in 1949, becoming—as she says—the first Kenyan woman in record to go that far by then. Against the dissenting voices of her family members steeped in their wish to see her married after training at Mengo Medical School, Ogot went for further training at the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in 1955. Once again she became the first Kenyan woman to pursue advanced studies in Britain.

Grace Ogot worked at Maseno Mission Hospital as a Sister-in-Charge of Maternity and Children's Ward between 1958 and 1959. At the same time she began to work for the Voice of Kenya Radio Service, giving weekly talks on issues affecting women. She was then appointed in 1961 to work as both the District Community Development Officer for Central Nyanza, an area

covering the present day Siaya, Kisumu and Busia Counties, and the Principal of Kisumu Home-Craft Training Center.

In 1963 she became the first African to work as Sister-in-Charge at Makerere Health Services Unit that served staff and students at the Makerere University College where she remained till 1964 before joining her husband at Nairobi University College (the present-day University of Nairobi).

Ogot emerged first again to become the first Kenyan woman to work for Air India Corporation of East Africa from 1964 to 1966. During the said period, she was the airline's Public Relations Officer in charge of East and Central African region. She also worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation as a script writer and an announcer.

Grace also worked as Director of Kenyatta National Hospital from 1987 when the hospital was established as a state corporation. She was among the eleven members of the board then established and mandated with the responsibility to administer, manage and develop the hospital.

Ogot's involvement in national politics began with her nomination to parliament by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) party in 1983, increasing the number of women in parliament to three against over one hundred men. Following the death of Horace Ongili Owiti who was the Member of Parliament for Gem Constituency in 1985, Ogot vied and won the by-election. She was appointed to the Cabinet as the Assistant Minister for Cultural and Social services. Ogot then became the second woman ever appointed to an assistant ministerial post in Kenya's history. She was re-elected in the 1988 general election and was then a Member of Parliament together with her younger brother, Ambassador Robert Jalang'o, who represented their rural

home of Asembo. She lost her re-election bid to serve another term with the onset of multi-party elections in 1992 for what she explains as being with the wrong political party.

Her writing career may have seen her election as the founding chairperson of the Writers Association of Kenya which was formed in 1974. She was also elected the Vice-Chairperson of the Kenya Oral Literature Association formed ten years later. She is considered a pioneer African author following the publication of her first novel *The Promised Land* (1966) by which she became the first African woman writing in English to be published by the East African Educational Publishers in 1966, the same year that Flora Nwapa from Nigeria also became the first African woman author following the publication of her novel *Efuru* by Heinemann African Writers Series.

Days of My Life (2012) is Ogot's last book. It adds to a long list of literary works. Her writing includes the novels, *The Promised Land* (1966), and *The Graduate* (1980) and the collections of short stories, *Land Without Thunder* (1968), *The Other Woman* (1976) and *The Island of Tears* (1980). In addition, she also authored two children's stories in Dholuo: *Ber Wat* (The Goodness of a Relative) and *Aloo Kod Apul Apul* (Aloo and the Ogre) both in 1984 and two novels also in Dholuo: *Simbi Nyaima* (1983) and *Miaha* (1982). *Miaha* was translated in English as *The Strange Bride* (1984) by Okoth Okombo.

Ogot was married to Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot in 1959 and together they had four children. She lived for 85 years during which she served the nation in various capacities as a career nurse, a tutor, writer, politician and women's activist. She died on Wednesday 18th March 2015, in Nairobi.

Days of My Life, the autobiography of Grace Ogot, was published in Kisumu by Anyange Press in 2012. In the text, Grace Ogot recounts her life experiences from childhood and chronologically relates her life through educational institutions in and out of Kenya and employment in various capacities abroad as well as within the country. The text is divided into six chapters with each giving a detailed account of her life in the stated contexts thus: Chapter One; “My Father and A Woman Called Rahel,” Chapter Two; “Early Education,” Chapter Three; “Professional Training,” Chapter Four; “The Makings of a Writer,” Chapter Five; “Women’s Empowerment,” and Chapter Six; “I Enter Politics.” *Days of My Life* conforms to Muchiri’s definition of autobiography in *Women’s Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* as the “story or an account of one’s life written by oneself (1).” Ogot emerges as a first in many varied ways since her life displays a constant break from the norms of her society’s traditions. This study examines how Ogot’s contest with traditions accords her the ability to suggest an agency for herself and other women.

1.1 Definition of Terms

The terms below are used in this research report and the definition of their meanings is borrowed from the *Feminist Movement Builders’ Dictionary*.

Agency: this word is defined as “capacity to take action or to wield power.” It has been used to refer to the need for women to have the liberty to decide what is good for themselves in pursuit of desirable objectives.

Advocacy: is defined as, “An organized, concerted effort by people and organizations to effect change in both the formal political and policy arena as well as social attitudes.”

Empowerment: is defined as a “process involving a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective mobilization and resistance aimed at upending systemic forces and power dynamics that work to marginalize women and other disadvantaged groups.”

Equality: refers to “measurable, equal political representation, status, rights and opportunities.” It is further noted that gender equality does not imply similarity of both men and women but that the two “need to have equal value in the society and should be afforded rights and treatment as equals.”

Oppression: refers to “a systemic social phenomenon based on the perceived and real differences among social groups that involves ideological domination, institutional control, and the promulgation of the oppressor’s ideology, logic system and culture to the oppressed group.”

Patriarchy: is defined historically to refer to “systemic and institutionalized male domination embedded in and perpetuated by cultural, political, economic and social structures and ideologies.” Such systems are known to subordinate women to inferiority while transferring control and decision-making rights and privileges to men and this makes values of masculinity to be considered the ideals of normal life.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Meic Pearse in *Why the Rest Hates the West* affirms the value of traditions in the past, stating that “wisdom and right behavior consisted in following tradition and the ways of one’s ancestors” (79). Today however, the individual—or a society—may reach a point where they do not see the value of the traditions of their community, so they choose to replace such traditions with new ways of life. Such an open and deliberate act in defiance of established and hitherto unchallenged traditions is preceded by a feeling that such traditions have become oppressive on

the population or a section of it. Rather than be the social fabric that holds the people together and provides relevance to all within a social setting, such traditions are deemed to have been crafted with the deliberate aim of limiting others based on differences of gender, background, race or creed. In this regard, individuals within a society may find the justification to contest some of its traditions.

Many traditions are felt to be oppressive to women to the extent that they limit what a woman should do, how and when. This limitation may trigger among women the desire to create a society devoid of gender-based biases which in turn necessitates the call for women's liberation from such oppressive traditions. In my study I examine how Grace Ogot (re)presents her society, focusing on the changes it undergoes and personal transformation, all as a means of dramatizing the reciprocal action and reaction between tradition and modernity and in the process suggesting a 'new' agency for women.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

- i. To explore the ways in which Grace Ogot dramatizes the interplay between tradition and modernity in her own life and that of the community.
- ii. To evaluate how self-writing is used as a tool to suggest and project personal agency and freedom for women.

1.4 Hypotheses

The study was based on the following hypotheses:

- i. Grace Ogot (re)presents the meeting point of tradition and modernity in her life and that of her community.

- ii. The autobiography provides a means by which the writer suggests a projection of personal agency and freedom for women.

1.5 Rationale

The study of Grace Ogot's autobiography is relevant as it traces the narrator's life to the pre-colonial era with its patriarchal societal structures that privileged male-dominance. The traditional society had little consideration for the formal education of girls, and even when access to education was allowed such access was limited. In his article "How Grace Ogot Made Kenya's Literary Torch Shine" in the *Standard Newspapers* on 20th March 2015, Joe Ombuor says, "Grace was a pioneer who broke barriers for women at a time when social attitudes saw little value in educating girls." Ombuor's position on Ogot's pioneering effort in subversion of tradition emphasizes the minor position allowed females in their pursuit for education in the past. This attitude was informed by the traditional view of women as people who were on their way out and who would eventually leave and go to join a new family in marriage.

The choice of my title is informed by the important role women play in the society as daughters, wives and mothers in the home, and other roles in the public. There are many African women writers who have portrayed female characters as role models in the struggle for liberation from patriarchal social structures, such as Margaret Ogola in *The River and the Source* (1994); Majorie Oludhe in *Coming to Birth* (2005); Wangari Maathai in *Unbowed* (2006); Mamphela Ramphele's *A Life* (1995); and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's *This Child Will Be Great* (2009). I chose Ogot's book because unlike the autobiographies mentioned above, it captures the tension and, in the words of Joe Ombuor, "the struggle between the demands of emerging Christianity and Western culture in Kenya and the equally powerful Luo culture." This confluence of cultures

leads Ogot to a blending of the customs of both tradition and modernity, even as she roots for the new one.

While Ogola's *The River and the Source* (1994) and Oludhe's *Coming to Birth*, also record women who break from traditions to chart independent life paths, theirs remain works of fiction unlike Ogot's book which is a record of life lived, hence carrying the authority of experience. In the same light, Ramphele's *A Life* is an autobiography whose author recounts the struggles of a woman who seeks to rise to a position of influence in a colonial set up in South Africa under apartheid. Sirleaf's *This Child Will Be Great* is also an autobiography narrating the struggles against poor leadership in post-independence Liberia, characterized by under-development and civil wars. Similarly, Mathaai's *Unbowed* is a record of the struggle against environmental degradation instigated by a male leadership structure immune to the challenge from an educated woman.

My study aimed to examine Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life* because it gives a first-hand account of her struggles to remain significant in being the link between the passing traditional lifestyle and the emerging modern life propped by Christianity. Such traditions had, attached to them, the central importance preferring marriage to women's desire to pursue further studies. While she lives through both the colonial and post-colonial era, Ogot does not show her involvement in the independence struggle much as she becomes a victim of race discrimination. She narrates a life of protest against tradition whose seed was planted by her parents' earlier decision to embrace the new religion, Christianity.

Unlike the three autobiographers named above, all whose love lives collapse at one time or another, Ogot does not experience any challenge at the family level to warrant a break up of her matrimonial union. Moreover, while studies may have been conducted on Ogot's fiction with

regard to the social, political and economic place of women and the role of tradition, I feel enough is yet to be done with regard to her treatment of these issues from a first-hand account as only an autobiography can. This is because her autobiography is relatively a new book with a few reviews to it so far.

1.6 Literature Review

This section reviews available literature with a view to establishing what has been done by other critics and researchers on Grace Ogot's writing as well as on the topic of contesting traditions and projecting female agency.

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger posit that a people who experience quick transformations and social change will subject pre-existing traditions to re-invention. Found rigid and devoid of adaptability, such traditions will be discarded and in their place new ones put installed. My study sought to argue that Ogot's parents were the first among their people to change tradition by converting to Christianity, thereby setting pace and justification for Ogot's life depicted as having been lived in opposition to some of the African traditional ways of life.

Molara Leslie-Ogundipe in her article "African Women, Culture and Another Development" identifies six mountains on the back of African women and identifies men as the fifth among these mountains. She calls upon African women to dismiss men out of their lives for being "steeped in his centuries-old attitude of patriarchy which he does not wish to abandon because male domination is advantageous to him" (113). Molara's position is interesting to my reading of Ogot's text as she narrates a subversion of patriarchal social structures to project her agency as well as other women's while in the end retaining her domestic relations with men. Rather than do

away with the men, Ogot advocates for a contestation of the patriarchal structures that permit male dominance. She does not advocate for Molar's radical stance against men.

In her fiction, *The Promised Land*, Grace Ogot describes a detailed procedure of establishing one's new homestead away from the parents' homestead. While in her autobiography, she tells of her father Joseph Nyanduga Onyuna whose decision to build his 'dala' (home) without the traditional son, cock and axe is by itself a contest of the established ways of life among the Luo people. Narrating her father's open defiance of the demands of tradition forms the basis of my argument that Ogot's contestation of tradition comes from the seeds of rebellion planted by her father in her childhood.

In *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in African*, Charlotte H. Bruner says *The Promised Land* shows Ogot's "concern for women's role and her fascination with the mysterious and the macabre" (91). The Protagonist, Nyapol, is the voice of reason whose earlier instinctive reaction against the move out of ancestral land remains justified in the end, as the couple must return home because of a mysterious ailment contracted by the man. My study aimed to explore how Ogot represents the interplay between tradition and modernity in her own life and that of the community. That Ochola's ailment drives the people to seek medication both from the traditional medicine men and the white man's hospital establishes Ogot's recognition of the coexistence of both tradition and modernity in her society.

Bruner further writes of Ogot's concern for Kenya, calling upon women as agents of social transformation and the travelled intellectuals to return their skills home. Of Ogot's *The Graduate*, Bruner states that it deals with "the problems and happy, if fortuitous, resolution experienced by the protagonist, Kenya's first woman Minister of State" (91). Bruner's position follows after the said woman makes a call for the skills acquired abroad to be returned home.

The effort to call back expertise from abroad mirrors Ogot's dilemma early in her life over whether to work in Britain after her training or get back home and fulfill her promise to the sponsors.

In *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers* edited by Mike Kuria, Ogot in an interview with Kuria states that wife inheritance is one of the cultures that are oppressive to women and declares that she would never be inherited if she were to remain a widow. She says, "There are others who will say no to these things. I am one of them that will never be inherited because there is no reason for it (77)." This research paper sought to study Ogot's attempt to contest traditional practices among her Luo community that she felt were equally oppressive to her as a woman.

In his autobiography *My Footprints in the Sands of Time*, Bethwell Ogot praises his wife, Grace Ogot for the firm stand she took during their courtship to secure their marriage against the opposition by the religious revivalists from Nyanza, Nairobi and Uganda who "were against their sister-in-Christ marrying someone who was not born again. In the 1950s and 1960s this was a serious issue. We were able to weather this threat largely because Grace took a firm stand....(97)" His revelation depicts Ogot to have begun to drift away early in contesting tradition, not only of ancestral ways of life but also of the religious limitations concerning her choices in life.

In his tribute to Grace Ogot following her demise titled, "Fare Thee Well until We Meet again in the Promised Land," Bethwell Ogot recalls his life with Grace from the time of their courtship through marriage to the time she passed on. He describes her as a courageous and diplomatic woman, illustrating the instance she approached the then President Moi to report a threat to her life while serving as the legislator for Gem Constituency. He also recalls her diplomacy in

handling political rivals in the same constituency. In a display of a break with tradition, he accompanied her to political rallies, carrying her briefcase and in the process, earning the mockery of many Luo men who branded him a handbag husband. This study has pursued the extent to which Ogot's disquiet with tradition received the support of the men in her life like her father and the husband.

In *Autobiography in Education*, Peter Abbs views the nature and origins of autobiography as a backward search into time with the intent to discover the true self. Abbs' view on the nature of autobiography calls for the critic to engage memory as it plays an important role in recalling the events narrated in the autobiography. The view also emphasizes the narrator's life as the subject of narration, implying that the writer is the subject narrator. It is the individual telling a life story. My study attempted to examine Ogot's life story in relation to how she makes attempts to circumvent the oppressive aspects of tradition and in the process project her agency and that of Kenyan women.

In his MA thesis, "Interrogating History and Restoring Agency to Women in *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola", Tom Odhiambo investigates the issue of women agency in fiction. My study proposed to use Grace Ogot's autobiography to find out how she subverts tradition and projects female agency in the process. However, Ogola deals with the success of women left alone after men who relate to them as sons, brothers, fathers or husbands have all died. Ogot's life story, on the other hand, presents her success in life in the full view of men who, with the exception of her father, opposed her earlier attempts to pursue liberty and attain success.

Jennifer Muchiri, in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya*, concludes that female autobiographers (re)present themselves in relation to others within their work, unlike male self-writers whose work is characterized by display of ego. She further argues that female

autobiography is “an effort towards finding an independent voice for the woman” (159), calling upon women to reject stereotypical labels assigned them. Muchiri’s conclusion on autobiography sparked my interest to find out how Ogot questions and possibly re-invents traditions, as an effort towards projecting women’s concern.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study relied on feminist theory. The term ‘feminism’ can be traced to the French word “feminism,” that was coined by Charles Fourier and had its first English usage in the 1890s in affiliation with the movement for equal political and legal rights for women. Feminism then became a movement organized around a belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. Feminist theory is an outgrowth of this general movement to empower women worldwide. It can be viewed therefore, as a recognition of and critique of and an effort to change male supremacy and dominance. As a theoretical perspective, it holds that prejudice against women is deeply rooted in culture. In *Literary Criticism* Charles Bressler states that the ancient Greeks supported gender discrimination by viewing the male as superior while the female as inferior. Women were then believed to “lure men away from seeking after truth, preventing them from attaining their full potential” (171). In her definition of feminism, bell hooks says in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* that it is “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (1). In her definition, hooks defines feminism based on its goal of achieving equality of the sexes. In identifying sexism as the trouble, her definition does not connote men in the opposition. Instead, “it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult” (1). The early twentieth century however, marked the beginning of major concerns of feminist

criticism. It was the era that saw women suffrage success as women gained prominence in social activism, although attaining gender equality was still far from reality.

Muchiri identifies four tenets of feminism by which the theoretical perspective operates: the first among these tenets is the belief that society is permeated with patriarchy, being organized in such a way as to ensure that women remain subservient to men. The second is that the prevalent concepts of gender are to a large extent, cultural constructs propounded by the patriarchal prejudices. Third one is based on the claim that the dominant patriarchal ideology pervades the literary canon, determining what is to be considered great literature, much of which is done by men. To illustrate the reality of this claim, Muchiri says "...this patriarchal ideology pervades those writings which have been considered great literature and which until recently have been written almost entirely by men" (18). Lastly, the criteria for analyzing and evaluating literature have traditionally been steeped with masculine assumptions, interests and reasoning. This has rendered critical valuations of literary works to be unofficially gender-biased.

Feminist criticism has developed into different branches over the years to produce a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies espousing concern with gender disparities and equal rights for women. Each of these branches is distinct with regard to their approach to literary texts.

Liberal Feminism works towards the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. To this end, it holds that all people are created equal and asserts that none should be denied equality of opportunity on the basis of gender. The proponents focus their effort on social change, calling for the institution of legislation and regulation of employment practices. They hold that inequality stems from the denial of equal rights, and that the basic hindrance to attaining this equality is sexism. Sara Motta et al in "Feminism, women's movements and

women in movement” emphasize the liberal feminists’ approach to attain equality of the sexes when they say that:

Liberal feminists have sought to free contemporaneous society from residual, pre-modern, patriarchal throwbacks in law and culture, investing in legal, educational and media strategies as a form of feminist civilizing process as well as lobbying the state for formal equality within the public sphere. (4-5)

Liberal feminist advocates such as Betty Friedan, Rebecca Walker and Naomi Wolf, believe that liberating women requires the elimination of sexist discriminations. Muchiri says that “according to liberal feminists, women will only be liberated when sexist discrimination is eliminated” (19). In literature, this discrimination is manifested in gender stereotypes and gender roles allocation. Key to the issues of concern to liberal feminists include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, “equal pay for equal work,” affordable childcare and health care as well as the need to make public the frequency of domestic violence against women.

Radical Feminism is a belief in underlining the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or the social authority of men over women. Motta et al defines Radical feminism “in terms of an emphasis on patriarchy as the foundational system of power from which all other injustices spring, and often depicted as pursuing separatist organizing strategies that celebrate and defend women’s difference from men” (5). This branch of feminism views patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges, and power by gender, and oppressing women while giving men the opportunities. It views oppression of women by patriarchy as the root cause of all other inequalities. Radical feminists believe that to free themselves, women have to first dismantle the patriarchal system which they view as inherently oppressive and dominating. The proponents believe that male authority and power structure is to blame for the oppression and inequality

borne by women. This is therefore their justification for seeking to abolish patriarchy. They hold that eliminating patriarchy and other systems perpetuating dominance of one group by another will liberate each individual from injustice in the society.

Socialist and Marxist feminisms blame the oppression of women on the labour exploitation of gender relations. The Socialist feminists hold that women's oppression stems from their work in the family and the economy claiming that women are held down due to their unequal standing in both the work place and the domestic arena. Suzanne MacKenzie in "A Socialist Feminist Perspective on Gender and Environment" asserts that this branch of feminism "...sees history in the materialist tradition" and says that the proponents "...focus on institutions and social practices of capitalism (or other modes of production) as these affect women, and attempts to understand the relations of gender and class in the course of social change" (186). The proponents of this strand claim that women's inferior position is the result of class-based capitalism. They further believe that history can be made in the private sphere of home and not just the public arena of work place associated with men. They basically argue for an increased emphasis on the private sphere and the role of women in the household matters. In addition, proponents also front an argument for equal opportunity for women in the public spaces.

Marxist Feminism is based, as Muchiri says, "on Marxist ideals of the oppressed and it describes a struggle between two opposed forces: men and women" (19). Borrowing from Marxist notion of oppression of the worker class by the minority, proponents view men as wealth owners while women remain the oppressed although they are the wealth producers. It also holds that division of labour is related to gender role expectations. Motivated by the teaching of Karl Marx that gender oppression would vanish with the end of class oppression, this strand of feminism focuses on dismantling capitalism as a way to liberate women and to ensure social ownership of the

wealth production means irrespective of gender. It holds that capitalism, in giving rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and the ultimate unhealthy competition between the sexes, is the cause of women's oppression in the current social set up. It is with regard to this that the proponents seek to eliminate capitalism. Proponents of the Socialist Marxist feminism include Clara Zetkin, Sheila Rowbotham, Michele Barrett, Friedrich Engels, Clara Fraser, Emma Goldman and Eleanor Marx.

Ecofeminism links ecology with feminism to contend that there is a connectedness between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by patriarchy. Greta Gaard in "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" states that the basic tenet of ecofeminism is "that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (1). Eco-feminists believe that domination of women stems from the same ideologies that cause the domination of the environment. The proponents blame the oppression of women and destruction of natural environment on patriarchal systems where men own and control the land. The explanation provided is that since men control the land, they can exploit it for their own profit and success, in similar manner as they do exploit the women for profit, success and pleasure. In an effort to amend social and ecological injustices therefore, eco-feminists assert that women must work towards creating a healthy environment to end the destruction of land upon which the women rely to provide for their families. The call to protect the environment is emphasized by Gaard who says, "Ecofeminists call for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature" (1). The proponents of this strand are Rosemary Radford Ruether,

Vandana Shiva, Wangari Maathai, Mary Daly, Karen J. Warren, Gerda Lerner and Val Plumwood.

Black Feminism advances the argument that sexism, class-based oppression and racial prejudice are so bound together that they cannot be disentangled. The proponents fault feminist theories that seek to overcome sexism and class-based oppression while ignoring racial prejudice for discriminating against the black women on the basis of skin colour. Deborah K. King in “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology” confirms the Black Feminists’ concern by saying, “The dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism remain pervasive, and, for many, class inequality compounds those oppressions” (43). The proponents therefore assert that any effort towards the liberation of black women calls for liberation of all humans as this would spell an end to racial prejudice, sexism as well as class-based oppression.

One of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Alice Walker’s “Womanism” which emerged in the wake of early feminist movements that were specifically led by white women advocating social changes such as woman’s suffrage. These movements were largely white middle-class movements and ignored oppression based on racism and classism that affected the Black women greatly. Mobolanle Ebunoluwa in “Feminism: The Quest for an African Variant” explains the rise of Womanism saying:

Although feminism claimed as its goal the emancipation of all women from sexist oppression, it failed to take into consideration the peculiarities of Black females and men of colour. In practice, feminism concentrated on the needs of middle class women in Britain and America while posing as a movement for the emancipation of women globally. (228)

Alice Walker and other Womanists pointed out that black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of the white women. Ebunoluwa surmises that it is the inadequacies of feminism as advocated for by the white middle class women “and the need to evolve a theory or an ideology that caters specifically of (sic) the needs of Black women folk (that) later led to the development of another variant of feminism called Womanism” (229). The other proponents include Barbara Smith, Hattie Gossett, Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis. Womanism, nevertheless, is faulted by Anna Chitando in “Narrating Gender and Danger in Selected Zimbabwe Women’s Writings on HIV and AIDS” for excluding non-black women of Africa, saying:

However, as a theory, womanism has its own weaknesses. Despite the fact that it seeks to give a voice to black women, womanism fails to adequately take into account the heterogeneity of women of African descent, with their different historical backgrounds and social realities. This has given rise to African Feminism. (15)

Chitando holds that Womanism’s key weakness was the failure to incorporate well the women of Africa whose ancestry draws from without the continent’s geographical or cultural confines.

In this study, I used African Feminism. This strand of feminism encompasses women who trace their origins to Africa and in the diaspora. They are also women of both rural and urban residence, spanning all social classes. Rudo B. Gaidzanwa says in the “African Feminism” article that African identity can be claimed by women who are located outside the continent but who can trace their ancestry to Africa. Gaidzanwa says, “This applies to women in the United States of America, whose ancestors were enslaved by Europeans. The identity of African is also adopted by Caucasians, including women, who have been born and bred in various parts of Africa even though their ancestors may have originated elsewhere” (7). One may best put it that

African Feminists form a majority of women globally, being residents in both African and other continents by virtue of their ancestral origins and residence. Revimbo Goredema justifies the breadth of African identity in African Feminist Theory when he writes in “African Feminism: the African woman’s struggle for identity” that it is a “feminist epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments, which validate the experience of women of Africa and African origin against a mainstream feminist discourse” (34). Goredema justifies the place of an African variant of feminism and recognizes that it has provided a platform for self-expression, and that it has “created a movement that aims to raise a global consciousness which sympathizes with African women’s histories, present realities and future expectations” (34).

The Working Group Members who adopted “The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists,” at a meeting held in Accra Ghana in 2006, underscore the existence of a multiplicity of African feminists’ identity. In the preamble to the charter, the members begin by asserting their feminist identity thus:

We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women’s rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicize the struggle for women’s rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. (4)

In the preamble, the Working Group Members daringly situate African Feminism as an ideological entity within the context of African political discourse. Of particular concern to African feminists are the issues of patriarchy, race and tradition. On patriarchy, African feminists assert that out of every autonomous space the society allows its individuals, women are always recipients of the lesser share. African feminists identify patriarchal social structures and systems as oppressive and exploitative, aimed at keeping women under subjugation. These feminists therefore seek to strive for equality with men. The charter elaborates African Feminists' understanding of patriarchy thus:

Patriarchy is a system of male authority which legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal, cultural, religious and military institutions. Men's access to, and control over resources and rewards within the private and public sphere derives its legitimacy from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance. (5)

Faced with the inevitable reality of living in a patriarchal society and its attendant consequences of discrimination and oppression visited upon the African woman, members of the African Feminists Forum seek to achieve equality with men and to this end they resolve that:

With this charter, we reaffirm our commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations in Africa. We remind ourselves of our duty to defend and respect the rights of all women, without qualification. We commit to protecting the legacy of our feminist ancestors who made numerous sacrifices, in order that we can exercise greater autonomy. (2)

African feminists also recognize that apart from patriarchy, racial hierarchies have also historically undermined the lives of African women both in and out of Africa. Omolola Ladele in

his article “Reconstructing Identities Through Resistance in Postcolonial Women’s Writings: A Reading of Ezeigbo’s *The Last of the Strong Ones*” recognizes that the African women have been “tyrannized by a paternalistic hegemony as well as patriarchal African traditions” (73), a fact that points to the double-pronged problem that women face in Africa as a result of their race and gender. Such discriminatory circumstances are equally to blame for the exclusion of African women writers from the literary canon.

Drawing from the feminist tenet that the literary canon is permeated with the dominant ideology that privileges men with the decision of what should be considered great literature, African feminists see the need to expand the confines of African literary canon to accommodate female writers. Ladele seems to support this view when he writes that “the lack of critical attention may well be the indication of the sexual/textual politics which is the bane of women’s lives and writing in Africa” (74). African feminists therefore seek to reverse these conditions that have made African women subservient to the problems of race and gender hierarchies perpetuated by colonial and patriarchal hegemonies.

On traditions, African feminists point out that patriarchal traditions distinguish gender roles in ways that are disadvantageous to women. In “Issues in African Feminism: A Syllabus,” Ada Uzoamaka Azodo verifies that, “Rigid traditions discriminate against African women, who are seen as perpetual children and second-class citizens. Endemic sexism, patriarchal attitudes, and the force of blinding tradition bond African men in a hegemonic system that nourishes and protects their interests” (201). African feminists specifically point out aspects of tradition like polygamy, wife inheritance, female genital cut and limited access to economic empowerment means as repressive patriarchal traditions.

Gaidzanwa points out that, “The development of feminism has been problematic within Africa particularly with respect to issues such as female genital cutting and violence against women...,” (8) which are considered oppressive thus victimizing to women. While the African feminists do not seek to abandon traditions, they aspire for traditions that will be adaptable to the changing times but not stall as the call for change becomes inevitable. Pinky Megwe supports this point in “Theorizing African Feminism(s): the Colonial Question” saying that, “African feminism is not antagonistic to men but challenges them to be aware of those aspects of women’s subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African people” (17).

Ogundipe-Leslie explains that women all over the world today are oppressed. She says that the African woman specifically is weighed down by “six mountains on her back: one is oppression from outside (colonialism and neocolonialism?); the second is from traditional structures, feudal, slave-based, communal, etc.; the third is her backwardness (neo-colonialism?); the fourth is man; the fifth is colour, her race and the sixth is herself” (107).

Ogundipe says oppression from outside comes in the form of what she calls “foreign intrusions” (108) and recognizes that, “The African woman comes from a continent that has been subjected to nearly five hundred years of assault, battery and mastery of various kinds” (108). She says that such experiences of history have caused pain and left in their wake indelible effects. Ogundipe holds that the entry of new production means brought in by the colonialists is to blame for the marginalization of African women. She says:

The introduction of new economic activities such as slavery, the slave trade and the growing of national sole “cash crops” as opposed to food crops must have thrown the pattern of production in African societies into severe crisis. The resultant upheaval must

have affected the position of women within the production process and the relations of production. (108)

Ogundipe further points that African women were marginalized the more when the cash crop took center stage to become the main crop and that this trend led to “new economic arrangements between men and women and new attitudes of male social and economic superiority” (108).

The second of these mountains is the heritage of traditions which Ogundipe says “is built of structures and attitudes inherited from indigenous history and sociological realities” (112). She points that traditional power arrangements always ensured that women were ranked second to men even in matrilineal societies and that men are still dominant in both the private and public spheres of life. She says, “The ideology that men are naturally superior to women in essence and in all areas, affects modern-day organization of societal structures. The ideology prolongs the attitudes of negative discrimination against women” (112).

Ogundipe lists the backwardness of the African women themselves as another mountain on their back and states that this backwardness is what proceeds from “colonization and neo-colonialism, comprising poverty, ignorance and the lack of scientific attitude to experience and nature” (113).

Race is another burden that the African woman has to bear on her back “since the international economic order is divided along race and class lines” and that “race is an important variable of imperialism and neo-colonialism” (113).

Identifying that men too form part of the burdens that African women have to bear, Ogundipe notes that, “Not even the most politically progressive men are completely free from patriarchal attitudes and superiority” (113-114). It is therefore upon the women to confront what ails their social structures and “to fight for their fundamental and democratic rights, without waiting for

the happy day when men will willingly share power and privilege with them—a day that will never come” (114). This call requires African women to rise and fight for equality and wrestle it from the men who are not willing to let go of it.

Finally, Ogunديpe says the African woman herself is the sixth mountain on her back. This is because, “Women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Their own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling” (114). She challenges the African woman to take charge of her emotions and attitudes, and to develop assertiveness.

This theoretical perspective helped my study in evaluating Ogot’s effort to move against the grains of her people’s way of life, and in the process voicing a similar concern for all women.

1.8 Scope and Limitations

This study was confined to Ogot’s autobiography, *Days of My Life* and specifically focused on how she narrates a life story which reveals and uncovers her efforts in subverting oppressive traditions privileged by patrilineal social structure. In addition, I made reference to Ogot’s selected fictional texts but only to the extent that such works of fiction display her narrative prowess that privileges female characters who are opposed to being victims of male dominance. The study was limited to my analysis of the mentioned *Days of My Life* as the primary text, and the other texts were only referred to when showing Ogot as a narrator who seeks to depict other female characters as empowered and able to rise beyond limitations of patriarchy and traditional gender-role expectations.

1.9 Methodology

This study sought to employ an exhaustive reading of Ogot's *Days of My Life* to gain knowledge of the issues she raises. I used textual analysis of this text to examine the autobiographical narrative and to arrive at the conclusions of my research. I read secondary texts that are critical to the works of Grace Ogot, feminist writing and the advancement of female agency. My focus on identifying her style of writing, narrative technique, language use, characterization, setting and plot development formed the basis of my argument on the role of self-writing. I used a number of articles from electronic journals on literature, newspaper articles and other selected works of fiction by Grace Ogot and these aided me in realizing the objectives of my study. I studied materials on the theory of feminism with specific focus on African feminism to find a firm theoretical grounding for my argument towards finding Ogot's way of treating the subjects of tradition and agency on the issues she raises in her memoir.

1.10 Chapter Outline

The study is sub-divided into five chapters thus:

- i. Chapter One: Introduction.
- ii. Chapter Two: The Autobiography and Contesting Traditions.
- iii. Chapter Three: Narrating Female Agency.
- iv. Chapter Four: Conclusion

Chapter One, "Introduction" which provides a biographical account of Grace Ogot in brief with focus on her birth, education, employment and leadership roles. The chapter also delineates the study's statement of the problem, its objectives, hypothesis and the rationale. In addition, I have provided review of available literature pertinent to the study and detailed the theoretical basis

upon which this study is grounded. Finally, the chapter states the limitations and explains methodology of the study.

In Chapter Two, “The Autobiography and Contesting Traditions,” I have examined the genre of autobiography by focusing on its definition, nature and artistry. The intention is to situate the autobiographical genre as a literary work. I have in the process explained the fidelity of Ogot’s self-narrative to the genre of autobiography when viewed against a backdrop of the same. The chapter also explains Ogot’s contest with tradition and traces the said contestation to her father. In this chapter I argue that in contesting traditions, Ogot treads the same path that her father did, thus following in his footsteps.

In Chapter Three the study centers on the idea of “Narrating Female Agency” and proceeds to analyze Ogot’s life through church sponsored institutions and the valuable role a number of women played in her life, especially the missionaries. This chapter has traced Ogot’s life through primary school, before proceeding for secondary education as well as her professional training both in Uganda and Britain. The focus in all these instances has been on her quest for agency, both for herself and other women against the limited provisions of a male dominated set up. I have also linked Ogot’s political roles to the effort of women who took it as their duty to convince her into elective politics. In the end, I have also explained how she projects agency for women by narrating her involvement in efforts to empower them. It is towards Ogot’s efforts to empower women that this chapter has also examined the portrayal of female characters in her fictional works.

In Chapter Four, “Conclusion” I argue that there are traditions that are oppressive to the women and that it requires a deliberate and selfless involvement of the males to help stamp them out. It notes that Grace Ogot’s attempts to contest traditions have not had adverse effects on her

matrimonial life, showing the value of men in helping stamp out subversive cultures. It must have been on this understanding that her husband stood beside her in politics and together they have raised a successful family.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND CONTESTING TRADITIONS

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the autobiography as a narrative of self-expression, proceeding from some of the definitions of the autobiography, and examine Ogot's contestation of the aspects of her society's traditions that she expresses disquiet with in her memoir.

The *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* defines the autobiography as "a book about your life that you write yourself," restricting the autobiography to an account of one's self that is written down by oneself. Roy Pascal's definition situates an autobiography as a narrative that "involves the reconstruction of the moment of life, or part of it" with the interest that is centered on the self but "not the outside world" (2). The outside world however, according to Pascal, must of necessity appear in the autobiography so that "...in give and take with it, the personality finds its peculiar shape...(as well as)...imposes a pattern of life, (and) constructs out of it a coherent story" (2). Pascal asserts that while the life story is concentrated with revealing the self, events outside the life of the subject narrator are indispensable in the process of constructing such a story. It is Pascal's belief that the individual narrating one's life will rely on such external events to get the story moving.

Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* views an autobiography as "the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7), a definition that shows the autobiography as an account of past events centered on the life of the individual character. Like Roy's, Abb's definition locates main concerns of the autobiography with the life of the individual narrator. However, Abbs specifies the time-frame of autobiographies in arguing that it attempts to answer

questions of the writer's identity in the present, as well as in the future, much as it provides a backward search in time. He elaborates this concept of time saying:

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

Even though the autobiography is written in the present time when the author is still alive, the narrative is based on past experiences of the autobiographer's life while seeking to find a place in the writer's future. It thus becomes, in the words of Abbs, an attempt to ask "Who am I? How have I become who I am? What may I become in the future?" (7)

In his article "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographies and as Literature" James Olney states that the autobiography "may be understood as a recollective/narrative act in which the writer, from a certain point in his life—the present—looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how that past history has led to this present state of being" (47). Olney's view shows that an autobiography is written in the present time but with the vision cast onto the past time. It is a definition that complements Abb's definition and establishes the role of memory in the writing of autobiography. According to Olney, the autobiography goes back in the past time to seek an authentication for the state of an individual's present life.

Jennifer Muchiri's definition of the autobiography as "the story or account of one's life written by oneself" (1) supports the foregoing definitions, to make the autobiography a narrative of the self in which the individual narrator is the subject of narration.

The foregoing definitions show the autobiography as a record of life story. It is an individual's own recorded biography which is the outcome of a truthful and deliberate effort to study and write the self. My understanding of the autobiography, therefore, is guided by the proposition that it is the story one person decides to write about oneself to account for the life that has been led, providing a justification for the nature of one's life in the process.

2.1 Locating Ogot's Fidelity to Autobiography

This section looks at the nature of autobiographical genre and then compares Ogot's life narrative against the characteristics of an autobiography. In the final analysis, I hope to show that *Days of My Life* is an autobiography, and use it to study how Ogot narrates a life of contestation with traditions while projecting an agency for women.

Muchiri holds that the autobiography is the "form of a 'coming-of-age' story" (28). This is because it depicts the subject narrator's life journey of initiation into adulthood from the innocence of childhood, through the acquisition of experience, knowledge and understanding. In Ogot's text, her transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by a physical journey as she progressively moves from one geographical location to another. In the process, she acquires knowledge through her pursuit of education as well as develops a strong personality from her life experiences.

Autobiography is also marked by an effort to relay a truthful account of the narrator's life. This need for truth calls for the cultivation of autobiographical truth. Muchiri quotes Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who define autobiographical truth in their book *Reading Autobiography* as "an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing the meaning of a life" (28). Cultivating autobiographical truth relies on the narrator's earnestness as they relive their life story. Muchiri then expounds that:

Standards of autobiographical truth appear in terms of the sincerity of the writers, evaluated through their seriousness of personality and the intention of writing; subjective truth, that is, the unique truth of life as it is seen and understood by the individual; historical truth, that is, truth that can be verified through history; and fictional truth, that is artistry. Autobiographers cultivate autobiographical truth through cohesion, especially in terms of consistency of narrative voice.... (28)

Ogot builds truth in her autobiography by incorporating a coherent narrative voice which becomes the cohesive device for the story she weaves of her life, in the text. She is equally consistent in the way she depicts herself as one opposed to traditions that worked towards subverting women. Throughout the narrative, she remains an advocate for female empowerment and seeks an end to traditions that did not respect the dignity of women. In addition, Ogot's text also involves the use of para-textual components such as photographs, and dates of historical events to authenticate her claims in the text. References to historical events like the 1992 first multiparty elections in Kenya as well as the 1995 World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China are claims that can be proved as true or not through the lens of historical facts.

Autobiography is also marked by an element of experience, since the process of narrating a person's own life story relies on an interpretation of the lived experiences. In their book *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, Smith and Watson contend that "in women's autobiography writers often authorize their text by appeal to the authority of experience...." (10) Ogot's narrative exhibits the outcome of her experience in the social, political and cultural contexts that influenced her upbringing. Abbs concurs that, "The central concern of all autobiography is to describe, evoke and generally recreate the development of the author's experience" (6). Experience thus becomes the primary source of information that is recalled to build up the

content in an autobiographical work. Ogot's life-narrative accounts for the outcome of her life as experienced while growing up, studying, working and advocating for women's welfare in a society whose culture and politics are steeped in patriarchy, thereby portraying her contest with traditions in the process of advancing her call for women's empowerment.

The value of experience in autobiography is given weight and breadth by Muchiri in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* when she says:

Experience is another important feature of the autobiography because the form (of autobiographical writing) involves narrating and interpreting one's experiences through retrospection and introspection. The experience presented in the autobiography is not merely personal, but an interpretation of the past and the author's place in a culturally and historically specific present. Autobiographical narrators do not predate experience, but, instead, they come to be through experience. Experience, then, is the process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject having certain identities in the social realm which are constituted through material, cultural, economic, historical, and social relations. (30)

As the primary source of evidence in self-narration therefore, experience is authoritative and serves to invite readers into believing the story and authenticating its claims

Memory is another important feature of the genre of autobiography. The process of writing an autobiography requires that writers have a good memory of the events they relate. As autobiographers are usually adults, in recounting their past lives, memory and recollection become useful tools in recalling the events of that past life and relaying them in the present life.

The autobiographer is thus a mediator who stands in the present time linking the past and the present through recollection and narration.

Olney sees the autobiographer as an active participant who engages memory in the process of recollecting and narrating the past accounts in the present time. According to Olney therefore, the autobiographer is not just a passive and impartial recorder of information but one who becomes an active maker of a creative work. He says of memory and narration:

Recollection, or memory, in this way a most creative faculty, goes backward so that narrative, its twin counterpart, may go forward: memory and narration move along the same line only in reverse directions...memory creates the *significance* of events in discovering the pattern into which those events fall.... It is in the interplay of past and present, of present memory reflecting over past experiences on its way to becoming present being, that events are lifted out of time to be resituated not in mere chronological sequence but in patterned significance. (47) (Emphasis in the original text)

Olney links memory to the process of narration and establishes the need for a backward search for information in recounting an individual's life. The narrative is therefore an outcome of well-ordered events that proceed from the narrator's memory of the past and relies on the ability to rearrange such events to produce a significant story.

Muchiri states that memory can draw from a variety of sources, making the process of memory not just a strictly individual activity but a corporate one. She says:

Memory is not entirely a private activity, but can be a collective activity to a certain degree. Various communities of memory such as religious, racial, ethnic and familial develop their own occasions, rituals, and practices of remembering which aid in

preserving and passing on memories and shape the memories conveyed. Some of the sources are personal (dreams, photographs, objects, family stories, genealogy) while some are public (documents, historical events, books, collective rituals). (29)

Ogot's autobiography, for instance, traces her memory to her family story and tells how her parents' conversion to Christianity had an impact on her religious upbringing. She says of the Christian gospel, "My parents imbibed and accepted this revolutionary gospel. And for the rest of their lives they tried to live by it; and we, as their children, were brought up in this strong spiritual brew" (22). She also recalls her family tree and dates it back to the latter end of the Nineteenth Century. She narrates it thus:

The story of my family within Asembo goes back to the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century. Our great grandfather was called Moli who, on moving from Lwak, established his village at Rakombe. He had four sons and three daughters. The first son was called Ombaye, the father of Twei; the second son Akeno was the father of Ongonga; the third son Onyuna, was the father of Joseph Nyanduga, my father; and the fourth son Mchura, was the father of Jethro Ombaye. (14)

The photographs she attaches to the story also help to authenticate her memory base and provide a rich source of information for her narrative. For instance, the photographs of her parents, and the one taken in 1963 at their home in Rakombe shows Ogot visiting her parents together with her sisters Rose and Sophia and their children. It is a photograph that shows strong family ties that Ogot held with her family. There are also photographs of her participation in development programs like the one at a fundraiser in aid of St. Mary's School, Yala presided over by the then President Moi in 1988. She can confirm that President Moi visited her home by the photographs

that show him arriving at Ogot's home. The photographs are therefore a source of memory for they provide useful material for her self-narrative.

The autobiography is also marked by the principle of selectivity which enables the narrator to decide the details that go into the story as well as which to leave out. Muchiri says "...the author deliberately selects what or who to include or leave out of the narrative, thus determining where and how the autobiography starts, proceeds, and ends" (32). Like many other autobiographers, Ogot delivers her life story through the first person narrative technique. This technique enables her to retain control over what we are able to know at each point in the course of her life. As the autobiography relies on the cultivation of historical realities to authenticate the claims made therein, it becomes possible to detect certain omissions and silences where the narrators may avoid talking about some aspects of their lives that readers would consider important.

For instance, following her nomination into Parliament in 1983 by the then President Moi, Ogot declares that there indeed arose speculations concerning reasons for her being awarded such an opportunity but does not mention any of such speculations. Coming at a time when she had not campaigned for such an appointment, and with her husband out of his teaching job at the University of Nairobi whose Chancellor was the President himself, one feels that Ogot leaves a lot unsaid concerning her nomination into Parliament by the President's party—Kenya African National Union (KANU). She also says the nomination had surprised both her and her family because "for the preceding three years, my husband had been out of work following his criminal dismissal from his job by the same President.... He was also prevented from going back to teach at the University of Nairobi. What could be Moi's motive...?" (246). She only says that speculations were then irrelevant and that she focused on serving the people. There is a notable silence in her dismissal of the speculations.

Her narrative also steers clear of mentioning the circumstances of the 1982 attempted overthrow of President Moi's government. One feels her silence leaves a gap in knowledge since the attempted coup is a historical event well remembered by a majority of Kenyans because it had significant political consequences including the rise of oppression and suppression. It is one act that left many women (including men) suffering the loss of property and lives as well as that of their children. In addition, she does not mention the amount of bride-wealth her clan demanded from her husband in exchange for her marriage, or if any bride-price was ever paid. However, being the narrative of an individual life, it becomes understandable that she selects what to reveal or conceal.

However, Ogot's self-narration gains credibility from her consistency in self-portrayal and in the provision of historical details backed by photographic evidence against which we can evaluate the credibility of her claims. For example, we can prove her marriage by a church wedding from the pictures she attaches to the story. As the narrator of her life story, Ogot becomes the sole source of information that reaches us about her life as she controls the delivery of the facts in her self-narrative.

2.2 The Autobiography as Literature

This section analyses artistic elements that autobiographers usually incorporate in writing their life narratives. There are a number of aspects of artistry that autobiographers employ in their narration. In this section therefore, I show the literariness of *Days of My Life*. Ogot has employed such literary devices as narrative voice, plot development, setting, characterization, dialogue, flashback and soliloquy in reconstructing the narrative of her life.

In her definition of the term narrative, Mieke Bal in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* introduces and defines the terms "story" and "fabula," too. She defines a narrative text

as one in which “an agent relates (‘tells’) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof” (5). She goes ahead to define a story as “a fabula that is presented in a certain manner,” and a fabula as “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (5). From this definition, a narrative may also refer to an account of events that have passed and are being reconstructed through the process of narration. There has to have occurred events whose details are getting recounted, and this calls for the presence of a narrator. Autobiographical narrators try to reconstruct their lives in the actual circumstance in which one’s life was lived. Ogot’s autobiography is the actual account of her life which she recounts using her unique narrative ability, making her life-story an interestingly related account to the reader. Throughout the story, we follow her life’s journey which she unfolds using not only her voice but also other aspects that make the story an interesting picture of her life. Being the narrator and subject of the narrative, she becomes the one that we see and whose path we follow throughout the narration so that we see and hear only what she reveals at every point in time. A case in point is when she goes for her studies at Mengo Medical School in Kampala and at the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Britain, she does not relate what happens back home in Kenya. Instead, the story shifts to her location and as readers, our knowledge is limited to what happens in her presence.

In the process of narrating their life stories, autobiographers use the first person narrative technique which relates to us events of the story only as they are delivered through the narrator’s own voice. This narrative voice is assumed by a narrator who is also the subject of the narrative. This means that both the one whose voice delivers to us events of the story and the one around whom events of the story revolve are the same person, also called the subject narrator. In Ogot’s

text, she relates the events of her life in a number of ways. She narrates her achievements from school, work, politics, and leadership in the social and family set up, in the process telling us what she did and experienced, including what she said and heard or witnessed in various situations. For instance, she remembers her experience in Britain saying:

The year 1957 was going to be an important one. First, I had to take the Final State Examination at the beginning of the year. Secondly, I had my practical work to do at Ipswich in a strange environment. Thirdly, I had to take my in-service training as a Tutor at St. Thomas Hospital in London. Finally, I had to start making preparations to go back home to begin a new life. (65)

She eventually comments on her experience in Britain saying it had “been a series of successes. I moved smoothly from success to another; I was able to be of help to so many souls either in the hospital or outside it.... I had also overcome so many difficulties: language, new surroundings, more educated classmates... (65).” This approach helps to establish Ogot as the first party to the events narrated in the text. The first person narrator thus becomes reliable and closer to the audience, as it enables the narrator to develop an intimate relation with the readers.

However, the first person narrative voice adopted by autobiographers is prone to limitations due to its subjective nature. This subjectivity favours the narrator’s discernment concerning what detail to make public and what to conceal. The first person narrative voice is equally limited in scope of time and space as it reveals to us only the events around the narrator. Therefore, the readers can only see, hear, smell, taste and feel what the narrator does, when and where the narrator does so. Any detail outside the narrator’s reach is equally out of the readers’ reach, however important such information may be to the development of the story.

In *Days of My Life*, Ogot takes care of such limitations by varying the mode of her narrative delivery. She does not deliver her life story through one long monologue; she incorporates such artistic aspects as flashback, dialogue, direct and reported speech, in the process detailing the lives of other characters who influence and shape the course of her life. In addition, she provides para-textual details as dates, photographs and reference to both historical personalities and occurrences like the presidency of Moi that was marked by disregard for women's empowerment; the 1992 multiparty elections in Kenya which she says was conducted based on politics and not development; and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. She says the 1992 elections were marred with violence and hooliganism to the extent that:

Stones were thrown at our vehicles by militia youth, young girls sang insulting songs against us, some priests compared me with Judas, and the police and the provincial administration turned a blind eye to all this. Some of my supporters were killed or maimed, and the police declined to record any statements from us, saying they did not wish to be involved in politics. (287)

The use of other delivery modes for her story serves to complement her narrative voice and diverts our attention from the shortcomings of her narrative voice. Irrespective of the notable silences in the text, the ever-present figure of Ogot as the subject-narrator holds the story and lends to it the cohesion that makes the story to hold together as a unified whole.

Plot involves the arrangement of events in the story to have some events occur only after or before others have been witnessed. The actions, events, occurrences and celebrations are ordered in a way that allows for the achievement of cause and effect which lead to the development of an organic whole out of the narrated story. Ogot develops her plot chronologically beginning from the days before her birth to situate the settlement of her clan in the place of her birth. Ogot is

unlike many writers who follow the conventions of autobiographical writing to narrate factual information beginning with the time and place of their birth. She begins by narrating a story of her parents saying:

When I retired from politics and public life in 1996, I planned to write two books of biography with the titles *My Father* and *A Woman called Rahel*. The first book was to be about the life of my father, and the second about my mother by the same name. They were role models in my life and part of me kept telling me that it was only by writing about them that I could thank them for giving me a wonderful childhood experience. (1)

She dedicates Chapter One of her book to narrating her family tree and follows her parents' conversion to Christianity and their Christian life. It is only at the end of the chapter that, convinced that she has told the story of her parents, Ogot says that "...the lineage of 'My Father' and 'A Woman Called Rahel' has continued to prosper in different fields globally. I count myself as one of the fruits of their blessed union, whose personal story must now be told" (32). She tells the circumstances of her birth in Butere on 15th May 1930, when her father "was selected for further teacher training course at Butere Normal School (at a time when married) teachers taking training courses at the school were allowed to take their wives with them" (24). Ogot's plot takes us back in the time long gone then moves chronologically to the time of her retirement from active politics.

In a literary work, setting refers to both the geographical location where events of the story take place and the historical time-frame within which the events occur. Ogot sets her narrative from the time of the Luo community's settlement in Gem area of present day Siaya County, running to the time of multiparty politics in Kenya. Geographically, the text is set in changing locations including Kenya, Uganda, and Britain among other places that Ogot visits during her travels as a

women's leader to attend regional and global conferences like the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women held in Dakar, Senegal in 1994. The change in setting conforms to the journey motif which is one of the key features of an autobiography.

The setting of the story during the early missionary incursion in Nyanza invites readers to witness Ogot's parents' contest with tradition marked by their conversion to Christianity. She speaks of her parents as pioneer converts saying, "My father...was among the first Christian converts in Asembo...and my mother...was similarly among the first women converts in Rarieda who were persecuted for their faith when they became Christians" (1). She specifically singles out her mother whom she says walked a long distance at night at the risk of wild animal attack to receive Baptism. The setting of the story in situations where Ogot experiences discrimination based on her gender and race, as exhibited in the attitude of her British women classmates, wins the readers' sympathy over to Ogot's side. This follows our understanding of why she has to contest what she considers oppressive to her and the female gender.

Characterization offers the writer an opportunity to fashion the readers' understanding regarding the role each character is assigned. The autobiography is dominated by one main character, while other characters' existence is only limited to the extent that they complement the development and portrayal of the main character. Character depiction is done by enabling the characters to hold dialogue thus allowing us to hear directly from them as well as the narrator's comment which also reveal them to the reader further.

In literary writing, character depiction is also achieved by what one character says about the other(s) as well as details that the writer may reveal about them. In an autobiography, characters are revealed to us through the eye of the subject narrator. One such character that is developed in Ogot's autobiography is Ezekiel Apindi. He is said to have championed the education of girls in

South Nyanza in the 1930s. Ogot says Apindi resigned from his teaching job at Maseno School against pleas from the then Principal, Mr. Carey Francis and left “his home in Alego...taking his family to South Nyanza to develop the area, start schools and churches and to improve the standards of living of the people” (37). He is credited with the inception of such school as Mariwa Secondary School, Pe-Hill High School, and Ogande Girls’ High School. Ogot describes Apindi as a promoter of girls’ education saying:

He was thus a strong promoter of girls’ education, at a time when most parents gave preference to the boys. It is in that context that we have decided to include this brief biography of Apindi as a champion of girls’ education in Nyanza, and as a pioneer educationist. (38)

The development of these other characters, is therefore limited to what the narrator may be willing to make known to us. In Ogot’s autobiography, she is the main character who shapes the events of her narrative, while the others only exist to authenticate the progress she claims to have made in the course of her life. As with the nature of an autobiography, she has carefully selected who to include among the characters in her narration.

2.3 Contesting Traditions: In the Footsteps of her Father

This section focuses on the life and upbringing of Ogot as the third born daughter in a family of Christian converts during the early missionary period in Butere, Western Kenya on 15th May, 1930. Born to a family that had chosen to break with Luo traditions on the basis of religion, Ogot was brought up by a family that privileged equity for both girls and boys in a society that favoured patriarchal dominance. In Ogot’s life she credits her parents for her success. Ogot suggests that her parents’ early conversion and devotion to Christian religion led to her becoming a Christian in her childhood. She says, “My parents imbibed and accepted this revolutionary

gospel. And for the rest of their lives they tried to live by it; and we, as their children, were brought up in this strong spiritual brew” (22). I argue that Ogot’s upbringing formed the firm base upon which her activism for women’s empowerment is grounded. It is the same background that provided Ogot with the humility to pray for her white friends who were students with her at the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies. Ogot says that following her excellent performance in the examinations, she “noticed a change of attitude among our British students from that of curiosity to admiration. As a Christian, I could only pray for them to learn to judge people by the quality of their lives and not by their race, ethnicity or country” (63-64). Her prayerfulness in such a situation can be linked to her Christian background.

As the family forms the first society a child encounters while growing up, its impacts on the child imprints long-lasting and in most cases, permanent lessons. Parents play an integral role in shaping their children’s vision and future. The upbringing Ogot received from her parents, and especially the father who repudiated his patriarchal privileges and bequeathed it to his daughters calling them boys, laid the foundation for her protest against repressive aspects of tradition. She says “...our father started to refer to his three daughters as his ‘boys’, and argued that there was nothing boys were doing that his ‘boys’ could not do” (23). Ogot’s father’s decision to refer to his daughters as boys was a result of his having established his new homestead without regard to the Luo culture’s demand that such an undertaking required the presence of a first-born son. In a way, Ogot’s stand against tradition, in the instances when she does so borrows from the influences of her father’s earlier effort in the same direction. He is the one she observed establishing a new homestead accompanied by his eldest daughter instead of a son as per the dictates of tradition.

The key, and earliest, among the factors that paved the way for Ogot's questioning stance on tradition can be traced to her parent's conversion to Christian religion, which marked a break with the traditional forms of worship in their community. Growing up under the care of Christian parents, Ogot acknowledges that "with such devoted parents, I inevitably became a devoted Christian in childhood" (1). It can be suggested that her background of Christianity, with its doctrine of equality, may have informed her decision to advocate for the welfare of women in a male-dominated society.

Her father Joseph Nyanduga Onyuna began what seemed as a break from the traditional set up by accepting Christianity, in a move she describes by saying her parents "imbibed and accepted this revolutionary gospel" (22). It proved revolutionary to the extent that Ogot's father ignored the requirements of tradition on various matters of life. One of these is witnessed in the manner he is said to have established a new homestead. In doing so, her father "decided to ignore all Luo traditions and customs regarding the establishment of a new home" (23). James Osman Harries in "Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa with Special Reference to Luo Response to Bad in Gem, Kenya," borrows from Paul Mboya's *Luo, Kitgi gi Timbegi* (The Luo, their Customs and Traditions) to explain the traditional Luo procedure of establishing a homestead. Harries says:

Mboya opens by saying "It is a *Jaduong* [senior man or more literally, elderly man] who *goyo ligala* [establishes a new homestead]. When he wants to move, he first goes to the specialist on *juok* [witchcraft prowess or 'the force']...for approval. This important stage in the life of a Luo man needs to be approached cautiously through the mishap (problems brought by *jochiende* (ghosts)) should it be done incorrectly. (142-143)

Harries proceeds to state that establishing a new homestead is a move to be made by an elderly man accompanied by his senior wife carrying fire, the first born son carrying an axe, and a man whom he calls his 'father'—or a clan member in his father's generation. Subsequently, many rituals are performed in a prescribed order to ensure the success of the new home, hopefully through realization of many off-springs, plentiful supply of food, many animals and peaceful living.

However, Ogot says her father chose a different path when he:

“...decided to establish a Christian home. In doing this, he decided to ignore all Luo traditions and customs regarding the establishment of a new home, which require that the father must be accompanied by his eldest son, and carry an axe to the new site. He ignored all this. Instead, he decided to establish his home accompanied only his baby girl, Rose Abidha born in May 1922. He carried no cock or axe” (23).

A warning from his horror-stricken community members that the consequence would follow him never to sire sons in his lifetime almost became real, coinciding with his next two children being girls too. In defiance of the expected curse, he referred to the daughters as his “boys.” It was on account of their father that Ogot and her sisters became “gender liberated from childhood” (23). In Ogot's father's decision to privilege his girls is found an attempt to dismantle patriarchy and its attendant discrimination against women, and can be read as some kind of a response to Ladele's challenge that “continued male dominance and sexism is legitimized only to the extent that people refuse to dismantle such oppressive constructs” (73).

Furthermore, Ogot's father sent the girls to school when education for girls was not prioritized. He even fetched water from the river when his wife fell ill to enable his daughters to be in school. She narrates her father's action thus:

True to his word, he decided to send all of us to school, at a time when most parents in the area preferred to send only their sons to school. And since our mother Rahel was sickly and suffered from high blood pressure, our father undertook the woman's job of fetching water from a nearby river, so that his "sons" could go to school. For a Luo elder to do this was abominable. They laughed at him, and wondered what other woman's chore he was next going to perform. (23)

Jennifer Muchiri in her article "The Intersections of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies" posits that Ogot's narrative is a manifestation of the importance of educating women. Muchiri states that Ogot achieves this effect "by narrating the effects of having a father who was willing to withstand public ridicule to educate his daughters at a time when many parents considered it a waste to educate daughters..." (91) I find that there is a way in which her father's decision to deny himself the patriarchal privileges contributed immensely to make Ogot the successful person that she became.

Watching the father do the work that was deemed feminine hence reserved for women, Ogot acquired the sensibilities for gender equity she refers to in the text. Thus, from her father were planted the seeds of protest against oppressive traditions that would characterize Ogot's adult life. It is important to point out that Ogot does not contest traditions in totality but only selects some practices that are considered oppressive to herself and women in general. Even her parents still retained some aspects of tradition which were positive like naming. For instance Ogot

herself is given the name *Akinyi*, a Luo name for a girl born in the morning, following her birth “in the morning” (24).

Moreover, Ogot herself invoked Luo traditions when the strict adherents to the Christian Revivalists group that she belonged to opposed her engagement to Bethwell Allan Ogot on account of his not being a born-again Christian. She decided to “appeal to Luo customs and traditions according to which marriage was a family affair, and only close members of the family should be involved in discussion” (82). An act that affirms the argument that Ogot recognizes the place of both tradition and modernity in her life. In addition, her father’s support came in handy to enable her overcome this challenge. Her father recognized the need for her to be left free, unchaperoned everywhere, and that her “wishes should therefore be respected” (83). In his autobiography *My Footprints in the Sands of Time*, Bethwell Ogot admits that the two faced a challenge on their planned marriage as the Revivalists were against Grace Ogot’s betrothal to “someone not born again” (97) and credits her, saying “we were able to weather this threat largely because Grace took a firm stand” (97) leading to their wedding on 3rd October 1959 at Maseno School Church. In their autobiographies, both Grace Ogot and Bethwell Ogot, identify that their parents had also been married in the same church; Bethwell’s parents in 1917 and Grace’s parents in 1921.

This spirit of resistance is seen in another instance. In a move against the government policy that sought to close down Ogot’s former school, Ng’iya Girls’ School, and transferring all its resources to Ng’iya Teachers’ Training College as a consequence, Ogot became “one of the women leaders who decided to oppose...this thoroughly discriminatory policy...(which she says)... was the first time I was participating in protest movement” (45). Narrating this bold step, she says, “We were really risking our lives, because Nyanza at this time was under close police

surveillance following the formation of an opposition political party by Oginga Odinga” (45). She however, states that their conviction about the justness of their case blinded them to the risk of possible arrest and consequent accusation with any mode of crime. She narrates the success of her effort saying, “At the end of 1968, the Ng’iya Teachers Training College was phased out its buildings handed over to Ng’iya Girls School. Our stand had triumphed” (45). Bethwell Allan Ogot explains why the risk is related to Oginga Odinga’s formation of a political opposition party. He says that, “The politics of Kenya since 1966 when Oginga Odinga launched his opposition Party, the Kenya People’s Union (KPU), had tended to lump all Luos together as anti-government and potentially subversive” (184).

In pursuit of education, an early gift from her father at a time when girls hardly went to school, Ogot had to go against popular beliefs hinged on culture to proceed beyond the confines of her home area. Her going to study at Butere Girls’ School had been met with the fears over her safety as family members argued that the place was “far away from home, and located among the Abaluyia” (53). It took her father’s intervention to clear the doubts noting that he too “lived there between 1928 and 1930” (53) and that it was the place where Ogot was born, hence her going to Butere would be as good as going home. Against her family members’ fears, she says in the end, “I had encountered no difficulties during my stay at Butere Girls School, made many friends and learnt the Luhya language which helped me to interact easily with Luhya-speaking students and with the community around the school” (53).

Later, however, the same debate would emerge in greater intensity when Ogot was to go for further training in Britain. On this occasion even her father, “...who was famous in the area as a champion for girls’ education, found it very difficult to support my request, especially when I clarified that I would be away for three years” (60). The relatives had a feeling that she would

then be too old to get a husband after the training. This strong attachment that the society had for traditions that favoured girls' marriage over their education is what Ogot seemed determined to dismantle. She says, "What my relatives were trying to impress upon me, was that I was living in a society where marriage could not be postponed indefinitely. Three years was too long for them to wait. However, I was not ready for marriage" (61). After a long debate, the reprieve was to come from the paternal grandfather who declared, "Let Akinyi go" (62) which enabled her to leave for Britain in May 1955. Her stand against marriage can also be glimpsed in her earlier communication with the man she later married, Bethwell Allan Ogot. In one of her letters to him on 19th April 1956, she says she told him that "as a young woman, I had always thought I would do something different, that is stay single" (68).

While at Maseno Hospital as a nurse, Ogot found herself being opposed to the doctors who seemingly attached less value to the lives of their African patients. Some doctors "felt nothing about causing death to African women, but felt so offended when a dog was put in a Russian Sputnik" (77) alluding to the racist attitude that permeated the missionary effort at the hospital. She states that she had "to take a firm stand, sometimes at the risk of losing my job" but always guided by the belief that "we educated Africans had to lead by example, and treat our people...decently as human beings" in an effort to "protect the lives and dignity of our people, for nobody else was going to do it for us, not even the missionary doctors and sisters" (77). Her position on the need for the educated to champion the cause of African women's dignity also demonstrates her effort to contest the seemingly established ways that appeared to favour racism and patriarchy.

Following Ogot's return to begin work at Maseno Hospital in 1958, she encountered challenges which called for her protest against what appeared to be a racial establishment. Among these had

been “the general attitude of the white missionaries towards terms of service” (74). She says the salaries offered to her were so low that “accepting them would have set a bad precedent for the future African members of staff” (75). She therefore felt the need for Africans to fight for their rights, which shows her protest against tradition that had been deemed normal before, in which white supremacy was unquestioned. This need to fight for the rights of Africans was necessary since “there was open prejudice (by the) white missionaries who found it difficult to accept the fact that I was as qualified, if not more qualified, than most of their sisters” (75). This criticism of the prevailing racist attitude in Ogot is a testament to the power that education bequeathed her. It can thus be seen that, education had already empowered her to see the evils of discrimination and stand against them.

Ogot’s life tends to follow the pattern that her parents’ lives followed. Just like her parents, who, Chris Wanjala says, “sacrificed a lot to deny themselves a working life in Mombasa to promote Christianity in Nyanza,” Ogot turned down a lucrative job in Britain offered to her by the Queen Elizabeth Association. She had to faithfully obey the terms of her contract with the Church Mission Society (CMS), the missionary body that financed her studies in Britain, to work for them for two years back in Kenya. Admitting that it was a difficult decision to make, she narrates the dilemma she faced and recalls that:

This was my first temptation: take the lucrative job, get married in Britain and get on with my life. According to my contract with CMS, I was to work for them for at least two years after completing my training. Accepting the job would mean breaking the contract and losing the confidence and trust of the whole missionary fraternity. (74)

Unlike many women under patriarchal traditions, Ogot recognizes that she enjoyed a liberal life on account of her having “had a father with great commitment to girls’ education, and (whose)

perspective embraced the right of women to equal opportunity with men” (173). She can trace her earliest contact with formal learning to her father who “read stories from both English and Kiswahili story books and translated them into Dholuo” (93) thus initiating her into the world of stories. She shares the same views about her husband, who she credits with the beginning of her writing career. Reading her letters to him during their courtship, he once observed that her letters were poetically filled, and asked her to become a poet. She recalls that:

My writing career can be said to have started in the late 1950s, when I met the man I was later to marry, Bethwell Allan Ogot. My letters to him, he said, were full of poetry. He suggested that I should try to write some poetry. I told him that I had never understood poetry, nor taken any interest in it. He did not give up, and urged me to try writing short stories. And that worked. I wrote a few short stories which I showed to my friends who encouraged me to take writing seriously. (92)

She celebrates her luck in having in him, a husband who “was free from male chauvinism” (173), a position that fits well with my argument that liberating women needed, and still does, a selfless and deliberate effort from their male counterparts, be they husbands, sons, brothers, uncles or colleagues.

Perhaps it is the liberal family background Ogot had from her father and later, the freedom she enjoyed with her husband that was to explain her contest with the political establishment. At the inception of multiparty politics in 1992, the Luo community united behind Oginga Odinga as the presidential candidate for Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). Ogot, however, remained in the Kenya African National Union (KANU), vowing to campaign for political office based on her “...shining development record. That automatically marked me as a traitor and an enemy....but I was not an enemy of the Luo. I loved my people so much, and I had toiled for

their development for many years” (286-287). In the end, she lost her parliamentary seat after a campaign period she says “...had been a terrible nightmare (during which) stones were thrown at our vehicles by militia youth, young girls sang insulting songs against us...” (287). It is possible to sense a tone of bitterness in her narration of the election outcome as she says,

I lost the election.... But I was not the only loser. Our man also failed to clinch the presidency. And although the Luo voted for him to a man, he was beaten to a poor fourth behind Daniel arap Moi, Kenneth Matiba and Mwai Kibaki. His loss, and that of the Luos, in my view were much greater than mine. (Consequently,) Moi and KANU continued to rule Kenya, and to marginalize the Luo for another ten years. (287)

In this instance Ogot defied the traditional unity of purpose which is characteristic of her Luo community especially in politics, and paid the price. However, her uncompromising, or contesting attitude can be seen in her refusal to appear apologetic for the decision she made. Ogot had defied the social establishment and in going her own way as a ‘mutant,’ gave voice to women who must not be too submissive to patriarchal subjugations. She finally concludes that although her loss was understandable, it was in her view a regrettable state of affairs, having realized that “politics was not about past achievements, however glorious, but about future hopes, no matter how nebulous they may be” (288). Although she remains silent on the political liberation efforts fronted by the opposition over the period of ten years in reference between 1992 and 2002, the opposition to the regime of President Moi did strategize to ensure their victory in the 2002 elections.

While still serving as a parliamentarian and an Assistant Minister in the single party regime of KANU under President Moi, she once openly defied the ‘orders from above’ that had barred all government officials from attending the funeral of the late Hezekiah Oyugi Ogango who “was

one of the most powerful individuals in government..." (322); a funeral in Rongo Sub-county of Migori County in 1991. This was despite being warned of dire consequences which spelt loss of both ministerial appointment as well as the parliamentary seat and knowing that the threat was not an empty one since "it had happened to even more powerful political leaders" (324). She however, "...decided to go to the funeral (where) sure enough, there were no KANU officials, no Ministers, no Assistant Ministers, no senior civil servants" (324).

The height of Ogot's contest with her Luo Community's traditions can be compared to that of the fictional characters in *The River and the Source* (1994) and *The River Between* (1965). In *The River and the Source*, both Akoko and her daughter Nyabera, at different times and places, seek a break with the Luo tradition of wife inheritance. After they are both widowed, they move out of their matrimonial homes in search of a completely new way of life. In so doing, they succeed in recovering the control of both their bodies and sexuality from male dominance. For Ogot however, she finds it necessary to undermine the oppressive aspects of the same tradition that she believes ought to be discarded from within the family and community in an effort to bring about social transformation.

The same attempt to question and act in contravention of patriarchal dominance is what leads Muthoni, in *The River Between* to question demands of Christianity on the new converts to discard altogether aspects of tradition including female circumcision. She turns a deaf ear to the pleas from sister, Nyambura who tries to remind her that being Christians, they "are now wise in the ways of the white people. Father has been teaching us what he learnt at Siriana. And you know, the missionaries do not like the circumcision of girls" (25). In response, Muthoni questions the sincerity of this restriction that bars her from undergoing the rite of circumcision. She asks, "Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not circumcised? Circumcision did not

prevent them from being Christians” (26). Even though Muthoni dies as a result, she celebrates having combined both traditional and modern aspects of life saying that she sees Jesus and that she dies a full woman. Muthoni therefore, succeeds in subverting the male power-structure projected by her father Joshua.

2.4 Conclusion

This Chapter sought to examine the genre of autobiography as a narrative of self-expression. In this chapter, I have situated *Days of My Life* to the genre of autobiography, and established its literariness. We have shown that growing up in the traditional society, Ogot experienced first-hand the treatment of women as second-class citizens. However, a study of her successful contestation of oppressive aspects of the same tradition leads us to suggest that women can liberate themselves from the limitations of tradition. This liberation, however, calls upon the complementary role of male support which for Ogot, came from her father and later, from her husband.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECTING FEMALE AGENCY

3.0 Introduction

The previous Chapter tackled the genre of autobiography dwelling on its definition, nature and artistry. It also explained the fidelity of Ogot's self-narrative to the genre, and further looked at Ogot's narration as a way of contesting traditions. This chapter looks at Ogot's effort to narrate female agency by dwelling on how she tells the story of her success and that of other women who aided her success both in and out of the country. The chapter also looks at the women Ogot depicts in her fiction and their attempts to break free from patriarchy and its limitations. In the end, I argue that Ogot's narrative projects an agency not only for herself but also for other women. She does project the female agency both in her autobiography and across her fictions as well.

The term agency is defined variously to refer to the liberty one has to act without limitations towards achieving the desire of one's heart. In "Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures of 1984," Amartya Sen defines agency as referring to "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important (203)." Closely connected to this definition is the emphasis that to understand a person's agency requires that we take note of the person's aims, objectives, allegiances, obligations and conception of what is good in life. This understanding links agency to the liberty to make decisions depending on one's desired goals in life. Thus agency is closely linked to liberty and the pursuit of individual goals in life.

In their article, “Agency and Experiment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence,” Emma Samman and Maria Emma Santos define agency as “an actor’s or group’s ability to make purposeful choices.” They elaborate that agency is determined by a person’s individual and social assets and psychological capabilities such as the ability to imagine and aspire for a better future; and collective assets and capabilities including voice, organization, representation and identity. This definition implies that agency incorporates the freedom to act as one deems suitable towards achieving desirable ambitions in life. It is with this definition that I view Ogot’s narrative as an effort to break free from traditions that appeared to limit her academic and social ambitions.

Agency therefore may refer to the ability to act as one deems desirable, guided by the suitability of objectives towards whose achievement one’s action is directed. Female Agency therefore becomes the capability allowed women to exercise their freedom in pursuit of liberally chosen and desirable ambitions in life. Feminists are opposed to the African traditions that have been known to historically limit women within an unfavourable social structures and its characteristic male power system. It is the women’s bold step to break free from such oppressive structures that constitutes an exercise of their agency.

My understanding of female agency is based on an examination of Ogot’s life-experience as a woman who makes the most out of her situation within the oppressive social structure of male dominance. I take interest in her ability to rise above such a situation to take part in community activities, asserting her identity as women’s representative in the process. I also wish to argue that Ogot’s continued survival, making changes for herself, and in the community, constitute an attempt to become an agent of change for other women too. This study proceeds from the premise that Ogot, while contesting traditions, charts a life path for herself and other women who

have had to bear the brunt of oppressive social traditions like limited access to education, forced early marriages, and subjection to the traditional gender-role stereotypes among others.

3.1 Self-Portrayal through Narration

Ogot links her earliest learning with the training from her grandmother's informal education through traditional oral culture. While recognizing that that her grandmother was a renowned story teller, she elevates women as having been the basis of traditional oral literature. She says:

The artistic creations of our people, like myths, legends, epics, poetry, proverbs, riddles, and music reveal a very old imagination which formed an essential part of the education of the Luo girl-child. The respectable old lady who took charge of this education was known as *Pim*, and she was the person whose responsibility included the introduction of young girls to this rich, imaginative world of our forefathers. In my case, my grandmother played the role of the *Pim*. (91)

Ogot traces her acquisition of education to the absorption of her community's oral tradition, and advances the projection of female agency when she identifies her grandmother as her earliest teacher who "introduced me to our artistic inheritance and encouraged me to use it in defining who I was" (91). Ogot recognizes that it is the grandmother who, in handing down to her the vast artistic knowledge, encouraged her to use the same in defining herself and the world around her.

The onset of European formal education in Kenya had its impact on Ogot through her father's conversion to Christianity which enabled him to promote "girls' education at a time when most parents preferred to educate boys only" (42). He is the one who took to reading story books in English and Kiswahili to Ogot and translating them to her into Dholuo. After she heard the stories being read, Ogot took to reading Dholuo translations of the Bible, discovering the close

semblance that the Bible stories bore to the Luo stories she heard from her grandmother. Ogot illustrates this similarity when she says:

For example, the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:15-29, sounded very much like that of *Simbi Nyaima*. Miaha, dealing with the origin of the earth, was really the Luo equivalent of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:15-3 (sic); and the legend of Luanda Magere with the beautiful Nandi woman, sounded very much like the story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16. I felt inspired. (92)

It is to these stories that Ogot can trace her prowess in narration that is witnessed both in her self-narrative and in the other works of fiction.

The first mission school that Ogot attended, Ng'iya Girls' School, had its establishment in the traditional gender-role specifications, with women being destined to complement the educated men's missionary effort through marriage. The Church Mission Society that is credited with the establishment of Maseno School in 1906 saw the need to start a girls' school whose "...main motive (was to) provide educated African men with literate wives" (33). In establishing Ng'iya Girls' School therefore, the missionaries had intended to perpetuate, according to Ogot, the patriarchal model that then existed by providing education not to empower women, but to make African missionary men's life more comfortable and meaningful. The goal of education for the girls was not to ultimately empower them then since it aimed to prepare them for their role in the homes under patriarchy.

As an indication of what skills the curriculum at Ng'iya Girls' School aimed to impart to the girls, Ogot points out that it was tailor-made for girls with focus on homemaking skills since "the girls were taught cookery, food preservation, tailoring and laundry...(a learning devoid

of)...science, agriculture, printing or other technical subjects” (41). Ogot becomes didactic when she attempts to highlight the irony that existed in the curriculum offered to them at the school as opposed to the norm. She holds that:

A curriculum, however, should be socially and historically located and culturally determined; and it should look to the future. But the curriculum at Ng’iya Girls School ignored the kind of girl-child education I had received from my grandmother. The African cultural heritage was considered irrelevant, and we were trained to be “Victorian ladies” in behavior, belief and taste. There was no room for African music, oral literature or dancing...The colonial school was thus a system for the annihilation of African culture. It created for the future the crisis of identity and survival from which Africa is still suffering today. (41-42)

Ogot points to the deliberate exclusion of African oral tradition in school curriculum, and argues that this deliberate exclusion of African culture in colonial training is to blame for the present challenge of identity that afflicts Africans. She decries, in advocating for women’s welfare, the education that was offered to them at Ng’iya Girls’ School for failing to equip the girls to compete with boys in the job market, and for only training the girls to become nurses or teachers. She contrasts the teaching at Ng’iya Girls’ School with that of her father’s and says that:

But my father had taught us, for example, that there was no training or job that was completely exclusive to men. With education and proper training, he told us, women could perform any of the jobs that men were doing. With that kind of background that encouraged I and my sisters to fly as high as an eagle, the education offered at Ng’iya could only be stunting. It tended to reintroduce new patriarchal norms (42).

The pursuit of a pre-determined goal is the reason why Becky in *The River and the Source* seeks to free herself from home. She gets away unnoticed to pursue her dream as an air-hostess, and away from her father who “wanted her into teaching, nursing or some such occupation” (228). Ogot’s narrative compares with Becky’s story to depict the picture of women seeking personal freedoms as a way of breaking with traditions established by patriarchal structures in their societies.

In projecting her agency for women, Ogot recognizes the sacrificial effort of the missionary women who especially left their native home comfort and families. Grace Ogot holds that being young and single at the time they made such sacrifice, “the foreign women missionaries who left their countries and the comfort and security of their families and came to Kenya to start schools...deserve credit for the establishment of Ng’iya Girls’ School” (46-47). In doing so, the women missionaries became “...the pioneers of girls’ education in Kenya” (47) and thus provided the basis of the society’s development.

Such were the days of Ogot’s life at her first boarding school. Stating her excellent academic performance that was to characterize her learning life, Ogot mentions her success in the final year at Ng’iya Girls’ School as a “first class pass” (43), an achievement which shows her strong academic prowess and helps to prop her exhibition of women’s excellent ability when presented with equal opportunity to men.

The period between the years 1946 and 1948 found Ogot pursuing secondary education at Butere Girls’ School, an experience she fondly recalls by telling the stories about fellow students and the women teachers who shaped her life. She states that it is at Butere Girls’ School that she enjoyed her life, made many friends and met teachers who facilitated her admission to Mengo Medical School in Kampala, Uganda in 1949. The missionaries at the Church Mission Society

were equally of help, boosting her pursuit for professional training by awarding her “a scholarship for training in Nursing in Uganda” (50). This support for Ogot shows the invaluable role of the missionaries in the development of girls’ education, an effort which as we have already seen, intended to produce literate wives for the educated mission boys. Much as this points to the stereotypical gender roles that were at play at the time, it does not negate the positive role played by the missionaries in educating the African girls then.

Ogot notes that even though there may be a temptation to blame foreign missionary women for ignoring the African culture in their provision of education and for introducing “a gendered curriculum, with an overemphasis on a narrow interpretation of Christianity,” (47)

...the fact still remains that they were the pioneers of girls’ education in Kenya, who provided a firm basis from which we have been able to make important developments. Credit should therefore be given to these brave missionary women, all of them young and single, who established Ng’iya Girls School. After all, they could only offer what they knew and believed in. (47)

The excellent academic record that trails Ogot’s performance at Butere Girls’ School where she sat and passed the Kenya Junior Secondary Examination with “high marks” (50) earned her admission to a nursing training course in Kampala with a scholarship to cover the cost. However, her pioneering effort in going to study out of the country at a time no known woman from her community had ever done so did not sit well with her family. Instead it only raised “grave concerns within the family” (53) whose members doubted whether she would ever come back after the three years away from home. This resistance to her going out of the country was based on the claim that “many Luo men went to work in Uganda in places like Tororo, Jinja and Kampala but many of these never came back” (53). Such arguments would appear convincing

considering her tender age. The family may have feared losing her into marriage elsewhere. The bottom line, however, is that it was not so easy for a woman to play a pioneering role, treading the paths yet to be trodden by women in a male dominated set up. While she mentions Argwings-Kodhek as an example of the few Kenyan men who had pursued education in Uganda and came back to Kenya, she states that “there were no records of any Kenyan woman who had ever gone to Uganda for study or training in their schools or colleges” (53). It is interesting to note that Ogot never mentions any man who was ever stopped from going to Uganda despite the society’s experience of ‘losing’ them there.

Professional training for Ogot prior to going to Mengo Medical School in Kampala was limited to teaching or nursing as these were the main options available for African girls at the time. Even her elder sisters had each taken to these available options with Rose becoming a trained nurse and Sophia a teacher. Ogot opted for nursing, a career which brought her great fame and provided the setting for a number of her short stories. She also says of her time while pursuing further training in nursing that, “A significant by-product of my stay in Britain was an encounter with the person I would later marry—Bethwell Allan Ogot. I had seen him casually during the Makerere Luo Students League meetings at Makerere and during their Re-Union Annual Meetings at Kisumu” (66). Even though they had met earlier, it was while she was training in Britain that they got engaged. Nursing may therefore be concluded to have been the best bet for Ogot.

While learning in Uganda, Ogot joined what came to be known as the Revival Movement, a Christian religious group that she says was officially known as the East African Revival and “originated in former Belgian territory of Rwanda in 1927. It was a great spiritual awakening that spread to Uganda and Kenya” (54). She attended the fellowship meetings which were conducted

in Luganda, necessitating her learning the language. In an effort to present herself positively, Ogot did well in the examinations at Mengo Medical College during the three years that she was there, and this performance eventually earned her “much respect from the Matron and the Nursing Tutors” (55). Her performance may have convinced the Matron of Ogot’s capability, and made her believe that Ogot’s “advanced training in England would be of immense benefit” (57) to the country. She eventually offered Ogot the scholarship that saw her proceed to Britain for further training. By this experience Ogot was becoming a pioneer as she sought to break through the barriers that patriarchy had set for women.

The struggle against family members who preferred marriage to pursuit of advanced medical training in Britain testifies to the barriers that existed then for women who sought to pursue professional careers. Convinced that Ogot had already been privileged enough to receive more education than was necessary for a girl, the relatives employed various ways to convince her into turning down the offer. She quotes what was the greatest concern of the relatives thus:

All this time you have always wanted to go. When will you go to your husband’s house? You went to Ng’iya, we allowed you. To Butere, we again allowed you. You went to Mengo, we allowed you. And now again, you want to go the Whiteman’s country from where people never come back. And where no African woman had ever gone to (61).

I find it a powerful illustration that in Ogot’s pioneering effort in pursuit of both academic and professional improvement, she chose to go to a country that no known woman from her own society had been to. The authenticity of this claim may be debatable but the point is that the community was aware that among them Ogot was to become the pioneer. However, such an effort went against the traditional gender role expectations of her as a potential wife. It is on this basis that I argue that in becoming the first among her people to pursue studies abroad, Ogot

broke barriers that then existed for women. One would argue that this act may have set precedence for women who may have later wanted to proceed for advanced training to cite in defense of their proposition.

Her admission to the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies, in Woolwich is another display of her pioneering effort. She says the hospital had four admissions made from Africa, with two Nigerians, one Ugandan and herself from Kenya thus becoming “the first African woman from Kenya to go for advanced studies in England” (63). This is yet another milestone in representing the African women’s resolve to break from the limitations of tradition and explore the external spaces of liberty and advancement.

In an excellent display of her academic ability, Ogot was able to overcome the initial curiosity and doubt that greeted her resolve to study nursing from the British women students who were her classmates. She was to prove them wrong by emerging with “top marks at the end of the Woolwich Group Hospital Preliminary Training School” (63) in a class of more than 120 male and female students, a record she maintained throughout her study in Britain. Here, she therefore played another pioneering role in subverting the white people’s mentality and changed the attitude of Ogot’s classmates from that of doubt and curiosity towards the African intellectual ability, to one of admiration.

Her writing career can be traced to the stay in Britain where she met her fiancé, Bethwell Ogot whom she had earlier “seen casually during the Makerere Luo Students League meetings and during their Re-Union Annual Meetings at Kisumu from 1950” (66). He noted her poetic ability from her letters to him and encouraged her to write poetry. She would later, in an interview with Lee Nicholas, state that her writing has “a touch of romantic background” (207). While she never

had the passion for poetry and so objected to his request to write poetry, he urged her to try short stories, and with that her writing career began.

Ogot pioneered women's writing in English in Kenya with her first short story "The Year of Sacrifice," that was later changed to "The Rain Came" as well as the novel *The Promised Land* (1966) which was the first of its kind to be published by a Kenyan African woman. In so doing, Ogot succeeded in giving voice to other female writers in Kenya. She gained the fame that saw her get elected as the first chairperson of the Writers' Association of Kenya (WAK) at its formation in 1974. Ogot identifies that the "most serious problem facing the Association from the very beginning was that of freedom of expression" (127). She saw the association through the challenge of freedom of expression. The same challenge led to the arrest of writers whose views were considered too critical of the government like Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In addition, Ogot mentions "Dr. Micere Githae Mugo, a poet, a short story writer, a playwright, a critic and a member of our Executive Committee, was arrested by the Kenya Police, detained for several days, and tortured in the police cells and tortured in the police cells" (127). This kind of treatment by the government of the artists occurred under what Ogot calls, "The suppression of creativity" (129).

The formation of the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) in 1984 equally saw Ogot pioneer in leadership following her election as the first Vice Chairperson. With KOLA, Ogot and her colleagues took to the promotion of Oral Literature "as a medium for passing down history, culture and experience from generation to generation, from mouth to mouth" (137). The promotion of Oral Literature was emphasized in recognition of the distinctive voice, identity and confidence that Oral Literature gave to the African continent.

3.2 Narrating Women's Kenyan Empowerment Efforts

Ogot's own experience informed her decision to make meaningful contribution to the values of women's empowerment. She links her success to her father whose commitment to education for girls saw herself through school at a time when education for girls was not prioritized. Ogot appears to have been lucky twice when she married a man who was free from chauvinism. She says "I was lucky also to have a husband who was free from chauvinism, and who endowed me with real power in the family" (173). The men who formed the most influential part of Ogot's society in her life were those already freed from the vice of patriarchy.

The political role that Ogot actively played from the year 1983 when she was nominated and later elected in 1985 to the Parliament of Kenya enabled her "to more fully realize, that Kenya women were still invisible in formal political institutions" (173-174). She notes that she faced significant challenges as a woman in a representative house dominated by male members. One of her challenges then was the awareness of the fact that "being in that position meant that I had to not only prove that a woman could be as good a political leader as a man, if not better; but my actions, behavior, and utterances, had a major bearing on the prospects for women in politics generally" (174). Her eventual appointment into the Cabinet as an Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in 1985 placed her second to Dr. Julia Ojiambo in the list of Kenyan women to have ever held such a position. Rising to such positions of influence placed Ogot in a vantage position to easily project the female voice. There is a way in which this appointment made it possible for her to play an influential role in the life of women, mainly because it accorded her the ability to legislate for equality of women in both the domestic and social circles. She says:

This appointment was significant to me for its direct involvement in women affairs. It gave me a fitting opportunity to deal with gender problems not merely at the problem solving level, but also at the policy formulation and implementation levels. Being in that position also enabled me to become acutely aware of problems facing women regionally and globally. (174)

Ogot appreciates that her Ministerial appointment presented her with the ability to legislate laws geared for the advancement of women's welfare. From the seminars she attended both locally and regionally, she came to understand the universal position of women as victims of patriarchal dominance. For example, Ogot says that as a member of the Kenya Delegation during the Thirteenth Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1975, the women from Kenya recognized and "expressed their great sympathy with their sisters in South Africa, Namibia and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) who were not only suffering from racial discrimination...but who were also suffering from discrimination based on sex" (176).

She decries the glaring under-representation of women in government appointments and the obstacles that stifled their attempts to correct such imbalances. Of specific concern is the reference to the August 1984 meeting of Kenya women leaders in which they resolved to demand for greater representation in the country's decision making organs. She says they had prepared a document which revealed discrimination against women in government appointments—a position comparable to today's government's unwillingness to implement the constitutionally stipulated two thirds gender rule. In response, the then President Daniel arap Moi said that "for women to demand equality with men was to imply that God erred when He made man the head of the family" (181). Ogot attributes the president's response to "the traditional male chauvinist attitude" (182) the said leader may have carried with him from a patriarchal

environment during his childhood. The president's take on the women's call for equality and Ogot's narration of female under-representation confirm what Ladele notes when she says that "politically, African women are not traditionally visible in the political landscape of the continent" (75). While the lack of visibility may be blamed on women's disinterest in politics, patriarchy is largely to blame for sidelining women and frustrating their effort to acquire leadership positions.

Ogot also finds fault with the unequal educational opportunities afforded girls and provides statistics to show the serious discrepancies in the access and quality of education available for girls and boys at secondary school level in Kenya of the 1980s. She says that "in 1985, there were 200 fully government-maintained boys secondary schools in Kenya with an enrollment of 147,000 compared with 107 government schools for girls with an enrollment of 75,000" (182). What Ogot emphasizes here is that the glaring discrepancy informed by gender difference worked to the benefit of males. Today, however, the situation is gaining progressive change thanks to the widespread campaign for girl-child education receiving support from across the globe although it is yet to achieve a satisfactory degree of equality.

Noting that progressively up to university level, women were in the minority with both University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University having only "2,566 women...compared with 6,488 men" by the years 1984/1985. This is the trend that led to imbalance in employment where "women formed only 21 percent of the 1.2 million Kenyans employed in the modern sector" (182). While the accuracy of such figures and statistics lies with the corroborative evidence outside the confines of this study, the fact to be emphasized is that women are yet to achieve equality with men when reference is made to access to educational opportunities.

Ogot expresses concern with the presentation of women in mass media. She recalls that while opening a Media Management Course for Women in Nairobi in 1986, her discussion centered on the unfair presentation of women in the mass media as the “major constraints to development in this profession” (292). Ogot expressed concern over what she explains that,

I pointed out that case studies of African countries had shown that the mass media tended to concentrate on the traditional image of women as housewives and mothers. At other times, women were projected largely as beneficiaries of social services. They were portrayed as social liabilities, or as a passive group playing supportive roles to male members of the society, rather than as active participants in development, which they were. (292)

Ogot’s dissatisfaction with portrayal of women by the media may have been informed by her awareness that women had made great strides in attaining social and economic autonomy in Kenya.

Ogot illustrates that women had excelled in their academic pursuit to attain the highest available qualifications. She specifically points out that:

Large strides had been made in academia, with more women earning doctorates and qualifying to lecture at university. Wangari Maathai earned her PhD in 1971, Julia Ojiambo in 1973, Norah Olembu, 1980, Miriam Khamadi Were, 1980 and Sally Kosgei, Edda Gachukia, E. Keino, Irene Gathenji, Achola Pala Okeyo—all obtained their PhDs. Kenya was beginning to have its share of brilliant, highly talented and ambitious women. (183)

Rather than depict this success achieved by women, Ogot was concerned with the media because “The images that the media projected (of women) only served to foster, in both men and women, negative attitudes towards women besides reinforcing traditional expectations which confine women to traditional roles” (293). She points that a major reason for the single-sided portrayal of women in the media stemmed from the dominance of the media by men. She therefore narrates a suggestion that women in the media too, “be equipped with the knowledge and skills that were necessary for management positions in the media service” (293).

Ogot also decries the exploitation of feminine sexuality by advertising agencies where “women often appeared as eye-catchers intended to direct customer’s interest to some consumable product or other (even when) the half-naked woman bore no relationship to the extolled product” (292). Expressing her agency for women, she recalls taking the initiative to urge media practitioners to “urgently correct this and produce advertisements that will reflect the true picture of society and its values” (292). Although this exploitative presentation of women has persisted today to be seen as the norm, Ogot has succeeded in showing it is a vice and that it can and should be addressed.

With the situation for women in education, politics and employment being this sorry, Ogot notes that the first step towards empowerment of women is “through imparting correct information and providing life-long education” (151) which she tried to do by providing weekly talks in Dholuo and Kiswahili in response to a request from the Voice of Kenya Radio Service. It is this medium that offered her the voice to air the silent wishes of the women, thus achieving agency. By such broadcasts, Ogot was convinced she was educating women thus “contributing to their liberation” (152). By narrating this section of her life, Ogot aims to show the value of education in the

projection of female agency. For her, educated people significantly have the knowledge to claim their rightful space in the society.

Ogot's appointment to head the Kisumu Home Craft Training Center elevated her to another platform upon which to continue her empowerment effort for the women. With courses that aimed at providing home care skills, the training center complemented Ogot's position as the District Community Development Officer for Central Nyanza which comprised "the present counties of Kisumu, Siaya and Busia" (152). The institutions worked towards the empowerment of women by providing them "with the capacity to form and manage their own organizations which function as platforms for discussing their issues and as avenues for influencing public opinion" (154). Even though there were still the challenges of translating the skills acquired effectively at the national level, Ogot drew satisfaction in the organization's achievement in changing the male/female roles at the local level. She says her role in mobilizing, organizing, and motivating women provided her with "an invaluable experience in the process of women empowerment" (156) such as could not be achieved by mere rhetoric.

A significant move towards the realization of women's voice in Kenya came with the need for political power for women. Kenya women were seriously under-represented politically considering that by 1983, the Parliament of Kenya had only one elected female member and two nominated ones "in a House of 158 males" (155) thus making women's representation insignificant. The national women's organizations like *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* and the National Council of Kenya Women provided the women with leadership skills and ability to shape such skills. However, presently the situation has not changed significantly even with the implementation of affirmative action that calls for inclusion of women in elective positions. The

Senate House in Kenya today, for example, has no single elected female member except by nomination.

Further in her projection of the female agency, Ogot became the Public Relations Officer of Air India and was in charge of the East and Central Africa Region between 1964 and 1966, an experience that gave her a view into the competitive life in the private sector and enabled her to “arrange for cheap airfares for Kenyan students studying in India” (158). Of specific interest to my study is that she thus became “the first African woman in Kenya to hold a substantive position in a foreign company dominated by Asian men” (158). With this experience in the private sector, Ogot was able to open her first boutique within the Central Business District of Nairobi becoming one of the first Africans to do so. She says the business was financed using a bank loan acquired in her own name but supported by her husband, a phenomenon “which at that time was unheard of” since for her, an African woman, “to obtain a loan in her own name from a commercial bank was in itself a major act of women’s empowerment”(160). This effort emphasizes the pioneering spirit that Ogot exhibited and the successful end to which it led her. In a way, it speaks for Ogot and on behalf of the women in their ability to rise beyond the limits of traditional gender-role specificities.

Ogot narrates her success in business that diversified to include printing and trade in books exemplified by her businesses whose names and locations she provides as Anyange Press Ltd. and West Kenya Booksellers Ltd. in Kisumu; real estate company, Winam Developers Ltd.; and educational institutions like Jubilee High School in Yala Town. She recognizes that her husband, in bestowing the responsibility of managing the family business on her, “... demonstrated in a very special way, his full support for women’s empowerment” (163). She recognizes too, that by her husband’s action, she “was not only being empowered, (but also that she) was in reality

being installed in power. With such a solid base in the family, I now felt strong enough to go out into the world to fight for women's rights as part of human rights" (163). Ogot emphasizes a recognition of the family, being the basic social unit, as an indispensable ingredient in seeking and realizing the successful empowerment of women.

Ogot participated in women's empowerment effort by attending several regional conferences both within the country and outside as a way of getting to understand the theory and practice of women liberation. She says that, "The first regional conference on women empowerment I ever attended was sponsored by the Kenya National Council of Women in collaboration with the East African Institute Social and Cultural Affairs" (163) which was held in Nairobi between the 24th and 28th April 1967. In the same conference whose theme was "Women in a Changing Society," (163) Mrs. Miriam Obote, the then Ugandan First Lady, spoke of the need for women inclusivity in development and emphasized the need to seek women's views on cultural issues, since "women are the transmitters of a nation's cultural heritage and traditions"(170). This may have incited in Ogot the desire to attend many more such conferences as well as the need for advancing the welfare of women against the backdrop of patriarchal societal structure.

One quite memorable conference that Ogot attended was the Fourth World Conference on Women held from 4th to 15th September, 1995 in Beijing, China that came to be famously known as the Beijing Women Conference. She lists the resolutions they made at the conference focusing on the need for women to be accessed to reproductive health care, and the need for fundamental freedom at the domestic and political levels. Also noted was the need for women to gain access to credit facilities as a requisite tool for both justice and development. She says that lack of access to education, credit facilities or property rendered women incapable of the power to make decisions. Therefore, "women and men around the world must work together, to transform the

political, economic, social and cultural institutions that perpetuate gender-based discrimination” (223). From the conference, the Kenya women were optimistic and waited only for action to implement their resolutions.

However, patriarchy was not yet ready to accept women inclusivity, as she reveals that back “In Kenya only words, not actions, waited for us on arrival from Beijing. President Daniel arap Moi issued a very strange statement saying that he totally rejected cultures alien to Africa which were discussed at the Beijing Conference” (230). She says the President’s statement insinuated that the women had gone to learn about same-sex marriages. Ogot sums the magnitude of the problem to have been a consequence of patriarchy and political power structure saying:

It was part of a silent connivance with patriarchal societal forces which opted to paint the Beijing process, and other international moves to address gender inequality, as Western propaganda, cultural pollution, and even promiscuity. The fact that the Beijing Conference made headway in obtaining a global consensus on conditions of women and policies and programmes needed to ameliorate their status was anathema to President Moi and his male supporters who preferred a patronizing approach that had very little to do with addressing the problems facing Kenya women. (231)

Ogot lays all blame on the then President Moi saying that “Kenya women will therefore remember Moi for squandering the opportunity to put them at par with men and for failing to rise above mere tokenism” (232). By this statement Ogot refers to several parliamentary motions that were passed but never became laws such as the motions on Maternity Leave and Gender Commission, in spite of the support that these motions received from the public. Today however, the situation has changed but this was only possible after President Moi had retired.

She acknowledges the role played by women from her rural home of Gem who sent delegations to persuade her to contest the Gem Constituency by-election following the death of the then legislator Horace Ongili Owiti on the 27th of May 1985. She says that at the time she was attending a United Nations World Conference on Women, also attended by twenty thousand women from all over the world who had gathered in Nairobi “to demand women empowerment, including political empowerment” (248). It is to the encouragement of these women from Gem that Ogot credits her entry into elective politics. Although she remains silent on the pressure from the women delegates at the conference too, Bethwell Ogot confirms that Grace Ogot equally received pressure from these women gathered in Nairobi from all over the world too, to contest the by-election. He says:

There was great pressure on my wife, especially from the women in Gem, to offer herself as a candidate for the pending by-election. Further pressure came from the delegates who were attending the World Women Conference in Nairobi where she had been elected chairperson of the Peace Committee. (384)

Recognizing the support from these women, Ogot confirms that she owes her success in politics to the women whose support for her subverted what she says “has often been stated that women never support fellow women in politics...(since the women from Gem)...sent delegates to Nairobi at their own expense to persuade me to stand in the by-election” (248-249).

3.3 Narrating Female Agency in Ogot’s Semi-Autobiographical Fiction

This section discusses how Ogot depicts her projection of female agency in the life of female characters in her selected fictions. The section dwells on the fictional texts that are highlighted in Ogot’s autobiography, including critical writing that address the issues relevant to the topic of female agency and contestation of tradition. Unlike a majority of male African literary figures,

Ogot's fiction lead in providing women agency in their positive portrayal of her female characters. The argument advanced in this section is based on the view that there are more male writers than female ones who are privileged by patriarchal ideology to dominate the African literary canon and this trend worked against portraying female characters positively. Ogot in her fiction therefore, gives female characters a fair representation devoid of male writers' gender stereotyping.

In an article titled "Female Writers, Male Critics" Femi Ojo-Ade holds that "African literature is a male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art" (158) and that this dominance of African literature by men, denies women a fair representation. Ojo-Ade gives, in what he calls "honour roll," the list of such dominant African male writers as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Senghor, Soyinka, Achebe, Mphahlele among others to show the patriarchal dominance in African literature. While observing that "man constitutes the majority and woman, the minority" (158), Ojo-Ade specifies that the female minority is not only numerical but that women are also "Dominated, Disadvantaged, Exploited, Excluded" (159-159). The domination of African literary scene by male writers therefore implies that female characters are least likely to receive a fair, impartial depiction in literature.

Eustace Palmer states in "The Feminine Point of View: Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" that there is an absence of the feminine point of view in the African novel. He maintains that "the presentation of woman in the African novel has been left entirely to male voices (whose) interest in womanhood has had to take second place to numerous other concerns" (38). Much as there is a notable number of male novelists in Africa such as Achebe, Amadi, Ngugi, Ousmane Sembene, Laye, Beti, Armah, and Soyinka among others, many of them incline their address to issues other than those of concern to the African woman.

In “Issues in African Literature: A Syllabus” Ada Uzoamaka Azodo lists Ousmane Sembene among Amilcar Cabral, Cheik Oumar Sissoko, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Chimalum Nwankwo as “male African Feminists whose contributions to the struggle for the liberation of African women cannot be ignored” (202). While there are African male writers who have been interested in women’s issues, Palmer’s concern is that the permeation of African literature by male writers is to blame for the limited presentation of feminine issues in African literary circles. He elaborates this concern, saying:

These male novelists, who have presented the African largely within the traditional milieu, have generally communicated a picture of a male-dominated and male-oriented society, and the satisfaction of the women with this state of things has been...completely taken for granted.... Achebe, Ngugi and others have portrayed women who complacently continue to fulfil the roles expected of them by their society and to accept the superiority of the men. (38)

However, Palmer also recognizes that against the backdrop of this male-dominated set-up, the African literary scene has witnessed the emergence of female writers whose emersion “seriously challenges all these cosy assumptions.” He explains that delineation of women who cheerfully and contentedly accept their circumstances is, in the writings of African women, substituted by “that of a woman who is powerfully aware of the unfairness of the system and who longs to be fulfilled in her self (sic), to be a full human being, not merely somebody else’s appendage” (39). The need for female agency can then be credited to the presence of women writers in African literature.

Ogot’s female characters are depicted in similar traditional settings just as the male novelists do, but she challenges her male counterparts in her espousal of a feminine point of view. It is Ogot’s

adoption of the female view that renders her capable of presenting female characters who seem to lack gratification in male dominance and the prevalent chauvinistic attitudes towards women. Ogot presents in her fiction a society in which the traditional gender-role definition is given prominent attention.

In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* Florence Stratton sums up the role that Ogot's fiction plays when she writes that:

The main ideological function of Ogot's fiction is to undermine patriarchal ideology by means of a reversal of the initial terms of the sexual allegory. Such an inversion—female and male, good and evil, subject and object—does not resolve the problems of gender, but it is, nonetheless, a subversive maneuver. For it exposes the sexist bias of the male literary tradition and creates space for the female subject. (62)

Stratton expounds that inversion in Ogot's writings is in part accomplished by "the designation of the national subject as explicitly female" (62). It is in this counter-narrative that Ogot can challenge the depiction of women as characteristically "passive" and "ahistorical" which the female image has received from the colonial and African male narratives.

The position that Ogot accords her female characters in her writing privileged the female voice even long before her autobiography was written. I find that the self-story that Ogot presents in her autobiography had been developed earlier in her writings, only by then it was through fictional characters. In other words, Ogot used the female characters in her fictions as a way of attaining self-expression, and in privileging the female voice in her fiction, she aims to project agency for women through these fictional characters.

I have discussed how Ogot's husband played an influential role to get her into writing but her interest in writing fiction was "stimulated by my childhood keenness to listen to my grandmother's folktales" (91). Ogot recognizes the role her grandmother played in equipping her with the skills necessary for developing and advancing the career with which she became known in literary and academic circles the world over. I wish to agree with Kuria when he argues that "all literature is somehow connected to the real experience of its author" (5). It is on Kuria's thought that I base the argument that Ogot as a writer places herself at the center of her fiction. Some of her fiction she says are stories that relate to her personal experiences while she was working at the hospitals in Uganda and Kenya.

The same autobiographic tendency in fiction is what emerges from Margaret Ogola whose award winning novel *The River and the Source* is a portrayal of stories narrated by her mother whom she acknowledges for her ability to recall and tell her grandmother's story. Ogola states that the first part of her book, appropriately titled "The Girl Child," is "extensively borrowed from the life and times of Obanda Kingi nyar Ang'eyo—my great grandmother which was narrated to me by my mother" (Acknowledgements). This attempt to credit the African women with the acquisition and transmission of oral traditions establishes the women as carriers and caretakers of African worldview. In relating the experiences of lived circumstances, the stories also show that in their fictions, authors develop literary works by recounting personalized life experiences.

Furthermore, in her article "My Mothers/My Selves: (Re)Reading a Tradition of West African Women's Autobiography," Mary-Kay F. Miller states the Senegalese female novelist Mariama Ba produced in *So Long a Letter* "a text that blurred the boundaries between the autobiography and fiction" (7). This statement is based on Miller's belief that Ba's life parallels that of Ramatoulaye's as depicted by Ba in the text. The text is Ramatoulaye's letter which is addressed

to her childhood friend Aissatou and recounts the experiences of betrayal by a husband who decides to take for second wife, her younger daughter's best friend Binetou. Ramatoulaye has no recourse to seek justice as her husband's act is established by the authority of their Muslim tradition. She then recalls with nostalgia the white school headmistress who had sought their emancipation. She says of her aims:

To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral value in us: these were the aims of our admirable headmistress.
(15-16)

Ramatoulaye's nostalgic memory of her days in school and the aim of education at empowering the African girls, according to Miller, reflects experiences of the life of Ba herself.

I borrow from the foregoing illustrations to argue that Ogot's autobiography is like a stamp which confirms that her narrated experience is the same that she has depicted across a number of her stories. Ogot confirms this position by stating that, "Not all my stories were rooted in tradition. Several of them, for example, relate to my experiences at Mengo Hospital in Kampala and Maseno Hospital in Kenya" (103). Her short story, "The Hero" is related from a close experience of irony and pain of losing Dr. Erick Sserwada to polio, yet he had been a respected doctor and expert at a time when "highly educated doctors like him were rare" (103). This experience left Ogot and the other nurses in such a shock that Ogot was to live with it for over ten years till she wrote the story. The other short story also relating Ogot's experience at the hospital and published together with "The Hero" under the collective title *Land Without Thunder* (1968) is "The Rain Came." Ogot speaks of this story in her interview with Lee Nicholas as one

that “touches me deeply (having) listened to it while I was young” (208). It is a story that recounts the experience of a Luo girl who is sacrificed to enable her people receive rains. It is a story based on tradition at the same time as it presents the painful role the young innocent girl has to play in salvaging her people from the jaws of a biting drought.

In the story “Elizabeth” Ogot says she related the problem of sexual harassment in public service. This is the story of Elizabeth, a shorthand typist who has the requisite skills that she would wish to apply in nation building. However, she faces the challenge of sexual advances from the bosses who want to employ her on condition that she bends her morality. Ogot says the result is that Elizabeth “moves from one boss to another trying to find just one man who will take her as a secretary and not as a woman. She does not find any” (105). In the life of Elizabeth, we find the depiction of woman as independent and defying male blackmail. It is a story that advances Ogot’s call for female liberation as the young lady seeking a job chooses to stand by her moral convictions. Stratton says that in this story, “Ogot privileges the female voice with...and gives it moral authority. At the same time she indicates how this voice has been suppressed by the patriarchal conventions governing relations between men and women” (1994:66). While it is a story of the challenges facing women who seek employment in male dominated society, Ogot develops in Elizabeth the need for women to proclaim and stand by their moral convictions.

Ogot also talks of her short story “The Island of Tears” in which she captured the pain following the bereavement of Rusinga Island people in the murder of Tom Mboya, a politician from the same area in 1969. She says that in this story, she “dealt with a different kind of a modern hero—a political hero. It is the story of the response of the people of Rusinga on Lake Victoria, and indeed of the people of Kenya as a whole, to the tragic death of the greatest statesmen of Kenya,

Thomas Joseph Mboya, whom I knew very well” (105). This story, like “The Hero” recasts Ogot’s memory at the point of losing well-known personalities.

In her novels too, Ogot develops the story of fictionalized female characters to reconstruct her own experience and as a way of projecting her wish through character depiction. In *The Promised Land* (1966) Ogot relates the life of Ochola and his wife Nyapol. Ochola leaves his ancestral home in Nyanza to seek wealth acquisition in the neighbouring Tanzania. Having acquired the wealth, a strange illness forces him to return home empty handed. As a story of real life-experience, Ogot says:

It is the story of a villager, Ochola, who leaves his home in Seme on the shore of Lake Victoria and goes to live in Tanzania. When I was about twelve, I was staying with my eldest sister Mrs. Rose Orondo in the same area where the story begins, and I heard this story from the people who lived with Ochola in Tanzania. The man had gone to look for wealth in Tanzania and he got it in abundance. Then he lost it all, all of it, after contracting a strange disease which Western medicine failed to treat. It was what the English doctor who is treating him brands “heathen practices”, “superstitious ideas”, that ultimately provided the cure. (106)

Although the novel relates a fictional account, there is a close relation to real experience that lends a factual dimension to the events related. The book portrays Ogot’s projection of female agency and a presentation of the confluence of tradition and modernity. In Nyapol’s objection to Ochola’s planned migration we find Ogot privileging the female voice not only with reason but also the courage to express opinion contrary to that of her husband while still remaining respectful as a wife. Nyapol emerges as the reasonable one in her objection to Ochola’s planned move to seek wealth. She says, “We are rich as we are and we’ve enough land. Instead of

working on the land which belongs to us, you make arrangements behind my back to move me from my people, to make me a beggar in a foreign land” (15). Nyapol’s concern is shared by Owiti, Ochola’s grandfather who tries to persuade Ochola from his migratory ambition thus:

But what drives you away from here? You’ve enough land at the moment, and when your father sleeps (to mean dies), being the first son, you’ll inherit all his as well. It is better for a man to live with his relatives. The strangers, amongst whom you want to live, may not be good people. They may be unfriendly and you may not find favour among them. You know the fate of the strangers who live amongst us here? They have no voice in the running of our land. They are lonely because they’re not accepted by our people. Is this what you want? (18)

Through Nyapol, Ogot privileges the women with the ability to reason, only that the patriarchal arrangements at play then stood between Ochola and his attention to her plea. Of great concern is that Ogot depicts, through Nyapol, the image of women seeking agency in a male dominated society and the patriarchal hurdles they face.

In *Miaha (The Strange Bride)*, Ogot recounts what she calls “the Adam and Eve story of the Luo” (91) to present the story of Nyawir as an example of what women can do to bring about social change. Nyawir in this text projects Ogot’s message that women can bring change by subverting traditional set-up with its support for the status quo. Enock Aloo holds that Ogot uses the interpretation of a Luo myth to show “the agency of women in societal transformation at the same time as she underscores the cultural aspect of development” (101). The story of Nyawir is a projection of Ogot’s desire for deliberate contravention of tradition as a way of initiating change in a society steeped in ancestral customs that justify patriarchy.

Stratton says that in the novel, “Ogot combats one of the major orthodoxies of male literature: the representation of women as outside history” (1994:64). By portraying Nyawir’s headstrong break of the commandment from *Were* thereby forcing the people to incorporate labour in production effort, Ogot subverts the patriarchal narrative that limits the woman to the traditional gender-role specifications. Stratton explains that “Ogot attempts to counter the male myth of the ‘traditional woman.’ She identifies her female protagonist with change and development and grants her historical agency” (1994:65).

In *The Graduate*, we find what Ogot calls “the story of how it felt like in the 1960s when the demand for qualified Africans who could take over from the departing expatriates was at its highest. A graduate was a rare person, with limitless opportunities” (105). The novel tells the story of Juanina Karungari who becomes the first woman appointed to the cabinet as an assistant minister on formation of the first post-independence government in Kenya. Posted to the Ministry of Public Affairs, she is mandated with the task to recall Kenyan graduates in the United States to return their skills home. Ogot says in those days, “Those who were studying in foreign lands, like Jakoyo Seda, the graduate of the novel, were lured back by sweet talk from the politicians” (105).

The task of infusing these skilled Kenyans into the civil service, with its expatriate majority, sets Juanina on the pioneering role of implementing the government’s Africanization policy in the civil service. The policy also seeks a break with the colonial tradition that ensured domination of the ministry by White staff members. Elaborating on the value of a graduate in the early independence days in Kenya, Ogot says “the ‘graduate’ is a new man in Kenya. He is the breadwinner who is received with utter joy when he returns from his sojourn overseas” (106).

This scarcity of graduates in the Kenyan scene is what justifies Juanina's role in seeking to recall Kenyan students back home from abroad.

Stratton recognizes Ogot's elevation of female agency in depicting the achievement of Juanina following her Ministerial appointment. Stratton believes that Ogot portrays women's success in politics, a field in which the men have seemingly failed. She says of Juanina's achievement in convincing the Kenyan students back home exemplified in Jakoyo Seda that "Ogot's view seems to be that women make more effective politicians than men because they are more committed to promoting national interests. The problem with men, she implies, is that they have been corrupted by their natural accession to patriarchal power" (1994:76). Stratton's interpretation supports my stand that Ogot's work displays a projection of female agency. While women are given to advancing national interests, men are limited to craving for patriarchal prowess in politics.

In Juanina Ogot recasts herself having been among the only three women legislators in 1983 when she became a nominated member by KANU Party. Juanina's effort to recall graduates back home is met by the challenge from expatriates who find it hard to leave their long held positions to native Kenyans. She says that "the expatriates were not going to depart without firing the last shots. They blackmailed, undermined, and even demonized many of the African graduates in order to postpone their departure date" (105). Narrating her entry into politics, Ogot recalls the onset of independence saying that "locally in Kisumu, nationally in Kenya and internationally, 1961 was a year of great expectations mixed with some anxiety" (243). Characterized by the 'Declining Colonialism', it was a period that paved way for African optimism and spelt an end to the imposed rule even though the white men never exuded confidence in African's ability to succeed. Ogot supports this observation when she says, "The Africans were overjoyed and had

great expectations but the white settlers did not see much future in an independent Kenya ruled by Africans” (244).

When Ogot returned from Britain to begin work at Maseno Mission Hospital, the white missionaries treated her employment in a manner that almost takes after what she narrates in *The Graduate*. Unaware of what status, rights and privileges she deserved, the missionaries’ indifference to her employment was informed by the racial segregation and prejudices at play then. In a stream of rhetorical questions, she lists the effects of racial injustice that marred the Christian flock at the hospital. She says in her autobiography:

They did not even know what status I should be accorded, and what rights and privileges I should have in a colony where racial segregation and prejudice still reigned. Was I entitled to a house, and what kind of a house? Could I use the hospital car that was reserved for the white sisters? Could I eat with them in the same hotels and use ‘western type’ toilets? The result was a situation full of contradictions, humiliation, and embarrassment all round, with Christian belief thrown to the winds! (76)

The experiences that Ogot recounts of her life at the hands of white missionaries occurred in the time just before independence in Kenya in the early 1960s, the same time that *The Graduate* finds its setting. The major problem for African intellectuals returning home to work was racial indifference by the white ruling class who feared losing (or sharing) their positions and privileges out to Africans.

3.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has examined how Ogot projects both her personal agency and that of the other women as well. We have seen how valuable women that are empowered become to the society.

The Chapter has also examined how Ogot views the process of liberating and empowering women, noting that it begins with the availability and access to educational opportunity. The Chapter has also examined how Ogot presents a projection of female agency in some of her fictional texts. The similarity in the experiences of some of her fictional characters and her life-story leads me to surmise that Ogot's fiction provided her with the space to project female agency in writing even as she did the same through her narrated life experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

In this study I had set out to examine how Grace Ogot narrates a contestation with the traditions of her Luo people's way of life and patriarchal system of male dominance, in an effort to privilege the female voice and advance a call for female agency. I have examined how *Days of My Life* enables Ogot to express herself in more ways than patriarchal dominance in African literature would have allowed her at the time. I have also examined the genre of autobiography with specific focus on its nature and artistry that make the genre a literary work. I have also linked Ogot's book to the genre of autobiography with the aim of authenticating the text as one.

This study began by a biographical analysis of Grace Ogot to provide a brief history of her life from birth, through education, employment and the roles she played both at home and the national levels. My aim was to link Grace Ogot's life to the topic of my research, that is, I intended to find how she contests traditions with the aim of projecting female agency in her self-narrative.

In this study therefore, I had set to pursue two objectives: to explore the ways in which Ogot dramatizes the interplay between tradition and modernity in her own life and that of her community, and evaluate how autobiographical writing can be used as a tool to suggest and project both personal agency freedom for women.

I proceeded from two assumptions: that Ogot (re)presents the meeting point of tradition and modernity in her life and that of her community and that the autobiography provides a means by which the writer suggests a projection of personal agency and freedom for women.

The study has been conducted from a Feminist Theoretical Perspective. The argument is that since the dominant male voice that pervades African literature does not allow women a fair representation, Ogot's autobiography offers a narrative that subverts the dominant ideals of patriarchy by (re)presenting women as deserving of liberty. Noting that women have in the past been faced with exclusion in a contextual framework where nationalism is constructed around the ideals of patriarchy, Ogot's narrative resolves to "represent women's anti-national experience as the solution" as Florence Stratton would say. Stratton further asserts that Ogot also "attempts to reconstruct nationalism so as to include women's aspirations" (1994:79). We have found that Ogot's story is not only a narrative of herself but also that of the African woman in a society pervaded with male-dominance.

The study employed the African Feminist strand of feminism, recognizing that the African woman is faced with the two-faced problem of race and gender which combine to deny her a fair representation in the literary canon pervaded by male writers and critics. The need to narrate a contestation of tradition and in the process achieve a projection of female agency is informed by the awareness of this skewed representation of male/female characters in literature. It is not enough to say that male writers cannot express feminist concerns, only that certain issues are best presented by "eye-witness account" mode to evade the doubts of having "groped in the dark" to recount stories about women. In addition, male writers are often known to write within the limits of patriarchal standards thus are bound to slip into the risk of sidelining women.

This study has achieved the objectives it set out to pursue. The findings of my research therefore, confirm my hypotheses. I have found that Grace Ogot succeeds in (re)presenting the meeting point between tradition and modernity in both her life and that of her community. By narrating a life that she has lived through the colonial and post-colonial faces of Kenya, Ogot's life-narrative

displays a fusion of both the traditional and modern ways of life. I have also found that the autobiography provides a means by which Ogot is able to suggest a projection of personal agency and liberty for herself and the women. Through her self-narrative, Ogot has projected and justified the call for women's freedom from oppressive traditions.

The study has also revealed that self-narration can be a useful tool for advocating female agency as it allows the female writer the opportunity to address issues of concern to women from a personal experience. This kind of self-expression is made possible by the use of a first person narrative technique which helps achieve closeness and immediacy with the readers. It is thus a useful way of narrating very close and personal issues that ordinarily, one would otherwise wish to keep private. Much as the autobiographical voice may be limited by subjectivity, the events related in such a narrative are only influenced by the subjectivity of the narrator to the extent that it allows for selectivity of content in its nature.

A brief analysis of Ogot's biography has revealed that she emerges as a "first" in many literal instances in her life from school, employment, writing career and political leadership, an achievement which sets her well ahead of her contemporaries. Growing up in the colonial Kenya, Ogot recounts the effects of Christian missionary effort more than the dark side of colonialist adventure in Africa to narrate her wish to seek a break from subversive traditional establishment. She uses her position in many ways to advance the cause of achieving liberty for women.

In addition, considering that her life spans the period of colonialism and after in Kenya, Ogot becomes the best placed-person to narrate the development of women's issues in Kenya. The study finds, in the role that Ogot's father and husband played to set her free from the limits of patriarchy, the need to incorporate all people irrespective of gender and class difference, in the

struggle for women's liberation. As the sole beneficiaries of patriarchal arrangements, men ought to lead in the call for advancement of female agency.

My study has also found that Ogot's fiction has relation to the events in her life. In many ways, we find that her autobiography relates some of the events that she had earlier addressed in her fiction and that many of her characters project her vision for a social structure that embraces gender inclusivity and is devoid of gender-based discriminations. A number of her short stories depict women who find themselves in patriarchal societies within which they strive to seek a break with what is considered the norm. Ogot's depiction of women who experience displeasure with patriarchal social structures becomes her strategy of presenting a counter-narrative to the presumed image of women as contented with the prevalent gender arrangement in society.

I conclude by stating that Ogot's self-narrative (re)presents her days of life among her Luo Community's traditions that spelt the way of life for every individual and the Kenya politics characterized by a majority of male-membership and leadership. Ogot's depiction of contest with this patriarchal arrangement is her way of seeking women's agency. She contested traditions that appeared oppressive to her as a woman and, at the risk of being considered a cultural deserter, sought to project an emancipative call for women. In a way, Ogot seems to suggest that she became a role model for the future proponents of women's empowerment efforts. In the process, Ogot strategically provided a template for successive generations of women to emulate.

I would recommend for further reading, Ogot's reconstruction of Kenya's history in her autobiography, a study which can be conducted by way of a comparative analysis of her fictions. As this study has shown, there is a link between the life Ogot narrates and that of her fictional characters in her earlier texts. One may be interested in studying how her writings mirror the growth of Kenya nation through history.

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