NARRATING PUBLICNESS IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY KENYAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other University.

Signed:  Date: 20th August 2020

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the four ladies whose love has kept me going:

My wife and the love of my life

Celline Margaret Njeri

My daughters:

Maya Angelou Mumbua and Salmah Mwihaki

My mother

Redemptah Mumbua Savethi

ABSTRACT

This study examines how Kenyan women who have been occupiers of public or privileged spaces narrate their publicness. The study focuses on three contemporary Kenyan women's autobiographies: Ciarunji Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run*, Rebeka Njau's *Mirrors of my Life* and Phoebe *Asiyo's It is Possible*: *An African Woman* Speaks. The selected writers are public figures in contemporary Kenya and therefore the study interrogates how they use their life narratives to paint a portrait of Kenya. It also examines how the three writers use various autobiographical strategies to explore and assert their private and public identities. The objectives of the study are: to examine the autobiographical elements employed by the three writers, to explore the strategies of narrating self that the three writers employ and to examine the issues the three autobiographers comment on in their life narratives.

The study is guided by three theoretical frameworks: the theory of the autobiography, feminism criticism and the theory of narratology. The study is divided into five chapters: chapter one forms the background to the study, chapter two focuses on Chesaina's text; *Run Gazelle Run*, chapter three analyses with *Mirrors of my Life* by Njau and chapter for is dedicated to Asiyo's *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks*. The last chapter is dedicated to the findings and conclusion of the study. The study seeks to advance knowledge by examining strategies of self-narration by contemporary Kenyan woman autobiographers who have at one point in their lives occupied public spaces in the country.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The autobiography as a literary genre commands the attention of critics and scholars due to its uniqueness; it is the story of not just the narrator/subject but also that of their community. Though it centres on a life lived, it is a work of art because the subject engages in artistic strategies to narrate lived experiences. Autobiographical writings exist in various forms such as autobiographies, memoirs, letters, reminisces and diaries. This autobiography has been defined differently by different scholars but what cuts across all the definitions is the unique properties of the genre; that it is anchored on history, depends on memory to narrate the life experiences, it is nonfictional in nature, the narrator is the subject, it is tied to the quest for identity by the subject and the narrated experiences should be guided on the concept of truth.

Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* looks at the autobiography as "the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). Abbs' definition makes the autobiography an account of past events of the life of the subject and also links the autobiography with history because the past involves history; history of the subject and the environment or society the subject operates from. Further, the definition brings to fore the idea of identity as "the evolution of the true self" touches on the principle of identity by the autobiographer as they seek to answer questions like 'who am I?', 'how did I become who I am today?' and 'what may I become in future?' (7). This concept of identity is a focus of my study as I seek to examine how three Kenyan women autobiographers assert their identities; public and private.

James Olney in "I was Born: Slave Narratives, Their status as Autobiographies and as Literature" notes 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 past history has led to the present state of being" (47). To Olney, the writing of the autobiography is done at the present and the subject relies on memory as the subject looks backward into their past. Memory therefore becomes an authority in the study of this genre as it is the basis upon which life is interpreted. Olney's definition also places history as a key component of the genre for it shapes the subject's identity. Further, in this definition, Olney observes that the subject "recounts them in such a way" pointing out to the artistic strategies that are at play in an autobiography; that autobiographers employ artistic strategies their life narratives. Memoirs differ slightly from an autobiography in that memoirs record memories and particular events that have taken place in the author's life.

Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography*. *A guide to interpreting life narratives* observe that "a biography or autobiography tells the story "of a life", while a memoir often tells a story from a life" (198). A memoir is therefore a snapshot of the subject's life. Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* posits that a memoir focuses on others more that the subject. Memoirs tend to dedicate themselves to a particular experience or events that stand out or are monumental in the writer's view. Pascal further points out that both the memoir and the autobiography depend on memory and the subject's experiences. Pascal further observes that the two differ in terms of what they reveal: the autobiography reveals more about the self while the memoir reveals to the reader experiences outside the writer/self. Concerning these differences on the autobiography and the memoir, Muchiri observes:

> The autobiography largely focuses on the self, but the memoir devotes more attention to occurrences around and outside the writer. From the memoir, we learn a great deal about the society in which the writer or subject lives, but only get limited information about the writer themselves. (39)

An autobiography can take many forms including letters, diaries, memoirs and reminisces, to a formal book-length autobiography.

The above definitions of the autobiography mark it as a genre that is non-fiction in nature where the subject is also the author and the process of actualizing it involves self-analysis or retrospection at a larger scale. I therefore proceed with my study on the understanding that the autobiography is a narrative of a life lived, told through recollection of the subject's life experiences; that memory is an authority in this genre. This is the definition that is used throughout my study. The definition helpes me to look at the autobiography as a narrative containing factual information about the subject and their society and that the retrospective nature of this genre hinges on the subject's desire to identify who they are at the present by looking back into their past.

Autobiographical strategies are about the elements of storytelling and their combination in a life narrative. This study aims at examining the autobiographies of three Kenyan women who have at one point occupied public spaces or privileged positions in the nation in terms of their autobiographical elements and strategies. It focuses on Phoebe Asiyo's *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks* (2018), Ciarunji Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run* (2018) and Rebeka Njau's *Mirrors of my Life.* (2018) Autobiographical strategies are ideally about two things: the content of the life story and the form used to tell the story. In her study of personal writings of the late

twentieth century Midwestern United States women, Elizabeth Hampsten in *Inscribing the Daily* observes that women diarists use their texts to assert individuality. She further notes that, "the said diarists employed strategies like repetition, deletion and encoding to shape what is and what is not said in their texts" (5).

Different people have different reasons for writing their life stories: some write to vindicate themselves; others write to inspire others while others may write to correct a perception or to protest against something. These texts chronicle the journeys of the three Kenyan women into what are considered public spaces. The research is interested in the autobiographical strategies that the selected writers have adopted in telling their life stories.

Phoebe Asiyo was born in Kenya in 1930 in Karachuonyo, Homabay in the former Nyanza Province. She was the first African president of Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization and the first female assistant superintendent of prisons in Kenya in 1963. She got into elective politics in 1979 with the support of the Luo Council of Elders and defeated Okiki Amayo, a close ally of president Moi to clinch the Karachuonyo Parliamentary seat which she held from 1980 to 1983 and later from 1992 to 1997. She was the pioneer of the historic affirmative action in Kenya that eventually got enshrined in the constitution in 2010. She was among the pioneer female politicians in Kenya.

Ciarunji Chesaina was born in 1947 in Embu, Kenya. Chesaina is both a diplomat and a literature scholar. She served as the second High Commissioner of Kenya to the Republic of South Africa. She is a professor of Literature in the University of Nairobi. A renowned scholar, Chesaina has

published widely and her books include *Oral Literature of the Embu* and *Mbeere, Oral Literature of the Kalenjin, Diazipporah* and *Joy Comes in the Morning*; a collection of short stories dealing with the plight of abused children.

Rebeka Njau was born in December 1932 in Kanyariri, Kikuyu division of Kiambu County. She is a renowned Kenyan artist and educator. She also writes under the pen name Marina Gashe. She attended Makerere University College in Uganda and is the pioneer principal of Nairobi Girls' Secondary school where she served between 1965 and 1966. She lives in Ongata Rongai in Kajiado County. Apart from the text under study, Njau has published the following works: *The Scar*; *The Sacred Seed*; *The Hypocrite and other stories*; *The Kenyan Women Heroes and their Mystic Powers* and *Alone with the Fig Tree*, later reprinted as *Ripples in the Pool*. A common motif in Rebeka Njau's writings is the condition of the African woman both in pre- and post-independence Kenya.

1.2 Statement of Problem

My study is a critical reading of three contemporary autobiographies by Kenyan women namely: *Run Gazelle Run, Mirrors of My Life* and *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks* by Chesaina, Njau and Asiyo respectively. This study examines how the selected writers use various autobiographical strategies to explore and assert their private and public identities. Further, the three autobiographers being public figures in contemporary Kenya, the study interrogates how they employ their life narratives to paint a portrait of Kenya. Despite the centrality of the genre of autobiography in literary discourse, there are no sustained critical studies on the selected life narratives.

1.3 Objectives

i. To interrogate the autobiographical elements in the selected life narratives.

ii. To explore the strategies of narrating self that the writers employ.

iii. To examine the issues that the three writers address in their autobiographies.

1.4 Hypotheses

i. The selected writers employ various autobiographical elements in their life stories.

ii. The contemporary Kenyan women autobiographers employ various narrative strategies to inscribe themselves into the Kenyan narrative.

iii. The three autobiographers use their life narratives to address both personal and national issues.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The three autobiographies under my study offer us insight into how and why people tell stories of their self-worth. Chesaina, Njau and Asiyo have occupied public positions and spaces in contemporary Kenya and the study of their autobiographies reveals the intersection between the public and private spaces and identities. There are no critical studies on the selected life narratives and therefore my study addresses this gap in literary scholarship. My other reason is that the three autobiographers belong to the same generation and are therefore representative of a particular period in the history of Kenya; having been born at the height of colonial rule in Kenya and went on to become public figures and their life narratives can be read as part of the larger Kenyan narrative. The positions occupied by the three autobiographers in the Kenyan nation gives them authority to comment on issues affecting the Kenyan republic, like education,

political leadership, art, the constitution and constitutionalism, equality and social equity. Chesaina comes with the authority and knowledge of a diplomat, a university professor of literature and a writer. Njau is a pioneer educator having been a high school teacher and a principal. She is also an artist of international repute having been a co-founder of the *Paa ya Paa* art gallery in Nairobi and a prolific novelist. Asiyo is a politician who served as a Member of Parliament for eight years and later served in the Kenya Constitutional Review Commission. She rose to the leadership of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization during the colonial period when she became its president in 1958 and later worked in the justice system as the first African woman deputy superintendent of the Kenya prisons service from 1962 to 1970.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on the autobiographical elements and strategies employed by the selected contemporary Kenyan women autobiographers and how these writers use their life stories to inscribe themselves into the Kenyan public space. Further, I examine the intersection of the public and private identities in the life narratives of three Kenyan women. Therefore, I limit my analysis to the three autobiographies: Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run,* Asiyo's, *It is Possible: An African Woman Speaks* and Njau's *Mirrors of My life.* Although both Chesaina and Njau have produced other works of literature such as novels, novellas, and short stories, I limit myself to their autobiographies because I seek to examine their life narratives and lived experiences. I only make reference to the writers' other works for illustration purposes where I deem necessary.

1.7 Literature Review

My literature review section examines critical perspectives on the autobiographical mode as well as literature on the genre of the autobiography and women writings. Lourdes Torres in "The Construction of the Self in U.S Latina autobiographies'', notes that the recent autobiographies written by women of colour in addition to exhibiting fragmented and disjointed narrative units, tend to mix genres in a manner we have not seen in the mainstream biographies. She says:

> These seeming subversive elements include fictional tales, myths and fantasies as a way of constructing themselves. There is no attempt to privilege any of the various genres; History-public and private mythfiction fantasy are all juxtaposed. (qtd in Francoise, Lionett *Autobiographical voices*, 6)

Torres' observations are beneficial to my study as I seek to interrogate how the selected autobiographers use various autobiographical strategies to explore and assert their private and public identities.

Jennifer Muchiri in *Women's autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya,* is of the opinion that personal writing offers a uniquely powerful platform to women for self-expression. This is because the history of many societies has been defined by the systematic campaign to exclude women from public issues and spaces. Therefore, the autobiography can be said to be an attempt by women to have their hitherto muffled voices heard. This unique genre helps women to reflect on their domestic spheres as they move to straddle public ones. She looks at the autobiography as a genre that gives women a voice and identity. One can deduce that Muchiri looks at the autobiography as a canvas upon which the writers imprint and chronicle themselves in order to narrative their stories in both an artistic and meaningful manner. Muchiri's study narrows on Kenyan female autobiographers, with a specific focus on the autobiographical narrative voice.

Her study gives my research a basis to interrogate other autobiographical strategies female autobiographers in Kenya utilize to craft their stories and the issues precipitated in these stories.

Jairus Omuteche in his study "Mediated plot in the Construct of the Theme of Struggle in Nelson Mandela's Autobiography Long Walk to Freedom", depicts a society under oppression and struggling to reclaim its identity. He argues that the apartheid regime was an arrangement that offered privileges to the oppressor against the oppressed. Consequently, the political edifice called apartheid distorts the values and the humanity of the blacks and their response through subversion. To develop the idea of a struggle, Omuteche observes that Nelson Mandela utilizes aspects of the plot. Although Omuteche's study is based on the male African autobiography, it is relevant to my study because it focuses on autobiographical strategies in life narratives. My study just like Omuteche's focuses on the literary output of a section of the society that has been relegated to the periphery for long. His study has also focused on autobiographical strategies for plot is part of narrative strategies.

Marciana Were in her "Negotiating Public and Private Identities: A study of the Autobiographies of African women Politicians", argues that the writing of the African female autobiography is, "a political act that the women use to give agency to diverse issues" (215). Were focuses on the autobiographies of African women who have at one point occupied political offices. To this extent, she focuses on the autobiographical strategies and formal components of the hybridized African woman's autobiography. This research benefits my study in that I am focusing on autobiographical strategies, themes and formal strategies. Again like Were, my focus is on women in public spaces. However, unlike Were whose work dwells strictly on women

politicians, my work is a comparative analysis of the works of an artist, a scholar and a politician.

In "The Autobiographical Impulses in African and African-American Literature," Indangasi argues that the desire to tell one's life is a universal desire. He further posits that, "story-tellers might orally talk about themselves in sharply focused incidents or span quite a chunk of their lives and that they do this with all stylistic embellishment that he associates with literature" (2). Indangasi's study benefits my research in that he emphasizes on the literariness of the autobiography. Henry Indangasi goes on to postulate that, "the autobiography is a work of art and goes on to point out that, "the writer of an autobiography being the artist he is, selects, reorganizes, and reshapes the facts of his life in order to communicate a higher truth" (2). Indangasi's observations help me as I interrogate the artistry of the three women autobiographies in terms of the autobiographical narratives strategies employed. My study goes further to investigate the particular autobiographical strategies utilized by the contemporary Kenyan female autobiographers when inscribing themselves in the Kenyan public space and the specific issues that they address in their life narratives. The current study focuses on the autobiographies of Chesaina, Asiyo and Njau and how they go about telling their stories, the autobiographical strategies they adopt, the autobiographical elements manifest in the narratives and the thematic issues these three life narratives address.

In his paper "The Rise of Feminism and The Growth of Black American Women Literature," Prasanta Kumar observes that, "the tragedy of the Afro-American woman comes from racial segregation which is the result of long-term slavery" (38). Kumar further notes that in addition to

slavery, the Black woman had to deal with the reality of gender discrimination. Consequently, the image of the Black woman in America was that of a human being twice removed from the centre of the society; affected doubly by slavery and patriarchy. He notes that as a result of these experiences, the Black woman, "developed a complexity in themselves; they see themselves with the eyes of the White man, the White woman and the Black man" (39). Prasanta Kumar's research is relevant to my study because he deals with a marginalized group; affected by both historical occurrences and social stratification. However, my study goes further to examine the specific autobiographical elements and strategies the contemporary Kenyan female autobiographers utilize in telling their stories.

Evan Mwangi in "Artistic Choice and Gender Placement in the Writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot" observes that, "Autobiographical impulses in art are a tool of resistance" (62). He points out that the autobiographical narrative voice is expressed differently based on the gender of the writer. Mwangi's research benefits my study since I am looking at the autobiographical strategies employed by the contemporary Kenyan female autobiographers. There is a point of confluence between my study and Mwangi's on the issue of autobiographical strategies in life narratives. However, my point of departure is that I am focusing on three generational women life stories to be studied side by side while Evan Mwangi's study contrasts a male and a female writer.

Charles Hornsby in, *Kenya: A History since Independence* discusses the history of Kenya with a focus on the challenges that have plagued the country since its inception in 1963. Hornsby notes that although Kenya became independent in 1963, her situation at the present can be better

understood if someone digs into her history. To him, the problems plaguing the country should not be blamed on the British colonialists who were largely self-seekers but one should also be honest enough to see the contribution of African philosophy and elements of traditional culture like patriarchy and ethnic bigotry. Hornsby further observes that the self-seeking nature of the country's leadership was not restricted to the British colonial administration but it has extended to the African leaders. Whereas Hornsby's research is purely historical and has nothing to do with the artistry of the autobiography and literature, it is related to my study in that the writers of autobiographies are immersed in the peculiarities of the histories of their societies. My study benefits from Hornsby's research since I am examining how the three autobiographies reflect Kenya's political, economic and social-cultural historical aspects. Furthermore Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* postulate that the process of writing one's life story is, "a historically situated practice of self-representation" (14). In addition, my study of the selected texts involves the interrogation of how the autobiographical subjects interpret history in their past and present.

Muchiri notes that the autobiography may borrow a lot from history, the autobiography should not be read as history and that this relationship between history and personal writing goes as far as how the historical happenings affect the autobiographical subject. In her paper "The Intersection Between the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies", she notes that this genre tells the history of the subject as well as that of the society where the autobiographical subject springs from for an individual does not live in isolation. An individual will live in a particular historical period and the events of that particular time affect and shape both the life of the person and the society as a whole. This observation benefits my study greatly since I am examining the

relationship between the life narratives of the three writers and the larger Kenyan narrative and how their past as individuals is anchored in the history of Kenya as a country.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Homecoming* argues for the understanding of history and its bearing on art. He posits:

> A writer responds; with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being kind of a sensitive middle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tension in his changing society. For the writer himself lives and is shaped by history. (47)

Therefore knowledge of history is important in the literary appreciation of the autobiography. Further, in telling their life stories, the Kenyan female writers under study dig in to the past: their own past as well as that of the society they live in. I intend to also look at how the three writers use history to craft their identities and how their life stories intersect with the larger Kenyan narrative.

Elizabeth Jumba Mukutu in, "The Use of Orature in Ngugi wa Thiongo's Autobiographical Writings" observes that formal choices, because of their efficiency in illustrating complex situations, implicate history, politics and culture to inscribe the self within the narrative of the nation. Her research is relevant to my study because like her, I am interested in how artistry is deployed in autobiographical writings. However, my study departs from hers in that I am interrogating the specific autobiographical strategies utilized by contemporary Kenyan female autobiographers and the thematic issues that are precipitated in women's life stories with a specific focus on Chesaina, Asiyo and Njau, while Mukutu dwells on Ngugi Wa Thiongo who is a male writer.

Chantal Zabus in her "Acquiring Body: New Developments in African Female Self Writing" posits that the discipline of African women autobiography has barely scratched the surface; it is under explored. She notes that unlike the European and American autobiography, the African female appeared in the late 1970s. She notes that compared to the male African autobiography the female African autobiography is a recent development and this is due to, "educational practices that delayed or limited women's schooling" (1).

She then focuses on the African female body in the face of cultural issues like circumcision. Her study focuses on analyzing the autobiographies of Waris Dirie's *Desert Flowe*r (1998), *Desert Dawn* (2002) and the autobiography of the Guinea author Kesso Barry *Princess Peule.* (1987) Zabus concludes her study with observation that the three texts offer a turning point in the development of the African female autobiography. Her main concern in this analysis of the three texts is trauma and the violation of the Africans woman's body specifically through circumcision. Whereas Zabus research relates to my study in that it deals with existential crisis of the African woman, my study goes further to examine the narrative strategies employed by the contemporary women autobiographers to tell their personal stories with specific reference to Asiyo, Njau and Chesaina.

While reviewing Rebeka Njau's *Mirrors of My Life*, Tom Odhiambo observes that the text is exceptionally good not only because it tells the story of an indefatigable pioneer educationist and artist but also because of the way it is written. He points out:

> As a poet and dramatist, Rebeka Njau writes her life story in *Mirrors of My Life* as if it is stanzas of a poem or acts in a play. Because of the style of the work, in which one stanza seems to have been merged with the act, we can read the memoir as a story told in cycles. (29)

I find Odhiambo's observations beneficial to my study because plot in a narrative is part of the autobiographical strategies I seek to interrogate in the selected life narratives.

In "Engendering Power Relations. A Feminist Reading of select novels of Jelinek Elfriede," Rose Pallaty notes that the discrimination of women in many societies has made the whole idea of women writing to be a subversive undertaking. Women are aware that much of what is in the society is originally intended to serve men and this includes language and all its rules. In Pallaty's view, language has been used for the perpetuation of patriarchy and phallocentric philosophy and women tend to reinsert themselves in the society by deliberately breaking existing rules of grammar. She further observes that female writing is an attempt at recreating safe zones for women; unconfined by patriarchal chains. Palaty's observations benefit my study since I am dealing with the autobiographical elements, narrative strategies and forms of expression manifest in the life narratives of contemporary Kenyan women as they seek to inscribe themselves in the Kenyan public space.

French feminist Helene Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" posits that the whole process of writing by women is bound to their body and body fluids and as such, any output by women through writing will turn out to be an expression of real femininity. To Cixous, only women can effectively write about the stories of women. The complexities of the female mind and lives will tend to give rise to unique narratives in both structure and content. Cixous advocates for a kind of writing for women based on the joissance which she calls 'ecriture feminine'; an output that defies all the rules of language outlined to guide communication because such rules were established by men to serve their selfish interests. A woman writer should embrace disorder and

outright disruption of linguistic rules in order to produce genuine female writing that captures the situation of women as a segregated unit of the society. Cixous observations are beneficial to my study for I seek to interrogate the various autobiographical strategies utilized by the three female writers in creating their private and public identities and how they inscribe themselves into the Kenyan public space.

James Olney in his book, *Tell me Africa* examines the functions and motives of African autobiographies. Olney's focus is on the male African autobiography and to this end he narrows down to Mugo Gatheru's A *Child of Two World*s, Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*. Olney argues that life narratives should be immersed in artistic creativity for them to attract readership and inspire interest in the readers. Although Olney's study is focused on the African male autobiography, I find his work beneficial to my study since I am interrogating the autobiographical strategies manifest in Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run*, Njau's *Mirrors of my Life* and Asiyo's , *It is Possible* : *An African Woman Speaks*.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their book, *Reading Autobiography* opine that by their very nature, autobiographies open up the life of the autobiographical subject. They posit that, "the narrator's interpretation and examination of their lives invites the reader to examine the shared experience" (12).

John Sturrock examines the concept of the autobiographical truth and posits that the autobiographical truth is not to be confused with binary of facts and falsehood; that the autobiographical truth is simply an exchange between the writer of a life narrative and the

audience with the intention being, "the production of a shared understanding of the meaning of life" (qtd in Smith and Watson R*eading Autobiography,* 13).

This element of truth is what sets the autobiography apart from fiction. Autobiographical truth is precipitated through cohesion, consistence and the risk to bare one's life for others to access and examine. This argument helps my study greatly since I am interrogating the intersection of public and private identities in the three selected autobiographies by Kenyan women.

Sidonie Smith in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* argues that centuries of the exclusion of women by the society denied them autobiographical authority. Consequently, women tend to have their unique way of presenting their stories. Smith posits that to understand and appreciate women's life narratives, one has to look at how a female writer claims her authority to write; how she negotiates the gendered fiction of self-representation and how her sexuality either gives or denies her of the literary authority. Smith's research benefits my study as I seek to explore how Chesaina, Njau and Asiyo negotiate their private and public identities and seek to inscribe themselves in the Kenyan public space in a society that has been historically patriarchal.

Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* points out that the centrality of intentionality in the study of life narratives. She argues that, "this principle of intention is what connects the author, narrator and protagonist" (2). To Linda, an "honest" intention is what gives rise to "truth" in these life stories. The principle of intentionality helps my study in examining and interrogating the intention of these three female writers in writing their life stories.

Peter Abbs in *Autobiography of Education* looks at this genre as, "the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). To Abbs, the writing of one's life story stems from an existential desire to, "enrich one's identity against the destructiveness of age" (16). This observation helps my study as I seek to find out how the three writers inscribe themselves in the Kenyan public space and construct their identities as public figures; to examine the autobiographical strategies they employ to construct their identities. Abbs further observes that as a genre, autobiography is concerned with, "evoking, describing and the revelation of the autobiographical subject's experience" (6). This observation assists my study as I examine the autobiographical elements manifest in these three texts.

Leigh Gilmore in *Autobiographics* observes that the ultimate goal of a life narrative is to achieve self-invention, self-discovery and self-representation; that an autobiography sums up the purpose of human life since it revolves around the concept of self-realization in human beings. Gilmore links the autobiography to quest for identity as the subject in a life writing tries to find meaning by infusing order in the chaos of life and lived experiences. Personal identity is tied to the retrospective nature of autobiographies as the subject looks back in order to understand who they are. Gilmore's observation about the autobiography help my study as I examine how the three autobiographers who are the focus of my research assert their private and public identities in their life narratives.

Francoise Lionnet in *Autobiographical Voices* links the acquisition of a voice by women in their life narratives to the creation of their identities. She views the writing of autobiographies by women as an act of revolution; subverting existing status quo where men would tell the stories of

themselves and those of women. Lionnet notes that, "women's voices are always present everywhere but rarely heard, let alone be recorded; women voices have not been a dominant mode of expression or legitimate and acceptable alternative to such dominant modes" (xi). Lionnet's observations benefit my study as I explore how the three Kenya women autobiographers use their life narratives to inscribe themselves into the Kenyan public space and assert their identities.

Agnes Muthoni Magu in "Development of the Female Self and National Identity in Selected Kenyan Women's Writings" posits that Kenyan women's literary output tends to narrate about the construction of women's identity and the concept of nationhood. To Magu, there is an integration of the self and the nation. She views the writings by Kenyan women as, "the site of complex negotiation of self and national identity in Kenya from the late 20th to 21st centuries" (3). Magu focuses her study on semi-autobiographies and fiction; she examines the works of five Kenyan women writers: Margaret Ogolla's *The River and the Source, I swear by Apollo* and *Place of Destiny;* Florence Mbaya's *A Journey Within;* Moraa Gitaa's *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold*; Wanjiru Waithaka's *The Unbroken Spirit*; Muthoni Garland's *Tracking the Scent of my Mother* and *Half Way Between Nairobi* and Dundori; and Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira*. Magu points out that self identity is about self-definition and self-assertion and that an individual's identity is partly shaped by their nation. (4) Further, Magu argues that, "the identity of an individual becomes manifest in the role/s that a person plays in respect to a particular position which enables him or her to realize self-definition" (4). I find Magu's arguments and observations beneficial to my study for we are both dealing with the writings of contemporary Kenyan women writers. Though Magu focuses on fiction and semi-autobiographies while the focus of my study is on autobiographies, like her, I am interested in how Kenyan women create

and project their identities through writing. My study also seeks to interrogate how the three women autobiographies use their life narratives to paint a portrait of Kenya.

Sarah Namulondo in "Imagined Realities, Defying Subjects; Voice, Sexuality and Subversion in African Women's Writings" observes that the nature of many African societies has been one that privileges men. This social reality, she notes, results in the loss of the identities of many African women. As a reaction to this cultural practice, Namulondo observes that "African women writers have engaged in rhetorical and performative strategies designed to reconstitute the cultural erosion as they try to claim statues as individuals" (25). Her study focuses on Flora Nwapa's Efuru (1966); Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*(1979) ;Yvonne Vera's *Without A Name*(1994), *Under the Tongue*(1996), *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and Calixthe Beyala's *Your Name Shall be Tanga*. Namulondo opines that the writings of African women are subversive in nature for it is meant to give African women a voice to create and define their identities, which are absent due to the cultural reality of being 'othered'. Namulondo's research benefits my study as I focus on how three Kenyan women assert their private and public identities through writing their life narratives. Like her, I am interested in the strategies of expression found in the writings of African women, though my study specifically focuses on three contemporary Kenyan women autobiographies.

Alina Rinkanya in "Some Trends in Kenya Women's Novel of the 21st Century" posits that Kenyan women writers of the 21st century have deliberately focused on creating characters who defy the stereotypical roles assigned to women in many Kenyan societies. She further notes that this new generation of Kenyan women writers is involved in a quest for a new identity for the

Kenyan woman. Rinkanya notes that the Kenyan women writers engage in textual strategies like characterization to redefine the Kenyan woman through literature. She opines:

> Kenyan women writers of the new generation, which emerged in the current century following tracks of their predecessors, try to thwart the ossified gender roles and gender stereotypes by depicting in their works various problems, share with their readers their recipes of how these problems could be dealt with and create role-model characters for further inspiration. (31)

I find Rinkanya's observations and findings beneficial to my study as we both focus on narrative strategies in contemporary Kenya women writings. Although Rinkanya's study focuses on fiction while my study focuses on life narratives, our point of confluence is how women renegotiate and assert their identities; private and public, through literary output. From the available studies and literature, I note there is a dearth of studies on the autobiographies by Chesaina, Njau and Asiyo and it was this gap in scholarship that my research sought to address.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The framework for my research is provided by three literary theories: theory of the autobiography, Feminist criticism and the theory of narratology. The theory of autobiography draws attention to the nature and functions of the genre and guided by the concepts of the nature and functions of the autobiography. The development of the theory of the autobiography is credited to a German national who was a philosopher and a historian called Wilhem Dilthey. This theory helps me explore the autobiographical elements and strategies manifest in the three texts under my study. The theory of narratology is concerned with the study and analysis of texts; it directs our attention to how the story is told and how it achieves its structure. The theory

is concerned with the components of a narrative in its various modes and different medium like language. This theory looks at a narrative as being composed of actors/characters that are affected or cause the events, the setting and time of the story. This theory helps me examine the narrative strategies employed by the three autobiographers to tell their stories. Feminism helps me to critically analyze the issues raised in these three autobiographies whose writers are immersed in societies that have been historically patriarchal in nature. Feminism also helps examine the issue of gender relations in the three autobiographies.

The theory of the autobiography makes reference to the nature and functions of life narratives. The tenets of the theory of the autobiography include the concept of intentionality. Writers in this genre are pushed by the inner compulsion to write the self. The theory holds the view that the writer should not have mercenary intentions while writing their personal narratives. Thus the autobiographical subject must offer a truthful rendition of their lives. Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* observes that intentionality is at the center of life narratives. She notes that this principle of intentionality is what connects the author; narrator and protagonist. To Anderson; an "honest" intention gives rise to "truth" in the autobiography. Laura Marcus in *Auto/biographical Discourses* posits that sincerity of the autobiography is determined by the inner compulsion to write the self (3). Truth is a core tenet of the genre of autobiography. This truth should not be mistaken for historical facts but it is what Smith and Watson in *Reading the Autobiography* refer to as "an intersubjective exchange between the narrator and the reader aimed at producing the meaning of life" (28). This autobiographical truth is depended on the narrator's integrity and sincerity. Concerning this tenet, Muchiri notes:

> Standards of autobiographical truth appears in terms of the sincerity of the writers, evaluated through their seriousness of personality and intention of writing; subjective

> truth, that is the unique truth of life as it is seen and understood by the individual; historical truth, that is the truth that can be verified through history; fictional truth, that is the artistry. Autobiographers cultivate autobiographical truth through cohesion, especially in terms of consistence of the narrative voice. (28)

Pascal Roy in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* emphasizes a historical and an aesthetic approach to the autobiography. Pascal's concern is mainly about the truth in autobiographies. He argues that the autobiography attempts to achieve coherence despite the fragmentation of identity. He further points out that the autobiography is "dependent on the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of the autobiographical subject's personality and the intention in writing" (60).

Memory is the principal authority in autobiography since a life narrative depends on recall of the subject's lived experiences. Smith and Watson posit that, "in women's autobiography, writers often authorize their texts by appeal to the authority of experience" (10). Concerning the place of experience in life narratives, Muchiri posits:

> Experience is another 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 a subject having certain identities in the social realm which are constituted through material, cultural, economic, historical and social relations. (30)

The autobiography also depends on the principle of selectivity as the subject chooses what to reveal and what not to. Muchiri notes that, "the author deliberately selects what to include or leave out of the narrative, thus determining where and how the autobiography starts proceeds and ends" (32). Apart from Wilhelm Dilthey, other notable proponents of this theory include George

Misch, George Gursdof and Christopher Lusch, Linda Anderson, Laura Marcus, Phillipe Lejune Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson and Peter Abbs.

The autobiography as a genre is immersed in history for the subject operates from a society affected and shaped by historical events. Muchiri notes that reading an autobiography is by extension reading the history of the subject's society although autobiographies are history itself. James Buchnanan and Robert Tollison in "A Theory of Truth in Autobiography" posit that the autobiographer "cannot escape history that manifests in records of actions, words and experiences" (509).

According to Gusdorf the autobiography is both artistic and representative. However, like Misch, Gusdorf holds the idea that the autobiography is ideally a western phenomenon and that it is representative of the European model of being: white, male and Christian. I disagree with Gusdorf, Misch and Dilthey on this view of the autobiographical subject; anyone one can write their life story. All autobiographies whether black, white, Hispanic, Asian, female, male, straight or homosexual demand the attention of critics since they offer unique experiences and interpretation of life and history. The theory of the autobiography and its tenets help me as I examine the autobiographical elements manifest in the three texts and in determining the extent of the three writers' fidelity to the genre.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines feminism as, "an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all form". It seeks to achieve social justice in all spheres of human life. *The Feminist Movement Builders Dictionary*

defines feminism as a movement organized around a belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes/men and women. Feminism theories can be traced back to the 19th century although modern feminism is a phenomenon that exploded in the literary world in the mid-20th century around 1960s. Over time, feminism as a movement has grown into many branches but for the purpose of my study, I focused on Radical, Marxist, Black, Liberal and Eco-feminism.

The Marxist feminism branch borrows from the teachings of Karl Marx; a German philosopher. Marx reasoned that economic inequality was the source of all forms of inequality in the society. Marx posited that the class that controlled the base structure influenced the super structure; religion, philosophy and art. This school focuses on bringing down capitalism since they consider it a patriarchal institution that has perpetrated unequal distribution of resources and means of production. To the Marxist feminist critics, the larger society and the roles assigned to women tend to further the gender stereotypes and it is all tied to who controls the means of production. Marxist feminist criticism benefits my study for I am dealing with women writers springing from cultures where ownership of the means of production is dominated by men. The feminist Marxist theories concerned with the power relations within an edifice and have a highly political purpose; the writers under my study are in public spaces where power struggles are a daily reality. To the Marxist feminists, life and literature are intertwined for one reflects on the other and the literary artist has a duty of awakening the oppressed through writing and subvert the status quo. Major proponents include Clara Zetkin, Eleanor Marx, Emma Goldman and Clara Fraser.

Liberal feminism is a school of feminism associated with Betty Friedan, Rebecca Walker and Naomi Wolf. This branch focuses on social change and champions for the equality of men and women and advocates for political and legal reforms to achieve equality. Key issues fronted by this branch include reproduction and abortion rights, affordable childcare and healthcare, education, voting, elimination of domestic violence and putting an end to sexual harassment. From liberal feminism, I examine radical feminism which is a branch that views patriarchy as the root cause of all social inequalities. To the radical feminists, patriarchy is oppressive to women and its elimination would usher in a just and equal society.

Ecofeminism highlights the connection between women and the environment. It notes that both the environment and women have been oppressed by patriarchal practices and philosophy. Its basic tenet is that men control land and therefore destroy in their selfish pursuits. This branch of feminism points out it is the same lands women depend onto eke out a living for their families. Major proponents include Wangari Maathai, Val Plumwood, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford and Karen Warren.

Black feminism proponents posit that class-based oppression, sexism and racial bigotry are elements of one entity. Proponents of this branch point out that although other branches of feminism have been beneficial to the liberation and empowerment of women, they have failed to factor in the reality of racism and racial discrimination. They specifically point out that the black women are ‘othered’ on the basis of their skin colour. They argue that black women face both sexism and racism. The proponents propose that to provide equality and inclusivity for the black woman, there is a need to liberate all human beings. The tenets of the feminist theory of literary

criticism include the view that the society is deeply patriarchal and operates on patriarchal philosophy that subordinates women to men. The concept of gender is viewed as a cultural construct and not a biological fact. Another notable tenet is that the patriarchal ideology has spread to the literary sphere and has resulted into the classification of literary outputs as either great or not; more often than not, great literary works are associated with men. Lastly, the feminist theory points out that for the longest time, human history has tended to be immersed in masculine assumptions and logic thus the appreciation of art has tended to be discriminatory. These branches of feminism benefits my study as I seek to examine how the selected female writers negotiate their identities and inscribe themselves in the Kenyan public space. Feminism tenets help me interrogate the issues these three autobiographers delt with in their life writings. Feminism critical appreciation further helps me interrogate the issue of gender relations in the three autobiographies.

The term 'narratology' was introduced in 1969 by Tzvetan Todorov. This theory is concerned with the study and analysis of texts. It focuses on the logic, principles and practices of narrative representation; narrative structure. This theory directs our attention toward how the story is told and how it sets out in achieving its (story) structure. Proponents of this theory posit that a narrative is made of the components which they call the fabula. These elements of the fabula are: the actor/character, the events, time, space and focalization or point of view. A key tenet of the theory of narratology is the central point occupied by characters in the story; a story revolves around the characters that cause or are affected by the events and this takes place within a space. This tenet benefits my study as I examine how the subjects narrate their experiences through recall and the development of other characters in the three life autobiographies under my study.

The principle of focalization further helps me as I examine the autobiographical subject-narrator as they are the principal characters in life narratives. The principle of events in narratology helps my study as I examine how the autobiographical subject use memory in recounting the events or experiences of a life lived. Another tenet of narratology is the view that narratives are expressed in different mediums and that language is only one of them. This tenet helps in exploring the place of photos and pictures in an autobiography. Miekel Bal is considered to be among the key proponents of the narratology and according to her, a narrative text is defined by principal attributes of subject and recipient. The principle of subject and recipient in a narrative helps my study as I examine the policy of truth in a life narrative as a contract between the subject and the reader. Bal notes that a story is the final product arising out of the artistic and coherent recasting the elements of 'fabula'.

Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia in *Narratology*: *An Introduction* posit that as a theory, narratology is at the core of artistic expressions such as films, novels, plays, diaries and short stories. They further point out that artistic works allow for specific presentation of the fibula, a different point of view strategies and various degrees of narrational intrusiveness and a different handling of time. This is important to my study as I examine the autobiographical strategies and the artistry behind the life narratives; for the three writers engage in selection and manipulation of events in their lives to produce coherent stories; these three autobiographies are not a collection of historical facts and events but creative narratives. Another tenet of this theory is that all narratives regardless of their medium tend to have gaps. This observation helps in examining the silences manifest in these texts and the exploration of the micro narratives that these silences

helped construct. Narratology as a theory helps my study as I seek to interrogate the autobiographical narratives strategies the selected autobiographers utilize to tell their story, assert their identities and precipitate different issues in their life narratives. Other notable proponents of the theory include Roland Barthes, Vladmir Propp, Gerald Ginette, Seymour Chatman, and Claude Levi-Strauss and Gerald Prince.

1.9 Research Methodology

The study is a reading and analysis of three autobiographies by Kenyan women namely Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run*, Njau's *Mirrors of My Life* and Asiyo's *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks*. The study is guided by three theories; the theory of the Autobiography, Feminist criticism and narratology to ensure a critical examination of the selected texts. The theory of the autobiography helps me in analyzing autobiographical elements manifest and the intersection of personal and national history in the selected life narratives. The tenets of the theory of autobiography leading the study include the compulsion to write the self, intention, truth, reliance on memory, experience and the centrality of history in shaping life narratives. Feminist criticism guided me in examining the issues raised and the gender relations in the three selected autobiographies. The theory of narratology helps me examine the autobiographical narrative strategies and language choices the three autobiographers utilize to assert and project their private and public identities in their life narratives. The tenets of narratology that help this study include the centrality of the actor/character in a narrative, that narratives are constructed through different media that include language, pictures, photos and paintings. The close textual reading of the selected three life narratives is guided by the research objectives set at the introductory part of my study.

1.10 Chapter Outline

For the purpose of ensuring the study is systematic and focused, I have divided it into five chapters:

Chapter One

This chapter lays the foundation for the study and identifies the research problem. It also outlines the research objectives, hypotheses and the justification. This chapter also discusses the scope and limitation of the research, reviews the available literature to point out the gap in knowledge, and then it outlines the theories that guides the study and finally it discusses the methodology adopted in carrying out the research.

Chapter Two

This chapter commences with a brief introduction of autobiographical elements in relation to Chesina's *Run Gazelle Run*. It also discusses the autobiographical elements Chesaina uses to construct herself.It further analyzes the issues the text raises.

Chapter Three

Chapter three focuses on Rebeka Njau's autobiography: *Mirrors of My Life.* It interrogates the autobiographical elements and strategies at play and how they assist Njau to define and insert herself into the Kenyan public space.

Chapter Four

This chapter focuses on Phoebe Asiyo's autobiography, *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks*. Specific focus is on how she tells her story. It interrogates her life narrative in relation to the large Kenyan one and finally examines the issues raised in therein.

Chapter Five

This chapter is dedicated to the research findings, recommendations and conclusions. It compares the three selected autobiographies in terms of the autobiographical strategies adopted by each of the writer and issues raised.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATING A FOLKTALE: CIARUNJI CHESAINA'S *RUN GAZELLE RUN*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to interrogating the strategies of narrating the self in Chesaina's autobiography, *Run Gazelle Run*. It seeks to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the text in terms of the nature and functions of autobiography, the strategies of self-narration and examine the issues raised therein. The chapter is divided into three sections: the first one discusses the nature and functions of the autobiography, followed by the section on the strategies of narrating the self and finally the conclusion. The issues raised in this text are discussed alongside the nature and functions of the autobiography and the strategies of narrating the self.

Jennifer Muchiri in "The Female Autobiographical Voices in Independent Kenya" defines the autobiography as the, "The story or account of one's life written by the self" (1). Muchiri's definition points to the centrality of the narrator/subject in the genre; in the autobiography, the narrator is also the writer and therefore the main focus of the genre is the life lived. The definition also points out the reliance of the autobiography on the memory of the subject for to write one's story will depend on constant introspection and retrospection; looking within the self and looking back on the experiences of the life lived.

Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* looks at the autobiography as, "A narrative that involves the reconstruction of the moment of life or part of it centered on the self and not the outside world" (2). Pascal's definition of the autobiography shows that the focus of the genre is

the life of the autobiographical subject and that this form of writing is dependent on the subject's memory since the reconstruction of the narrator's life depends on recall of life experiences. Pascal notes that although the center of interest for the autobiography is the self, the external world comes into play since events outside the subject's life affect them for they live in communities and not in isolation; that the autobiographical subject is a member of a society and live within historical periods. To Pascal, the autobiography also becomes a historical discourse for both the subject/narrator and their community. Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* looks at the autobiography as, "The search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). Abbs' definitions points out that the writing of an autobiography is an identity quest by the autobiographical subject and that it is founded on the principles of introspection and retrospection.

James Olney in, "I was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographical and as Literature" notes that:

> The autobiography may be understood as a recollective narrative act in which the writers, from a certain point in life, the present, looks back on the events of that life and recounts them in such way as to show how the past history has led to the present state of being. (47)

Olney's definition precipitates several principles of the genre of autobiography: that autobiography focuses on the life of the writer and the subject relies on retrospection, "looks back and recounts", experience is the principal authority in this genre, "how the past history", that the writing of one's story involves strategies of expression and reliance on memory, "recounts in such a way" and that the process of writing an autobiography is aimed at creating an identity and to understand oneself, "how the past history has led to the present state of being".

The above definitions of autobiography point out properties of this unique genre of writing: that the autobiography relies on the writer's memory to tell the story, it is an identity quest as the autobiographical subject tries to understand who they are and how they have come to be, that the writer's experience is the authority upon which the autobiography is based, and that history plays a role in the life of an individual autobiographer. The discussion on this chapter takes off on the premise that Chesaina's text, *Run Gazelle Run* is an autobiography; a narrative of self-expression and that she has structured her story to take the form of an African folktale. This text captures the life of the writer from the birth in 1947 to 2018.

2.2 The Autobiographical Attributes of Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run*

The autobiography as a genre of writing has its unique properties that set it apart from fiction. This is because of its focus on narrating and interpreting the subject's experience, it hinges on the narrator's memory and recollection, is concerned with search for identity by the subject, the cultivation of autobiographical truth while narrating one's life experiences, it is selective in nature as the subject chooses what goes into their story, it is intertwined with history, avoids conscious fictionalization and the subject sets out to seek the reader's empathy. This section interrogates the nature and fuctions of the autobiography as manifest in Chesiana's *Run Gazelle Run*

Chesaina relies on memory to tell the story of her life. The nature of autobiographies is that they are written when the subject is already an adult and therefore, to narrate their story, they have to search their memories; to recall the events of their life, the backward search for information in order to narrate. Of the centrality of memory in narrating a life's experiences, James Olney in, "I

was Born: Slave Narratives , Their Status as Autobiography and Literature" points out that the autobiographical subject does not just recall but also arranges the recollected material into a coherent story; puts order in the recalled material thus making the subject a creator of an artistic output. Concerning this intertwining of the memory and the process of narration, Olney notes:

> Recollection, or memory, in this way a most creative faculty, goes backward so that the 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 pattern into which those events fall…it is interplay of past and present, of memory reflecting over past experiences on its way to becoming present being, that events are lifted out of time to be resituated not in a mere chronological sequence but in a patterned significance. (47)

Memory, the process of remembering and the recreation of the past experiences by the autobiographical narrator is what creates the autobiography. Therefore, the possession of a good memory by an individual is key to writing a credible life story. Chesaina uses memory to recall the events of her childhood and her family that was characterized by love. She recalls the excitement of growing up in a progressive family that was a role model in the village because of the commitment of her parents; a mother and father who loved each other, loved education and the new way of life brought to Kenya by the British through colonization. She recalls of her father:

> Our father was quite an ingenious character. He had built a modern house in the middle of nowhere. He started planting cash crops such as coffee before any other African within reach. He also started the first nursery school which was run by our mother inn our house. My father loved education and he worked hard to make sure that all his children, including girls, were educated. He was a civil servant during the colonial days; it meant that he could be transferred anywhere in Kenya and he could be given the job the *Mzungu* desired. So most of the time we were under our mother's care while our father- *Vava* – came during his leave days or at the

> beginning of each term to pay school fees, shave our heads and check on our behavior. (10)

Through the recall of her family and childhood, Chesaina makes it known to the reader that to her, family is defined by mutual love for one another, looking out for each other's interests and sharing of duties and responsibilities. Their family was a happy one because it was founded by selfless and progressive parents; a civil servant father who practiced cash crop farming and a hardworking mother who doubled up as a farmer and a teacher. The recall of this experience helps her to talk about the place of the family in bringing up balanced individuals; she grows up with the idea of gender equality and social inclusion because these were life principles practiced in her home.

Chesaina relies on memory to recall the experience of growing up under the British colonial administration that was largely corrupt and whose core business was the exploitation of Africans for the benefit of the British Empire and its African collaborators. She recalls an instance when a colonial administrator, a provincial commissioner named Eliud Mahiu Esquire defrauded the people of Embu of millions of Kenyan shillings with the promise of installing piped water to all their homes. She narrates:

> Ha! I do not know if I should mention it in this book. But since it is something I have complained about to my friends, let me put it down. Talk of corruption in Kenya; it did not start in the 21st century. Yes, running water. Do you know who or what Provincial Commissioners (PCs) were? Well, I will tell you. They were powerful men, more powerful than the post 2010 Kenya Constitution Presidents. PCs were gods. (11)

To this end, every household had to pay an amount that was non-negotiable. The provincial commissioner made it part of the school fees paid by parents in schools as a strategy to ensure that no parent could keep their child at school without having paid for the water installation levy. Many impoverished households were forced to slave their way cultivating other people's farms in order to raise the money. Chesaina narrates of this exploitation and humiliation suffered by the Embu people, "Mind you people were so poor that for food they had to work for other people in their small s*hambas* to get a few grains and a little *posho,* flour for porridge. This was called, *kurimia*, cultivating for other people. The English translation does not come anywhere close to rendering the demeaning aspect of this type of livelihood" (12). To exploit such a needy population is the epitome of corruption, inhumanity and vileness; Chesaina makes the reader see the British colonial administration in Kenya as the corrupt and criminal enterprise it was. This water never came and the people could do nothing against a powerful government officer. She says, "what I can tell you as a daughter of Eastern province is that PC Mahiu collected millions which the people did not have, but not a drop of water was seen or heard anywhere" (12).

Chesaina mentions the colonial administrator by name in order to cultivate credibility in her story; the reader can corroborate this information through a search in government records and archives. This helps cultivate autobiographical truth; the pact between her and her reader that she is telling the truth. The act of mentioning PC Mahiu's name underscores the autobiographical principle of selectivity where the subject narrator chooses what to include into her story and what not to; Chesaina chooses to include the PC's name in her story; to give a face to the rampant corruption of the colonial period.

Chesaina observes that corruption is spread in all social spaces including ironically religious spaces and the world of academia. She recalls her tribulations while at Kenyatta University College as a lecturer and trying to get accommodation within the institution and the issue of her ethnic extraction was raised. Here, she points out the many faces of corruption that include nepotism and tribalism. She recalls that when she mentioned that she did not come from the Gikuyu community, the registrar lost interest in her case and dismissed her. She narrates:

> I had no intention of being hit, left, right, head and foot. So my response was to march out of the Registrar's office.
> "Are you from Kiambu, Murang'a or Nyeri (Kikuyu zones)?" the Registrar asked.
> "I am from Embu," I replied naively.
> "Then come next week and I will arrange for a house for you," he concluded. (171)

Chesaina posits that corruption has been a major impediment to national integration and attainment of the concept of nationhood. She traces this moral vice to colonial period when she highlights the story of PC Eliud Mahiu and his scheme in Embu that saw poor Africans lose millions to a fellow African; corruption denied the people of Embu water; a basic need for life and condemned them to penury. Chesaina laments that successive Kenyan post-colonial governments have failed to address it and thus Kenyans continue to suffer from poor service delivery yet they are no longer under colonial rule. She recalls that she encountered the vice again while looking for a job at the Teachers Service Commission; that despite having the necessary qualifications, she was taken in circles and eventually dismissed, ironically for being overqualified. Out of desperation, she seeks the father's advice and the father sends her to Kenya Institute of Education to see a certain Mr. Kiriro who once schooled with her father. Mr. Kiriro sends her to a certain Mr. Tengeza who writes a note to the principal of Alliance Girls' and she immediately gets a job. Although a beneficiary of corruption, Chesaina recalls this incidence as a

way of condemning and demonstrating how corruption hold back development in a country by locking out qualified people out of engaging in nation building activities because of their lack of connections. She laments:

> By now I had learnt that to get a job in Kenya, it did not depend so much on your qualifications as on who you knew or who you knew, knew who. "*Wacha maneno ya masatifiketi au matestimonio,* leave the business of certificates and recommendations. (169)

Chesaina uses memory to recall the events of her childhood and highlight the issue of childhood trauma. She brings to the fore the issue of child molestation and abuse, an issue that tends to get swept under the carpet in many families and societies. She points out the society has greatly failed children since the oppressors are ironically found within the family, church and schools. Those who are meant to be the protectors of the children are among the perpetrators. Amrik Singh and Ajoy Batta in their article, "Trauma Studies: Trauma in Early Childhood and its Recuperation" note that, "Children up to the age of eight are particularly at a very high risk for exposure to traumatic events because of their developmental growth and dependency on parents and janitors" (1).

Through retrospection, Chesaina recalls the case in her childhood of a senior church member called Hezekiah who defiled his firstborn daughter and she got a child from the rape. The family then moved covertly to cover the crime by of loading the young girl off through an arranged marriage to an old man from a distant location. Still on the exploitation of children, the writer recalls her days at primary school in class four and a teacher took advantage of her school mate. She recalls of the incident, "A school girl was made pregnant by a teacher" (29).

To further illustrate the betrayal of children by the adults, Chesaina uses memory to narrate the story of Lilian, her Sunday school mate, who got brutally defiled by their Sunday school teacher. Chesaina uses shock effect to awaken the reader to the crime and create revulsion towards child molestation and molesters; Lilian is described in graphic terms following her defilement. The writer remembers, "Crying painfully and not able to walk. Her dress covered with blood. And being beaten by the mother for being a bad girl" (19). Despite there being evidence of a crime committed, the case turns into a classic case of blaming the victim and the conspiracy of silence; Lilian is beaten severely by the mother while the perpetrator is left free. Such a traumatic experience by the young girl and the absence of a support system was bound to change her life negatively. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines trauma as, "Severe emotional shock and pain caused by extremely unpleasant experience".

Steven Mock and Susan Arai in, "Childhood Trauma and Chronic illness: Mental Health and Socioeconomic Status as Explanatory Factors and Buffers", observe that unpleasant and traumatic occurrences in children have long-term effects on adult life. The said traumatic experiences include sexual abuse, physical abuse and family instability. They further note that, "Lower income in adulthood for individuals who have experienced violence in childhood is a result of lower educational and occupational attainment" (2). Destabilized childhood is likely to give rise to unstable adults who in turn form an unstable society if no intervention measures are instituted. It is easier to heal the physical scars than the psychological and emotional ones. Mock and Arai further note that perpetrators of violence against children usually threaten them with death, physical injury or hurting the victims' loved ones and thus the child victim grows up with feelings of hopelessness, pain, helplessness and fear. Traumatic experiences in children

destabilize their world and prevent them from achieving their full potential as members of the society; they exhibit social maladjustment and psychological disorders like aggression and depression thus making them unable to fit in a school system and work places. Traumatized childhood thus tends to turn the victims into adults who are liabilities due to their unstable psychological and psychiatric faculties. Unstable adults cannot contribute to their family, society and country's economic development because their faculties are in disconnect; this section of the society is also more predisposed to self-destructive tendencies like suicide and drug abuse. Further, the process of rehabilitating such adults and re-establishing internal equilibrium is costly in terms of resources further stretching their families' income. The government's development agenda is also compromised when a lot of resources are channeled to the auxiliary health infrastructures needed to rehabilitate a disturbed and maladjusted society.

Childhood trauma can metamorphose from being a health and economic issue into a security one if not dealt with professionally; psychologically unstable people are susceptible to engage in crime or terrorism as they nurse the feelings of betrayal and try to find a sense of belonging. Chesaina takes the role of a human rights defender by delving into the issues of child exploitation and its effects in her autobiography. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines human rights as, "Norms that aspire to protect all people everywhere from severe political, legal and social abuses". Exploitation of children is an aspect of social exclusion and the writer pushes for social inclusion through the respect of human rights for all members. To Chesaina, there can never be meaningful development in a society without the respect of universal human rights in Kenya and the world over.

Through reliance on memory, Chesaina narrates the importance of education; she notes that for a colonized population, education played a key role in the liberation of Kenya as a country as people learned about their rights and the importance of unity. She also observes that exposure to education has the capacity to push people to reflect on some of their cultural practices with the view of instituting change. She uses the character of her father Mr. Rowland Njeru to pursue this argument. Following his exposure to the European system of education at Alliance High School, he is able to build his family a modern house and gets into cash crop farming long before his village mates thought of venturing there. The writer narrates about her father, "My father loved education and worked hard to make sure all his children, including girls, were educate" (10).

Chesaina credits exposure to education for making her father more adaptable to a changing political, social and economic environment that was colonial Kenya; he is able to question existing cultural practices like the othering of a section of the community based on their gender. To this extent, Mr. Njeru discourages the division of household chores based on gender; he insists on boys helping in the kitchen. He fights sexism and tries to ensure equality among his children. The writer points out the role of parents in nurturing and educating their children about life and correcting cultural biases; the role of the family and parents as the basic social unit in instituting change in the mindset of the next generation based on how they run their families. The writer attributes her fighting spirit and revolutionary nature to the influence her father had on her while growing up. Watching her father push her brothers to participate in household chores and help in the kitchen, Chesaina internalizes the idea of gender equity and social justice which in turn defines her life. Tonney Hillary Odhiambo in "Contesting Traditions through Self-Narration in Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life*" stresses on the importance of positive parental attitude and

constructive philosophy; how the two impact on the children's future and worldview. While commenting on Grace Ogot's trait as a rebel, Odhiambo observes:

> Watching the father do work that was deemed feminine hence reserved for women, Ogot acquired the sensibilities for gender equity she refers to in her text. Thus, from her father were planted the seeds of protest against oppressive traditions that would characterize Ogot's adult life. (47)

Although Chesaina's parents were exposed to education and were opposed to demeaning social practices, she recalls that it was not that smooth at home and patriarchy would occasionally rear its head in their home. She recalls, "Although our parents insisted that boys help with some household chores such as fetching water from the river (not with *mitungi*, barrels), most of the work fell on my small shoulders. From the time I was three years old, I do not remember sitting down to eat or rest" (10).

Through retrospection, Chesaina recalls that it was through education that she was able to travel around the home county, country, region and later the world when she goes to Alliance Girls High School in Kiambu County, then to Makerere University in Uganda, to Harvard university in the United States of America and later to Leeds University in Britain where she attains a Doctor of philosophy degree, PhD in Literature making her among the first women in Kenya to achieve such a qualification. Alliance Girls' High School is a national girls' school located in Kikuyu town, in Kiambu County of the former central province of Kenya. It is a center of academic excellence in Kenya and was established in 1948 by an alliance of protestant missionary groups. Originally, the institution was known as the African Girls' High School but the name was changed to the current Alliance Girls' High School after Kenya attained her independence in

1963. Makerere University is located in Kampala, Uganda. It was the pioneer institution of high learning in East Africa, established in 1921 as the Uganda Technical College. It was granted the status of a university in 1949. Harvard University in the United States of America was established in 1636 and was named after a British church minister called John Harvard for his financial support to the institution. Harvard University is a center of excellence that has produced eight presidents of United States of America, thirty foreign heads of states and one hundred and sixty Nobel laureates. It has consistently been ranked among the top ten best universities in the world in terms of research output and quality of its faculty membership. The point Chesaina is making by inscribing herself into these institutions is that she is a scholar of international repute, a citizen of the world and an authority in the field of education; her story is believable because it is narrated by an authority. These academic spaces also give her the authority to comment on matters such as education. Having occupied these privileged academic spaces; Chesaina projects herself as a role model for the Kenyan society in specific and the world in general to emulate.

Chesaina attributes her raise to the privileged position of a distinguished literature professor and a top diplomat in the country to her exposure to education and does her part in having education penetrate the Kenyan population by becoming a teacher/scholar and researcher. In addition, she supports the poor to acquire education through her philanthropic engagements to get the children from poor backgrounds to emancipate themselves from both poverty and ignorance; two issues that enslave humanity, degrade societies and act as bottlenecks in the achievement of social justice and equality. She says, "I have assisted young men and young women who left school prematurely due to financial constraints to go back to a training institution and acquire skills to enable them to get employment" (127). However, despite advocating for the acquisition of

education and being an educator, Chesaina is alive to the constraints that stand in the young people's path to education and especially the girls. She notes that for many women, the greatest impediment has been patriarchal attitudes and tendencies that have pervaded all spheres of life and spaces including ironically, the institutions of learning; schools and universities. She cites examples in her story and recalls of cases where schools and universities become spaces for the oppression and exploitation of girls and women. She recalls of an incident after completing her class five and sitting her Common Entrance exam, one of her classmates, a girl was impregnated by their teacher. A scandal followed when the villages realised the affair but the teacher ran off for some time and then resurfaced only to get a slap in the hand, she recalls the incident thus, "We do not know what else happened but the teacher was transferred to a distance school and he moved his family from the neighborhood" (30).

The reader can only guess what would happen to the girls in the said teacher's new work station; he is likely to continue with his predatory behavior towards his female students. Sexual harassment and violence is never about the sexual gratification of the perpetrator but is usually the expression of power and dominance over the target. The writer identifies racism, poverty and patriarchy as the major challenges to the education of women in Kenya. She observes that despite many girls during her time in the colonial time being intelligent, there were not many schools for the African girls and they had to compete for the few slots in few institutions available. Many were pushed out of the system by poverty especially during the colonial period when Africans were at the bottom of the economic strata in the racial hierarchy. In families where the financial resources were limited, parents would prioritize the education of the sons while the daughters remained at home. She narrates:

> There was a belief that a girl was born to be married. There was also the belief that if a girl got highly educated, she would not get a husband. There was also the fact that at home, a girl was made to share more responsibilities that the boy and therefore leaving little room for her to do her school homework or to study. (40)

Chesaina directs the attention of the reader to the patriarchal mindset that impedes personal development of the womenfolk. The writer considers exposure to education as being an empowerment strategy since the knowledge and skills gained make it possible for women to earn a living on their own. Education makes women aware of the philosophies and practices that subjugate them and consequently educated women are better placed to fight for inclusion. She uses her experience at Makerere University to further illustrate patriarchy in educational spaces. She recalls, "On arrival at Makerere, Florence and I found out that we had been allocated the same room at the 'Box'. This was the nickname of Mary Stuart Hall, the only residence for female students. The name Box was coined by male students who referred to the female body as 'goods" (81).

Despite being in a space where an individual's intellectual acumen is used as their identity, Chesaina realizes that the men at Makerere objectified and commoditized the female body as an item of trade to be bought or/and owned, hence the demeaning and dehumanizing terms 'goods' and 'box'. Sexism was prevalent at Makerere University, the pioneer institution of higher learning in East African, established in 1922 by the British as a technical school. The men at the university still thought of women as sex objects and not intellectual equals worth of their respect and dignity.

The autobiography is anchored on history although it is not history, it forms part of historical discourse because the subject narrator lives at a particular historical period and is affected by historical events. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* observe that, "The writer of an autobiography expresses himself or herself to the world. In this way, the focus becomes the self but the outside world appears because it affects the self. The subject extends the self to the readers" (28). Having spent her childhood in colonial Kenya, Chesaina uses her life story to comment on historical occurrences and events. She narrates about the advent of Christianity in Kenya and mentions the pioneer Christian missionaries in the country such as The Salvation Army, Consolata Catholic Mission and The Anglican Church. She recalls that it was the missionaries who established the earliest school in Embu. The culture clash that came with the presence of Europeans in Embu and other parts of Kenya is presented to the reader through the autobiographical narrative voice. She narrates how the spread of Christianity in Embu led to cultural alienation as the converted Africans got new European names following their baptism and had to discontinue with some cultural practices such as female circumcision. Female circumcision she notes, was anchored on patriarchal philosophy that aimed at controlling a woman's body and sexuality; a form of female subjugation. This cultural practice among her Aembu community was meant to control the women sexually and make it safe for the men who reasoned that a woman whose sexual urges were not silenced was dangerous. Marriage was polygamous and men used female circumcision to reign in on their wives lest the women demanded for sexual pluralism in order to take care of their sexual needs; a woman who enjoyed the sexual act was frowned upon and scandalized in many African communities.

Although Chesaina points out that some of the new ways such as the education brought by the European Christian missionaries were beneficial in that they gave girls like her agency, she also satirizes the missionaries for their approach when dealing with Africans. She narrates that the Christian missionaries came with preconceived ideas about Africa and Africans and were reluctant to change their mindset even when confronted with different situations. She points out that the Europeans were not keen to learn that different nations had existed in the geographical locality that came to be referred as the republic of Kenya. She recalls an instance of generalization where European missionaries with the Anglican Church lumped together the Aembu community with the Agikuyu one without taking cognizance of their linguistic and cultural differences. She cites the case of the Lord's Prayer which the Aembu people to recite in the Gikuyu language. She narrates, "The Mzungu thought Kiembu was the same as Kikuyu". (18) She narrates that they ended up reciting the prayer blindly:

Ithe rietu rieguru
Riitwa riaku ria muro
Uthamaki waku uke uria utwendete we
Ni wikagwa guku Nthi
Notwovere mavia metu
Woria tuovagira aria matuvivagia
Tuve umunthi mugate wetu wa muthenya
Na ndugatutware kigomanori
Nwati tuvonokie uruuri
Ni undu nthamaki ni ciaku
Nonene wana wingi
Tene na tene
Aamini

She narrates that the prayer ended up as a joke when translated from the Gikuyu language into Kiembu:

Our joke on top
Your name of the digging stick
Let your fishing come
How you love us

Let it be done here on the ground
And tie our burns
Just as we tie for those who burn us
Give us today the cut of every day
And do not take us to a meeting
But save us from circumcision
Because fish are yours
And bigness and more bigness
Long ago and long ago
Aa many (18)

Through this satirical translation of the lord's prayer, Chesaina communicates a very important point about language; that it is not just for communicating ideas but it forms part of an individual's identity. She uses humor to comment on historical facts about colonial education; that although the British were keen to pass his education heritage to the Africans, they used the same education to demarcate the local population along tribal and racial lines. European settler children could pursue higher education in better schools while the Africans exposure to education was restricted with the intention of making them subordinates to the whites in the work place. She says, "The *mzungu* was worried that educating Africans was bound to produce a breed which would learn about their rights and possibly agitate for independence" (30).

Chesaina points out that all education systems in the world over do not just seek to pursue pedagogy but rather embedded within, is a political-cultural agenda; to pass the cultural and political philosophy of the leading society that develops it; European education was meant to produce an African workforce that would support the colonial administration. A case in point is her father who although a very intelligent student, he is not allowed to go past form two; instead he is sent to a college and later given a junior administrative position in the colonial administration hierarchy. She observes, "*Vava* was not only a very intelligent but also had

expertise in critical thinking. People like him were therefore sent to an appropriate training college to assist the *mzungu* govern their fellow Africans" (30).

Chesaina observes that in colonial Kenya, education was used to socially stratify the population and perpetrate the concept of divide and rule and unfortunately this trend continued even after independence as a result, the end of colonial rule in Kenya did not usher in equality among Africans. She cites the example of the pioneer education institutions in Kenya; Alliance Girls' High School, then known as the African Girls' High School, was reserved for few excellent performers among African girls while Kenya High School, then known as European High School was for Europeans girls. She recalls that after independence, Kenya High School was reserved for, "A few girls from special families were admitted there, Jane or Jeni Kenyattta, the daughter of our first president, was among the pioneer girls to enter Kenya High School" (36).

Chesaina posits that colonial education was meant to keep the African student from being aware of what was happening in the rest of the world and to this end, the syllabus was high censored. Books and materials that taught equality of races and inculcated the sense of human rights were not included especially in those countries colonized by the British. Chesaina recalls that their reading materials were about Europe and America. She recalls that they were never exposed to the works of Nardine Gordimer or Micere Mugo yet their works were already published. She recalls:

> Oh! Dear! And women had broken traditions and started writing even though Mhlope wrote in the toilet. But they could not put that lovely short story 'The Toilet' in the syllabus; lest some of us learn that there was more to life than being Mzungu's housemaid and living in toilets. (99)

Chesaina makes a reference to the historical period that came to be known as 'state of emergency' by making reference to the governor who instituted it in 1952, Evelyn Barring .She says, "Hence after Form Two at Alliance High School, our father was initially trained teacher and would later be used as an interpreter for a Governor called Evelyn Barring" (31).

The text makes reference to historical events like the East African trade whose main commodity of trade was the slaves and that explains the mixed heritage of the current population of Madagascar and other Indian Ocean islands. By recalling her experience about her first time in the United States Chesaina is able to comment on world history like the transatlantic slave trade and the enslavement and subjugation of Africans in the Americas. She remembers:

> I did not like crossing the Atlantic. It reminded me of our people sailing in those slave ships, chained to one another, dying. The women being raped by the slave beasts, dying some more, being buried at sea, falling sick, being thrown into the sea because sick people made the slave beasts incur losses, cold… I did not like crossing the huge expanse of water. (112)

A life story of the autobiographical subject ends up taking the reader to the suffering, alienation and loss of identity of the people of African origin in the Americas something that continues to be a problem to this day. Dates are used to aid memory while recalling history; the date 1st June 1963 is mentioned as the birth of an independent Kenyan state while December 12th 1964 is mentioned as the date of internal self-rule and complete divorce from the British colonial masters. The use of these dates and making reference to colonization and independence is a strategy by the writer to chronicle the process of creating a Kenyan nation and identity; to underscore her desire to belong in this identity called Kenya. It is also meant to remind Kenyan citizens about their past as having been a place of struggle and that the creation of Kenyan identity was marked by bloodshed and thus make Kenyan citizens appreciate this past and work towards creating one nation from the 44 nations (tribes).

Chesaina makes reference to the 'cold war', a historical event that was characterized by ideological competition between the then world super powers: The United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The two countries had been allies during the Second World War but after the war ended in 1945, they started a fierce rivalry; competing to influence the world; The United States of America trying to extend capitalism while the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was out to spread communism as the ideal economic and political approach. The cold war resulted in massive accumulation of arms, space race and threats of a physical war between the two super powers. It ran for forty five years from 1946 and only ended when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. She narrates, "We were taught about the 'cold war' between Russia and the United States of America. The Russians were painted as devils" (72). She also mentions the Pearl Harbor attack dated 7th December 1942 in which the Japanese scored a historical military victory over the United States of America during the Second World War: two thousand four hundred and three American soldiers were killed in a single day, one thousand, one hundred and forty three others were wounded and eighteen American war ships were sunk. She further makes reference to how the Americans took revenge on the Japanese by bombing their cities: Hiroshima on 6th August 1945 and Nagasaki on 9th August 1945 with atomic bombs with an immediate casualty of one hundred and forty thousand people and effects of the bombs in those two cities are felt up to today due to the radiation that is yet to clear.

The focus of the autobiography is the subject's lived life and therefore this is a genre that relies on the narrator's life experiences. The autobiography is anchored on the interpretation of the experiences of the subject since the focus is on the life of the subject narrator. Peter Abbs in

Autobiography in Education points out that, "The central concern of all autobiography is to describe, evoke and generally recreate the development of the author's experience" (10). The text *Run Gazelle Run* revolves around the life experiences of Chesaina from her childhood, her growing up, period of study, professional and marital life. Muchiri posits that:

> Experience is another important feature of 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 narratives 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 a subject having certain identities in the social realm which are constituted through material, cultural, economic, historical and social relations. (30)

The point Muchiri is making is that experience is central in autobiography because it helps not just in providing the material to create the life narrative and in the narrating of the subject's story but it also helps in giving the narrator subject the different identities they project in the autobiography; that it is through the interrogation of the experiences of a life lived that the subject narrator understands who they are and the reader get to understand the different identities the subject narrator occupies.

Through recall of her childhood experiences, the writer demonstrates that patriarchy in her Aembu community made the men to look at their wives as part of their property and not equal marriage partners. She recalls the story of a character she has named Simeon Kameme, a radio journalist who even after he separates with his wife Maritha, considers her his property; he visits her without prior notice or consent and gets physically intimate as a demonstration of power and ownership. This patriarchal mindset by Simeon Kameme demeans and dehumanizes Maritha; it

erodes her dignity and respect as a human being, reducing her to an item or object of entertainment for her erstwhile husband. The writer narrates:

> There is no desertion or divorce of a woman by an African man. He can divorce and /or desert you for many years….twenty….thirty…forty…and even fifty. He is still your husband and he is free to come back anytime he pleases. And you can take him nowhere. Not to court. Not to your parents. Not to his parents. (27)

Despite the separation, Simeon still has power over Maritha and specifically, her sexuality. However, when Maritha conceives during this period of separation, Simeon accuses her of adultery and having a child outside their marriage. Chesaina utilizes memory to recall this childhood experience to illustrate the herculean task that is trying to get justice by an African woman; the council of elders that sits to decide Simeon and Maritha's case is comprised of men and not a single woman representative; leadership and decision making organs in the society are preserved for men. Despite being outnumbered, Maritha refuses to be silenced, she speaks to the elders about her estranged husband's nocturnal visit to her house; by confronting both the elders and her husband, Maritha actively works on her empowerment as a woman. *The Feminist Movement Builders Dictionary defines* empowerment as:

> A process involving a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective mobilization and resistance aimed at upending systematic forces and power dynamics that work to marginalize women and other disadvantaged groups.

Chesaina uses female characters who progressively engage in acts of resistance and subversion of patriarchal social structures as a way of communicating her feelings towards 'othering' of women. In doing so, Chesaina echoes the views of Molara Leslie-Ogundupe who in her paper "African Women, Culture and Another development" posits that "the African woman is saddled with six mountains on her back and that the fifth of these burdens is men" (113). Ogundipe

makes a call to the African woman to embrace the subversion of patriarchal social structures as a way of creating their own identity and space as members of the society. She argues that men will be reluctant to champion for an inclusive society because this arrangement benefits them (men). She observes that, "man is steeped in his centuries-old attitude of patriarchy which he does not wish to abandon because male domination is advantageous to him" (113). Maritha informs the elders of Simeon's covert visits to her house that resulted in the conception of their son. The writer narrates:

> Then without waiting for an answer, he stood up and walked her son up to Simeon Kameme. The boy started playing with the man's moustache. 'Athuri', she now addressed the elders.' look at him and then at my little boy'. The elders were shaking their heads and making those idiophones that say, 'wonders will never cease'. The boy was a complete and identical copy of Simeon Kameme. (28)

Patriarchy dehumanizes and degrades Maritha by forcing her to talk publicly about intimate issues like her sexual relations with her estranged husband and how she conceived their son; to bare her nakedness in public for all to see. The case proceedings were very humiliating for Maritha and had it not been for Simeon's disrespect for his wife and the desire to control and own her, they would have sat as a couple and solved their marital issues in the privacy of their home. Simeon uses shame and humiliation as a control tool against his wife.

Through retrospection, Chesaina recalls her experiences as a university teacher at first at Kenyatta University College and later at the University of Nairobi. She notes that she realized that it was not just the woman who is in the village who was exposed to the vagaries of patriarchy and that even the educated are confronted by patriarchal mindset. She satirizes the world of academia as being a cocoon for patriarchy and male chauvinism. She notes the instances of gender discrimination perpetrated by men towards women in a space that is

supposedly the epitome of mental liberation. She recalls how difficult it was for her to be housed at Kenyatta University College because priority was given to male lecturers. When she is called for the interview for the position of a lecturer, she finds that there is a gentleman who like her has a masters degree from Harvard University. Despite the two having the same qualification, the writer is relegated to the position of a tutorial fellow while the gentleman gets appointed as a lecturer. Of importance to note is that in those days, the qualification for the position of a tutorial fellow was an undergraduate degree. She recalls, "I was not foolish to think it was a mistake that a man with the same qualifications as myself was rated higher than me. I knew it was sheer discrimination on the gender basis" (170).

She is in for more shock when she gets a job but realizes that getting a house within the university was almost impossible for a female lecturer. She becomes, militant and does not take this lying down but matches to the next office where a Mr Njagi engages her:

> Are you married?
> No' I replied.
> Then you can share a house with one of the secretaries. (171)

Chesaina uses direct speech as a strategy of convincing the reader that she is saying the truth that is why she quotes the exact words used by Mr. Njagi. She also chooses to mention Mr. Njagi by name as another way of cultivating credibility and autobiographical truth in her narrative.

Chesaina does not give up but pursues the issues with registrar and despite being taken in circles; she eventually gets the house. She encounters similar hurdles when trying to seek for medical intervention in the university hospital for her sick husband. She is told that such services are only extended to male lecturers and their spouses but not to the spouses of female lecturers. She fights back through tears and eventually she gets her husband treated, albeit reluctantly by the

university medical staff. Moving from Kenyatta University College to the University of Nairobi, the writer finds the same patriarchal attitudes and culture. She narrates of the time when her husband died and she approached the administration for a vehicle to transport him to Baringo for burial. The officer in charge of transport dismisses her request on the premises that such privileges are only extended to male lecturers. She recalls:

> You see, if you had died and your husband was the one working here, it would have been a straight forward case. We would have given him not only a vehicle to transport your body, but also a bus for the mourners. But this case now is a bit complicated. (160)

Chesaina recalls this experience to bring light the inhuman way she was treated by a callous and cruel university system. She satirizes the University of Nairobi for being a space where human feelings are suspended when dealing with a woman. Here Chesaina seeks the reader's empathy by narrating this painful experience.

The sexism and sexual harassment of women in institutions of learning is further seen when the writer narrates the case of the nun and a male lecturer. Chesaina recall this case that happened at Kenyatta University College where a nun approached her about being harassed by her teacher. She recalls:

> A male lecturer had failed her in his paper because she had refused to sleep with him. For those of you readers, who are still living in cloud nine, let me tell plainly. The lecturer had demanded sex from the woman of God and when she refused; he gave her a failing mark. (178)

The writer in the spirit of the sisterhood of women confronts this form of oppression head on by giving the nun a passing mark. She subverts the patriarchal action by not sending the nun back to the male lecturer but by becoming the symbol of reason and justice; she uses her powers as the faculty examination officer to correct the marks. She recalls, "I changed the failing mark to a passing mark". (178)

Chesaina uses rhetorical questions when dealing with this incident in order to connect with the reader and safeguard her image. She asks, "What would you have done my dear reader? While you are thinking, let me tell you what I did; I changed the failing mark to a passing mark" (178). The direct engagement with the reader as if they are having a face to face interaction gives her autobiography the characteristic of an oral narrative where Chesaina plays the role of the performer/narrator engaging her audience. To give herself authority over the male lecturer turned sex predator, the writer lets logic and reason rule supreme; she looks at the performance history of the nun before awarding her the passing mark, she recalls, "I checked all the marks of this sister and found out she had 'A' grades in all but this particular lecturer's paper" (178).

By solving the nun's problem, Chesaina projects herself as both a savior and the voice of reason, traits hitherto associated with men due to patriarchal mindset; this makes her actions an act of resistance. To create revulsion against this sexism in the readers' minds, the writer uses vulgarity as a strategy when marking the conclusion of the narration of this incidence by saying, "I would advise my male readers to think with their heads standing on their necks and not with the heads standing on their testicles" (178). Here Chesaina is saying that sexism and patriarchy are primordial tendencies that have no room in a civilized society; that the measure of civilization is the entrenchment of the intellectual faculties of human beings; both men and women; that sexism and chauvinism reduces human beings to the level of animals who operate on instincts; a society cannot develop if its members operate on instincts like animals.

Through retrospection, Chesaina recalls her experiences as a professor at the University of Nairobi. She recalls an incident when she was demoted from the director of international programmes at the University of Nairobi to the chairperson of the department of literature. She observes that this was unprocedural and discriminative because she was a woman; she notes that this demotion had come following a verbal war with the male members of the committee following an invitation to the USA by the Kalamazoo international office in the United States of America. The male members had argued that it should have been one of them representing the University of Nairobi at the international arena and not a woman. She recalls of the experience:

> my dear reader, when I say, "I was demoted from Director of International programmes of the university of Nairobi to the chairperson of the department of literature, "I am using a euphemism or what we call in literature 'an understatement.' The vice chancellors action was something that was and is never done. It was a clear male chauvinistic and inhuman thing to do. You cannot do such a thing to a Full professor of an internationally recognized university. (193)

The writer uses self-effusiveness, revealing to the reader her humiliation and pain in the hands of a sexist university administration as way of seeking the reader's empathy. Concerning this vile reality of sexism, sexual harassment and exploitation of women in institutions of higher learning in Kenya, Chesaina discovers that it is not only perpetrated towards students but it also happens to female lecturers too. She recalls her experience when she was a new faculty member at the University of Nairobi and went apply for allocation of her accommodation quarters, she narrates, "During my fight, one male officer who was in charge of housing (a senior colleague), told me that if I slept with him, I would get a house and other benefits in addition" (177). Here Chesaina employs the autobiographical principle of selectivity by choosing not to name the said colleague perhaps to avoid embarrassing him or getting him in trouble with his employer.

Still on her professional experiences as a university teacher, the writer recalls the case of Wambui Njenga, her compatriot at the University of Women's Association who gets locked out of their matrimonial house by her husband. She narrates:

> When we arrived at Wambui Njenga's big mansion, we had to enter through a hole she had created at the back. *Ati* why? You are asking me "why?" and you know that men were the undisputed owners of all property, including their women? (182)

Wambui's husband, a diplomat, accused her of adultery and bearing a child out of wedlock. Mr. Njenga humiliates his wife by her locking her out of their home; he reduces her to the level of an animal that has no permanent abode. The metaphor of the hole in the fence evokes the image of a vermin or/ and a criminal; pests and criminals sneak to the host because they are ordinarily not welcome. To force his wife to sneak into the compound through a hole is dehumanizing; Mr. Njenga criminalizes Wambui's existence; taking away her dignity and respect because she is a woman. He then filed for a divorce and changed the locks to their house. Wambui does not sit and cry about her situation, she becomes proactive in her situation and confronts this patriarchy. She creates a hole for herself and her friends to access the house. By doing so, Wambui lays equal claim to the property. By locking her out of the family house, Wambui's husband, Mr. Njenga dehumanizes and degrades her to the level of an animal living out in the wild. Further, Wambui lodges a fight to clear her name. The spirit of the sisterhood of women is manifested when the association's leader' professor Wangari Maathai helps reclaim Wambui's dignity when she gets a welder to fix new locks ultimately making Wambui the only one to access the property; effectively locking out her husband Mr. Njenga. The depiction of Wangari Maathai as a savior is Chesaina's way of paying homage to a woman she considers a role model and a mentor. The association also contributes money for Wambui's legal representation and what

happens at the court during the trial is the ultimate coup de grace for Mr. Njenga. The writer recalls the incidence thus:

> With calculated steps and carrying the baby with one arm while the other carried a big mirror, she walked to her husband. Without saying as much as one word, she handed Mr. Njenga the baby. Then with calculated steps she went backwards until she thought the husband could see his image and that of the baby in the mirror clearly. (184)

The courtroom provides an opportunity for Wambui to reclaim her dignity and respect; it accords her a hearing and thus restoring her voice. Chesaina is pointing out that the justice system has a role to play in the demolition of patriarchal social structures. She recalls of this courtroom experience and the final exchange between Wambui's lawyer and Mr. Njenga:

> What do you see Mr. Njenga?
> Total silence from Mr. Njenga.
> What do you see in the mirror Mr. Njenga?
> The judge was getting impatient.
> Answer the question, Mr. Njenga, Justice Opondo (not his real name) shouted.
> I have nothing to say, my Lord the baby is mine. (184)

The use of the direct speech here is Chesaina's strategy of creating autobiographical truth; the reader can confirm the exchange between the lawyer and Mr. Njenga happened by visiting the court archives. The direct speech has the effect of creating a sense of immediacy; making the reader experience Wambui's courtroom victory in a more powerful way and also allows the reader access Mr. Njenga's thought process and therefore be in a position to make an objective judgment of his character.

A personal narrative needs to be believable for it to be acceptable to the reader; the content of an autobiography must be credible. This principle in life narratives is called autobiographical truth. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* define autobiographical truth as, "an

intersubjective exchange between the narrator and the reader aimed at producing the meaning of a life" (28). This kind of truth is dependent on the subject's sincerity and integrity while telling their story. This means that the subject narrator must aim at convincing the reader that what they are reading is a truthful rendition of the life lived.

Chesaina builds up autobiographical truth in her life story by depicting a consistent autobiographical subject character; she projects herself as a gender activist and a human rights defender. In her narration of her life experiences from childhood to her adulthood, the reader can see that Chesaina is an individual who questions any form of exclusion and violation of human rights. She narrates that she was uncomfortable with her brothers for expecting her to shoulder all the household chores and celebrates her father for his efforts to ensure equality in the homestead. She narrates of her childhood when boys came to their home in the pretext of coming to see her cousin Joeri but in reality they wanted to sexually harass her. In response to their advances, she picks a kitchen knife and they all run. She recalls of the incident:

> Something told me the boys were up to no good so I just intensified my chopping. I chopped like I was chopping the boys.
> "Give us the other cabbage," Joeri said
> "Who wants to start?" I asked, brandishing the kitchen knife. All the boys, starting with their leader, scampered for their lives never to be seen at *kwa* Rorandi again. (15)

The metaphor of food used in the conversation points out to the sexist attitude of the boys towards girls; they consider the female body and sexuality a food item for the men to consume; none of the boys talks of befriending her as a human being but they all talk of 'eating her' by using the words, "Give us the other cabbage". She also recalls of another similar experience when the family farm hand named Bramweri begins to have sexual innuendos in his conversation

with her, especially when she was alone. Again, she defends herself by using the ironbox and the predator runs way. She narrates how he asked her to iron his underpants, an insinuation to sexual intimacy between them and how she reacted to his overtures, "I opened the iron and started chasing him with the intention of hurling the red hot charcoal on his body. He scampered faster than Joeri and his friends" (15). Mentioning both Joeri and Bramweri's names is a strategy of making her story credible and therefore helps in cultivating autobiographical truth.

Chesaina narrates the story of the grounds man at a certain unnamed secondary school who was in an incestuous relationship with his daughter and the daughter got pregnant. When Chesaina learns about it, she confesses that she did her own investigations and after ascertaining that it was indeed true, she dismissed him from his job. The act of dismissing the grounds man and talking to the girl, whose name was Ann, was Chesaina's way of protesting and fighting sexual predation and the violation of human rights. When recalling her experiences at the University of Nairobi, Chesaina narrates how the Vice-chancellor in a humiliating move, demoted her. She says, "The Vice-chancellor's action was something that was and is never done. It was clear male chauvinistic and inhuman thing to do" (193). Chesaina further narrates how she protested about the demotion during a meeting for the university's top administrators. She recalls her protest speech to the panel:

> I made history when I was removed from a Director to a Chairperson. This is something that is never done and I just want it to be minuted so that it never happens to another Full professor of this university in future. It is very humiliating and inhuman thing to do to a Full professor. It seems the University of Nairobi is behind in terms of the wind of gender equality that has been blowing in the world for some time now. (195)

Chesaina includes this direct quote of her protest speech in the meeting as a way of cultivating autobiographical truth; the speech was captured in the minutes of the meeting and a reader can confirm with the University of Nairobi. Throughout the autobiography, Chesaina projects a consistent character of a gender activist and human rights defender by speaking up or/ and acting to right the wrongs; she does not keep quiet when an act of exclusion and a violation of human rights happens even when it does not touch her directly. The consistency of the character of the autobiographical subject convinces the reader that they are reading a truthful rendition of Chesaina's life.

The writer includes paratextual elements like photos, historical events and dedications as way of cultivating autobiographical truth. She includes photos of her children and grandchildren as a way of authenticating her claim to motherhood. She also includes photos of her husband Elijah Kiprotich Chesaina and her father. There are also photos of her in an academic gown delivering her inaugural lecture as a professor of literature at the University of Nairobi as a way of corroborating her claims of being a university teacher. There are also photos of Chesaina with her academic colleagues at the department of literature at the University of Nairobi as well as her photo with former South African president, Thambo Mbeki, when she was presenting her credentials as Kenya's High Commissioner to the country. Chesaina dedicates her autobiography to both her father Mr. Rowland Njeru and her husband Mr. Elijah Kiprotich Chesaina. She further includes her date of birth which can be verified using government documents like a birth certificate. She says, "I was too small and too new in this world to know what was going on and when this was. But those who were present tell me it was in the year 1947; seventy-one years ago" (7). Chesaina also makes reference to historical events like the colonization of Kenya by the

British when she says that she grew up in colonial Kenya, a historical event that begin with the process of the partition of Africa by European powers at the Berlin conference in 1884. In 1895 Kenya and Uganda become the East African Protectorate then in 1920; Kenya officially became a colony with a governor stationed in the country to represent the British government. She mentions the colonial period that came to be known as the state of emergency that was declared by the then governor of the Kenya colony, Evelyn Baring in 1952. The state of emergency was characterized by the suspension of the rule of law, the deployment of the military that preceded a massive crackdown of suspected Mau Mau fighters and their sympathizers. The killing of a colonial chief called Waruhiu, a colonial sympathizer, by the Mau Mau fighters triggered the declaration of the state of emergency. She also makes reference to year 1963 when Kenya attained her independence from Britain and the succession of Kenyatta as the president of Kenya, in 1979 by his vice president, Daniel Arap Moi. James Buchanan and Robert Tollison in, "A Theory of Truth in Autobiography" posit that, "an autobiographical narrator embraces history" (509). Chesaina includes historical dates and events that the reader can independently verify by referring to mainstream historical sources and ascertain that she is telling the truth. By intertwining her life story with the history of Kenya, Chesaina is able to cultivate autobiographical truth as well as write herself into the Kenyan narrative.

Chesaina recalls her experiences at Alliance Girls High School, Makerere University and Harvard University as another way of cultivating credibility. She recalls of her time at Alliance Girls High School:

> Form Two year was my best at AGHS. This was when I discovered how talented I was. I must thank the Alliance Girls staff and the school's dedication to moulding students' characters as well as nurturing talents. I would not have discovered these talents had I not joined the school. And, of course, I thank God in all this. (53)

The mentioned institutions are well known and the reader can verify Chesaina's claims of having studied there by using the institutions' records. Of her academic experience at Makerere University, Chesaina narrates:

> On the academic side of things, Makerere was no joke. Everything was well organized and we had no excuse to underperform. Each one had an academic tutor, that is; the lecturer you consulted periodically on your progress and on any challenges you might have. I was happy to have David Rubadiri as my tutor. He and Pio Zirimu were the only Africans in the English department. (81)

Chesaina narrates that it was the experience of studying at Harvard University that shaped her future as a university teacher. She recalls, "What I am saying here is that I acquired tools of my trade as a university don at Harvard. We were given an assignment on each unit every single day and I cannot enumerate the examinations we had every week. I had loved my sleep before I went to Harvard. Here I learnt that, sleep was a foreign body in a scholar's eye" (117).

The writer acknowledges the contributions of other people to the Kenyan narrative; she pays homage to political leaders like Charity Ngilu, the current Kitui Governor and the first woman to contest for the presidency in Kenya and Daniel Arap Moi, Kenya's second president. The writer's life narrative also becomes the story of her father Mr.Rowland Njeru. This gives her life story a unique trait of the female autobiography. Jennifer Muchiri in, *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya*, notes that, "Female autobiographers re/present themselves in relation to others within the work, unlike the male autobiographers whose life narratives are characterized by the display of ego" (159). The point Muchiri is making here is that female autobiographies tell not just the story of the subject narrator but also the stories of other people the narrator consider instrumental in developing the society; the female autobiography celebrates

the victories and contributions of both the narrator and other people. She credits her exposure to education and the agency it gave her to her father Mr. Njeru. She celebrates him for his efforts to fight sexism in their home and ensuring that her brother helped with the household chores. Chesaina attributes her fighting spirit and revolutionary nature to her father. Her father taught her to fight for what she her right. She recalls how due to this upbringing, she fought her elder brother for snatching her banana. She narrates:

> I was roasting a banana as a snack and when it was just ready to be eaten, Venje snatched it and ran into the coffee plantation. I took a kitchen knife and chased him. He had no alternative but to release my banana. He still remembers the incident to this day. I believe the boundaries between him and I were clearly demarcated that day. (15)

She also celebrates Ambassador Benjamin Kipkulei for using his position not to manipulate people but to help them. She recalls how he assisted her while they were both working at Kenyatta University College. She had marital problems and it was Kipkulei who offered her a shoulder to cry on and advice on how to overcome the family problems. She recalls, "I looked to Ben as a brother, not a brother in-law. He gave me excellent advice and it was from Ben's advice that I did not leave my husband. I am grateful I listened to Ben" (150). When her husband died and the University of Nairobi failed to give Chesaina a bus for transportation on the excuse that her husband was not its employee, she turned to Ambassador Benjamin Kipkulei and once again he assisted her, She recalls:

> I went to my brother Ambassador Benjamin Kipkulei. You remember him? Yes, that one. He simply telephoned while I was still in his office. He ordered that by time I arrived back on campus, I should be shown the vehicle that was to transport my husband's body. And that is what exactly happened. (160)

Chesaina develops characters in her narrative whose traits and initiatives offer a counter-narrative to the patriarchal status quo that privileges males and discriminates against women; she uses her autobiography to celebrate the achievements of professors Micere Mugo and Wangari Maathai. The writer pays homage to Professor Micere Mugo for her achievements at the University of Nairobi, she narrates:

> Ah! Excuse me, my reader. This one broke a record that has never been broken by any shero at the University of Nairobi. Professor Micere Githae Mugo was the first woman (and the only woman so far to become a Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the World Class University of Nairobi, alias the Mother of Public Universities in Kenya. (61)

She celebrates Professor Maathai for being the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for her efforts in conserving the environment for human survival and peace. Chesaina does this by dedicating a song in honor of Wangari Maathai:

> Who is that
> They call her Wangari
> No! I will call her other name
> I will call her Noble Nobel African woman!
> They call her Wangari Maathai
> No! I will call her other name
> I will call her Black Beauty of Africa
> I will call her Daughter of the Savannah
> I will call her Noble Nobel African Woman!
> But the courts? What will they say?
> No! I will not listen to the courts
> They dragged her in the mud
> They lied and lied in broad daylight
> She stood tall as our forests
> No! I will not listen to the courts
> I will call her Noble Nobel African Woman!
> And stubbornness?
> How she refused building built?
> I will not listen to buildings
> Build cold concrete buildings?
> I would rather wear a green belt than that dull cold cement

I will call her the Nobel Nobel African Woman!
I will call her Muumbi the Birther
I will call her Birther of Green Belts
And her stubborn stubbornness?
I will refuse to listen to you
I will call her Birther mother of many
I will call her Noble Nobel African Woman!
I will call her Noble Nobel African Woman! (181)

In this song, Chesaina celebrates Professor Maathai's contribution to the preservation of the environment. She makes reference the fight Professor Wangari Maathai had with the government of president Moi when it wanted to construct a sky scrapper at Uhuru Park, recreational park within Nairobi city. Professor Wangari Maathai mobilized environmental conservationists to block the move and she suffered physical beatings and humiliation when the Kenyan police descended on her group with batons and tore her clothes. Prof Maathai suffered more beatings from the police when she and her group known as the Green Belt Movement opposed the Kenya government's move to encroach on Karura forest and fence off large portions of the forest as private lands by top government officials. Chesaina uses the metaphor of a 'tall tree' on Professor Maathai thus depicting her as an environmental sentinel. The writer uses the song to point out that the courts and justice system in Kenya was deeply patriarchal; she refers to how Professor Maathai's character was disparaged during an acrimonious divorce case in which her husband accused her of adultery, yet he had no evidence. She narrates, "In her early days as a university professor, Wangari Maathai was taken to court by her husband. The husband wanted to divorce her using false allegations that she had slept with his friend" (180). Chesaina says the move was to silence Professor Maathai by attacking her character and morality; a patriarchal strategy of using a woman's sexuality to shame her into submission and silence. Chesaina points this out in line 11-13:

No! I will not listen to the courts
They dragged her in the mud
They lied and lied in broad daylight. (181)

Chesaina further celebrates Professor Maathai's unmatched feat; being the first and only African woman recipient of the Nobel Prize for peace. She celebrates this by referring to Professor Maathai as, "Noble Nobel African Woman". She considers Professor Maathai her mentor and recalls narrates about her admiration for Maathai, "Yes, the first time I met the professor, I said to myself, 'waaoh! When I grow up I want to be just like this phenomenal African woman!" (182).

Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* point out that, "the writer of an autobiography expresses himself or herself to the world. In this way, the focus becomes the self but the outside world may appear because it affects the self. The subject extends the self to the reader" (28). The point that Smith and Watson are making here is that by narrating their experiences to the reader, writers of autobiography end up revealing who they are; their identities to the world; that writing an autobiography is an act of self-revelation as the subject narrator looks back to understand who they are and how they came to be. Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* views the autobiography as a genre engaged in identity quest, "the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self. The point Abbs is making is that the principle focus of an autobiography is the self; identity. To Abbs, the writing of a life narrative is an endavour aimed at answering the questions, "who am I? How did become who I am? What might I become in the future?" (7). By writing her life story, Chesaina is involved in a quest to understand who she is and project that identity/s to the reader. She recalls her family tree to claim her identity as a

daughter. She recalls of her parents as loving and caring individuals who made their home an environment where their children could grow up and be what they wanted to be. She narrates:

> So most of the time we were under our mother's care while our father-*Vava* – came during his leave days or at the beginning of each term to pay school fees, shave our heads and check on our behavior. *Vava* was a disciplinarian and each one of use regarded him with awe, even when he was away. I resembled him physically, intellectually and character-wise. (10)

Chesaina also recalls that it was her parents' love for discipline, education and their conversation to Christianity that made it possible for her not to undergo retrogressive cultural; practices like female circumcision. She credits her discipline, love for philanthropy, focus and passion to change the society for the better; her love for social inclusivity to her family. She recalls, "My family belonged to the Anglican Church which was stricter that the other two. When I say 'strict', I mean in adherence to Biblical doctrines as well as forbidding certain cultural practices such as female circumcision" (17). Chesaina identifies herself with her father and recalls his good deed to the family and to her as her way of claiming her identity as a daughter. She recalls how he escorted her when she was joining Makerere University in Uganda, even though at that time, she was already an adult, "*Vava* escorted me to the train station" (77). Chesaina further recalls how affected she was when her father left after she had boarded the train to Uganda, "I cried uncontrollably after Vava left" (79). She also dedicates her autobiography to him. She narrates of her own family, children and grandchildren as a way of claiming her identity as a mother and a grandmother. She attaches photos of her children and grandchildren as a way of authenticating the claim to this identity. She narrates how her family depended on her, "My husband stopped working and I became the sole bread winner. Money was getting more and more scarce and competition for academic positions at Nairobi and Kenyatta was becoming more and more stiff" (158). By narrating about her family; her sense of responsibility and self-

sacrifice, the writer claims her identity as a mother. She is also seeking the reader's empathy by narrating about her tribulations as a mother and the family's sole bread winner.

The writer uses her names to reveal her identity. Leigh Gilmore in *Autobiographics*; *A Female Theory of Women's Self Representation* points out that names have a bearing on people's identities. Concerning the place of a name, Gilmore posits:

> It identifies a person within a historical context of place and patrilineage, and focuses attention to the solid corporeality to which it refers to. Ultimately, it seems to mark a ground zero of representational vercity. (65)

Her name *Ciarunji* in the Kiembu language means, "Child of the river". This identifies her as a daughter of the Aembu tribe. It situates her within the Aembu cultural space and extraction and therefore gives her an identity as a Kenyan of Embu extraction. Her moniker, *Kathia* which in the Kiembu language means 'gazelle' helps her project her identity as peaceful and agile individual. Chesaina makes reference to river Tana and Runyenjes in Embu County to both locate the story and helped to culturally contextualize the narrative as well as to claim her cultural identity as a Muembu. Chesaina uses Embu proverbs and songs to show her mastery of cultural philosophy and wisdom; another strategy of claiming her cultural identity. These include, "*Muumbi arugaga na ngio*" (a potter cooks with potsherds) (32) "*Muembu ndeci mbaura, eci mbaika*", (An Embu person does not know, "help me put this down; he/she only knows help lift this load onto my back") (74). Use of Kiswahili words and proverbs such as, "kikulacho ki nguoni mwako", (whatever is afflicting you is just inside your clothes) (134), "mtafuta mabaya hupata", (if you look for something bad, you will surely get it) (134) is Chesaina claim her identity as a Kenyan.

The name Chesaina is her husband's and she uses it to claim her identity as wife to a man of Kalenjin, specifically of Turgen extraction. She attaches photos of her husband, Elijah Kiprotich Chesaina as way of proving she was his wife. Chesaina tells the story of her problematic marriage partly through words, photos, silences and gaps as a way of proving to the reader that she was married. She recalls:

> Trouble started soon after the wedding. I was lonely. I was desperately lonely. My husband was in a big group of professionals who would meet immediately after work and enjoy beer and dirty jokes until the wee hours of the morning. I would cook nice dishes, including *nyama choma*, roast meat which he loved. But I would wait for him in vain. I would often cry myself to sleep, but if I woke up in the middle of the night and found he had not yet arrived, I would start worrying that he been involved in an accident or something more terrible had happened to him. (50)

Her husband's behavior traumatized her greatly and she later developed depression as a result of his irresponsibility and failure to love her. There are few photos of her husband and mostly depict him in either his professional attire as a lawyer or as a father. In addition, the writer does not talk about his contribution to the family despite working as a lawyer; it is Chesaina who looks for accommodation for the family at Kenyatta University College and the University of Nairobi. Most of the information the reader gets about the writer's husband is when she talks about his irresponsible drinking sprees, his illness, his death and burial; all along it is the writer who heads the family; dealing with all the emotional and financial needs single handedly.

On the other hand, she confesses that despite being married to her husband, there was another man in her life, in heart, the man she was in love with; Clement Attiron from Burkina Faso. To help precipitate this situation, she attaches a photo of her and Clement in a very intimate pose; holding each other. Further she recalls of Clement with a lot of nostalgia and longing. She says:

> I actually fell in love with a man from the third group visiting Madagascar. I fell in love with Clement Attiron from La Haute Volta (the current Burkina Faso).Clement was just exactly the kind of man we short girls like-tall dark and handsome. We also like them quiet, because we can be very loud. Clement was exactly like that. Quiet, gentle and considerate. If we are intelligent, and are inclined towards the academic road, we cannot stand foolish men. Clement was very intelligent and innovative. (142)

Chesaina confesses she was set to marry Clement Attiron the love of her life but patriarchy interfered with this dream. She recalls that she was stopped from marrying him by her father and brother and she had to take a painful step of discontinuing with her relation with Clement and later got into a marriage of convenience with her High School boyfriend, Elijah Kiprotich Chesaina; this was not what she had in mind because by the time she was writing her autobiography, she was aged seventy one years, a wife, a mother and a grandmother yet she confesses that she stills loves Clement. She says of the decision to marry someone else, "I wrote a letter that I regret to this day. Why? Because I have never forgotten Clement. I should have seen a psychologist or better still counselor, but I did not. I decided to be my own counselor" (143). About her marriage, she confesses the only thing that kept her going was her children, she recalls, "When my firstborn son was born, I found meaning in my marriage" (150). This confession is a bold move by a woman in a culture where more often than not marriage means she surrenders her sexuality and individuality to her husband and his community. Francoise Lionett in *Post-Colonial Representations, Women, Literature, Identity* notes:

> The female writer struggles to articulate a personal vision and to verbalize the vast areas of feminine experience which have remained unexpressed, if not repressed, is engaged in an attempt to excavate those elements of the female self which have been under the cultural and patriarchal myths of selfhood. She perceives these myths as alienating and radically other, and her aim is a more authentic image. (91)

The writer owns her sexuality and freely talks about it thus expressing her independence of mind as well as let the reader know that despite being her a public figure, she has lived a conflicted life for being in love with one man but being married to a different one. Writing her autobiography is therefore an act of therapy as she tries to recover from the destabilizing occurrences in her adult life. She also uses the opportunity to put a closure on her marriage and the accusation that followed her husband's death; that she was not a supportive wife and had a hand in his death. She makes it clear that her husband benefited from the union more than she did. Further, by confessing to being in love with another man while married to another, Chesaina commits an act of resistance against patriarchy that seeks to control a woman's life; her body and sexuality. However, unlike men who are in polygamy and get intimate with all their partners, Chesaina commits her resistance without bringing questions to her morality; she only keeps Clement in her heart. She also uses this confession to claim her sexuality as a woman; that it cannot be owned by someone else on her behalf as patriarchy presupposes.

Textual evidence points to a united and caring Rowland family and therefore, the reader will notice inconsistences when Chesaina narrates that she was degraded through a beating and being stripped naked by her own family after her husband's burial, accusing her of having a hand in his death. There are silences about her husband's family throughout the text which tells of a lack of connection with them and therefore it is likely that the accusations and humiliation did not come from her own family but her late husband's. There is no mention of her husband's family's contribution when he fell sick and later died and neither is there any photo of any of his siblings. This is in my view an attempt by Chesaina to seek for acceptance by her matrimonial family by talking about the incident but protecting them by pointing fingers at her own family. It is also a

characteristic of the female autobiography in which the autobiographical subject does completely get over issues in her life; the conclusion of the text does not necessarily come with a solution for all problems.

The writer sympathizes and empathizes with the less fortunate and engages in acts of charity to uplift humanity; this helps her to project her identity as a philanthropist. Chesaina confesses to being internally destabilized by her marriage experience, something that makes it possible to sympathize with others. Of her health issues she says:

> I became a chronic worrier and loneliness added to it. Eventually, the doctor from the list of Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews's doctors prescribed valium drug for me. Before this drug was prescribed, I used to hear my heart beating and I told my doctor so. All along, I could not share this with any of my girlfriends or colleagues. I needed to protect my husband from public criticism and I also wanted to protect my image as a" happily" married woman. (150)

Chesaina lays bare her inner fights; struggling with depressions and inner turmoil as a result of being in a dysfunctional marriage, thus making her story a confessional autobiography. Recounting the pain helps heal from the emotional trauma. In my view, Chesaina's involvement in philanthropy is inspired by two reasons: her desire to changes the society for the better by uplifting the downtrodden and secondly, it is an attempt to re-establish equilibrium in her own life by extending happiness and inner balance in others. Unlike many whom when faced by traumatic experiences engage in self-destructive activities, Chesaina redeems herself by uplifting others and this helps solidify her image as a fighter and a champion of positive social change.

2.3 Strategies of Narrating the Self in Chesaina's Life Narrative, *Run Gazelle Run*

Although the autobiography is an account of the subject narrator's life and lived experiences, it is a work of art since the writer engages in various artistic strategies to tell their story. Henry

Indangasi in, “The Autobiographical Impulses in African and African-American Literature” observes that the autobiography is a work of art and goes on to posit that, “the writer of an autobiography being the artist he is selects, reorganizes, and reshapes the facts of his life in order to communicate a higher truth” (2). The point Indangasi is making here is that the recall of the lived experiences is done in a way that involves the organization of the events to tell a story; it involves the principle of reorganization and selectivity; the autobiography is not a chronological recall of the subject’s life experiences and facts but a creative undertaking.

Chesaina structures her life story in the form of an oral narrative; she appropriates elements of African oral literature such as the use of the fantastic, direct speech, vulgarity, rhetorical questions, symbolism, digression in the form of oral poetry, analeptic narratives and oral narratives within the main story. By doing this, she creates rapport with her readers and makes them identify with her and believe in her story, facilitating the creation of autobiographical truth. Structuring her autobiography as a folktale makes it possible for the writer to engage in various forms of digression through which she can comment on several issues such as the corrosive nature of patriarchy, the dehumanizing nature of colonial subjugation of Kenyans by the British, child exploitation and education. It is worthy to note that she writes her autobiography at the age of seventy one years; thus by narrating her story as an oral narrative, Chesaina is also claiming her identity as a grandmother who therefore has the authority of experience to tell stories to her children and grandchildren.

Using digression, specifically an oral narrative within her story, she narrates the story of Ndega, the father of the Aembu community and the mysterious woman who became his wife. Through this oral narrative, Chesaina comments on the unfairness of patriarchy in many African communities. Ndega's wife refuses to take the status quo and demonstrates her revulsion to patriarchy by snatching her husband's piece of meat. The writer narrates, "One day, Ndega was eating meat while she watched hungrily, women were forbidden from eating meat" (8). The metaphor of food underscores the inhumanity of patriarchal structures; Ndega's wife's life is threatened by starvation because the society does not treat women as human beings with human needs like food and dignity' she is reduced into a scavenger to live. It is important to note that Ndega's wife is not named, she is just referred to Ndega's wife; a patriarchal strategy of vulgarizing her existence; she is not worthy of a name and a separate existence outside Ndega because patriarchy looks at women as items or possessions to be owned by the men. As it is, the society has turned women into fighters in order to survive; something that Chesaina feels is unnecessary if the society could review its patriarchal social organization to level the field for both genders. To Chesaina, patriarchy is corrosive and has the potential to disenfranchise the society for it brings disharmony in the basic social unit; the family. The oral narrative helps illuminate on some social realties in many African communities; women are not allowed to own property despite their contribution to the process of wealth creation. Ndega had no property before he married the mysterious woman and only gets rich through her efforts yet he forgets this and holds parties for his relatives; an occasion the wife is not allowed to partake in.

Through digression in the form of a narrative within a narrative, Chesaina narrates about the dehumanizing nature of British colonial rule of Kenya. She recalls the story by Phyllis, her Alliance Girls' High School friend and classmate. The story was about a man from Chinga in Nyeri County who had been employed by a British settler. The British settler was always chastising the African servant and belittling him with constant profanities. Chesaina narrates of the story:

> Whenever he made a mistake, the *Mzungu* would call him "*mjinga wewe*" (you fool). One day the Chinga man met a fellow Nyerian and he had this great news to him:
> "U kai Mushungu nota Ngai-i!
> Ekumenya gwitu no Chinga!"
> (The *Mzungu* is like God. How did he know I was from Chinga?). (74)

Chesaina uses this story to highlight the degradation and dehumanization that Africans under colonial rule experienced; that the British colonial administrators did not just take land and freedom from the Kenyans but were also involved in a campaign to psychologically manipulate the Africans to erode their self-worth and always be in awe of the European race as being superior. As it is, the man from Chinga does not realize his constant he is being insulted and thinks that his British employer has superhuman powers. Chesaina recalls this story as a way of saying that the colonization of Kenya was a barbaric act that was carried out by barbarians because civilized people do not belittle, torture and bully others; the British rule in Kenya was characterized by massive violation of human rights of the Africans; brutal repressions, arbitrary arrests and detentions without trial and massacres. Here, Chesaina is refuting the 19th century claim by European powers that the colonization of Africa by Europe, was a favour; a way of civilizing Africans because they were 'barbaric and uncivilized' in European standards. She

makes the reader see that the barbarian was not the African but the European who perpetrated atrocities against the African people in the continent during the colonial period.

Using an analeptic narrative; a form of digression, Chesaina illustrates the hypocrisy of the Europeans in Kenya during the colonial period; having brought Christianity to Kenya, the Europeans tended to view themselves as being beyond reproach in their dealings. The reality was that racism was rampant even among the teachers and Christian missionaries in the country. She recalls the story of Florence Gitoho, her schoolmate at Alliance Girls' High School who was prevented from pursuing science subjects by the European teachers because they did not think an African had the brain capacity to study science subjects and/or pursue a career in medicine as Florence wanted to. She narrates:

> Florence's story was popular with us AGHS girls. She had been forced by our teachers to do Arts in Lower Six. They had insisted that she was not as strong in the sciences as she was in the arts. Just as every dark thing has a bright side to it, every bright thing has a dark side to it. Alliance was a Christian school, but when it came to certain decisions, it seemed the teachers put Jesus aside and the colonial self-stepped in. This was how it was in the choice of subjects for Form Five and Six. They assumed they knew better than the girls. They believed they knew where young girls' strengths lay and even what career we should pursue in the future. (80)

Through this analeptic narrative, Chesaina is able to comment on the issue of racial bigotry; the misplaced belief that some races are superior to others; Europeans are superior to Africans. She does this by showing how Florence defies the expectations of the European teachers; Florence took the arts, sat for the examination and passed but instead of proceeding to the university immediately, she repeated classes in High school and took science subjects, passed her examinations in the sciences and pursued a career in medicine. The writer also comments about the education debate on the hierarchy of subjects and careers that suggest science subjects and

careers are more important than the arts and humanities; she celebrates Florence for proving the European teachers wrong and eventually becoming a medical doctor. On the other hand, she says that she was happy to be studying arts because her passion was in literature; and like Florence, she considers herself an important person in the Kenyan society; like a doctor who cures the sick, a teacher cures the society by imparting knowledge and values. The point Chesaina is making here is that all subjects and careers play important roles in the development of the society and that the prioritization of science subjects and careers is largely misplaced and unnecessary.

Through the use of the fantastic, the writer brings to focus the harmony between humans and nature at the time of her birth. She reflects on happenings at the time of her birth. She was said to have been greeted by a little gazelle just before and immediately after her birth something that makes one of the ladies assisting her mother to suggest the name 'kathia', gazelle for baby Chesaina. She narrates:

> One mother gazelle had recently delivered for she was suckling her little one right next to the river. She was *Wa* Venje as she yielded herself to the castor oil massage. Her little one licked the castor some castor oil from *Wa* Venje's big stomach. When the masseur shooed her off, *Wa* Venje said, 'let her be, she is greeting her sister. (3)

This clearly is an element of fantasy, a characteristic of oral narratives where the narrator performer has license to create an ideal world where everything and anything is possible; the creation of an ideal world. More importantly, the author digresses from her own story to tackle the issue of the environment; that there was a point human respected the environment and interacted harmoniously with nature. The women and animals come to the river for water and they do not hurt the animals that come to the river. Embracing the gazelle as her animal totem as is evidence from both the story and the title is an African thing; therefore it helps in creating an

identity for the writer as an African woman and at the same time demonstrates her love for nature and the environment. Chesaina also uses this incidence to buttress her character as an agile, fast and friendly individual who accepts she has vulnerabilities which predators can exploit; the metaphor of the gazelle is used to illustrate to the reader her speed at running not just away from activities, people and cultural values that would endanger her life and dreams but also her determination in life to pursue issues that bring life not take it. It is worthy to note that she does not use the image of a predatory animal or bird as her totem for in her entire life, she becomes a giver of hope and life to other; she avoids situations and pursuits that would hurt or take way hope from others; she is never associated with bloodshed in her life.

Being born next to a river and having animals coming to pay homage to the newborn is also a strategy of convincing the reader about the birth of a great individual; a future scholar of international repute, a writer and a top diplomat; to create her identity. This foreshadows her later achievements as a university professor, diplomat and writer, by pointing to her the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the writer's birth. By introducing the reader to the fantastic at the beginning of her autobiography, Chesaina is also making it clear that she intends to tell her life story as an oral narrative.

Chesaina uses the analeptic narrative of the incidence at the river to articulate her views on issues of gender relations in African societies. She observes that gender relations in her Aembu community like in many African communities is skewed to privilege me over women from the earliest point in an individual's life. She observes that when she was born, the traditional

appreciation and celebration of a new member of the society, girls are appreciated with four ululations while boys are welcomed with five ululations. She laments:

> If it had been a boy, the women would have ululated five times; a boy was considered one ululation more important than a girl. After all, it was said a boy was the one who carried the family's lineage and looked after his parents in their old age. A girl on the other hand, got married and bore children to sustain other people's lineage. (5)

Among the Aembu community, ululation is a cultural way of showing appreciation for the gift of life, of welcoming a new member of the society. The difference in the number of ululations based on a child's gender is meant to show the engendered valuation of human life; a bot is given five ululations because the society considered the male to be the ideal human being; the man is seen as a source of security against the community's enemies and a permanent member who will ensure the continuity of the community; a communal asset. The girl on the other hand was received with four ululations, one ululation less than the boy because the community thought of the girl child as a sojourner who was within its borders on temporary basis as she would grow to be married elsewhere; a liability.

This instance of false consciousness among the women in her community something that disturbs her and throughout her life, Chesaina questions and becomes opposed to patriarchal social structures which she views as being responsible for the treatment of women as second class members of their African societies. Concerning this cultural reality, Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, a leading African feminist in her article, "Issues in African Feminism" observes that, "These rigid traditions discriminate against African women, who are seen as perpetual children and second class citizens" (201). This incident helps bring to focus the gender bias that is normalized

by patriarchal social set up in many African societies where women are seen as being only good for bearing children ; the objectification of the female body as being a baby-factory.

Chesaina uses an etiological narrative that her community used to explain the geographical phenomena that is river *Thagana* (Tana River) and one of its tributaries that the Aembu call river *Tumbiri*; how the two rivers never mix. She narrates the story that the Aembu used to explain why river *Thagana* and another smaller river called *Tumbiri* do not meet or have their waters mixing. The story goes on to explain that the friendship between the two rivers ended when they planned to travel together to the Indian Ocean but on the day of travel, river *Tumbiri* woke up early and left her friend river *Thagana* asleep. River *Thagana* woke up late to find his friend had already left and she took this as betrayal of the highest order. She recalls of the oral narrative:

> By the time *Thagana* finished her snoring, rubbed her eyes and made her first morning yawn, Tumbiri had covered distances and joined the traditional songs of other small rivers on their way to the big ocean. *Thagana* was tall and was a fast runner; like some community her people had heard who lived in a big valley called the Rift Valley. With her long strides she not only overtook *Tumbiri* and her friends but she had to carry them on her back. They were worn out. And from that day, *Thagana* and *Tumbiri* became sworn enemies. It is believed that the enmity between the two is so bitter to this day, that if you put water from the two rivers in the same gourd, the gourd breaks immediately. (2)

The writer uses this folktale to comment on an important social institution; friendship. That true friendship is based on mutual trust and concern for each other's interests; real friends do not betray each other. The river *Thagana* (river Tana) traverses Kenya to end up in the Indian Ocean. This then becomes a statement by the writer that although born in the interior of colonial Kenya, she would like the river travel far and wide to end up in the ocean; a spatial metaphor for the infinite possibilities and freedom; the writer traverses the world in several journeys in search of education and eventually the several journeys end up defining her as an African literature scholar

with a global worldview. At the same time, Chesaina is informing the reader that she will carry others on her back; she will be a communal and national asset to help others, friends and foe to reach infinite opportunities. This oral narrative also helps her to inscribe herself into the Aembu community by identifying with their oral literature forms. By using the etiological narrative on the introductory chapter of her autobiography, Chesaina is informing the reader of her intention to tell her life story in the form of a folktale. The story contains hyperbole, an element of orality, again buttressing the argument that Chesaina tells her life story as if it is an oral narrative and she is the performer/narrator

By structuring her life story as a folktale, Chesaina is able to get away with intentional falsification of known facts, for instance, she says that the text *Not Yet Uhuru* is written by Jomo Kenyatta while in reality it was written by Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. By engaging in intentional falsification, Chesaina manages to pique the readers' interest in her narrative and create rapport as the reader argues back using facts. Telling her life narrative as a folktale is also meant to buttress her identity as an African and demonstrate her love for African literature. In one of her digressive narratives, the writer mentions Camara Laye's autobiography. The protagonist narrator in Laye's life story is involved in the search for his identity after years of exposure to the western world and education. She narrates:

> Camara Laye broke the record of early African novelists in French university syllabus. He wrote the novel entitled , L' Enfant Noir(The African Child)which became a classic in African literature and has been translated into several European languages, beginning with English. I was very happy that I was able to study it. This was during a period in my life when I had started being critical of colonial education and was very much interested in our African culture. (100)

By referring to Laye's story, Chesaina is making a confession that her sojourns to the western world; The United States of America and later Britain in search of further education and self-actualization left her with feelings of cultural alienation. The reader can infer that her passion and love for oral literature that makes her tell her story as an oral narrative is an effort to reconnect with her cultural roots and regain her identity.

In telling her, Chesaina also employs rhetorical questions, direct speech and vulgarity which are elements of orality. When narrating about her experience as a Kenyatta University College faculty examination officer and how she assisted a nun who was being sexually harassed by a male lecturer, Chesaina asks the reader a rhetorical question, "what would you have done my dear reader?" (178). This rhetorical question helps Chesaina to justify her action of changing the nun's marks from a fail to grade A and at the same time, seek the reader's sympathy. Chesaina uses an element of orality; vulgarity to express disgust for the rampant sexual predation and male chauvinism she experienced in her professional life as a university don. After she corrects the nun's marks, she remarks, "I would advise all my male readers to think with their heads standing on their necks, and not with the heads standing on their testicles" (178). This is a deployment of vulgarity by the writer. The point Chesaina is making here is that sexism and the inability to control one's sexual desires is an animal trait that ends up causing suffering in the society. When she is sexually prepositioned by a male colleague, who also happened to be in charge of staff housing at the University of Nairobi so that he helps her get accommodation within the University, Chesaina poses a rhetorical question for the reader, "My dear reader, can you imagine a woman who has tortured her brain to get all those degrees in order to qualify as a university don demeaning herself by opening her legs to some fellow for what benefits?" (177).

The writer uses this rhetorical question to get the reader's sympathy and also creates revulsion towards sexual harassment and male chauvinism. The writer employs direct speech in the autobiography, for instance, when Chesaina's husband died and she went to pick her daughter, Kaptuiya from Alliance Girls' High School, she had a conversation with the deputy principal,"What is so important that you must come to disturb me this early in the morning?," "Her father has died," I said calmly" (60).

Chesaina quotes the exact words used by the deputy principal to highlight the callous and inhuman traits some education institution administrators exhibit; they do not occupy the positions to serve but for prestige and status; she complains when a student and their parent seeks her assistance instead offering condolences and quickly arranging for the student to leave the school compound. It is ironical that the deputy principal admonishes a student and their parent who are mourning the death of a loved one. This incident also helps cultivate autobiographical truth for the reader can use school records to ascertain who the deputy principal was. At the same time, she mentions the school by name to demonstrate to the reader that she is telling the truth.

Chesaina uses intense allusion of know literary artists, critics and texts in her life story. She makes reference to writers like Leo Tolstoy, William Shakespeare, Simone de Beauvoir, Camara Laye, Ferdinard Oyono, Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, John Donne and Micere Mugo as a way of revealing to the reader that she is widely read and therefore has the authority to comment on matters like art and education. Allusion also helps Chesaina claim her identity as a literary artist of international repute.

2.4 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I find that Chesaina's life narrative falls under the autobiography genre of literature that is structured in the form of an African oral narrative. She utilizes autobiographical elements like the use of memory, experience, retrospection and introspection to tell her story. This is because the narration of one's life is dependent on the interpretation of lived experiences. The concept of the self and identity of the autobiographical subject/narrator as demonstrated in Chesaina's *Run Gazelle Run*, is greatly affected by the historical, social and psychological forces the subject encounters. Smith and Watson in *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader* observe that, "In women's autobiography, writers often authorize their texts by appealing to the authority of experience" (10).

The text largely centers on her life and the self but she also comments on several issues like education, child welfare, and examines the corrosive nature of patriarchal social structures .Her life narrative comments on historical events in Kenya and the world. The life narrative can be paralleled to the story of Kenya as a country. Chesaina's struggles from a patriarchal background to become a scholar and a diplomat but with human challenges and this reflects the history of the country; from being colonized by the British and the efforts Kenyans used to attain their independence. Like Chesaina, Kenya attained self-rule through military efforts. Despite being learned and having given her best to attain her childhood dreams, Chesaina faces betrayal and impediments from those around her; she loses the love of her life, Clement, due to pressure from her family. By narrating about her problematic marriage, her fight with depression and feelings of betrayal, Chesaina makes it possible for the reader to identify with her by examining their own lives and experiences. Kenya's struggles during the colonial rule and her efforts towards

independence were meant to give dignity to her citizens just like Chesaina wanted a better life but her marriage partner became part of the problem. Kenyans had pre-independence dreams of a better life but upon the attainment of self-rule, the Africans leaders who took over from the British have consistently betrayed and failed the people. The issue of corruption is a form of betrayal of the citizens for it makes life difficult for the lead.

Chesaina's efforts to change her life despite being failed by those around her can be read as Kenya's political and legal efforts like the fight for multiparty democracy and constitution reforms made to create an economically, politically and socially inclusive state. The writer's struggles for acceptance in her intertribal marriage can be read as the national efforts that are aimed to deal with bottlenecks to nationhood; problems like tribalism that have resulted into Kenya being a state made up of forty five nation/tribes instead of one nation. The writer's efforts and appreciation of the Turgen dialect of the Kalenjin language and culture to the level of being able to use it in her writings is a call on Kenyans to explore their different cultures and find the points of confluence and celebrate the differences as a step towards the creation of Kenyan nationhood and nation. The fragmented nature of the plot as a result of intense use of digression is a reflection of the writer's inner disequilibrium and pain, an indication that she is narrating pain and trauma hence the need for constant breaks from the narration of her painful story

The appropriation of forms of oral literature is meant to be a cultural coup; oral literature is an embodiment of the African culture, the same culture that male chauvinist wave around when instituting the exclusion of women. By structuring her life story to reflect a folktale, Chesaina makes the statement that she is part of the culture and more importantly, no one can use culture

to discriminate against her because she has owned it through by mastering its oral literature enough to structure of her autobiography as an African folktale.

CHAPTER THREE

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AUTHORITY IN A LAMENTATION: STRATEGIES OF NARRATING THE SELF IN REBEKA NJAU'S *MIRRORS OF MY LIFE*.

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to examine how Rebeka Njau constructs her identity through the narration of her life story; *Mirrors of my Life*. Autobiographical authority derives from the unique properties of the autobiographical form of writing; such as the reliance on memory and the recall, analysis and interpretation of the experiences of the subject narrator's life. In writing her life story, Njau appeals to the authority of memory and experience. Therefore, autobiographical authority here refers to the authority of memory and experience, through which the autobiographical subject is able to tell their story. I will interrogate how Njau inscribes herself into the Kenyan national narrative and the use of her life story to interpret Kenya's history. The discussion on this chapter begins with the lead argument being that Njau tells her story in the form of a lamentation; an expression of great sadness or disappointment. This chapter will be divided into three sections: section one will examine the nature and functions of the autobiography as manifest in this text, section two will examine the autobiographical strategies Njau uses to tell her story while section three will form the findings and conclusions for the chapter.

3.2 Nature and Functions of the Autobiography as Manifest in Njau's *Mirrors Of My Life*

This section seeks to examine how the unique attributes of the genre of autobiography are manifested in the text. In the study of the autobiography as a genre of writing, several scholars

have come up with different definitions. Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* looks at the autobiography as, "the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self" (7). Abbs' definition makes the autobiography a genre concerned with past events and experiences of the subject's life. Abbs also links the autobiography to history since the past involves history; the history of the subject and their environment or the society they operate from. This definition also precipitates the idea that the autobiography is concerned with the issue of identity; the subject's identity. In his definition, Abbs talks of, "the evolution of the true self" as the subject seeks to answer the questions: "who am I?", "how did I become who I am today?" and "what may I become in future?" (7).

James Olney in, "I was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographies and as Literature" postulates 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 their life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the past history has led to the present state of being. (47)

The point Olney is making is that the writing of an autobiography is done at the present, while the subject is already an adult and therefore they have to rely on their memory to explore their past experiences. Memory, therefore, is the principal authority in in an autobiography; the subject appeals to the authority of the memory to tell their stories. This definition also points out to the central role played by history in the construction of the autobiographical subject's identity; "how the past history has led to the present state of being" Memory is principal authority in life narratives since autobiography as a genre is depended on the subject's lived experiences. Philippe Lejeune in, *On Autobiography* defines this form of writing; the autobiography, as, "a retrospective prose narrative that someone writes concerning his own existence, where the focus

is on the individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (22). Lejeune's definition points out some unique properties of the autobiography: that its focus is the subject's life experiences, that these experiences are recalled through retrospection or the reliance on memory, that the autobiography concerns itself with the search for/formulation and perpetuation of the subject's identity. The definition also focuses attention to the introspective character; a nonfictional character; the autobiographical subject. With the principal focus being the nonfictional character's life experiences, it is therefore understood that the autobiographical subject tells the truth in their life story.

Francoise Lionnet in *Post-Colonial Representations: Women, Identity* argues that:

> Enlightenment claims about selfhood and individuality were underwritten by the simultaneous othering of those who had to be spoken for because they were said to possess no reason (slaves, women, children, the mad, the incarcerated, and the disenfranchised. (5)

The point Lionnet is making is that, women have for the longest time been 'othered' by their communities and as a result, they have had to content with the identities which the patriarchal social structures have given them. The nature of many societies all over the world has been one that subordinates women to men and in such a social order, women have not been allowed space to tell their stories and formulate, project or perpetuate their identities. Njau tells her story as a way of claiming her voice and projecting her identity. In doing so, she identifies family, professional life and culture as her main fields of identity formation. Njau narrates her family tree to help construct herself; it is a field of identity formation for her as daughter, granddaughter, sister, wife and a mother. She traces the family tree and roots from Murang'a to Kabete. She mentions her great grandfather Wanga'ang'a; the patriarch of the family who was very wealthy. She further narrates about her father; a missionary educated man who deeply loved

his family and worked for the colonial government until his retirement. Michael Pratt and Barbara Fiese in their book, *Family Stories and their Life Course across Time and Generations* observe that "young people are seen as drawing on cultural reservoir of family stories to provide elements from which the sense of self is constructed" (17). The point Pratt and Fiese are making is that family, its history and guiding philosophies helps individuals understand who they are; gives them an identity. Njau dedicates several pages to narrating the lives of all her siblings and their achievements. This recall of the entire family tree is buttressed by the use of family photos that give her a sense of belonging and convince the reader that she is telling the truth. By appealing to the authority of her memory, Njau narrates about her family:

> My parents left their respective mission schools after five years of education. Three years later, they met and decided to marry at the oldest Presbyterian Church at Thogoto. They were blessed with twelve children: seven boys and five girls. I am the third born. John, the eldest, was born in 1928, followed by Samuel. The fourth born is Karen, then Grace, Obadiah, Job, Keziah, Edwin, Titus, James and Jemima in that order. (11)

She recalls of her father a way of claiming her identity as his daughter, "My father Paul Wainaina, tall and slim always bearing a stately look, comes to mind. He was born at Kanyariri in 1901" (6). She is proud to be the daughter of a man whom she describes as being progressive, loving, caring and very hardworking. She narrates of her mother's exploits with a lot of pride and admiration. She recalls of how her mother would lease land from neighbours for cultivation and that she would do so in through the modern way of signing lease agreements. Njau recalls, "Her impressive signature in the lease papers is still clear up to this day. To me, it indicates that she was quite an enlightened person. Furthermore, I admired her spiritual strength, her resilience and determination" (12). She further narrates about the influence and contribution of her parents in her life as a way of claiming her identity as a daughter and paying homage to them as having

been her role models. She recalls of her parents, "Their cherished dream was that we grow up to become people of integrity, discipline, hardworking and God-fearing and they made great sacrifices to make their dream a reality" (41).

Njau dedicates chapter three of her autobiography to recalling the memories of her maternal grandfather, Ngumi wa Muigai, who she fondly refers to as *Guka*. She narrates about his exploits as a warrior, blacksmith, environmental conservation, traditional medicine man and a diviner. She narrates of his love for her as his granddaughter and the many life lessons she learned in his compound. Through this recall, Njau is able to claim her identity as the granddaughter of a great man who positively influenced her to become a resilient fighter later in her life. Through retrospection, Njau recalls of her grandfather:

> On reflection, Guka, my maternal grandfather, a warrior, a medicine man, a blacksmith and a diviner, was a great inspiration to me during my youth. It was at his homestead, which I visited quite often, that I got the opportunity to learn about the complexity of nature. It was there that the courage to fight my way in hazardous situations and circumstances, were firmly rooted. Guka was thorough and focused in whatever he did. (27)

Njau further narrates about her eleven siblings as a way of claiming her identity as a sister. Chapter four which she names, "Kinsfolk" is dedicated to her brothers and sisters starting with the six who have already died. She mentions them by name, John Mbugua, Job Mungai, Grace Wangui, Titus Njihia, Samuel Ngumi, and Keziah Nduati, all deceased. She then names those who are alive and how as a family they are coping with the loss of their siblings; this celebration of her family is also a way of telling the reader that family has been her support system throughout her life. She narrates, "In order to honour those who have left us, the six of us; Obadiah Wainaina, James Wainaina, Edwin Wainaina, Karen Kamau, Jemimah Wainaina and I have continued to live in peace and solidarity, providing moral and financial support to those of

us who may need it" (48). Mentioning her siblings by name not only helps Njau claim her identity as a sister but also helps cultivate autobiographical truth since the reader can verify through government documents whether the family/kinship claims that Njau makes are true or not.

To claim her identity as a wife and a mother, Njau narrates of her marriage to Tanzanian artist, Elimo Njau. She recalls how they met in Nairobi:

> Towards the end of 1958, something happened which was to change my life. Sheila Mayo, the wife of the Rev. Gordon Mayo, a missionary working at the Christian Council of Kenya (today, The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), invited me for lunch at their house along Valley Road in Nairobi. The couple was highly regarded both in the secular and church circles because of their genuine friendship and respect for everyone, whether white or black. Sheila was an artist and a designer and their daughters were active in theatre activities in Britain. I accepted the invitation, even though I had no idea why I was being invited, since I had no personal contact with the couple. When I got there, I was taken aback to find Elimo Njau present. I learned that he stopped over at the couple's home on his way to Murang'a County to paint a series of murals on the walls of St. James Cathedral. Although Elimo was a student at the school of Fine Art at Makerere while I was there, I had never met him personally. (97)

The writer narrates that Sheila Mayo played an active role of matchmaking until she; Njau, accepted to be in a romantic relationship with Elimo that was to culminate in a marriage a few months later. Njau confesses that at that point in her life, marriage was not a priority and that she was only focused on advancing her career as a teacher and a playwright. She recalls of her wedding and the subsequent relocation to Tanzania, "Immediately after our wedding at the Chapel of Alliance Girls High School, we went to his home in Moshi and was introduced to members of his family who had not attended the wedding in Nairobi" (100). Njau recalls her experiences as a first time mother in a foreign country and the birth of her first child, Morille Njau. She narrates about Morille's difficult birth, "In the long run, I was admitted at Barnstaple Hospital, where I had a successful caesarian operation and gave birth to our first offspring,

Morille" (102). Njau narrates about her difficult experiences at her matrimonial in Moshi Tanzania and the unpopular decisions she had to make to protect and secure her children's future. Njau's father-in-law wanted her to be his personal nurse and that meant she had to live in the village where the quality of education and health care was poor. Njau disagreed with both her husband and father-in-law because it would mean that her children would miss out on proper schooling. This recall of her sacrifices and responsibilities helps her claim her identity as mother to Morille and Hannah Njau. She recalls how she fought for future of her children:

> The following morning I woke up feeling composed and more confident. Without hesitation, I told Elimo that we needed to find a place to live near important facilities such as hospitals and schools. I thought that was a reasonable request but to my consternation, neither Elimo nor his father, seemed to embrace my suggestion. Nevertheless, I was determined to leave the village, whatever happened, and look for a school, and a place to live in Moshi town. I would listen to no suggestions which were of no benefit to my children. (127)

Njau narrates about her professional life experiences as a teacher and an artist because they form another field of her identity formation. She confesses that these two careers were what she dreamed of pursuing as she concluded her studies at Makerere University in Uganda. She recalls of the desire, "Before I left Makerere in April 1958, I had only one goal in mind- to be a playwright and a successful teacher" (98). She narrates how she was the pioneer headmistress of Moi Girls' High School in Nairobi and the contributions she made in the education sector in Kenya. She recalls:

> The school, named Moi Girls School, was founded at the beginning of 1964 with a class of 35 girls, picked from the low income areas, which included Bahati, Majengo, Gorofani, Kaloleni and Makongeni. I knew there were challenges ahead but I was determined to face the main ones immediately. The first one to find evidence that would convince the Ministry to reverse the colonial authorities' assertion that a girls' boarding school in Nairobi was not necessary. In order to prove them wrong, I visited the estates to see for myself the kind of houses available for African families in Eastlands. I found their one-roomed houses

> crowded, dark and lacking in fresh air. They were deplorable; neither conducive to studies nor suitable for habitation. (109)

Njau narrates how she managed to convince the Ministry of Education to give the school a bus to help in the transportation of the girls in order to relieve the parents of the burden of providing their daughters with daily bus fare. Later, through her initiative and efforts, the Ministry of education gave the school some boarding facilities for the girls and a kitchen so that they can have meals at school. By the time she left Moi Girls' High School, she had managed to transform it to an educational center of excellence. Njau narrates of her how her former students celebrate her contribution to making them better citizens. Njau recalls:

> After leaving school, most of them admitted that I was right to have enforced discipline. They were grateful that I had made them realize that discipline was more necessary at the time than liberty. Several years later, I learned that the first 35 girls to be enrolled in the school, were doing so well in their careers. They had become pace-setters for those who came after them. (113)

Njau also recalls of her time at Alliance Girls High School where she taught English and History beginning 1958. She recalls of her experience as a teacher at Alliance High School, "One of my students, Professor Micere Mugo, became so confident in the use of the English language during her first two years in high school, that she was able to use it creatively to write plays. Njau recalls these experiences to perpetuate her identity as an educationist of high standing. She is also inscribing herself to these institutions and at the same time giving her story credibility because the reader can confirm if she is telling the truth. Both Makerere University and Alliance Girls High School are institutions that have a history of distinct cultures; of discipline and academic excellence and by inscribing herself into them, Njau is telling the reader that she is a disciplined academician. Fatuma Chege and Daniel Sifuna in their article, "Girls' and Women's Education: Gender Perspectives and Trends" point out that, "Just as familial and societal cultures

influence attitudes, so do the institutional cultures of the school and other educational institutions" (21). The point Chege and Sifuna are making is that the educational institutions an individual attends influence their world view, philosophy and identity. Makerere University was the pioneer institution of higher learning in East Africa where the best brains in the region were educated. Alliance Girls is a pioneer high school in Kenya that has produced individuals who have gone on to occupy very privileged positions in the country. Micere Mugo, a product of Alliance Girls High School became the first female professor in Kenya and a literary artist/ critic of international acclaim.

Njau narrates of her experiences as an artist; a writer and a tie and dye specialist to claim her identity as an artist. She recalls how reading other people's works inspired her to start writing plays and mentions that her play, *In the Round Chain* was inspired by the colonial experience. She narrates, "At the same time, I discovered other interesting books which inspired me to write a play about the injustices committed in Kenya by the British colonial government, and how the home guards were used to terrorize those who were considered to oppose the brutal regime" (86). She further narrates about her first play to be published which she called, *The Scar*. Njau recalls of the feeling, "The Scar was published by the Kibo Art Gallery and the proceeds from its sales used to supplement what was needed to complete the project" (101). She also recalls about her tie and dye works, " When I was not teaching, I spent most of my time making tie-dye cloth ready to sell at *Sanaa Zetu*, mainly to members of the international community who were working at Kilimanjaro Medical Center and also at the International School" (134).

Njau's use of European Christian names when referring to her siblings, all born during the British colonial rule of Kenya is a pointer to her hybridity; the coming of the Whiteman marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. This coming together of two cultures; the African and European cultures plays a role in giving Njau an identity. Despite having been born in Christian family at the height of colonization and having been educated at Christian missionary schools, Njau creates her own identity as a hybrid individual straddling both worlds. She makes it clear that she draws inspiration from both the European and her Gikuyu traditions. She confesses that her Christian mother and her traditionalist maternal grandfather shaped her view of the world and life. She narrates of her mother, "I admired mother's courage and strength of mind" (2). Leigh Gilmore in *Autobiographic*: *A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation* discusses the place of names as a field of identity and points out the place of names in autobiographies. Gilmore posits that, "it identifies a person within a historical context of place and patriliniege, and focuses attention on the solid corporeality to which it refers. Ultimately, it seems to mark a ground zero of representation vercity" (65).

Njau uses Gikuyu names for places titles; words like Guka (grandfather) for the purpose of projecting her cultural identity. June Chebet Chelule in, "The Convergence of the Self and History in Ellen Johnson's *This Child will be Great* and Joe Khamisi's *Dash before Dust*: *A Slave Descendant's Journey in Freedom*" argues that, "language in personal narratives is a field of identity negotiation" (40). To Chelule, language helps to culturally situate the autobiographical subject. By having Gikuyu words in a life narrative written in English is Njau's was of acknowledging her hybridity. Njau further identifies her birth place as Kihingo in Kiambu County. This use of geographical location helps situate her in the Agikuyu cultural context; gives

her cultural identity and also contributes to autobiographical truth since it is a place that can be verified using government records like the national identity card and birth certificate.

The autobiography is immersed in history because the experiences and memories recalled by the subject are historically situated; refer to historical periods, events and personalities. Njau uses her autobiography to recall Kenya's history. Concerning the place of history in personal narratives, Jennifer Muchiri in, "The Intersection Between the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies" notes that the autobiography tells the history of the subject as well as that of the society where the subject springs from. This observation is further emphasized by Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography*: *A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* when they posit that writing of one's life story is "a historically situated practice of self-representation" (14). Njau narrates about the colonization of Kenya by the British after Africa was subdivided among European powers in the Berlin Conference of 1884, to when Kenya was formed as part of the British East African protectorate that had Kenya and Uganda. In 1920, Kenya officially became a new edifice; a colony headed by a governor who administered from Nairobi.

The writer narrates about the establishment of Fort Smith by Captain Eric Smith in 1891 of the Imperial British East African Company and the subsequent loss of land by Africans. She narrates, " I see Kihingo, where I was born, a kilometer away from Fort Smith, the fort established by Captain Eric Smith, of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) in 1891" (4). She further mentions how the British colonial administrators used some African collaborators to pacify the rest of the country , "In collaboration with loyal Gikuyu colonial chiefs, led by Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu, the '*Mugumo*' was named the 'Tree of Peace',

signifying, at the time, the so called amicable relations between the Gikuyu and the British officers of the fort" (4).

Njau also narrates about the establishment of early education institutions by the European missionaries as a way of documenting Kenya's history in her life story. She narrates, "In 1920 father was enrolled at Kabete Mission, established by the earliest missionaries of the Church of England" (8). She also recalls about the punitive ways in which the colonial administration dealt with Africans who were opposed to their administration by narrating how Chief Waiyaki wa Hinga was among the first casualties when he was exiled to Kenya's coastal region but died along the way ay Kibwezi. This mention of historical figures is a way of documenting Kenya's history. She narrates of Waiyaki, "Chief Waiyaki was known to be a brave who was opposed to punitive expeditions from time to time, conducted by the British officer against the Gikuyu" (9).

Njau recalls the treatment of Africans during the period that came to be known the State of Emergency by narrating her experiences and also those of her father in the hands of British soldiers. She tells of her father's experience, "In April 1954 when the British Military police mounted a major operation, named Operation Anvil, to root out members of the Gikuyu living in the city of Nairobi, my father was among those picked up from his place of work at the Survey of Kenya" (16). For being a member of the Agikuyu community, Njau's father was jailed for several weeks during which he was screened and after being found innocent, he was released. The British operated on the premise that an African was guilty until proven innocent; a direct affront to the rules of natural justice that decree that an individual is to be presumed innocent until proven guilty through a fair and just court process. Njau further narrates about her experience with the colonial police during the state of emergency in 1957:

> One day, on a Friday, during the holidays, I was walking along the Government Road (Moi Avenue) in Nairobi, accompanied by my college mates, Edith Matiba and Lizzie Njoroge, when we were confronted by two police constables who requested to see our movement permits. We handed over the permits and as they scrutinized them, they rudely said, "You seem to be the type of girls who pass information to Mau Mau, our enemies. We can tear up these permits and you'll be taken to court and accused of having left your villages to come to the city without permits". Instantly, I realize that those policemen were intending to do us mischief I got out a pen and a notebook and started writing down the numbers on their helmets. (88-89)

Njau further recalls historical figures like Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia. These are individuals who played a pivotal role in the re-establishment of multiparty democracy in Kenya. President Daniel Moi and his government had reduced the country into a one party state through an amendment of the constitution in June, 1982. She narrates of the two political leaders, "In May 1990, Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia, proclaimed their intention to protest Moi's excesses, in a public rally on 7 July 1990. Their application for a licence to hold the rally was turned down" (239). Njau's recall of Kenya's history beginning in the colonial period is a strategy to authenticate her story; cultivate autobiographical truth. It is also a strategy inscribe herself into the larger Kenyan narrative. The reader finds Njau's life narrative believable as it is intertwined with Kenya's history; the inclusion of historical events and personalities verifiable by use of history is enough proof that she is telling the truth.

Experience is another important feature of the autobiography. Concerning the centrality of the autobiographical subject's experience in appreciating autobiography, Jennifer Muchiri in *Women's autobiography*: *Voices from Independent Kenya* Posits:

> Experience is another feature of the autobiography because the form (autobiographical writing) involves narrating and interpreting one's experiences through retrospection and introspection. The experience presented in the autobiography is not merely personal, but an interpretation of the past and the

> author's place in a culturally and historically specific present. Autobiographical narrators do not predate experience; instead, they come to be through experience. Experience, then, is the process through which a person becomes a certain kind of a subject having certain identities in the social realm which are constituted through material, cultural, economic, historical and social realities. (30)

Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* buttress Muchiri's view when they postulate that, "in women's autobiography, writers often authorize their texts by appeal to the authority of experience" (10).

Njau writes her life narrative in the form of a confession. Rita Felski defines this sub-genre of the female autobiographical writings as, "A type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" (Qtd in Smith and Watson's *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*). Njau allows the reader access to her private space as a woman, mother, wife and artist. She makes it known that her marriage to Elimo Njau was a mistake on her part after being let down by the man she loved at Makerere University; she knew very little about him. She confesses to being a victim of domestic violence and eventual family breakdown through a bitter divorce. This narration of very personal and equally painful experiences amounts to self-revelation; which proceeds therapy. It is her way of finding healing from the trauma suffered during her time in marriage.

Njau confesses that her marriage left her with feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, mental anguish and crippling emotional pain. She narrates that from the onset of the marriage; she noticed that her husband did not encourage divergence of opinions and that he preferred that she lose her identity and individuality. In her long letter to her sister Grace, Njau shares with the reader the raw emotions she felt when her husband eventually married his American girlfriend, Philda Ragland. This letter, which she refers to as her letter of lament alludes to the letter written by Ramatoulaye to her close friend Aissatou in Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*. Ramatoulaye

laments to her friend how patriarchy has ruined her marriage as the husband married a young girl as his second wife; the emotional pain occasioned by the betrayal was crippling. Reliving these painful experiences through narration signals to the reader that Njau is looking for a way to vent and reclaim her emotional equilibrium; the writing of her autobiography is an attempt at therapy. Njau talks of her husband's brutality, emotional abuse, adultery, betrayal and abdication of parental responsibility that left her feeling overwhelmed. The inclusion of personal letters in her autobiography is Njau's strategy of allowing the reader into her private space; making the reader to experience her experiences and to empathize with her. It also buttresses the idea that what she is telling is the truth. She recalls, "He was reluctant to accommodate other people's ideas. He wanted absolute power and authority in running our home" (191).

The eventual divorce did not mark an end to Njau's marital problems as her husband was reluctant to share the family property. Due to Patriarchal social structures in many African communities, property is owned by the man. Njau resists this by instituting a court case that culminated in the equal division of the family property; the division of the five acre land at Ridgeways, Kiambu County where the matrimonial home was located. Njau makes reference to the character of Nora in Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*; unlike *N*ora who left the marriage due to her husband's patriarchal inclinations that made it difficult to see her as an equal partner worthy of respect, Njau choose to fight back and get part of the family property. Although Njau comes out as a stronger and a resolute character, she confesses that the toxic marital family environment negatively affected her. She confesses to experiencing nightmares especially after the husband confessed to marital infidelity. She recalls:

> That night I lay down to sleep overcome by anger; not because Elimo had married Philda secretly, but because he had been lying to me. Everything that had come

> out of his mouth regarding his relationship with her was wrapped in falsity. I tried to sleep but several short nightmares lay in wait and disturbed me greatly. (180)

By narrating about her experiences in marriage to Elimo, Njau creates awareness about domestic violence in her life narrative because she feels that there is unnecessary stigma attached to it. The reader can see that Njau is involved in self-exposure; allowing her readers to access her private and intimate family details. This is necessary as it forms the basis for her recovery from the trauma of domestic violence, betrayal and rejection; it signals that she has come to the point of acceptance of what happened in her past and she has to deal with it conclusively in order to get past it. Here Njau is also looking for the readers' sympathy. She looks at domestic violence as a war; war has been known to cause Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among combatants due to the sustained anxiety, the constant fear of death and hopelessness they have to deal with. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a mental disorder that arises from traumatic events experienced and if no intervention is done, victims lose their mental faculties and may either become violent towards others or turn into self-destructive activities like drug abuse, crime or suicide.

Debilitating mental illness has also been shown to interfere with an individual's economic output as well as their ability to socially integrate with others. Selena Tramayne in, "Intimate Partner Violence as a Risk Factor for PTSD in Female Survivors of Domestic Violence: A Meta-Analysis" posits that the resultant mental disorder arising from physical and emotional abuse by an intimate partner renders the women victims unstable. She notes that domestic violence is a global health problem and urges governments to deal with it to avoid a health crisis. She points out that, "Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global public health problem that greatly impacts women's mental, emotional and physical well-being" (12). Njau's trauma resulted from both

emotional and physical abuse. She narrates that that her husband physically abused her. She recalls:

> I had just returned from Tanzania and had no idea, that there was an affair going on between them. Also I had no idea that she was with him inside that studio. However, he did not want to hear my voice. He got hold of me, slapped several times and tore my blouse. He continued beating me until a worker who heard the commotion came out of his room and stopped him. (136)

Njau uses her autobiography to advocate for the rights of women; she identifies patriarchy as an impediment to personal actualization among Kenyan women; her husband's conducts made her give up on many economic and artistic endavours. She also looks at domestic violence as an offshoot of patriarchal social structures that objectify and commodify women; Elimo beats her because he feels that he owns her, that she is part of his property as a man. Njau uses her story to inspire women in violent unions to seek help and to prioritize their health by walking away from such violent partners. Njau is able to convince the reader that what she narrates about her marriage and her husband in her autobiography is the truth by attaching new paper article from *The Standard* of April 15, 2000 (247) that talks about how her husband left his marriage for the American woman called Philda. She also attaches her husband's letter trying to make her feel guilty about claiming her part of the family property, attaches the court ruling by both Justice Joyce Aluoch and Justice Kalpana Rawal. (262)

Njau uses these paratextual elements like letters, court rulings, newspaper articles and gallery calendars to construct the concept of autobiographical truth as well as to construct the character of her former husband Elimo Njau as a selfish, irresponsible, exploitative, cunning , philandering individual who is completely delusional and quixotic. She paints him as a latter-day Don Quixote whose delusional personality gets those around him in danger. In her letter to her sister Grace,

she points out, “Moreover, I had to stay for the sake of Morille and Hannah. I could not leave them under the care of their father who had clearly shown that his uppermost allegiance was to his art and not his family” (185).

Njau life narrative to pay tribute to other people she considers worthy of emulation. She narrates about Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia’s contributions to the re-introduction of multi-party democracy and the fight to cut down the excesses of President Daniel Moi’s dictatorial government. She observes that it was risky to oppose Moi’s government that was characterized by rampant abuse of human rights, theft of public funds and election malpractices and tribalism. Njau also pays tribute to her parents, brothers and sisters, artists like Lwanga Musoke of Uganda, Kiasi Nikwitikie of Mozambique and Samuel Wanjau of Kenya, Micere Mugo, a professor of literature, Eddah Gachukia, a pioneer educationist, Edith Matiba and Phoebe Asiyo. Micere Mugo was the first woman to head the faculty of Arts at the University of Nairobi. She is an internally acclaimed playwright, poet and a literary critic. Eddah Gachukia is a pioneer Kenyan educationist and a literary critic. She is the founder of The Riara Group of Schools in Nairobi. She is also among the first women in Kenya to acquire a doctoral degree in Literature and among the pioneer women lecturers at the department of literature of the University of Nairobi. She also founded a private university, The Riara University, in 2012. Phoebe Asiyo is the first African president of the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation, something she achieved while Kenya was a still under the British colonial rule. She went on to become the first female deputy superintendent of Prisons after she was appointed to the position in 1963. Asiyo is credited for introducing a lot of reforms at the prisons department in Kenya. She is also among the first Kenyan women to venture into elective politics after she was elected the Member of Parliament

for Karachuonyo for the first time in 1979. Phoebe Asiyo is also credited for introducing the Affirmative Action motion in Kenya's parliament in April, 23rd 1997. This particular motion sought to address the exclusion of women, especially in political matters and leadership.

Autobiographical writings involve the element of self-inscription by the subject. Njau inscribes herself into Kenya's history and national narrative by recalling its history, especially the colonial history. She feels that the violent and degrading nature of the British colonial administration of Kenya, the country was traumatized greatly. She looks back into her own life and observes that her healing started when she deliberately set out to confront of her past. Njau seems to be saying that Kenya as a country needs to deal with its traumatic past in order to understand the current problems and move forward to develop itself in all spheres; political, social and economic. To Njau, the present and the future of Kenya lies in the candid addressing of historical pains and injustices like political and economic exclusion of a section of the population on the basis of either gender or tribe. Njau also inscribes herself into the national narrative by narrating about her contribution to the country as an educator and artist. As an artist, she has contributed to the country by producing artistic works; novels and plays whose historical and cultural context is Kenya and thus she has put the country on the world map through art.

3.3 Strategies for Narrating the Self Employed by Rebeka Njau in her Life Story

Lourdes Torres in, The Construction of the Self in U.S Latina autobiographies" postulates that the recent autobiographies written by women of colour in addition to exhibiting fragmented and disjointed narrative units tend to mix genres in a way that has not been witnessed in mainstream biographies. She points out:

> These seeming subversive elements include fictional tales, myths and fantasies as a way of constructing themselves. There is no attempt to privilege any of the various genres; History-public and private mythifiction fantasy are all juxtaposed. (qtd in Francoise Lionnet's *Autobiographical Voices* 6)

Njau narrates her life story as a lament and from the first opening page; she signals to the reader that she will be narrating pain and trauma; that hers is a lamentation. She narrates in her opening paragraph that her life has been punctuated by pain and that writing her story; recalling the painful experiences and memories of her life was emotionally taxing. She confesses, "When I decide to write the story of my life, I strained every nerve trying to find the most appropriate way to express my complex emotions and beliefs" (1). To foreshadow the persecution, pain and suffering that have characterized her life, Njau begins her autobiography with a poem/song of anguish:

> My ears are plugged up
> By poisonous spittle of a grimy tongue;
> Times without number,
> Little birds have been twittering, joyfully at my backyard,
> But I cannot hear them.
> Falsity, scattered like rotten millet seeds
> By an evil-minded genius,
> Has driven to extreme pain and bitterness
> Making me feel powerless to forgive and forget.
>
> Like a piece of rock that stands on its own,
> I stand alone beside a sweet-scented bush
> To ease my tormented spirit;
> But in desperate helplessness.
> I approach the Mugumo tree in my compound
> To offer my supplications
> To the comforter, the Life-giver
> And erase the agonies of pain
> Suddenly I am distracted;
> I see images of Ondiri Swamp,
> Looking like a large carpet of mossy green,

Fringed with masses of giant reeds.
Near Kikuyu town, was a sight to behold,
A sight to glory in
Memories of that phenomena of nature
Occupy my mind.
I recall wading through it
On my way to Guka's homestead;
The ground swayed from side to side
Scaring me to the uttermost.

When I recollect wading through courageously,
Inspired by Guka's words of wisdom
And the amulet he wore to shield himself against evil forces,
I ask myself:
Who will shield me against the fangs of the unjust?
As I lift up my eyes, suddenly an apparition flashes across my face,
Leaving behind haunting images of a day I will never forget. (3)

Njau uses the image of poison to signal to the reader what the pain that she has experienced in her adult life has done to her body and existence; it has damaged her greatly and that her life and wellbeing has been constantly threatened by the pain. She creates the image of a snake as her adversity, "By poisonous spittle of a grimy tongue" (stanza one line two) and in stanza three line five she asks, "Who will shield me against the fangs of the unjust?" The image of the snake points to the idea of betrayal by an individual who was close her and that this betrayal has pained and traumatized her. This alludes to Shakespeare's *Othello, the Moor of Venice* where Othello is betrayed; misled by his friend Iago into murdering his wife Desdemona thinking that she had been unfaithful to him. Njau confesses that the pain has largely come from falsehood that has been peddled about her by an individual who is close to her and she considers the individual to be an intelligent person. The reader can infer that the source of Njau's pain came from within her family circle; however, she makes it clear that the pain has not been caused by her blood realtives or her kinsmen because she makes reference to her childhood, her family memories

with nostalgia; she escapes the painful present by recalling her childhood that was filled with love and laughter. In stanza three line two, Njau recalls, "Inspired by Guka's words of wisdom".

Njau further confesses that in most of her adult life, she has felt alone and detached from the rest of the human society and has come to find solace in nature; that nature has provided her with company when human beings gave her pain. She narrates, "I stand alone beside a sweet-scented bush, to ease my tormented spirit" (Stanza two line two and three). By saying she is alone yet she was married is Njau's way of signaling to the reader that her marriage was problematic and that her marriage partner was the cause of her emotional pain. She confesses that the pain arising from the malicious gossip spread about her caused her to harbor bitterness that made her find it difficult to forgive. Pain also made her unable to respond to stimulation provided by the natural environment. In the first stanza, lines four and five, Njau confesses that although she is a lover of nature, at some point in her moments of agony, she could not respond to the twittering of birds, "Little birds have been twittering in my backyard, but I cannot hear them". Njau is signaling to the reader that emotional pain and trauma has the potential to desensitize and kill human beings. She narrates that when the pain and feelings of being alienated from humanity made her also seek for solace in spirituality in addition to nature and the recall of fond childhood memories. She recalls in stanza two lines 4-8: But in desperate helplessness.

I approach the Mugumo tree, in my compound
To offer my supplications
To the Comforter, the Life-giver
And erase the agonies of pain

The *Mugumo* tree apart from being part of the natural environment was used as shrine; a sacred place of worship by the Agikuyu people to connect with their creator deity and ancestral spirits thus creating a spiritual link between the physical and the metaphysical and bringing harmony to human life.

Njau laments about the damages that patriarchy has inflicted on the society and especially on women. She narrates that patriarchal tendencies almost robbed her mother of a chance to acquire education during the colonial period. She narrates that her grandfather was opposed to the idea of a girl getting education because in his worldview, a woman was supposed to grow up to become a wife and a mother and those two roles did not require education. To him, a girl child was an item of trade to be given out in marriage in exchange for livestock. To Njau, patriarchal social structures and beliefs deny the women a chance to empower themselves to become contributors to social development. She posits that Kenyan women should actively pursue the restoration of agency in their lives because men would not willingly grant it. Njau demonstrates this by propping up female characters that openly subvert patriarchy in its various forms and embrace progressive thought. She recalls the case of her mother who became an empowered woman because of exposure to education. Njau observes that her mother had to initiate the idea of going to school but when diplomacy failed her, she went against the grain to achieve it. She narrates that her mother disobeyed her father and ran away to join Thogoto CSM Boarding school. Her mother had to sneak away from home after her father denied her the opportunity to attend school. She narrates:

> However, her father who was aware that the missionaries were opposed to most of the Agikuyu cultural beliefs and traditions, did not want his daughter to have any contact with them. But her thirst for education, to enable her to understand the Bible, instilled in her enough courage to defy her father. One morning, she

> secretly crossed the Nyongara River, zigzagged through the forest and ended up at the CSM Boarding school (Mambere) at Thogoto. (9)

Njau's mother did not just defy her father by joining school, but she also went on to thwart his efforts to get her from the missionary school at Thogoto. Further, she went on to recruit her step-sister to join school and empower herself through exposure to the missionary education. Njau uses her mother's character to rally Kenyan women actively participate in changing the image of women in the society by claiming what they believe is their rights.

To Njau, education empowers individuals to better their individual lives and the society. She notes that when her father was joining school, he did not experience the same family resistance like her mother alluding to the discrimination of women. Her mother was only able to mend her frosty relationship with father after gets betrothed to a man from a wealthy background and her father is assured of a huge bride-price. Njau highlights this incident to bring to light the retrogressive cultural practices among the Agikuyu in which women and girls were commoditized by their parents as sources of wealth and owned by their husbands after bride-price. Njau narrates of the experience of her mother being accepted back by her father:

> It came when she found a suitor whose family owned a lot of cattle and was ready to give her father a larger number of them, as well as a flock of sheep. When that happened, she was forgiven. (10)

Njau notes her grandfather must have been motivated by paternalistic tendencies of male ownership and the fear of the loss of an economic asset and not the love of a father terrified of losing his child. The liberation of women from retrogressive cultural practices was not opposed by the men, but that in some instances, the biggest stumbling blocks for women was their fellow women. Njau laments that patriarchal philosophy hurt women not just physically, and economically but also psychologically; she narrates that years of patriarchal socialization made

women to suffer from false consciousness; to believe it was the way of life. She recalls that it was girls and women who made life difficult for the females who chose not to under female circumcision. Njau narrates about one of her teachers, a lady who made life very difficult for the girls who had not been initiated through the traditional way of circumcision. She recalls, "One of them was an act of malice, engineered by a woman teacher called Wambui who detested the sight of those of us who had refused to be circumcised". (51) She further narrates how girls her age made life difficult for those who chose not to circumcise their daughters due to their conversion to Christianity. She recalls of the incidence:

> One day during the initiation season, groups of newly circumcised young women started moving around the villages singing. They were all dressed in white calico sheets, fastened with safety pins, with a long line of coins fixed on one side of their garments. When they reached our village and saw us, they intensified their merry-making and started hurling nasty remarks at us. (50)

Njau narrates that patriarchal mindset played a huge role in the collapse of her marriage to Elimo Njau. She narrates that her husband did not consider her opinions because he believed that family decisions were to be made by the man. She narrates that soon after marriage, her husband and his father expected her to stop everything in her life and become her father-in-law's servant, a decision that her husband supported. Patriarchy relegates women to servitude, to serve men and her resistance to this kind of arrangement brought tension between her and her husband. Njau's husband behaved as if he owned her; she was his property and so was any other woman he fancied. This patriarchy mindset of ownership of women by men explains the violent tendencies exhibited by Elimo. When he got interested in the American art student called Philda Ragland and found her dancing with another man, he beat her and when his Wife questioned his actions, he beat her too. Njau narrates of the experience:

> In the middle of the merry-making, Philda was approached by a man who wanted to dance with her. She obliged and they started dancing. Then suddenly, Elimo rose from his seat, moved towards Philda and her partner, looking agitated. He then slapped her on the face and ordered us to leave the club immediately. What had gone wrong? To me, Elimo's behavior was shocking and unbecoming and I told him so in Philda's presence. Little did I know that I had disturbed a bee's nest. The following day, I was surprised to hear Elimo call me a trouble-maker and started shouting abuses at me in front of Philda and the children. Then he slapped me hard on the face when I continued to criticize him. (135)

The violence meted out on both Njau and Philda by Elimo springs from his patriarchal inclinations that make him treat women as children and possession; violence as a form of control is a mate-retention tactic situated in masculinity and patriarchy. This patriarchal world view causes Njau untold emotional pain and suffering; she loses her self-worth and dignity for being married to such a violent and controlling man and ends up seeking for a divorce. Elimo goes on to marry Philda despite being already married to Njau and when confronted, he makes it known that he celebrates polygamy because his culture allows it. To Elimo, his wife's feelings and emotional wellbeing do not matter; such mindset epitomizes patriarchy; that a man can marry the number of women he wants because they are not human enough to have feelings, they are his property. Njau refuses to be a property owned and used by Elimo; she filed for divorce as a way of leaving the toxicity of patriarchy symbolized by her husband. It is patriarchy that makes Elimo claim that he owned the family land at Ridgeways yet they Njau contributed equally to its purchase. Patriarchal philosophy denies women the ownership of property or means of production which further alienates them from the society. Many African communities are founded on patriarchal philosophy and as such, property is owned by men. Njau resists this mindset when she files a court case concerning the ownership of the property and thus claims her share through legal means.

To Njau, patriarchy is responsible for silencing the voices of women world over and denying their contributions to their societies and countries. As a scholar and educator, Njau notes that the history of Kenya's resistance to colonization and the fight for independence has tended to focus on the men and downplay the contribution of the Kenyan women. This, she notes arises from the patriarchal mindset that criminalizes the existence of women. As a reaction to this philosophy, Njau conducts her own independent research that ends up making several women freedom fighters conspicuous. She narrates that the absence of the stories of women in national matters disturbed her greatly and she dedicated time to research on the contribution of women from different Kenyan societies in terms of leaders or/and the resistance against colonization and the fight for independence. She confesses that this was a protest move against the deliberate silencing of women from national matters. She points out that she discovered that women played a bigger role than it has been acknowledged in Kenya's history.

Njau corrects this subjective version of Kenya's history by narrating the stories of women she considers pivotal developing their communities, occupying leadership positions and /or contributing the attempts of creating a Kenyan nation. She digs into the histories of individual communities to show that patriarchy paraded a false narrative that it was only men and very few women who were concerned with economic and political matters. To this extent, she narrates the stories of Mekatilili wa Menza among the Giriama, Me Po among the Digo, Ndiko wa Githura of the Agikuyu, Syotune from among the Akamba, Moraa wa Ngiti of the Abagusii and Nshehele wa Said Bwana, Mwanaidi and Mwanasiti of Kwale. Njau notes that some historical accounts have acknowledged the contributions of the Agikuyu, Aembu and Ameru women to the struggles of independence but notes there was silence about women from other Kenyan communities. Njau

narrates that many women from the different communities in Kenya played roles in dislodging the colonial administration. The celebration of women leaders is not just about staging a protest against patriarchy but also Njau's way of informing the reader that the creation of a nation needs the acknowledgement that all communities in Kenya have a role and are important; inclusivity is the key to creating a nation. By narrating the stories of these women leaders from different Kenyan communities, Njau is signaling to the reader that her story can be read as the story of Kenyan women. She is also providing these hitherto silenced women with a voice to speak to the nation republic and the world about their contribution to the emancipation of the country from British colonial rule.

Njau further points out that patriarchy is spread to the church, a space that is supposed to champion for fairness, inclusivity and justice. She points out that when worked at the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), the top positions were reserved for men. She narrates:

> Women's role in the church was an issue of great concern to me. I wondered why women were not recognized as equal persons in the decision making structures of the church, such as the Executive Committee of individual churches. While they worked so hard, carrying out various duties in churches, women's were hardly ever heard in those important committees. Why was the church reluctant to address those injustices? (153)

Njau laments about the historical tragedy that was the colonization of Kenya by the British and the far-reaching largely painful, traumatizing colonial experiences whose effects are felt to the present. She traces the colonization of Kenya starting from its infancy as part of British East African Protectorate in 1895 and later as a colony beginning 1920. Njau narrates about the atrocities of the colonial regime and how they entrenched the policy of divide and rule as a strategy of ruling the different African communities. This policy of divide and rule entrenched

tribalism and regionalism in the country something that has impeded the actualization of nationhood. She narrates about the Agikuyu colonial chief Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu and how he played a big role in the entrenchment of the British in Kiambu following his collaboration with Captain Smith. This collaboration by some Agikuyu elites led to the massive alienation of Agikuyu land, benefitting the collaborators and the British while disadvantaging the rest of the community. Njau makes this reference to history to bring to light a major problem that the country has been unable to deal with conclusively; land and colonial injustices in Kenya.

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The issue of land in Kenya has been a stumbling block in the achievement of the concept of a nation since independence; feelings of disillusionment and existential crisis that faced many communities in Kenya following colonization by the British did not end with the attainment of independence 1963. The British alienated the best lands on a massive scale for their settler farmers leaving many Africans destitute. Many African communities became disillusioned because any resistance to land alienation and colonial establishment was met with harsh military expeditions. Njau brings this out in her life narrative when she narrates about the story of Chief Waiyaki wa Hinga, one of the earliest casualties of British punitive measures of imprisonment or summary executions. Chief Waiyaki of Dagoretti protested against the colonial invasion and the violation of the rights of the Agikuyu people. He was arrested and exiled from home and died in Kibwezi while on transit to the coast. By appealing to the authority of memory, Njau narrates about the disillusionment and dislocation experienced by many African communities following colonization of the country. She recalls of her childhood experiences in the face of land alienation:

> Living as a community at Kihingo village during our childhood made us value our historical roots and develop a deep sense of sharing and togetherness.

> Nevertheless, I feel sad to recall that the closeness we had developed as close-knit families was disrupted when our homes were demolished by the British colonial government, supported by the home guards, during the land consolidation. (5)

Colonization led to dislocation and identity crisis among Africans and Njau feels that to move forward and forge a nation, Kenyans must look at their history and address issues that led to the state of disenfranchisement. She laments about the failure by successive post-colonial Kenyan governments to conclusively address the historical injustices inflicted on Kenyans by the British colonial administration. Njau points out that in Kenya, land is an emotive issue that has to be addressed in order to create a nation. She posits that land is not just a factor of production in economics but that for many Kenyan communities, land is tied to their identity and spirituality. Njau narrates that the loss of their ancestral land and how it has continued to affect her years later. She recalls:

> We were led out of our original homes like slaves and taken to a new habitation of two acre plots per family unit, in an area where social and spiritual values of the dwellers differed from ours. Up to this day, my brothers, sisters, cousins and others closely related, still feel the pain of the injustice done to us, especially by the home guards who benefited from the exercise. (5)

Njau laments about the atrocities of the British army and colonial administration and how they ended up traumatizing Kenyans through torture and detentions without trial. She narrates the events of 1954 to 1963 that came to be historically referred as ‘operation Anvil’, a violent campaign mounted by the British military in Kenya that aimed at rooting out all Mau Mau sympathizers from Nairobi. Njau recalls the violation of human rights and the racial and ethnic profiling of Kenyans during this period as many got imprisoned while others were killed on suspicion of being members of the Kenya land and freedom army. She recalls how her father was arrested in 1954 even though he worked for the British; his crime was being an African of

Agikuyu ethnic extraction, a community that was blamed for leading the rebellion. She narrates, "Father had never been a member of liberation movement such as the Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A), the Kenya African Union (KAU) or the Kenya Land and Freedom Army" (17).

Njau bemoans the colonial experience for she feels that it deeply scarred the collective Kenyan psyche and that this has not been given prominence in the national discourse. The British colonial rule in Kenya led to deep seated suspicion and created fault lines that have made it difficult to have a unified post-colonial Kenyan nation half a century later after independence. The divide and rule policy used by the colonial administration resulted into two groups of Kenyans; the collaborators who worked with the colonial powers and benefitted and those who resisted colonial rule and were rendered destitute. These two groups and their descendants have found it difficult to form a unified nation.

Njau stresses that looking back into history; especially Kenya's colonial history and making efforts to address historical injustices should be the first step by post-colonial Kenyan governments in the search for the elusive national identity. In 2009; the Kenyan government formed the *Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission* (TJRC) in an effort to address the historical injustices that have impeded the formation of a national identity. In its report handed to the government in 2013, the Commission mentioned land-related injustices to be a major impediment to national integration and cohesion. The Commission noted that there was a close connection between ethnic violence and land-related injustices. The report pointed out that the

land problem goes back to the time before British colonization. In the subsection titled "Land and Conflict" number 247, the report states:

> The Commission finds that land-related injustices started recognizably during the period of colonization of the coast by Arabs and later by the British both at the coast and in mainland Kenya. However, indigenous Kenyans expected the injustices to be fully addressed soon after independence but the first independence government failed to fully and genuinely address the problem. (66)

The report further said that failure to address land-related injustices created grounds for landless individuals and communities to involve themselves in attempts at solutions that included violence. Still on the section on land and conflict, the report noted that no independent government in post-colonial Kenya has ever bothered to act on the various land commissions reports. Further, number 248, on land and conflict section of the *Truth,* Justice *and Reconciliation Commission* report states that, "All post-independence governments failed to honestly and adequately address land- related injustices that started with colonization" (66).

The writer further bemoans the absence of the sisterhood of women by confessing that in her adult life, among those who caused her great pain were women. She tells of the story of the American student, Philda Ragland, whom she welcomed into her home when she came to study about art. Philda Ragland learned under Njau's husband, Elimo, but secretly started a sexual affair with him and later married him. Philda's affair and eventual marriage to Elimo caused Njau to suffer physical beatings and emotional pain; a case of a woman betraying a fellow woman by accepting to be in a polygamous marriage. When Philda invited Njau to her New Jersey home in the United States of America, she actively participated in a plan to discredit Njau's character by drugging her and organizing with two men to sexually molest her. She

narrates, "I suspected that a secret plan had been planned to discredit my character. I could not trust anyone including Philda" (143). Njau also recalls that the art journalist Margareta wa Gacheru who she accuses of writing one-sided stories about the couple Njau and Elimo as well as their joint art ventures, Paa ya Paa and Kibo galleries. By mentioning the two women by name, Njau is signaling to the reader that she is telling the truth; she does so to create credibility to her story. She narrates of Gacheru's one-sided reporting about the destruction of Paa ya Paa Gallery and the pain it has caused her both as a mother and as artist:

> But why did she single out Elimo's work. Other artists' works were also gutted by the same fire. Who were those artists? Why were they not given a chance to express their pain? What about my own writing on the self-taught artists, which Elimo confiscated from me? From my limited knowledge of journalism, a good journalist goes behind the scenes, in order to get a different perspective in the story and let readers judge what to believe. (254)

Njau confesses to her readers that this lack of camaraderie among women; the absence of the sisterhood of women ends up causing women pain and impedes their emancipation from patriarchal social practices like the objectification of the female body; she almost got raped and a woman was at the center of organizing such a vile act against a fellow woman. Ogundipe-Leslie Molara in, "African Women, Culture and Another Development" opines that ignorance and false consciousness among women plays a big role in their subjugation by patriarchy. Molara calls this phenomenon of women actively participating in their own oppression, "the sixth mountain" on the African woman's back" (107). Molara observes:

> Women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Their own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. (114)

Even though Njau structures her life narrative as a lamentation, she ends it with a victory song signaling to the reader that she views herself as a victor not a victim and that despite the pain in her life, there are issues she celebrates:

> For years I searched for the seed of freedom, justice and peace
> I searched in the Holy places where worshippers congregate
> I peeped at every hole and corner,
> Beating bushes and shrubs to unearth the precious seed;
> But what I found was the seed of hopelessness
> The seed of fear and hatred;
> The seed of greed and lust for power;
> The venomous seed which destroys people's precious dreams.
> I had to change course; I had to discover alternative paths to follow
> Now, I rejoice my journey is almost over;
> The doves and the sparrows have started twittering in my backyard.
> They have taught me to sing their songs;
> Songs that end in teardrops of joy;
> Songs inspired by tales of courage and wisdom of those dear
> Ones now departed;
> Songs that have made it possible for me
> To live a creative life, creating stories of mysteries and wonder.
> Now, I can keep my head up, guided through
> The mercy of the Comforter and the Life-Giver, who has
> Emboldened me
> Never again to be hostage of imaginary phantoms. (278)

Here Njau points out that her life been punctuated by injustices that have caused her pain and despair but in the midst of the pain, she found people, institutions and issues to celebrate because they gave her inspiration, hope and support. Song as used in the poem is a metaphor for celebration and victory; victory over her pain and enemies. Songs are an African way of celebrating. She celebrates family, "Songs inspired by tales of courage and wisdom of those dear ones now departed" (lines14-15), art and artists, "To live a creative life, creating stories of mysteries and wonder" (line 17), the justice/judicial system, education and the

environment/nature, “The doves and sparrows have started twittering in my backyard. They have taught me to sing their songs” (Lines11-12).

Njau celebrates art and the artist in her life narrative as being very central to the wellbeing of individuals and the society. She feels that art has so many roles in human life but it has not been prioritized as it should and that many challenges affecting human societies have been as a result of this relegation of art to the periphery of life. Writing about the place of art in the society in the “Saturday Nation” dated May 16, 2020, Godwin Siundu posits that art and the artist make it possible to demarcate a land from a mere geographical phenomenon into a nation. He points out it is the writers who help craft a nation by capturing stories of shared experiences making citizens identify with each other. Siundu argues that art transcends national and cultural boundaries by its appeal to what elevates humanity; that the literary output of renowned European writers from as far as the 14 century to the 20 century, inspired African artists who in turn helped the emancipation of Africans from colonial subjugation by writing stories about colonial atrocities . Of these European writers he points out:

> These writers were not just cultural monuments that made their countries stand out; they also became whetstones upon which the first generation of African political and intellectual leaders sharpened their anti-colonial struggles in their quest for Europe’s recognition of Africans’ humanity and the restoration of their liberty. (19)

Siundu further observes that art has a transformative capacity; it makes individuals to become better members of the society, a key factor in the creation of a nation. To Siundu, it is the artist who empowers citizens by creating awareness of the social, economic and political realities in their locality, through stories. Siundu observes that, “It is not a historical coincidence therefore,

that some of the most outstanding African leaders-overlooking their individual weakness-were also literary writers or historians of note" (19).

Njau looks at art as a key element to making life bearable and worthy to live. Stories were and still are used for socialization purpose and enriching life by many Africans especially following colonization. She points out that art helps in dealing with trauma and narrates how their displacement as a family during the colonial period brought pain and that they dealt with the pain by telling and listening to stories. Njau recalls:

> However, in order to chase the gloom way, we would listen to village jesters who had entertaining stories to tell. One of them was a young man whose jokes were unforgettable. One day he related to us how his father, a great disciplinarian gave him a severe beating for wrong doing. He told us the story in such a humorous way that we almost broke our ribs laughing. He said his father held him by the neck like a goat, dropped him down like a sack of potatoes and covered his mouth to stop him calling for help. It was a sad incident but the humour in telling it, flooded our cheeks with tears of laughter. His jokes brightened our lives during childhood. (5)

Njau brings to the attention of her readers the power of art; stories helping in healing broken spirits. The stories told by the village jester made her and her siblings cope with the pain and trauma of dislocation after their family land was alienated by the white settlers and African home guards. Story telling also accords one a form of therapy; the young man who told the jokes would bring joy to his life by retelling his story help heal trauma induced by parental violence. Story telling precedes a collective healing process that will help recovery and wholeness in the human society undergoing existential crisis. She recalls that when her husband became irresponsible, violent and adulterous, she found healing in writing her novel, *Ripples in the Pool* She narrates:

> During the writing of the novel, I could hardly sleep. I shed tears as I wrote certain parts. I would be filled with such passion that my whole body would be shaking. I didn't know why but what I'm certain of is that writing that story was therapeutic. (176)

She further narrates how during her studies at Makerere University, the acrimonious fall out with her romantic partner, a fellow student called Zak, caused her untold mental anguish that almost left her with a mental breakdown. She had discovered that her partner Zak was having a sexual relationship with a fellow man, the University chaplain, named Reverend Dennis Payne. She narrates of the experience:

> I was desperate to find an outlet, through which I could emerge out of my hopeless state of mind and become stronger and less dependent on others. I further realised that the hope of ever making a career in drama as an actress, was fast fading. Nevertheless, I was convinced that I could still use other aspects of drama to distract my mind from the pain of rejection and injustice. (85)

To deal with the pain, sleeplessness and recurring nightmares, Njau immersed herself in art by reading Franz Kafka's, *The Metamorphosis* and thereafter, she wrote a play she titled, *In the Round Chain.* Hester Parr in, "The Arts and Mental Health: Creativity and Inclusion" observes that mental health patients who were exposed and involved in artistic endavours were noted to experience feelings of stability, increased sense of resilience, that art facilitated self-directed therapeutic processes, demonstrated increased self-understanding and prompted self-esteem. She further notes that, "artistic practice facilitated a sense of psychological locatedness, enabling a temporary all-consuming occupational space that distracted negative and disruptive thoughts and emotions" (17). Njau points out that art punctuates people's lives regardless of the occasion. She narrates that during her childhood, stories were a form of entertainment as well as a means of inculcating critical thinking skills among the young. She recalls that as she and her siblings

waited for their mother to prepare and serve them food in the evening, stories occupied their time and provided entertainment. She narrates:

> In the meantime, we would entertain ourselves by relating amusing stories or interesting incidents of the day. One of the most entertaining pastimes involved describing an interesting person and from the description, one was expected to find out the person's identity, within the shortest time. (14)

To Njau, art is central to the wellbeing of human beings because it touches every sphere of human life. Art has economic value in many ways; she recalls that stories made their work more enjoyable; literature makes people do more work and enjoy it thus increasing their productivity and economic output. She recalls that reading interesting stories made their time in the farms interesting and enjoyable. She narrates:

> Reading was such an ingrained habit in us that whenever we were sent out to the field to cultivate or harvest, we would take with us novels hidden inside our baskets. An inspiring story always filled us with happiness and joy. (18)

Njau observes that art not only helps in the socialization process in a family, it also promotes emotional and mental wellbeing of individuals. She narrates how she at one point found her siblings very jovial because their brother Sammy was playing a guitar and singing for them, on landing from Mombasa. She recalls, "he had a guitar and was playing some beautiful songs; both in Kiswahili and English. Some of my siblings were seated around him; enjoying listening to his beautiful tunes" (23). There is a detailed description of Njau's siblings as being ecstatic because of the presence of art and an artist in their family. Njau narrates about her brother's stories:

> The stories were so juicy that my siblings were almost choking with laughter. They seemed so free, so happy and so mesmerized by Sammy's mystical narratives and guitar music. Sammy had the skill of making people break into laughter and keep laughing while he showed no emotions. (24)

Laughter has positive effects on human relationships as it fosters feelings of camaraderie as is seen in Njau's family. Njau notes that the artist not only makes people happy with their art and thus plays a role in promoting human mental and emotional health through laughter, the artist also plays a pedagogical role in the society; using their craft to pass across and inculcate useful social values necessary for harmonious co-existence. Among the stories Njau's brother, Sammy was telling his siblings was the narratives of Karani and the ghosts of Mombasa. Sammy uses the story to pass important life lessons like the respect of women and caution against sexual exploitation. In this story, the lead character, Karani is a worker stationed at Mombasa. He helps a woman but it turns out that his help was not extended out of pure altruism but because Karani harbored sexual predatory traits; he houses a stranded lady but goes to ogle at her body in the middle of the night and was about to sexually violate her but the tables were turned. Njau recalls the story, "That night at around midnight, he made a big blunder. After making sure that the young lady was sound asleep, he took his dimly lit hurricane lamp, quickly crawled to her room and stood beside her bed" (25). Njau here makes the point art is alive to social realities but goes past reflecting the society to providing a way forward; providing solutions to social problems. Karani is painted as a hypocritical individual who uses stage-managed hospitality to achieve his selfish goals.

The objectification of women; a social, legal and a human rights problem has its roots in the patriarchal social structures in many Kenyan societies and many a times, the victims never get justice. Karani does not talk to the lady nor does he bother to find out more about her seemingly destitute situation; his interest is on her physical attributes; her birthmark. To deal with antisocial behavior exhibited by Karani, the story ends with him being punished for his predatory behavior,

"he watched her reaction, and to his surprise, she neither expressed disapproval at his ill-omened action nor showed any emotion of anger or excitement. As he got ready to perform a nefarious act and find what would happen, the girl vanished into thin air as quickly as lightening" (26). For indulging in exploitative and demeaning behavior, Karani is humiliated as poetic justice is achieved. The lady who turns out to be a spirit being inflicts grievous injuries on Karani's body and puts so much fear in his life that he relocates immediately, abandoning his work station to run back to his home:

> The woman's protruding canine teeth, looking like those of a man-eating creature, scared him so much that he jumped up like a deer and ran for the door. But not before he could get away, the creature got hold of him, tore into his ears furiously and continued biting and devouring the skin of his face ferociously. He screamed for help so loudly but no one appeared to help him. (26)

Njau refers to this narrative told by her brother to illustrate that art is a pedagogical tool. Through it, she is able to communicate a higher social truth; that sexual harassment comes with not just issues of emotional destabilization but that it has an economic angle to it; Karani the perpetrator of sexual violence is forced to abandon his job as he ran for his dear life. Karani's social maladjustment as a sexual predator cost him his job, "The incident taught him a great a lesson. He packed his belongings and secretly left Mombasa, never to return" (26). Njau further recalls that her grandfather, who was an artist; a blacksmith, had mystical powers. She narrates that artists among the Agikuyu traditional setting, occupied a higher social status because of their powers of creation; they created useful tools and weapons from iron mass. Njau recalls that before her grandfather embarked on his artistry in the form of ironworking; he would conduct a traditional ritual to reconnect with the spiritual world. She recalls:

> Before embarking on his work, he would carry out a ritual which involved sprinkling a little Gikuyu honey 'beer' over the furnace, uttering words of supplication to the ancestral spirits and appealing to God for guidance and protection. Moreover, he was admired for his generosity. (38)

Njau elevates artists in her life narrative as a way of centering art in human life. The character of her grandfather as a blacksmith with mythical powers and unrivaled generosity alludes to the character of Camara Laye's father in his autobiography, *The African Child.* This strategy of using allusion to well-known literary works is Njau's way of constructing herself as an artist as well celebrating art and directing the attention of the reader to the place of art in human life.

Njau also looks at art as playing the role of a constructive pastime for human beings especially the youth. She recalls the experiences of her youth to support this. She recalls that after working; washing clothes, she and her sisters would read novels to pass time as they waited for the clothes to dry. She narrates, "We loved washing clothes at the riverside, especially when mother was away from home. During that time, we had a chance to enjoy reading our favorite novels freely, as we waited for the clothes to dry" (19). Njau narrates that when her husband Elimo Njau deserted the family in Tanzania, she was overwhelmed by the family responsibilities; she felt abandoned and she did not have a source of income. She recalls, "Up to this day, I'm pained whenever I recall the helpless situation my children and I endured during our stay in Moshi" (131). Njau narrates that art helped deal with her feelings of depression; art played the role of therapy to her. She recalls that it was an artist, Kiasi Nikwitikie from Mozambique who produced wooden sculptures that gave her inspiration; that art has the capacity to inspire creativity in human beings, which is necessary for survival. She also confesses that producing art made her life bearable. She recalls, "The two sculptures inspired me to write exciting folktales" (132). When she moved to Moshi, her new found job as an art teacher helped her to provide for

her family and to supplement her meager income; she got into making tie-dye clothes. Art therefore saves her and her children from destitution. She recalls:

> When I was not teaching, I spent most of my time making tie-dye cloth ready to sell at *Sanaa Zetu*, mainly to members of the international community at the Kilimanjaro Medical Center and also the International School. In that way, I was able to sustain the family. (134)

Njau uses art as a way of healing from the pains inflicted by her husband and the trauma of divorce. By telling her story, she intends to clear the air on issues affecting her marriage, the bitter fall out with her husband, the loss of the art galleries of Kibo in Moshi, Tanzania and Paa ya Paa in Kenya. The telling of stories therefore is a form of therapy that precedes recovery and wholeness; Njau points out that art has the power to re-establish equilibrium in hurt, bruised and traumatized individuals. She also revives the age-old debate started in classical Greece by Plato and Aristotle about the role and place of art and artists in the society. Njau does this by recounting how her immersion into art at one point when she was young, interfered with her duties. One day she and her sisters sneaked novels to the farm and instead of working; they read their novels the whole day. She narrates:

> One day, Karen, Grace and I were sent to Ndeiya, at our Guka's homestead to work on a new patch of land. It was Christmas Eve. We left home at dawn and walked more than fifteen kilometers to get there. Hidden in our baskets were the usual, our favourite novels. When we got there, we convinced ourselves that we were too tired to start working and needed at least half an hour or so to rest. We brought out our books and started to read. For the next two hours, we buried ourselves inside those thrillers. (18)

Here Njau lets the reader feel that art can make one to become quixotic and delusional; she confesses that having read the thriller novels that day, she started seeing the clouds transform themselves into mythical creatures, giants in the sky. She recalls of that incident:

> I lay on my back, watching the drifting clouds sail gently in the sky. As they moved, they formed strange-looking creatures, fascinating to watch. "Look at these clouds and the giant creatures created in the sky!" I remarked, "Look at the way they are enjoying themselves up there because it is Christmas Eve! (19)

Njau here makes allusion to the character of Don Quixote in Miguel De Caventes' *Don Quixote.* Don Quixote read so many romantic novels about the knights that he lost touch with the reality and started to mistake windmills for giants. Although Njau and her sisters failed to work only in that particular day and rescheduled another day to compensate for the failure, she uses this incident to center the debate about art just like it was in ancient Greece. To Njau, this debate is beneficial for the nation since it will lead to the generation of great ideas. She feels that this debate helped ancient Greece in developing as a nation and becoming the cradle of European civilization; Kenya can benefit greatly if this debate becomes part of the national discourse.

Njau also highlights the centrality of the environment and the natural world to human life and existence. She celebrates nature and the environment and uses the autobiographical narrative voice to advocate for environment preservation in the country and the world. She points out that the environment/nature has played a huge role in her life; it provided her with a form of therapy and inspiration; a form of rebirth. Njau narrates how she seeks solace in nature when contact with fellow human beings proves painful and traumatic. She adopts the *Mukungugu* tree (*commiphora emini*), a very important tree among the Agikuyu community, as her totem. This is a fast growing tree that is usually loved by goats and birds and also has medical value; its back help relieve toothache. It was also used to support yam vines and as a boundary marker. Taking this tree as her guiding light helps connect her to her cultural past as well as buttress her identity as an individual who is supportive of those who need help and a conservationist. The tree is a metaphor for the natural environment and how such it supports human life; the symbiotic

relationship between her favourite tree and the yam is a reflection of the relationship between human life and nature; human life is intertwined with the environment/nature. She recalls how her grandfather's compound and its environs had so many trees. She narrates:

> There was so much to see and learn in the wilderness which bordered his homestead. The trees with leaves of every shade of green; quick moving hares and rabbits; the porcupines with their sharp quills; the moles with velvet-like fur and birds with their mystical and melodious songs, were a source of joy. (27)

Njau describes to the reader the joys she would find in the wilderness as a way of championing for the preservation of the environment; the different wild animals, trees and birds co-existed harmoniously with her grandfather because he did not degrade the environment. Njau narrates that the environment is connected to the cultural and spiritual realm of human beings as it was pointed out by her grandfather. She recalls that the *Mukungugu* tree was treated with respect because it was traditionally a symbol of security in the Agikuyu homestead. She narrates:

> There two trees have similar qualities, but they are not related. There are many other trees, like the Mukungugu, whose functions are different. For instance, the Mukungugu is grown on the right hand side of the hut's entrance which is considered to be the dwelling place of the spirit of the dead. It acts as the household guardian. (37)

Through the use of the fantastic, Njau stresses the interconnection of the survival of human life with nature. She does this by including a folktale told by her childhood friend about a blacksmith and a dove. In the story, a dove witnesses the atrocities committed by an ogre by denying the blacksmiths wife food. The blacksmith had left his expectant wife at home and travelled to far off lands to work and it was during his absence that his wife gave birth and a monster was eating all the food in the homestead. It is through the singing of the dove sent by the wife that the blacksmith gets to know what was happening and quickly rushed home, killed the monster and saved his wife and son. Njau uses this tale to buttress the argument human life is dependent on

nature and therefore is important to conserve the environment for it is central to the survival of the human species.

Njau recalls her meeting with the an Ethiopian artist called Skunder Borghossian in New York city and says that she noticed he was overwhelmed by city life and that to create a feeling of closeness to nature, he had started painting on goatskins. Ronen Berger in "Incorporating Nature into Therapy: A Framework for Practice" observes that patients who had their therapy done in a natural setting recorded faster recovery. Berger notes that the dynamics of postmodern life predispose individuals to inner disintegration. He observes that being one with nature triggers strong emotions that were not previously touched or shared. (10) Berger links this influence of nature on individuals to the rituals that human beings conducted in the early civilizations when they entirely depended on nature. Berger posits:

> The concept of touching nature is based on the belief that through direct physical, emotional, and spiritual encounter with nature, one can touch upon deep parts of one's personality, receive profound insights, and sense a strong connection to the universe. This opportunity can help a person develop qualities which otherwise would be difficult to access in an intensely modern lifestyle. (10)

Njau recalls this incident to highlight the role played by the natural environment on the human spirit; the characteristic rapid urbanization is in her a view fuelling the detachment between humans and nature. When she settled at Ongata Rongai, she confesses that the absence of trees in her new environment made her life boring, she recalls, "There were no bushes or trees branches upon which the little birds could settle and sing joyfully at dawn. I found it boring without their happy chatter and started looking for tree seedlings" (235). Njau uses the city as a metaphor for modernity and seems to posit that human civilization should not come at the expense of the environment. She leaves the city, a space where she experiences pain and psychological

disequilibrium and heads to rural Ongata Rongai where she finds refuge and her life acquires meaning; she confesses regaining her creative capacity and her self-worth is renewed; she feels proud and useful after building her children a home .She associates the natural environment with her cultural past and links the *Mugumo* tree that she planted at the entrance of her new home with her grandfather and childhood. She narrates:

> This one has grown to become a unique evergreen tree of great height, with thorny branches, and three crosses at its apex. The sight of the three crosses, the bigger one in the middle, takes me back to my childhood. I recall the lessons we were taught about Christ carrying the cross and dying for our sins. The *Mugumo*, which has also become a gigantic tree, awakens in me stories I learned from *Guka's* compound, it reminds me of my ancestors who taught me to work hard and become self-reliant person that I am today (235-236)

The writer uses her life narrative to celebrate the basic social unit; the family. She looks at the family as acting as the first educational space for children to learn life skills and values. She also celebrates the inspiration that family camaraderie can accord an individual; that family provides a support system for individuals. She notes that the social capital provided by the bonds of family kinship; the love, care and concern of each other's interests and wellbeing can go a long way in mitigating psychosocial destabilizations caused by traumatic life experiences. To Njau, the social, political and economic development of a nation is dependent on the family as a socialization unit. Parents are a child's first teachers and the lessons offered at home during a child's formative years shape the mindset and philosophy of a child to their adult life. Njau credits her parents for giving her a memorable childhood and inculcating social/moral values that have guided her life and made her a dependable national figure in education and art. She narrates that in her adult life, she has always been guided by her family values, "Even though I told myself that I was raised to be free, I still had to respect rules and restrictions laid down by my parents" (41).

The reader can see that Njau looks up to her mother as a role model and adopts her life philosophy in her adult life. She credits her parents for the person she turned out to be in life; a just, hardworking, morally upright citizen, an educator and an artist of international repute. She narrates, "Besides their busy schedules, my parents made sure that they found time to instill values that forbade laziness, greed, theft and bad language, among others. They taught us the value of being able to think and determine our individual goals in life" (13). Values and critical thinking skills are necessary in the actualization of nationhood and Njau here suggests that the challenges of the nation could be effectively addressed if the intervention measures are done at the family level; inculcation of values and critical thinking skills among children to start at home. Njau recalls how at one point while shopping at a butcher shop in Pangani, a fellow customer pointed to a dropped fifty shillings note which he assumed belonged to her. She told both the customer and the attendant that it was not hers but they prevailed upon her to take the money. Eventually she took it and went away but her value-trained conscience could not allow her to keep it, and she had to drive from Muthurwa to Pangani to take it back, only then did she experience peace. She narrates:

> What mother had had taught us during our childhood had remained in my subconscious mind over the years. I believe taking a shilling that does not belong to you is as bad as stealing millions. Theft in the African traditional society was considered to be a serious offence. That it is why the responsibility of parents to teach their children respect for positive and relevant traditional values, which are beneficial to developing their individual identity. (115)

Njau looks at nation building through the lens of the family; that most of the challenges that Kenya is facing could be dealt with at the family level. She points out that corruption and greed have contributed to social exclusion and underdevelopment as individuals in leadership positions divert national resources for private use. Njau looks at the family as the place where national

challenges could be addressed and social vices could be dealt with. She further observes that it is cheaper to deal with challenges related to nationhood at the family level; inculcating values to young children is easier that waiting to address their failures as adults; it is the adults who occupy leadership positions and if they grew up without moral values, they are likely to entrench vices like theft of public funds, violation of human rights and electoral malpractices. With the uptake of values entrenched at the family level, a country will have citizens who are solution and value oriented and development in all spheres; social, economic and political, will be easily achieved.

Njau celebrates her children Morille and Hannah for being an inspiration for her to keep pushing herself to be a better parent. She points out that her struggle to get a home in Rongai was inspired by the need to give her children a peaceful environment and a safe space to call home. She narrates that her children inspired her to actualize the dream of owning her home; a safe space for her and the children; away from the corrosive presence of her husband, Elimo Njau. She recalls how the completion of her house in Ongata Rongai gave her great pride as a mother for being able to provide a home for her children. She narrates, "I'm proud to have been able to build a home for my children and I through the sweat of my hands" (236). She celebrates her daughter Hannah for starting The Njau Foundation, a cultural organization focusing on African Art in the United States of America. She observes that her daughter has kept her dream of showcasing African art to the world alive. Njau further points out that when the family land was about to be auctioned by the Nairobi City Council for unpaid land rates, it was her son, Morille who came to her rescue. She recalls, "He told not to worry. He said he was going to apply for a

loan to clear those rates. Three months later, a waiver of the land rates was announced and Morille was able to pay Ksh. 700,000 to clear the outstanding amount" (263).

Njau confesses that her ability to survive the traumatic experiences of her marriage is partly tied to her family; her siblings. Njau's siblings provided her with social capital that proved critical in dealing with the feelings of dislocation and trauma when her husband abdicated his responsibilities and married another woman, effectively rendering her destitute. She exploited this social capital of family kinship to achieve therapy; she wrote a long letter, pouring out her pain to her sister because she knew her sister Grace cared about her wellbeing. She says in the opening part of the letter, "I have decided to write you this letter of lament to seek your support and encouragement as I struggle to forget August 1975" (183). This was in reaction to the realization that her husband had formalized his marriage to his American mistress, Philda. She notes observing close family ties can help one triumph over challenges instead of becoming anorexic. She narrates;

> I shudder to think what would have become of me if my siblings and I had not heeded our parents' advice to always stick together, for it was that rare solidarity that enabled me to remain afloat when I was faced with insurmountable problems. (13)

The concept of family according to Njau is not necessarily about blood relations making up the basic social unit; rather she looks at a family as being a unit held together by a shared sense of responsibility, love and care for each other's interests. She recalls that her grandfather adopted Biru, a Maasai boy he and other Gikuyu warriors had captured in battle. Tradition had it that prisoners of war would eventually be killed by the warriors but out of love, Njau's grandfather adopted Biru, protected him as a father and made him part of his family. She narrates:

> In order to protect Biru, he prepared a *rukwaaro* (a strip of goat's skin) and tied it around the boy's wrist to protect him against danger. When Biru grew up, Guka found him a Gikuyu girl to marry. And the girl bore him several children. (37)

Here Njau employs allusion to foreground the argument that it is love that makes up a family. She makes allusion to the story of Okwonko and Ikemefuna in Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart.* Unlike Okwonko who selfishly chooses to protect his reputation as a warrior and takes part in the killing of Ikemefuna, Njau's grandfather chooses human life over traditions and gives Biru love and life. If there is no harmony, love, care and concern for each other's interests, the family can become a source of pain, trauma and lead to the loss of inner equilibrium among individuals.

As an educator, Njau celebrates education as being an important and a life changing process among human beings. Njau narrates that education; both the African traditional education and the European one drastically changed her life. She notes that education has the power to build capacity and give people agency. She recalls that traditional African education, mostly done by elders was meant to make one learn their culture and history and thus facilitate the creation of the concept of identity. She recalls that her love for the environment and nature was inculcated in her by her maternal grandparents.

Njau narrates that colonial education was revolutionary in nature in its role of empowering Africans socially, economically and politically. She recalls that her father who was missionary educated was able to get a job with the colonial government and this made it easy for him to provide for his, large family. Mission education made Njau's father more accommodative of women, something that was not common in the deeply patriarchal Agikuyu society. She recalls how her father reprimanded one of his brothers who was both physically and emotionally violent to his wife. Through retrospection, she narrates about the incidence:

> He possessed good manners and exhibited qualities of a well-bred person. At one time when he learned that one of his brothers was consuming too much alcohol and quarrelling with his wife, threatening to beat her, he was so angry that he went to his house and reprimanded him, warning him of dire consequences if he was foolish enough to continue behaving in such a primitive manner. (8)

Colonial education empowered Njau's father economically and this is seen when he built the family a modern house that was more comfortable and he is also able to get himself a means of transport to ease his daily movement from Kanyariri to Nairobi. He became a progressive man in both thoughts and deeds because of his exposure to the missionary education. Njau recalls:

> On our compound, was the family house, a small cottage beside it, a two-roomed kitchen and a granary nearby. The houses, including the kitchen, were rectangular in shape and roofed over with iron-sheets which was an indication that the dwellers belonged to the *athomi* (enlightened) who had already received some mission education and adopted a new way of life. Most of the other dwellings were round in shape, grass-thatched, with walls plastered with clay or cow-dung. Those belonged to those described as *achenji* (primitive). (14)

Njau confesses that the European presence in Kenya was a paradox; it came with positive and negative effects on the Africans. She considers missionary education as among the positives. Through experience, Njau narrates that this form of education gave agency to the hitherto 'othered' African women. She recalls that her mother was able to wield economic power, a domain of men in pre-colonial and colonial period among many African societies, because of her exposure to missionary education. Missionary education helped African women like her mother to subvert patriarchal cultural practices that excluded women. She narrates:

> Similarly, mother's basic education and her experience under the missionaries, instilled in her progressive ideas, insight and ability to deal with many issues. One of her greatest gifts was her ability to focus on problems that faced the family and solutions. In order to keep the family healthy, she leased patches of land along river banks and grew various types of vegetables, sweet potatoes and arrowroots. I was highly impressed by her knowledge and ability to carry out duties and responsibilities usually reserved for men. Her impressive signature on the lease papers is still clear up to this day. (12)

By recalling about her mother, Njau is telling the reader that she would grow up to act like her, especially when she gets married and the marriage falls apart because of her husband Elimo Njau proved irresponsible and violent. She uses her mother to as her role model and therefore solidifies her identity as a responsible, loving, hardworking and innovative woman and a mother. Nancy Chodorow in, *The Reproduction of Mothering*: *Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* notes that the mother- daughter relationship is central to the development of the concept of identity in women and this explains why more often than not, female writers celebrate their mothers in their writings. She points out, "Girls in relation to their mothers experience themselves as overly attached, unindividuated and without boundaries" (137). Alina Rinkanya in "Some Trends in Kenya Women's Novel of the 21st Century" observes that characterization in these texts by Kenyan women writers is a strategy for creating new identities for the Kenyan woman. Rinkanya further points out Kenyan women writers of the 21st Century deliberately create characters who defy stereotypical roles assigned to women in many Kenyan societies. Rinkanya opines that characterization is a key strategy by Kenyan women writers to redefine women through literature. Women characters in these texts by Kenyan women writers are depicted as having tremendous personal initiative and courage to defy social expectations concerning gender roles. Rinkanya observes:

> Kenyan women writers of the new generation, which emerged in the current century following tracks of their predecessors , try to thwart the ossified gender roles and gender stereotypes by depicting in their works various problems, share with their readers recipes of how those problems could be dealt with and create role-model characters for further inspiration. (31)

To Njau, European missionary education played a bigger role in the emancipation of Kenyan women from retrogressive and degrading cultural practices that had contributed to their marginalization. Her missionary educated parents were keen to educate their children without

discrimination on the basis of gender because their own exposure to education had shown them the power; economic and social, that education gives an individual. The women characters who manage to achieve a measure of economic independence in this text are all educated. Apart from Njau's mother, there is her aunt Rebecca who becomes a nurse at Kenyatta National Hospital, then known as King George Hospital. Aunt Rebecca becomes an inspiration to Njau as a child. Njau's aunt, Rebecca manages to rise above social expectations of patriarchal society when she chooses not to marry; education therefore gave her agency to choose what would work for her life and stand above cultural tyranny. Agnes Kibui, Loamurthie Athiemoolam and Bernard Mwaniki in their paper, "Gender Equity in Education Development in Kenya and the New Constitution for Vision 2030" look at education as tool for economic development of a country. They are of the opinion that gender inequality in education apart from being a legal and a human rights issue, it also impedes economic take off in developing countries. They postulate that cultural factors play a big role in the perpetuation of gender inequality in the education sector. They observe that the problem is more pronounced in the rural communities which form the bulk of most of the developing countries' populations. They point out the recent changes in Kenya's education system have resulted into the accommodation of more girls and women and this has come to be because most communities have realised the central roles played by women in nation building. They posit:

> The fact that women's empowerment is key to achieving long-term development has been embraced among almost all governments of developing countries and this is due to the crucial role women play traditionally which is essentially managing households. (23)

Njau also narrates about her contribution to nation building in Kenya through education; she takes great pride in being the pioneer principal of Nairobi Moi Girls' school. She recalls that the experience of running the school, organizing for more building to be put up while at the same time teaching three subjects was challenging but rewarding. She narrates, "However, to me, teaching those girls was not just a job to earn a salary. It was a privileged opportunity to nurture and inspire them to grow and become responsible citizens who values discipline" (113). Njau credits the missionary education for spearheading the eradication of retrogressive cultural practices among African communities. Such cultural practices included female circumcision which is an affront to female sexuality. Female circumcision was inspired by patriarchal social philosophy that sought to deny women their right to enjoy sexual relations because men thought that a woman who had unrestrained sexual feelings was difficult to control. Njau points out that the eradication of female circumcision among the Agikuyu was initiated by the missionaries who also acted as the pioneer educationists and their African converts. She narrates:

> Led by Dr. J. W Arthur, a missionary doctor of the Presbyterian Church, the missionaries spoke vehemently against it and demanded to have early converts make a declaration denouncing the practice. Those who chose not to abide by the missionaries demands, broke away from the missionary churches and set up their own independent churches. (13)

Njau's mother was a missionary educated woman and a committed Christian. Njau recalls how her mother participated in the fight to end female circumcision in her area; to end this affront on female sexuality and womanhood. She recalls, "Being a great believer, mother was opposed to women circumcision and did her utmost to preach against it. Time after time, she would invite young girls to our home and explain in details why they should not embrace it" (13). Njau posits that the Kenya woman has to actively fight to restore agency in her life because the men would not willingly grant it. Njau demonstrates this by propping up female characters that openly rebel

against patriarchy in its various forms and embrace progressive thought especially after being exposed to education.

The writer celebrates the role and place of an impartial judicial system in a society. She points out that it was through the courts that she was able to get justice; to claim part of the family land that she rightfully deserved having actively contributed to its acquisition. She says of the struggle and the eventual victory through legal means, "It has been a long and tedious battle. I am grateful to all those who stood by me and encouraged me as I struggled to achieve justice" (278). Her celebration of the role of the judicial system is further seen when she includes court rulings, legal documents and judges' names in her autobiography, especially towards the conclusion of her narrative as an indication that the victory song that marks the end of her story is inspired by the court rulings; the courts contributed immensely in her change of status from a victim into a victor.

In narrating her life story, Njau also employs other autobiographical strategies apart from lamentation. These include a fragmented plot; structures her life narrative to resemble a hybrid of a poem and a play, journey motif, dream motif and allusion. Tom Odhiambo in the "Saturday Nation" dated August 31, 2019 points out that, "A poet and dramatists, Rebeka Njau writes her life story in *Mirrors of my Life* as if it is stanzas of a poem or acts in a play. Because of the style of the work, in which stanzas seem to have been merged with the act, we can read the memoir as a story told in cycles" (29). The point Odhiambo is making is that Njau tells her story is a fragmented manner. She uses digressive units like poems and oral narratives in between her narration. These digressive units help highlight issues, project her character and help her take a break from narrating pain and trauma. When narrating about her childhood in pre-colonial Kenya, Njau includes a poem that talk about circumcision:

Time after time,
Season after season,
I would watch long processions,
Of timid girls head to '*iruko*',
To have their most sacred parts of their bodies mutilated,
And I would ask myself:
When will this shameful,
Desecration of womanhood end?

Through this poem, Njau signals to the reader that she is opposed to some of the cultural practices in her Agikuyu community, especially those that degrade women. The language used communicates her stand on the issue of female circumcision: she talks of, "timid girls", "bodies mutilated" and "desecration" to paint the picture of a crime; the crime of torture and murder. She looks at female circumcision as a form of a death ritual to womanhood. By including this poem, Njau projects her character as being an individual who is opposed to all forms of degradation and social exclusion; female circumcision robs women of the right to enjoy sex and medical research points a risk of obstructed labour during childbirth and this can be fatal to both the mother and the child. The poem acts as a digressive unit since it helps Njau temporarily hold the narration of her story. She also has a whole chapter composed of poems and she titles the chapter as, "Lamentations 2". She uses the poems in this chapter to pour out her frustrations with patriarchy:

Toil and Sweat

Toil and sweat, what else is there?
When the sun is like fire scorches in the sky,
And every plant droops its leaves
As if to ask for mercy from the ruler of the day
When the strong maize plant is weak and useless;
Old women dark and bent trudge along
With their hoes to their drought stricken land.
Young wives like donkeys perform their never ending drudgery
From cock-crow to the setting of the sun;
Their scraggy figures like bows set in a row

Plod up and down the rolling village farms
With loads on their backs
And babies hanging down their bellies;
In the field all day they toil
Stirring up the soil with their hands and knives
Like chicken looking for worms.
Toil and sweat
What else is there?
For their minds are like dwarfed plants
Full of blisters at the roots;
Their joy is in their load, the hoe and the cooking pots
What other joy is there?
When the men ride away in the morning
And return at the dead of the night
Drunk and disorderly! (168)

Njau here decries the enslavement of women by patriarchal social structures. They work throughout the day in harsh weather conditions and without a break in order to provide for their families. The women are said to "Toil and sweat, what else is there?" (Lines 1, 18 and 19) The women are said to work under the scorching sun, "When the sun like fire scorches the sky and every plant drops its leaves" (lines 2-3) The image of fire points out to the hard and life-threatening conditions under which the women work. On the other hand, the men are said to be free of every responsibility. They are said to return at the dead of the night, "Drunk and disorderly!" (Line 25) Njau points out that the society treats women like slaves because all work is placed on their shoulders, "Young wives like donkeys perform their never ending drudgery" (line 8)

Njau also employs oral narratives within a story in her autobiography. She includes a narrative told to her by her childhood friend, Wairimu. It is a story about an ogre and a recently delivered mother whose husband is a blacksmith. It happens that at the time of her delivery, the woman husband was away and a monster took advantage of his absence to torment the wife. The ogre would cook and eat all the food; as a result, the mother almost dies from starvation until a dove alerts the blacksmith about the situation at home. The blacksmith travels back home and kills the ogre thus freeing his wife and son. Here Njau is telling the reader she is an artist and appreciates African oral literature. It is also a strategy of claiming her cultural identity as an African. Njau further uses excerpts from her plays and Novels. She includes excerpts from her first novel, *Ripples in the Pool*, and from two of her plays; *In the Round Chain* and *The Scar*. These helps Njau project her identity as a versatile artist. The structuring of her life narrative as both a poem and a play, the intense use of poems as digressive units and the cyclic nature of the plot are all meant to construct her identity as an artist with diverse artistic interests and trajectories; she is a novelist, playwright, poet and folklorist

Njau greatly utilizes intertextuality, specifically, intense allusion. She makes allusion to known literary texts throughout her life narrative; Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Camara Laye's; *The African Child*, Mariama Ba's; *So Long A Letter*, Plato's; *The Republic*, Aristotle's; *The Poetics* and the ancient Greek mythology of the phoenix, an indestructible bird. She further makes reference to literary artists and critics like Ama Ata Aidoo, Okot P' Bitek and Micere Mugo, painters and fine artists like Pablo Picasso, Michelangelo and Vincent Van Gogh. Njau projects herself as a resilient and indestructible individual who has withstood a lot of pain and difficulties. This is an allusion to indestructible mythical bird found

in ancient Greek mythology; like the phoenix that could raise from the ashes anytime it was burned, she survives many painful experiences, from rejection, betrayal, domestic violence, destitution, loss of job and sustenance, defamation and draining court cases and emerges victorious ;she begins her life narrative with a lamentation; in mourning and deep anguish ,but concludes the autobiography with a victory song; celebration and honour; to buttress her image as the phoenix.

The writer also uses dream motif. She has dreams of wild animals, like lions chasing to devour her. She recalls one such dream, "One night, after falling asleep, I dreamt of an antelope, that graceful animal with soft gentle eyes. I saw it moving fast, rising high up as it strode in the air, unafraid. Suddenly, I saw it turn into a lion and start coming towards me. I tried to get away but a strange force held me back. I could not move a single step. I was scared that I started calling for help. My own cries then woke me up. How relieved I was that it was only a dream!" (173). This dream turned into a nightmare is Njau's way of signaling to the reader that her emotional health was unstable and that her life was punctuated by fear, anxiety and pain. Dreams tend to show what has been dominant in a person's subconscious; an issue or idea that they have been thinking about. The lion chasing Njau in her dream is her way of acknowledging that she was experiencing intense emotional turmoil. This came about at the height of her marital problems.

She recalls, "However, I realized that I needed help; I needed to consult a doctor. When I did, Dr. Oluoch, our family doctor seemed to be aware of our marital problems and prescribed some tranquilizers right away" (173). Dreams are a fictional rendition of the realities a subject is dealing with in their lives; a reflection of what is dominant in their subconscious. The lion

chasing Njau in her dreams is her violent, philandering and selfish husband who had turned her marriage life into a torture space; a field for physical and emotional subjugation of Njau. She uses the autobiographical narrative voice to comment on issues like the place of family in nation building, the role of education in providing women with agency, the need for environmental conservation and the need for addressing historical injustices in Kenya's quest for nationhood.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter finds that Njau uses family and professional spheres as her fields of identity formation as an autobiographical subject. Njau uses the autobiographical narrative voice to advocate for environmental preservation in the country and the world. She points out that the environment has played s huge role in her life; it has provided with a form of therapy and inspiration; a form of rebirth. The chapter also establishes that Njau recounts Kenya's history as a strategy of inscribing herself into the Kenyan national narrative. She recalls of her contributions to nation building through education and art as a strategy of self-inscription into the national narrative. Njau intertwines her personal story with Kenya's history as a way of foregrounding the concept of autobiographical truth; the history events and personalities she narrates about in her life narrative can be independently verified through research of Kenya's history. This convinces the reader that Njau is telling the truth. Njau relies on retrospection, recall of her life experiences from her memory, to tell her story as the principal authority. She invites the reader into her experiences as she looks back in order to understand who she is today making her autobiography a confession.

She tells her story in the form of a lament; she is engaged in a lamentation as she bemoans the personal and national pains and trauma that punctuated her life; she laments about the damage inflicted by the British colonial administration, the corrosive nature of patriarchy and the absence of camaraderie among women. Njau uses her autobiography as a form of therapy; to facilitate healing from the pain of spousal betrayal, physical and emotional pain inflicted on her by her husband and some of his associates. However, despite the text being a lament, Njau ends it with a victory song to signal that she considers herself a victor and not a victim. There are also issues she celebrates despite being in pain; she celebrates family as a support system, the judicial system for extending justice to her, she celebrates education for its role in empowering and giving people, especially women, agency. She celebrates the healing power of nature and the environment and the place and role of art and the artist in the society.

The use of digressive units like poems and oral narratives within the story; the fragmented nature of the plot is an indication of an autobiographical subject in deep pain and a strategy for taking a break from the narration of a painful story; she is able to temporarily take leave in order to avoid a breakdown; it affords her space to find composure to recall her painful experiences and continue with the narration. This chapter further finds that Njau uses writing as a form of therapy to help re-establish her lost personal equilibrium; the narration of her story is meant to be both a way of seeking closure for the pains in her life' therapy and a way of clearing her name. She also uses paratextual elements like speeches, newspaper articles, book reviews and letters as a strategy of sharing intimate details and experiences and supporting her claims of being innocent of accusations leveled against her by her enemies.

CHAPTER FOUR

REWRITING THE EPIC. PHOEBE ASIYO'S *IT IS POSSIBLE*: *AN AFRICAN WOMAN SPEAKS*

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to examine how Phoebe Asiyo constructs her identity through the narration of her life story, *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks.* Vesna Lopicic in "Autobiography as Identity Quest: Todorovic and his *Book of Revenge*" postulates that, "The aim of an autobiography is thus to establish/confirm/perpetuate the identity of the narrator or to follow its development in the course of his life" (1). To Lopicic, all unique properties of the autobiography come together to help the subject narrator claim, project or /and formulate their identity. The chapter has three sections: section one deals with nature and functions of the autobiography, section two focuses on the strategies Asiyo employs in narrating her life experiences while the last section deals with the findings and conclusions based on the first two sections. The issues she raises her autobiography are be discussed alongside the strategies of narrating the self and the nature and functions of the autobiography. The autobiographical discourse on this text is anchored on the preposition that Asiyo writes her life narrative in the form of an epic.

4.2 Asiyo's *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks* as an Autobiography

In this section, I analyze the autobiography as a unique form of writing. I examine the nature and functions of the autobiography as manifest in Phoebe Asiyo's life narrative. French critic Philippe Lejeune in, *On Autobiography* defines the autobiography as, "a retrospective prose narrative that someone writers concerning his own existence, where the focus is the individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (22). Lejeune's definition reveals some key

properties of the genre: that the focus of the autobiography is the subject's life, individual life their life experiences, his own existence and their identity, his personality. James Olney in, "I was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiographies and as Literature" looks at the autobiography as, "a recollective narrative act in which the writer, from a certain point in his life-the present-looks back on the events of their life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the past history has led to this present state of being" (47). Olney's definition precipitates some key points: that life stories depend on memory, "recollective narrative", that the autobiography is held together by an introspective character/subject narrator, that the subject is involved in a retrospective interpretation of their life experiences, "looks back on the events of their life" and that the past or history has a bearing on the present identity, "how past history has led to this present state of being". Jennifer Muchiri in, "Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya" looks at the autobiography as, "an account of an individual life written by the subject and must be composed by the subject" (28). Muchiri's definition makes the autobiography a narrative that focuses on the life and experiences of the subject, imprinted with the authority of the subject's life experiences. The introspective character in involved in self-analysis where they look back upon their lives to solve the riddle of personal identity. The above definitions point out key characteristics of this genre of writing called autobiography. The autobiography is seen as a form of writing that depends on the analysis of the subject narrator's life experiences as the raw material, that in the process of analyzing the lived experiences, the subject has to look back or recall, hence rely on retrospection and memory, that the subject is engaged in an active search for identity as they look back on their lives; that the subject is the key authority in their life narrative and as such, the subject have power to choose what goes into their story and what to leave out; the subject is engaged in an artistic endeavor because they have

to organize the recalled experiences into a coherent narrative; the life of the subject is intertwined with history because the events of their life were not lived in a vacuum , rather they were affected by historical events. To write one's life story means that the writer will reveal themselves to the world; through self-analysis or introspection, they end up communicating to the world their personal convictions, hopes, dreams, fears, strengths and their interpretation of the world they live in. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* postulates that all autobiographical activities have an element of religion in them because of the introspective nature of the genre. It posits, "What makes an autobiography religious is the author's attempt to describe and evaluate his or her life from the perspectives of the author's present convictions about what is ultimate or sacred" (2).

The autobiography depends on the subject's experiences in order to tell a coherent narrative; the autobiographical subject recounts the events of their lives, past and present as they try to understand themselves and the world around them. Jennifer Muchiri in, "The Female Autobiographical Voice in Independent Kenya" postulates:

> An autobiography hinges on personal experience and is based on reflections. Due to this, its authors impose patterns on their lives and construct coherent stories out of them. Its underlying principle is the scrutiny of the self, with outside happenings, persons encountered and observations admitted primarily as they influence the consciousness of the person whose character and actions the writing focuses on. (2)

What Muchiri is saying is that, the study of the autobiography is the study of the life experiences of the autobiographical subject. She points out that the subject selects and organizes the events of their life in an artistic manner that results in the creation of a story the reader can follow and the that the focus is on the subject narrator's inner world though the outer environment will also be reflected in the autobiography for the subject narrator lives in a socio-historical ecosystem. In

Asiyo's *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks*, she narrates her experiences of being born and growing up in Luo Nyanza, a society that was rapidly changing due to the historical event that was the colonization of Kenya by the British. She narrates about her community being a deeply patriarchal one that greatly 'othered' the women while the British colonial administration was founded on the philosophy of European racial supremacy and patriarchy; the Luo culture discriminated the woman on the basis of gender while the colonial administration discriminated the African woman on both the basis of gender and race.

The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists defines patriarchy as, "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 spheres derives its legitimacy from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance" (5). Asiyo recalls how she grew up watching the women in her society being treated as beasts of burden. She narrates:

> I grew up at a time when most domestic duties were left for women. The daily chores comprised of tilling the land, fetching firewood, cooking, washing clothes, cleaning, processing grains, fish and other activities. Most women would down the clock in the farms to ensure that hunger was kept at bay. The common belief was that a decent woman cared for her family's culinary needs. Interestingly, even as a child, I could see it; I could smell it. Women shouldered an inordinate family workload, caring for children and husbands. I gather it was the same story in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In matters education and important decision making, the women in Karachuonyo were often relegated to the back seat. The men took charge. (3)

This childhood experience greatly affected Asiyo's world view and she grew up questioning the validity and value of patriarchal ideology; she adopted a position against patriarchal policies from a young age. Including this experience early in her life narrative is Asiyo's way of telling

the reader that her life will revolve around the push for inclusivity in the society by fighting all forms or exclusion, starting with patriarchy and racism that was perpetrated by the British colonial government in Kenya. The use of food metaphors such as "fish and grain" is meant to center women in the existence of the society, a society that treats them without dignity and respect; Asiyo is pointing out the irony that is the society's exclusion and demeaning of a section of itself that is responsible for its survival. She is telling the reader that women are paramount to the survival of the society. She traces her discomfiture with patriarchal social structures and social exclusion to her childhood and observes that the belief that she could excel in anything and everything she set her mind on as reinforced at the family level specifically by her father.

Asiyo narrates that even the school, which is supposed to be a space where gender barriers are broken and equality extended to everyone was deeply immersed in patriarchal philosophy. She recounts of her experience at Gendia primary school when at one point the European missionaries who also acted as teachers decided that English and Mathematics were to be taught to boys alone. She narrates:

> The missionaries made a decision not to teach girls Mathematics and English language. They argued that the two subjects were for future breadwinners. In their wisdom or lack of it, they claimed that since girls were destined to be housewives anyway, there was no need therefore to waste precious time and energy teaching them how to count and speak English. (19)

Asiyo further narrates of her experience at Kamagambo School where the administration encouraged the boys to take up leadership positions because the assumption was being a male was the key qualification to lead. She recalls that being a female student ensured that the highest leadership position she could occupy was a deputy school captain since the head or captaincy could only be occupied by a boy. This realization hurt her and she questioned the rationale used

to arrive at the conclusion that a girl could not head the student leadership. She points out that in matters academic, the head boy could not match her performance. She narrates of the experience:

> Two years after joining Kamagambo, I rose to the position of a head girl, but by virtue of being a girl, I was relegated to the position of a deputy head. This assumption of my inferiority did not sit well with me because it happened that the head boy was a student I had defeated when students from Karachuonyo who were at Kamagambo at the time were electing their officials but I had to live it anyway. (20)

Asiyo protested this injustice, being denied the opportunity to lead the students on the basis of her gender. This incident at foreshadows to the reader, Asiyo's revolutionary approach to national politics when she eventually decided to venture into active politics as a member of parliament for Karachuonyo constituency. She does not accept the way her society excludes women on the basis of being women and points out her willingness to be a vanguard of social inclusivity and equality. Asiyo narrates that even with the entrenchment of the colonial leadership in Kenya; things did not change for the better for the African women for the British colonial administrators were also defined by their patriarchal inclinations. To Asiyo, British colonization and rule of Kenya is a historical tragedy that made life unbearable for the Africans and especially the African woman who had to contend with double displacement by colonization and patriarchy. She narrates of the experience of living in a patriarchal society whose discriminative policies had the support of the colonial administration. She recalls:

> The Luo community like other African communities in Kenya, placed women in subordinate roles in the family. The lowering of the women's status was further exacerbated by the colonial government which also endorsed customary law in which women wielded very little power, if any, in both civic and social circles. Under customary law, property was owned by men. It reduced women to dependents who had to submit to the will and wishes of their husbands or male relatives to survive. In fact, women were in many ways seen as minors. Customary law turned fluid and flexible traditional practices into hard and fast

> rules that were oppressive to women. While traditional customs were both adaptable and sensitive to extenuating circumstances, customary laws were not. (19)

Colonial rule further marginalized the African woman by supporting African cultural constructions that only catered for the men. Apart from being a racially bigoted outfit, the British colonial administration in Kenya was also deeply patriarchal; historically, there was no female colonial administrator in Kenya, the British women were treated as appendages to their husbands; with no voice or role to play for the colony apart from domestic chores for their husbands. She narrates how life changed for Africans as a result of being under an oppressive and dehumanizing regime; she recalls how the struggle for independence by the Africans was met with brute force especially during the time of the state of emergency that started in 1952. Prior to this, the British had drafted Africans into its military and sent them to war. The Africans had been promised money, land and freedom on coming back from the war but none of that was honored; only the British soldiers were rewarded. Even though the war casualty among the African soldiers was high but the survivors got the necessary experience to organize an army and fight for their freedom. The betrayal of the African war veterans by the British government led to the creation of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army that went by the popular name, Mau Mau. Hitherto, Africans had been given the false narrative that Europeans could not be killed but the war experience as they fought alongside British soldiers exposed this idea of European invincibility as a lie.

The Mau Mau wagged a vicious guerilla war against the British administration and settler farmers for years and in 1952, they killed a colonial chief called Waruhiu, a key ally of the colonial government and this is what led the then Governor for the Kenya colony, Evelyn Baring to declare a state of emergency; the suspension of the civilian rule and deployment of the British

military to contain the rebellion. Asiyo narrates how she was caught up in the middle of the war between the Mau Mau and the British soldiers. The use of dates is Asiyo's strategy of creating credibility in her story. She recalls that the period saw many families broken as parents were either killed or detained in the several concentration camps that were established throughout the country. She recalls:

> Many African children were left destitute in the countryside and along city estates, owing to the rigorous political crackdown on African adults. Most parents were forcefully sent to detention camps, killed by the British forces or even by fellow tribesmen, leaving behind children who needed love and care. (41-42)

The autobiography as a genre is immersed in history. Smith and Watson in *Women, Autobiography, Theory* observe that, "the autobiography has been employed by women writers to write themselves into history" (5). Asiyo inscribes herself into Kenya's history by intertwining her life with the history of the country. She recalls Kenya's history in great details, especially the country's experiences under the British colonial administration. Through the recall of Kenya's history, Asiyo makes it possible for her life narrative to be read as an alternative source of the country's history. Asiyo narrates that this was a period marked by pain and despair among Africans and that she was among those who gave their fellow Africans support and hope. She notes that the future of any country depends on the realization that the children are the foundation upon which a country is build; a neglected and traumatized childhood is like to produce a society and a country of broken and socially maladjusted adults. She notes that the British army committed atrocities like mass rapes, massacre of African detainees and forceful evictions. She narrates that this colonial experience forced her to change careers as she wished to serve the nation by taking care of the young children and women as a social worker. She recalls of the experience:

> My life would take a turn in 1952 after the Governor of Kenya Sir Evelyn Baring declared a State of Emergency in the country. Circumstances forced me to abandon my teaching job at Pumwani School to join the Municipal Council of Nairobi as a Social Worker- there was need for social workers during this period. (41)

Asiyo posits that the essence of leaderships is to serve the people and especially the vulnerable and the needy like children and women. She points out that the atrocities against Africans by the British was a statement that the subjugated population was a property of the colony and it epitomized social exclusion on the basis of race; a strategy of denying Africans their humanity. She confesses that despite her efforts as a social worker, the trauma induced by the war experience in Kenya between 1952 and 1959 needed to be handled at a national level for collective national healing. She recalls:

> The noble ideas aside, the struggle for independence brought a lot of suffering to the local African population. It led to serious family disintegration and breakdown and breakdown in relationships. The struggle impaired the health and wellbeing of everyone, especially children. Although we tried help, the people were mostly powerless and voiceless. (43)

Asiyo postulates that the future of any country depends on the experiences given to the young one, especially in their formative years. She highlights here that despite the attainment of independence in Kenya in 1963, four years after the conclusion of the State of Emergency, the independent government and successive post-colonial Kenyan governments did not prioritize the establishment of a national program or/ and process of venting the pent up trauma and pain Africans had experienced under an oppressive and violent British colonial administrations for many years. Asiyo brings to the reader's attention the importance of psycho-social programs for a population coming out of a war situation; Kenya's independence government did not realize the importance of national healing as a basis for a fresh start for its citizens and national development. Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* points out the importance of

dissociation for the oppressed from the oppressor in order to find a reality that will not revolve around the perpetration of acts oppression on others. Freire observes that the end of an oppressive regime or situation does not necessarily free the oppressed individuals or societies due to what he refers to as, "adhesion" to their oppression. (43) He postulates:

> But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend to themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors". The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. This phenomenon derives the fact the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience; adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to their oppressor. (43)

To Asiyo, many of the problems Kenya has faced as an independent state stem from years of tyrannical colonial rule. She insinuates that the post-colonial Kenyan governments have not been different from the British colonialists; they became tyrannical and oppressive, using the very tactics that the British used on Africans. Asiyo attributes this to the failure by the first post-colonial government to spearhead complete disassociation from the colonial mentality. The Kenyatta government continued with the policies of exclusion and the silencing of dissenting voices. She recalls of Kenyatta's government:

> Kenya's political context in the late 1970s was characterized by the one-party absolute stronghold over the political affairs of the country. The government vested power in a strong prefectural provincial administration that frustrated any space for political liberty. KANU had perfected politics of control that only benefitted the allies of the system, who in turn reaped the benefits of independence. (116)

The trauma induced by the colonial experience and the failure to heal from oppression, turned all post-colonial governments in Kenya into oppressive edifices; spreading disappointment and disillusionment to the population. Asiyo laments that Kenyan citizens came from the colonial

rule with dreams of freedom, economic empowerment, equality and a democratic space to express their views but sadly the African governments that took over were not different from the oppressive British colonial administration. Asiyo points that just like the British colonial administration that abhorred criticism and chose assassination as a tool of silencing its critics such as Waiyaki wa Hinga, Koitalel Arap Samoei, Dedan Kimathi among others, all post-colonial governments in Kenya have at one point killed leaders who were deemed a threat to the state. She points out the assassinations of Pio Gama Pinto in 1965, Josiah Mwangi Karuiki in 1975 and Tom Mboya in 1969 by the Jomo Kenyatta regime. She points out that President Daniel Moi turned the country into a one party state that ostracized its critics who included Koigi wa Wamwere, Paul Muite, George Anyona, James Orengo, Martin Shikuku, Kenneth Matiba, Raila Odinga, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga among others. Asiyo notes that during Moi's tenure, use of the security apparatus to clamp down on dissents was institutionalized and that detention without trial and assassinations were common. She points out the assassination of Robert Ouko in 1990 as a case in point.

Asiyo observes that even after the democratic space was widened by the re-establishment of multiparty politics in 1992, Kenyan governments still exhibit colonial traits like the entrenchment of tribalism and silencing of dissenting voices. She cites the example of the killing of Dr. Odhiambo Mbai in 2003, an academician who was in the Constitutional Review Commission of Kenya. This happened during the tenure of President Mwai Kibaki. Further, Asiyo notes that despite the country having forty four tribes, it was largely dominated by two tribes: The Agikuyu and the Kalenjins. She notes that this tribal divisive approach to politics has impeded the creation of a united Kenya or Kenyan nationhood. She posits that Kenya should

look back into its past without shame and draw lessons from the terrible events in order to shape an inclusive nation state. To stress on the importance of reviewing history and dissociating in order to move forward, Asiyo narrates:

> I had the rare blessing of travelling extensively around the world and from this, I have observed that advanced societies, I mean societies have adopted inclusive policies, which consciously strive to improve the welfare of all citizens have never forgotten their history, however unkempt. (225)

Joaquin Flores in, "Schooling, Family, and Individual Factors in Mitigating Psychological Effects of War on Children" points out that traumatic events like war on children have adverse effects that derail the normal growth, development and social adjustment and that these effects spill over to their adulthood. She observes that both children and adults who have experienced war are likely to develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is characterized by anxiety, withdrawal from the society, anger, recurring nightmares, depression and predisposition to violent behavior. Witnessing death of a loved one or a friend is potentially harmful to children and can lead them to have low concentration levels and the acceptance of harmful or abnormal inclinations like violence as being normal ways of expressing power and authority over others.

Flores' study focused on how the civil war in El Salvador from the late 1970s to 1992 affected the population especially the children. The children of El Salvador had grown up witnessing violent acts and cruelty committed by soldiers in their locality. In her findings, she notes that several years after the war ended, the El Salvadorian population exhibited signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and further notes that humanitarian work and programs never put into consideration the deployment of psychosocial services like counseling for the entire population to disengage the people from the war experiences; experiences that continued to influence their

lives long after the guns fell silent. Flores notes, "Psychological interventions have shown positive outcomes, in reducing distress symptoms in children affected by political violence" (18).

Emmy Werner in her article, "Children and War: Risks, resilience, and recovery" observes that war has tremendous effects on the survivors; apart from physical injuries, war damages people's psychological make-up and ultimately their physiological wellbeing. Werner notes Germany adults who were children at the height of the Second World War exhibited problems in their adulthood. She postulates:

> Those who had been exposed to bombing and combat as children were 2.3 times more likely to have severe illness in their early sixties; those who had been actively involved in fighting were 4.9 times more likely to be in poor health, as judged by a physician. Enforced separation from parents during World War II increased the likelihood of poor health among the elderly 3.6 times. (3)

The point Werner is making here is that if trauma from war experiences is not dealt with using psychosocial intervention measures, it moves from harming the psychological faculties to compromising the body's physical wellness; traumatized people become susceptible to physiological illnesses at some point in their lives. To Werner, exposure to war experiences is traumatizing to human beings and it must be fully addressed to safeguard the people's wellbeing. On the centrality of experience in autobiography, Muchiri posits:

> Experience is another important feature of the autobiography because the form (genre of life narratives) 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 a subject having certain identities in the social realm which are constructed through material, cultural, economic, historical, and social relations. (30)

Muchiri connects the various identities claimed by the autobiographical subject narrator to the experiences they undergo. Asiyo takes pride in having taken care of the country's weak and vulnerable; women and children in their time of great need; the State of Emergency, and narrates this experience to claim her identity as a mother of the Kenyan nation and a servant leader who prioritizes the interests of others. She confesses that the experience of social work taught her important lessons as a future civil servant and political leader. She narrates:

> I took a variety of roles, often acting as a critical friend, a broker and an advocate. I was a positive enabler, facilitating the support that people needed- and particularly children during emergency period, through creative use of limited resources in spite of the unbearable hostilities by the British army. We often engaged in the hard task of protecting the children and young people from the colonial government as a consequence of their parents taking part in the Mau Mau struggle which was not an easy task. I still cherish the experience and privilege of doing this work for it gave me the expertise to build bridges with other disciplines, agencies and the people whom I would work with later. It prepared me, for example, to make a vital contribution in a fractured, racist and gender discriminating society, helping me to overcome barriers among different genders, age groups and even tribes. (44)

The writer narrates that patriarchal social relations did not just affect the women in the villages but also those in the city, because the colonial government patriarchal was largely led by racially bigoted male chauvinists. She narrates that city planning was an architectural embodiment of masculinity because basic units like female lavatories were not factored in for the many city buildings, factories and industries. There was a systematic campaign to erase the existence of women by denying them basic needs, respect and accord them dignity. She points out that as late as the 1950s, the Nairobi city council did not have toilet facilities for its female employees. She narrates:

> There were no toilet facilities for female employees in the council. Appalling, when the Young Women's Christian Association carried out a survey in Nairobi's industrial area in the early 1960s, the survey indicated that most industries and factories and offices did not have women's toilets. (47)

The absence of toilets for women employees in the city was a way of demarcating places of employment and therefore, economic empowerment, as being strictly for men; that a woman was an intruder in matters economic production and empowerment. It was an indication of a deep-seated cultural practice of criminalizing the existence of women in the society; a society that is deaf and blind to the needs of women because it considers men as the model of being. Asiyo points out that urban spaces and places of employment have always been unfriendly to the women, that women are humiliated and dehumanized by many of the work environment policies. The city is a metaphor of modernity and Asiyo is saying here that modernity as not being inclusive; it ironically exhibits retrogressive practices like gender discrimination. Insensitivity towards women's needs in the work place translates to economic sabotage because unsettled and demotivated women cannot make productive employees; inclusivity is the only way to maximize the productivity of employees and hence national development. Asiyo makes it known to the reader that being the leader she is, she could not keep quiet when an injustice, a violation of women's rights was being committed. She narrates, "I used my position to educate fellow workers, mostly women about their rights in a racist and gender discriminating system. I am glad that did not matter to the planners then the female toilets are now part of nearly all buildings, factories, offices and all institution" (47). She recounts this experience as a way of projecting herself as a compassionate leader keen on inclusivity.

Asiyo observes that acts of gender discrimination against women at the work place have been diverse and not limited to the absence of toilets. For instance, despite having attained independence in 1963, successive post-colonial Kenyan governments did not have a legal framework to take care of nursing or lactating mothers in the work place until 2017 when the Health Act was enacted into law by the parliament. A survey done by the Philips African Innovation Hub in 2015 found out that 52% of Kenyan working women return to work within three months after delivery and therefore the issue of breastfeeding friendly work environments should have been a topic in the national discourse upon the attainment of independence. This legislation makes it mandatory for all employers both public and private, to provide nursing or lactating mothers safe spaces or rooms where they can breastfeed their babies or express breast milk for their babies to ensure exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. Exclusive breastfeeding as defined by the World Health Organization (W.H.O) is, "Giving a baby only breast milk either directly from the breast or expressed and no other liquid or solids, not even water for the first six months of life"

In 2018, The Ministry of Health mandated a committee that came up with a program for implementing the Health Act of 2017 and they called it "Guidelines for Securing a Breastfeeding Friendly Environment at the Work Place". This program details the benefits of breastfeeding for the baby, mothers, families, employers and the nation. It notes that babies who are exclusively breastfed have better growth and development in all spheres; cognitive, physical and motor. This would mean a reduction in child mortality rates and less pressure on the healthcare system as healthy babies do not have a disease burden that is likely to strain the healthcare system.

The Ministry of Health also noted that such employers will enjoy high employee retention rates hence retention of skills and experience. (10) Families of lactating mothers are able to save resources that would have otherwise gone to purchasing alternative foods and taking the babies for regular medical services and lastly, the Ministry noted that the country benefits immensely if babies and lactating mothers are taken care of since the overall effects include reduced pressure on the healthcare system because breast milk has immunological benefits for the baby's health, improved economic growth because healthy comfortable mothers make productive employees and healthy children grow up to be healthy productive citizens. Of importance to note here is that the connection between this form of work place inclusivity for women; breastfeeding friendly work environments and economic development was not prioritized for the first fifty four years since Kenya attained her independence and thus the country lost greatly in terms of economic productivity and development for its failure to address gender discriminatory practices. The Ministry of Health's "Guidelines for Securing a Breastfeeding Friendly at all Work Place" observes:

> Interventions that promote breastfeeding are critical for a child's optimal growth, development and survival, wellbeing and productivity of mothers and consequently sustainable development of the nation. Work place support for breastfeeding is key to sustainable development as it has an impact on the employees' productivity. (10)

By narrating the experience of lack of toilets for female employees, Asiyo is making the point that gender discrimination hurts everyone; women and men and more importantly, a country cannot develop economically if it segregates part of its population. The absence of toilets for women is a metaphor for dehumanization; a patriarchal strategy of demarcating work places as masculine spaces; criminalizing the existence of women in work places and therefore ensuring that the economic sphere of life is left in the control of men. Toilets are a basic need for human

beings, giving them the dignity of disposing off waste in safe, decent and humane manner. To deny women this important hygiene space is to dehumanize them; to reduce them to animals that do not have designated sanitation zones.

To narrate the experiences of her lived life, Asiyo depends on retrospection and memory. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* posit that, "The autobiographical subjects rely on memory to tell their story. Memory thus becomes a source of autobiographical acts and an authenticator of autobiographical facts" (16). The point Smith and Watson are making here is that an autobiography is a narrative constructed out of recalled life events hence the subject narrator requires a good memory to tell a coherent and credible life story. Through retrospection and reliance on memory, Asiyo recalls the dehumanizing environment Kenyans lived in while under the British colonial rule. She remembers for herself and for her country, the pain of colonial subjugation and the atrocities the British colonial administration committed again Kenyan citizens; reminding everyone that Kenya's independence came at a great price. She recalls:

> In one incident, I watched in shock, British soldier humiliating a pregnant woman in Starehe Estate. The woman was sitting outside her house minding her own business when the soldier who was patrolling in the estate ordered her to spread her legs, placed a beer bottle next to her private part before kicking it right inside her birth canal. The woman grimaced and screamed in pain as blood jutted from inside her. My colleague and I took her to Pumwani Maternity Hospital where she unfortunately miscarried and later died due to excessive bleeding. (43)

The image of a pregnant mother humiliated , then losing her baby and her life can be construed to be Asiyo's way of saying that Kenya had much of its future destroyed irreversibly by the colonial experience. The British killed the hope of nationhood when they entrenched the policy of divide and rule, planting suspicion among the nations or tribes that make up Kenya. The tribal

fault lines created during the British colonial administration of Kenya have made national unity an elusive dream that is yet to be achieved fifty seven years after independence. The pregnant mother is symbolic of Kenya, full of expectations at independence but the child, a metaphor for the country's future prosperity, was killed by the divisive and cruel policies that the oppressive colonial administration entrenched in the country.

The vivid description of the crime committed by the British soldier leaves the reader disgusted by the colonialist and all forms of subjugation. It helps the reader appreciate the peace and privileges of independence and also makes them undertake a self-analysis in order to distance themselves from such atrocious acts against a fellow citizen/human being regardless of the their differences in terms of race, ethnicity or gender. Asiyo recalls that all colonial policies were meant to look out for the Europeans' interests in the country which explains why major decision making positions were occupied by Europeans. She recalls how her attempts to join the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization were derailed because of her race; the institution had been created by British women and they were not keen to have Africans on board. Asiyo went on to form a parallel organization in 1956 that was named, *Usalama ya Wanawake na Watoto* (Wellbeing of Women and Children). Asiyo laments about racism disenfranchising the sisterhood of women as the British women discriminated against their African counterparts yet they both suffered exclusion from political participation on the basis of being women. Asiyo uses this incident to satirize the British women for their myopic worldview. It is ironical for the European women to name their organization using an African language, Kiswahili, yet they operated it by excluding African women. She satirizes the colonial mentality that resulted in the exclusion and marginalization of African women in their own country.

Asiyo uses her life story to highlight the double displacement of the African woman by patriarchy and racism. Racism and patriarchy came together to impede the social, political and economic actualization of the African woman. Her organization was denied registration by the colonial government but it made the leadership of M.Y.W.O to reconsider their position on African women membership and allowed Asiyo and a few other African women. However, Asiyo realised that the African members of the organization were ceremonial appendages meant to giver M.Y.W.O the façade of inclusivity. She remembers, "It dawned on us that the White women only wanted us as members, but not to be in leadership positions where key decisions were made" (49). The organization never spoke against the abuse of the rights of African women and children and neither did it allow the African members to participate in decision making. She recalls, "It was not long before I realised that the organization had not been aligned to the needs of the African woman". (48) Through retrospection, Asiyo makes the reader understand that her revolutionary nature would not allow her to accept this form of exclusion. She narrates of her efforts to correct the injustice, "A group of African women leaders and I organised a demonstration against the discrimination. We matched from Secretary Building (now Jogoo House) through Muthurwa, Shauri Moyo and Kaloleni estates in Eastlands to push for our inclusion in the M.Y.W.O leadership" (49).

Asiyo notes that the African woman suffered double displacement during the colonial period; the Europeans discriminated against her as an African and a woman; that on the hierarchy of races that characterized colonial Kenya, the African woman was at the bottom; she faced both racism and patriarchy. Asiyo recalls that the colonial administration was male dominated and that most of its policies were patriarchal; that British women were mostly housewives who had no role in

the decision making organs such as the military, provincial administration and the judiciary. The systemic exclusion of in many spheres of economic production left them susceptible to male exploitation and oppressive polices. Asiyo considers education to be a launching pad for the political and economic empowerment of African women. To Asiyo, educated women must find their way to political leadership where they can influence positive change; that women in political leadership are the answer to the problem of gender discrimination; their voices in political spaces will midwife legal frameworks that will eradicate gender discriminations towards women and foster inclusivity and social justice. Asiyo recalls that the British colonial administration made the discussion of the future of Kenya as an independent state a male affair by providing transport only to men to go and discuss future governance with Jomo Kenyatta who was incarcerated in Lodwar. She recalls of her experience as a woman leader in colonial Kenya:

> Women were generally left out because they did not have the resources to provide their transport and could not drive vehicles. More importantly, the colonial government argued that women were like children and did not have opinions of their own. (53)

Relying on her memory, Asiyo points out that the inception of Kenya as an independent state was done on a weak foundation; gender exclusion. She notes that the independence government inherited government structures, institutions and philosophies that were founded on exclusion of a part of the population. She decries the decision by post-colonial Kenyan governments to inherit structures that were established by the British colonial administration instead of coming up with new governance structures, institutions and institutional policies that would conceptualize and reflect the independence dream of inclusivity of gender and ethnicity and the treatment of human life with dignity and respect. She points out that most of the inherited institutions and structures were meant to run a colony and not a country; they were oppressive and dehumanizing in their approach. A case in point was the prison facilities in colonial Kenya that were founded to be

concentration camps; spaces of punishment and dehumanization and not correctional and/ or rehabilitations institutions. The British colonial operated on the premise that an African was guilty until rarely proven innocent and that they needed to be punished and not rehabilitated. She recalls of her experience as a Deputy Superintendent of prisons in 1962 and confesses that being in that space threw her, "into colossal spiritual and moral dilemma" (65). She recalls of the prison department, "yet, executions were a common practice in the late colonial prison system, something that spilled over to the early post-independence days" (65).

During the colonial period, the British administration had instituted the prison system as a political tool of control; to intimidate the Africans' dissenting voices into silence hence the prisons were defined by inhuman acts such as executions, torture, starvation and the absence of facilities such as toilets and bathrooms. Asiyo recalls her contribution towards the conversion of prisons from being institutions of punishment into spaces of rehabilitation with a human face as a way of constructing herself as a compassionate leader and epic heroine. She narrates a case where a woman inmate whom she names, Evelyn, perhaps to avoid embarrassing her, who was brought to the court as part of the remandees. Asiyo recalls that Evelyn was uncomfortable in court and on looking closely, she realised that Evelyn was on her menses but the callous prison system did not cater for women's needs like menstrual hygiene products. Asiyo remembers:

> I looked closely only to realise that she was covered in menstrual blood. It suddenly hit me that no one at the police Department, even during the time of the British rule, had thought about providing sanitary towels to the female convicts or even those in police custody. In prison, women had to do with dirty rags- or just anything, they could lay their hands on. With prison being a confinement, options were limited to nothing most of the time. (68)

Evelyn may not have existed in reality and this incident could be part of the unconscious fictionalization of the autobiography but it helps illuminate women's experiences in a powerful way. The fact that the society that came up with the concept of imprisonment and the prison system did not think about the special needs of women inmates highlights the consistent campaign to dehumanize and criminalize the existence of women. The story of Evelyn is the story of women in disadvantaged positions in the society. It demonstrates the callous nature of patriarchal social structures and philosophy. Asiyo uses this story within her narrative to point out the double displacement suffered by women in many societies world over. Evelyn is incarcerated and in the prison space, she lacks menstrual hygiene products and what is more, she has no control over both the imprisonment and the acquisition of the menstrual products. It takes Asiyo, a fellow woman to notice the problems Evelyn is going through. This is Asiyo's strategy of encouraging women in positions of authority to be agents of change; social, political and economic. It is a challenge to women in privileged spaces to help end all forms of exclusion.

In the construction of a narrative, a writer may use other forms of communication apart from words. These other non-linguistic forms are called paratextual elements. Paratextual elements in an autobiography may be used to construct the element of autobiographical truth as well as to create micro-narratives, embedded within the main narrative. Asiyo uses paratextual elements in her autobiography. They include photos, speeches, lists and parliamentary proceedings.

Asiyo uses photos to authenticate her memory; she has photos which depict her in her professional space as senior prison office, photos that help her recall her life with her late husband Richard Asiyo, while addressing a political rally and others while attending a meeting

with fellow Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization shortly after her election as the first African woman president of the organization. She attaches a speech by Sir Evelyn Baring about Tom Mboya's exceptional oratory and leadership skills as a way of remembering for herself and the country about the tragic loss of a leader whom she describes as far-sighted. Tom Mboya was killed by an assassin in 1969 because he was considered a political threat to many who wanted to inherit the presidency from Jomo Kenyatta. Asiyo attaches lists of parliamentary Bills sponsored by women members of the National Assembly and the Senate in 2013. She also attaches a list of the national assembly and senate committees that have been headed by women in 2013. These lists are public documents used to aid memory and chronicle the journey of political inclusivity for women in Kenya. Asiyo uses historical dates like 1952 to remember the punitive measures perpetrated by the British soldiers against Kenyans and to remember how she served the country in her hour of need by saving the children.

Autobiographical subjects are involved in a process of understanding who they are and the do this by engaging in self-analysis and retrospection; they look back into their lives and recall and examine their life experiences in order to understand who they truly are; their identity. Leigh Gilmore in *Autobiographics* observes that the ultimate goal of writing a life narrative is to achieve self-invention, self-discovery and self-representation; identity quest. To Gilmore, an autobiography sums up the purpose of human life; self-realization. The point Gilmore is making is that, autobiographical subjects will write as a way of achieving three things: to understand who they are by examining their lives, to create an identity they would want the world to have of them and to claim a voice by which they can perpetuate their identity. In narrating her story, Asiyo is involved in an identity quest. She narrates of her various identities and the fields of

identity formation. She narrates about her family and how their conversion to the Seventh Day Adventist doctrine of Christianity changed their lives. She narrates that her father was adaptable to change because of his exposure to the new religion. She recalls of her father:

> As a leader in the church, he was a firm but loving parent. He worked hard for the mission and would travel far and wide on his bicycle, preaching the gospel. Many were the days when eagerly awaited his return to hear tales of his trips. I would run to meet and relieve him of his bicycle and cascade it home as he told me stories of the places he had been to. (5)

She recalls of her mother, Miriam Amolo who acted as a traditional midwife and a healer. She narrates:

> I wouldn't have been if it were not for her. As a child, her daughter, I was an express beneficiary of her revered medical services. She had learnt the trade from her father, who was a medicine-man. She would run short errands to the forest to gather medicinal roots, leaves , pods and the bark of various trees and plants, becoming her father's 'medical student' by association. (6)

Asiyo recalls her paternal grandmother, the warrior known as Odete Magungu Nyar Olonde as the anchor to the family. She narrates of Odete, "It was Odete who led the family sojourn in Karachuonyo after their relocation from Nyakach" (4). She also recalls that she got the name Muga from her father's cousin. She remembers, "I was named after my father's cousin Muga" (3). Asiyo recall of the family genealogy is her way of claiming her identity as a daughter.

Asiyo narrates of her husband and children and mentions them by name as a way of claiming her identity as a wife and mother. She narrates of her husband, "I met my late husband Bezellel Richard Asiyo Genga during my time at Kangaru" (28). She attaches photos of her and her husband and other with her children as her way of authenticating her claim to the identities of a mother and a wife. She recalls of her first time pregnancy and the experience of delivering her

first child, Lilian Atieno, “My first child arrived rather fast, in an experience that would usher me deep into the world of motherhood” (33).

Asiyo further narrates of her role as a social worker during the State of Emergency in Kenya between 1952-59 as a way of claiming her identity as a mother to the Kenyan nation. She recalls, “As a social worker tasked with the welfare of the vulnerable children, I worked in Bahati, Babadogo, Ruaka, Ololua, Kiserian and Ngong. I worked with people and families in complex social circumstances, given the hostile Mau Mau conditions” (43). She narrates of her triumph over Okiki Amayo in the 1979 General elections, to become the Member of Parliament for Karachuonyo constituency as a way of claiming her identity as a community leader. She narrates, “In Homa Bay town where the votes were being counted, people waited throughout the night for the announcement of the results. And when they were finally announced that I had won, celebrations broke out in the town. People lined up along the streets dancing and singing” (128).

Asiyo claims her identity as a national leader by detailing her contribution to the Affirmative Action Motion that although failed to sail through when she tabled it in parliament, ended up becoming the foundation upon which the two-thirds gender rule was enshrined in the Kenyan constitution that got promulgated in 2010. She also recalls of her contribution to the changes in the prison department by pointing out that she was the one who wrote the Borstal curriculum in Kenya that was to be used to rehabilitate young offenders. She narrates of the glory she has been accorded for her service as a deputy superintendent of prisons, “I have been told that my tour of duty in the Prisons Department had far-reaching impact on many inmates and staff” (283). Autobiographers will construct their life narratives to portray themselves as role models in the

society; they narrate their achievements as a way of saying that they worthy of emulation and Asiyo does this by chronicling the praises heaped on her by other people.

To construct her identity as a world leader, Asiyo narrates about her involvement and service with international bodies. She narrates:

> In 1989, I was appointed Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) - now UN Women. For me, there could never be a greater honour. The then UNIFEM Executive Director, Dr. Margaret Snyder, wrote to the Kenya Representative to the UN informing him of my appointment to this prestigious position. (234)

In narrating her life story, Asiyo recalls Kenya's history; her autobiography can be read as source of Kenya's history. She intertwines her life narrative with the history of the country as both a way of cultivating autobiographical truth and formulating her identity. Smith and Watson in, *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader* observe that, "Autobiography has been employed by many women writers to write themselves into history" (5). The point Smith and Watson are making is that autobiography makes it possible for women to be heard, to announce their presence in their communities. Asiyo makes references to historical dates, events and people as a way of claiming her identity as a Kenyan. Her intimate knowledge of the country's history is an indication of her interests in the affairs of the Kenyan and a revelation of her identity as a Kenyan born in the colonial period. She narrates of the events of the State of Emergency in 1952 as a way of reminding the reader that the traumatic past has been a major impediment in the formulation of the concept of Kenyan nationhood. It is her way of tracing the origin of the problems that have plagued the country since independence; issues such as tribalism, oppressive governance strategies like assassination and use of security in the violation of citizens' human rights in Kenya.

Asiyo recalls Kenya's history as a way of trying to understand herself and her community; the failures and successes of the country and her contribution to them. Her life story recalls many historical events and personalities; narrates about the failure of the first independent government to foster inclusivity. She recalls, "Although KANU had been one of the strongest instruments that brought about the country's liberation in 1963, by 1979 it seemed to stand for everything that ran against the dreams espoused by freedom fighters of the pre-independence struggles". (117) Through this recall of history, Asiyo is able to understand herself as nationalist who has been consistent in her fight for a better country, for equal distribution of the national resources and the provision of equal spaces for both men and women in the running of the country.

Asiyo also appropriates history as a strategy to cultivate credibility for her life narrative. Intertwining her story with the history of Kenya makes the reader believe she is narrating the truth. This is because the historical dates, events, documents and personalities captured in her autobiography can be corroborated independently using mainstream history. The reader can confirm if it is true Asiyo contested for the Karachuonyo Parliamentary seat in the 1979 general elections by accessing both electoral and parliamentary records. The reader can also independently verify whether Pio Gama Pinto, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki and Thomas Joseph Mboya were killed the way Asiyo claims in her autobiography. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography* define autobiographical truth as, "An intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing the meaning of life. This kind of truth is dependent on the subjects' integrity and sincerity while telling the story" (28). Asiyo ensures that there are no contradictions between the claims she makes and mainstream history in her life narrative which

may end up discrediting her autobiography; her capturing of history signals to the reader that she is sincere.

Apart from history, Asiyo makes use of paratextual elements like photos as evidence of her claims. She has photos of her coronation as a Luo Elder, photos of the Luo-Kuria parliamentary group with the then president Moi at his home in Kabarak and with the members of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission as a way of validating her claims to national leadership roles. She recalls of her appointment as Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), her studying at Kangaru Teachers College and her working for the Nairobi City Council as a way of signaling to the reader that she is telling the truth; the reader can visit the said places to ascertain the claims. From her childhood to school, work, political leadership and world leadership and then retirement, Asiyo presents to the reader a consistent character; that of a revolutionary servant leader opposed to all forms of discrimination and exclusion. This consistency in character convinces the reader that they are reading a credible narrative because the narrator is a believable individual.

Asiyo also uses the element of selectivity as a way of cultivating autobiographical truth in her life story. She mentions those people who helped her by name, for instance she narrates of how Tom Mboya helped her during the State of Emergency when she needed to form an organization called *Usalama ya Wanawake na Watoto* (Wellbeing of Women and Children). She narrates that at one point, she sought the assistance of Margaret Kenyatta to help with a case that involved a female prisoner on death row. She also makes reference to the court case that pitted Virginia Wambui Otieno against her late husband's Umira Kager clan as a way of demonstrating how

patriarchal social structures demean women. Virginia Wambui was married to lawyer Silvanus Melea Otieno and upon his death, Wambui went ahead to organize for his burial at their home in Matasia, Ngong but Otieno's clan wanted to bury their kin at their home in Siaya County. After a protracted court case, the court decided to rule in favour of the Umira Kager clan, yet Otieno had bought land and built a home with his wife in Ngong. The inclusion of this case also contributes to making Asiyo's story credible because the reader can confirm about it with the court archives. Asiyo considers herself a role model to and her achievements worthy of emulation and thus she narrates her story to inspire women not just in Kenya but in the whole world. She narrates:

> Throughout my political life, I resisted tantalizing temptation to engage in unsavoury schemes to loot public resources. This is the leadership example I hope to bequeath to young women leaders. Some political leaders were offered large tracts of farmland and lucrative 'wet' government tenders in exchange for their loyalty. (253)

Asiyo uses the autobiography to make it known that despite many Kenyan politicians being immersed in corruption; she belongs to the rare and few leaders whose lives are guided by moral values and integrity. She narrates:

> I know many of my readers are young women who will one day be leaders in various sectors of our society, including politics. I know that many women look up to me as a mentor and guide in navigating the challenges facing their efforts to participate as equal partners with men in political leadership. As a woman leader, I am compelled to encourage women, especially those who have endured many years of denigration and exclusion, to take up leadership positions. (253)

Lastly, Asiyo uses her autobiography to claim her voice as an African woman and a woman political leader. She titles her book, *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks* as a way of signaling to the reader that although she comes from a cultural background that silences women by 'othering' them, she subverted this cultural philosophy and spoke. She is saying that she will not delegate her story to someone else; she will tell her own story. Francoise Lionnet in

Autobiographical Voices: *Race, Gender, Self- Portraiture* comments on the subversive nature of women writing their stories thus:

> Our voices have existed in a state of a greater or lesser tension with other points of view in all historical eras and geographical areas. Always present everywhere but rarely heard, let alone recorded, women's voices have not been a dominant mode of expression or a legitimate and acceptable alternative to such dominant mode. (xi)

The point Lionnet is making here is that, the culture of silencing women has been the reality that has defined many cultures world over and throughout history. She points out that only women can tell their stories and by doing so, claim their place in their communities. Asiyo chronicles her life and narrates it as a way of claiming her place not just in the Kenyan community but also in the entire human community world over. She alludes to Maya Angelou's , *autobiography* as a way of buttressing the idea that speaking out or claiming a voice is part of the process of acquiring freedom' refusing to be silenced. She narrates, "I am writing about the journey of a woman, an archetype that speaks of the, "caged bird which sang freedom" (245). *I know Why the Caged Sings* is Maya Angelou's autobiography released in 1966. Angelou was an African-American writer, civil rights activist and a poet. In the autobiography, Angelou chronicles her journey as a Black woman in a racist and patriachal society and how her dysfunctional family traumatized her childhood because she was sexually defiled as a young girl. Faced with racism and a broken childhood, Angelou confesses that the love of reading; literature, saved her from self-destructive activities and gave her dignity and a livelihood.

4.3 Strategies of Narrating the Self in Asiyo's Life Narrative

The autobiography is a genre immersed in artistry. Henry Indangasi in , "The Autobiographical Impulses in Africa and African-American Literature" observes that, "The autobiography is a

work of art and the writer of an autobiography being the artist he is, selects, reorganizes, and reshapes the facts of his life in order to communicate a higher truth"(2). In narrating her life story, Asiyo utilizes several artistic strategies such as appropriating the structure of the epic, the use of foreshadowing, allusion and journey motif. Asiyo appropriates the elements of the epic to tell her life story as a way of signaling to the reader that her life revolved around subverting all forms of exclusion such as patriarchy. The epic has been traditionally an androcentric genre in its philosophy; a male institution that holds the view that masculinity is the model of being. Further, Asiyo introduces new concepts to the epic as a way of making it a socially inclusive literary unit instead of a masculine one. In narrating her story, she re-writes the epic by introducing new concepts and doing away with others hitherto found in the traditional male epic narratives. Rachel Scott Poe in, "Engendering Epic: Heroism as Constructed Masculinity in the Epics of Gilgamesh and Beowulf" postulates that, "Since the epic presents not the reality but the ideal state of the culture from which it comes, epic hero is the embodiment of the values that his culture holds dear" (1). The traditional epic is centered on the life of the epic hero, a man, but Asiyo introduces the idea of an epic heroine; herself. Poe identifies the following as the attributes of the traditional epic: the focus on a community, privileged background or an aristocratic lineage of the hero, influence of religion on the life of the hero, an exceptional individual, a difficult quest for the hero, celebration of strength and bravery, the embracing of glory and honour, a heroic character who also has weaknesses and that the epic is not just about the hero but is also a reflection of the culture of the hero's community (2).

The concept of heroism in the traditional epic is understood to be passed from a male ancestor to a male offspring but Asiyo rewrites the epic by introducing the idea of heroism being passed from female ancestry to a female protégé. The traditional epic is a genre that gives men a voice and /or a platform to showcase their exploits and announce their presence in their community. Asiyo makes an affront to this masculine tradition by writing her own life story and detailing her heroic deeds and contribution to the bettering of the different communities that she identifies with; the Luo, Kenya, Kenyan women and children, prisoners and women citizens of the world; claiming a voice and making it known that she is not going to accept the status quo – the silencing of women – hence she titles her story, *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks*. Daring to speak and claiming a voice in an androcentric and patriarchal world that is organized around silencing the women and subordinating them to men is both epic and heroic. Through retrospection, Asiyo traces and narrates of her lineage to a great female warrior called Odete nyar Olonde as a way of constructing her identity as an epic heroine and a revolutionary leader. Odete defied the patriarchal nature of her community that demarcated warfare as a space for expressing masculine heroism; she brought feminine heroism to the battlefield. Asiyo narrates:

> Odete, my father says, was the family's engine. She was a warrior, a fighter- and she had many scars to show for it, most of which she sustained in battles that would put weak men to shame. Her triumph and feminine ingenuity won her accolades across the villages. (4)

Asiyo paints herself as exceptional individual by narrating about her exceptional exploits in her childhood. She narrates of her desire and resilience in an education system that demoralized girls from pursuing further education. She constructs her narrative to project herself as a special person; while other girls were having problems in learning, she recalls that teachers, and specifically male ones, such as James Mukogi and Zakayo Orata were placed on her path to assist her to embark on a heroic quest for education as a way of empowering her to fight all

forms of social exclusion and injustice like patriarchy, racism and tribalism in her adult life. She recalls of James Mukogi's contribution:

> An African teacher who thought and reasoned differently. He encouraged girls to work hard in school. I remember his counsel and the many times he emphasized the importance and value of education. He often advised me to avoid boys like plague and instead direct my focus on books. He knew I was a clever girl. He told me to shelves any thought of getting married until I wear the crown of knowledge. (21)

Asiyo further recalls how Zakayo Orata who taught her at Gendia came into her life when she needed support. She narrates, "Zakayo Orata, a teacher at Gendia, also mentored me and encouraged me to go beyond primary school- at a time when most young girls dropped out of school to get married" (21). She recalls of her special place in her society:

> I became a village celebrity partly because finding an African girl who had defied the odds of early marriage at that time to seek western formal education was uncommon. I gained fame because of my determination and ability to continue learning despite the challenges women faced then. I was also about to travel by train to the distant land, one which not, many young people had visited. (24)

Here Asiyo makes her reader realize that they are reading the epic exploits of an exceptional individual who considers herself an unrivaled achiever with legendary capabilities; a heroine, a future leader with a string of firsts in many fields. She claims her identity as a revolutionary fighter for social justice, equality and inclusivity by using military terms and words in her life narrative. She uses words such as, scars, fighter, battles, warriors, war leaders (4). This signals to the reader that Asiyo's life story is a war narrative about the exploits and achievements of a great fighter. The creation of the identity of a female warrior, an epic heroine, is a subversion of an institution that propagated social exclusion; patriarchy. Asiyo is signaling to the reader that her life will revolve around the quest for inclusivity and equality; that her life's mission will be

dedicated to the disruption and demolition of all practices that impede inclusivity and social justice in her community, her country and the world as a whole.

Asiyo credits her family for the life principles that came to define her adult life. She narrates of her father as a loving parent who encouraged inclusivity in his home and pushed his daughters to believe they could achieve anything they set their minds on; education and financial empowerment. She narrates of how her father reacted when her sister Perpetua's husband stormed their home with shock all over his face on realizing that his wife had a bank savings account at a period when a woman was not supposed to have her own money. Asiyo's father calmed his son-in-law and encouraged him to celebrate his luck for having such a visionary woman for a wife. She recalls her father's reaction:

> Nyar Omolo, nyar Omolo! Come urgently and bring that book from the post office which you always hide from me. Can I please see the book from post office? When she brought the tiny book, my father turned to Perpetua's husband and said; "*wuon Odolo*", you and I are lucky men. We have people who can run our homes and provide us with good meals. You see, she does not know that I know she has a savings account, but I peep at it every so often and know that she is a wise woman like the Bible says. Be proud of my daughter, peep at that book whenever you can, but let don't her know. Be happy and thank God for the wise woman that God gave you. (10)

Religion plays a key role in shaping the character of the epic hero, for instance, Achilles in Homer's *The Iliad* is said to possess extraordinary strength and invincibility because he is the son of a Greek goddess, Thetis, and a mortal man, Peleus. In addition, Thetis is said to have dipped Achilles in river Styx and this made him invulnerable to weapons safe for his heel. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh's strength that makes him carry out grand undertakings like flattening mountains comes from his divine heritage as the son of the goddess Ninsun. In *Sundiata*: *An Epic of Old Mali*, Sundiata's birth and life is guided by an ancient prophecy that

was given to his father and the help of the *jinnis* (spirits). In the *Aeneid*, the epic hero, Aeneas, is the son of the goddess Venus. Venus influences her son's conduct to try and guide him from self-destruction. For instance, when Aeneas is overcome by feelings of revenge against Hellen for being the cause of the destruction of Troy by the Greeks, Venus holds his hand to prevent him from striking Hellen and chastises him in "The Fall of Troy" thus, " why let such suffering goad you on to fury past control? Where is your thoughtfulness?" (366).

Although Asiyo does not claim divinity or direct lineage to the gods like most male epic heroes, she points out that religion played a pivotal role in shaping her character as a leader; it gave her inner conviction to pursue social inclusivity and service to the people as her heroic quest. Asiyo here introduces the idea of an epic heroine who uses her mortal strength to achieve extraordinary deeds without the superhuman contributions of deities and gods. She recalls that her father was a church minister with the Seventh Day Adventists and that the Adventist ethos she learned from her childhood turned her into a compassionate leader. She recounts how her religious convictions disturbed her upon joining the then callous Prison Department in 1962. She recalls, "I had been raised in the principles and practices of the Seventh Day Adventist and socialized in the Luo norms and customs. Both my Christian values and Luo norms abhorred the taking away of human life" (65). As a result of the influence of religion in her life, Asiyo fights for reforms in the prison department that would see the treatment of prisoners as human beings and not animals as it had been the case under British colonial rule. The Adventist religious ethos internalised from childhood make Asiyo value humanity and helps her to give the prison department a human face and touch in its dealings with prisoners.

The epic as a literary genre celebrates the connections to family and friends since the hero needs support and encouragement in their difficult undertaking or quest. The epic hero, a man, usually has a helper either a woman or man and Asiyo subverts this by depicting herself as a heroine who gets a man for a helper. The helper walks with the hero and together they achieve more. Enkidu is given to Gilgamesh by the elders of Uruk to stabilize his thoughts and focus on the city of Uruk; Enkidu helps Gilgamesh learn about love and caring for others. When Gilgamesh's mother, Ninsun mentions about the idea of the special gift, Gilagamesh excitedly comments, "Let me acquire a friend to counsel me, / a friend to counsel me I will acquire!" (1296-97). Even in death, Enkidu proves to be useful to Gilgamesh because his death shocks Gilgamesh to the realization of his own mortality and it is this realization that makes Gilgamesh become useful to the city of Uruk; he acquires the disposition of love and he is thus described to protect his people like "a mighty bank". Sundiata had Balla Fasseke, a griot given to him by the king. When handing Fasseke to Sundiata, King Nare Meghan advise his son Sundiata thus, "Be inseparable friends from this day forward. From his mouth you will hear the history of your ancestors; you will learn the art of governing Mali according to the principles which our ancestors have bequeathed us" (4). Achilles the god-man warrior gets his human attributes from having Patroclus as his mentee and friend; Patroclus teaches him about love and care. Achilles loved Petroclus so much that he even allowed the young man to don his (Achilles') war armor. When the young man (Patroclus) is killed by Hector, the loss pushes Achilles to fight so hard against Troy that he manages to kill Troy's celebrated war hero; Hector. Thereafter, the Greeks led by Achilles burn the city to the ground. The helper to the epic hero helps them achieve more and become better at what they do. Asiyo dedicates a whole chapter in her autobiography to the

celebration of her husband as the person whose support and love made her venture into and survive the tumultuous world of politics. In the acknowledgment she narrates:

> My late husband, Richard Asiyo my love of over 60 years, the father of my five children and my friend who was snatched from us by the cruel hand of death, I would never have done this, or anything else for that matter, without your unwavering support. I thank you. (Viii)

The reader can deduce that Asiyo's husband's death jolts her into the realization of her own mortality and thus pushes her to publish her life story as a way of achieving immortality. Peter Abbs in *Autobiography in Education* emphasizes this observation when he postulates that, "the impulse to write autobiographies derives from the desire to enrich one's identity against the destructiveness of age" (16). To Asiyo, the move to share her life story is her way of educating the world about the importance of inclusivity and the need to continue with the fight against all forms of exclusion and violation of human rights among the human society. This move to document her life narrative is inspired by her husband and helper. She narrates of his contribution to the writing of her life story:

> It is sad that after all the work, time and energy my husband put in the writing of this book, he passed on before we could finalize the work. He was passionate about the book; in fact, he not only encouraged me to write the book, but he also helped me write it. He wanted me to share the challenges I faced when I joined politics and how I weathered them. He felt my story could inspire and educate those who aspired to become politicians, especially women. With him, I could remember places and dates of some of the events captured in the book. (32)

Asiyo recalls that when the elders settled on her to contest for the Karachuonyo parliamentary and her husband was worried about his wife being overwhelmed, the elders promised to get him another wife but he declined. She narrates, "He praised the elders for their support, but declined their offer of another wife. He also sought the elders' reassurance that they would support and protect me during my campaigns" (110). As a helper, Asiyo's husband prioritizes his wife's

welfare and security; making sure that she is alive to achieve her quest of service to the people and the achievement of an inclusive society. He supports Asiyo's dream of occupying a political space from where she can achieve her greater quest of an inclusive society and a united Kenya.

As an epic heroine, Asiyo celebrates friends and family for their support and encouragement in her epic quest. She acknowledges her children and family as being the force behind her achievements. She also points out that friends contributed to her growth through giving her opportunities, encouragement and emotional support. She cites Tom Mboya and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga for holding her hand in her political journey. When she was barred from joining Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation because of racism, she narrates that she vowed to start a parallel organisation that would address the needs of African women and children during the oppressive colonial rule and it was Tom Mboya who chose to support her. She recalls of Mboya's help, "I consulted Tom Mboya, then the leader the Trade Unions in Kenya for advice on how to get the organisation registered and for initial funding to get us of the blocks. He responded positively to both requests" (48). Asiyo also recalls that while preparing for the 1979 General elections, she got the endorsement and support of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the then de facto political leader of the Luo community. She confesses that this endorsement and support helped her beat Okiki Amayo the then Karachuonyo Member of Parliament.

The epic hero draws their inspiration from the community they come from; however, Asiyo introduces the idea of an epic heroine being inspired by different communities at the same time. Asiyo is inspired by the desire to improve the welfare of her community the Luo, then the African woman and child, prisoners in Kenya's penitentiaries, Kenya as a republic and finally the larger community of global women. The epic hero has a relationship with their community;

they advise and provide the hero with a sense of purpose as well as guidance. As an epic heroine, Asiyo makes it known that her quest is to fight all forms of exclusion that affect the different communities that she sets out to serve. The forms of social exclusions leading to violation of human rights include patriarchy, racism and tribalism. During the colonial period, especially during the state of emergency, Asiyo joined the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation to fight for the rights of Kenyan women and children. She recalls how she gradually she changed the mission of the M.Y.W.O from serving the interests of the British women in Kenya to the empowerment of the Kenyan woman. She narrates of her contribution to the movement:

> With the assistance from other leaders, we immediately embarked on the process of reviewing the mission of M.Y.W.O and giving it new objectives apart from baking cakes, embroidery and learning domestic science and housewifery. African women were always in the field weeding, fetching firewood, harvesting, looking for food unlike their European counterparts who had house helps who dealt with the chores as they relaxed. I lead women through M.Y.W.O in the direction of economic empowerment, women's self-worth, and self-esteem, learning new and better farming methods in agriculture, the establishment of small-scale businesses and lobbying for the improvement of women's healthcare, especially maternal child health, nutrition, hygiene, political empowerment and representation in the three arms of government. (51)

The economic and political exclusion of the African women community inspires Asiyo to confront a powerful hegemony; the institutionalised racial bigotry of the colonial administration and the British citizens in Kenya. She uses the privileged space of the leader of the M.Y.W.O not to address her needs but to serve the community of African women and children and therefore the glory and honour of being the first African woman leader of the M.Y.W.O is not the force behind the achievements, the force is her selflessness and service to the people; she does not deliberately seek for honour and glory, rather, the two come to her due to her service to this particular community.

When Asiyo joined the Prisons Department as the first woman deputy superintendent, she chose to serve the prison community, especially the women and children whose needs were never taken into consideration by the prison system. She initiated changes to help take care of the children whose parents were in incarceration. She considered these women and children as her community; she gave saw them as human beings and not as prisoners as the system did. Their needs as human beings inspired her to institute changes that saw her immortalized in the prison's archives and the national history. She narrates:

> I ensured that every institution in the republic with inmates was equipped with a complete nursery to take care of the children of the prisoners during the day, while their mothers were away doing various tasks. A special diet including milk, eggs, fruits, meats and vegetables was prescribed by the medical authorities for prisoners' children in the nursery. We also designed industrial programmes for the women to make them self-reliant after their release. They were also taught diverse skills. These included pottery, doll-making, knitting, tailoring, sisal work, weaving and embroidery. (179)

Asiyo becomes a heroine for serving those whom the community has condemned; she looks at prisoners not as statistics but as human beings with needs and worthy of dignity. She turns the prison from a space for condemnation to a space for rehabilitation. She takes pride in having developed the Borstal curriculum in Kenya that helped rehabilitate young offenders through nurture and empowerment instead of punishment; to turn children offenders into responsible members of the society. She was against the idea of using punishment for rehabilitation arguing that it was defeatist in nature because dehumanizing them would likely make them hardcore perpetrators of criminal activities. She narrates:

> As a trained teacher, I assisted in developing and improving the Borstal curriculum for Kenya. The curriculum covered training in discipline, vocational activities and basic education. These institutions also offered a complete primary school education program based on the national primary school system. (280)

On entry to national politics, Asiyo is credited for introducing the affirmative action motion that aimed at widening the political space to allow many women to come on board political leadership in 1997. She recalls:

> The government of the day had not implemented any tangible programme to promote gender equity, therefore, women remained the less privileged, not just in Karachuonyo but in Kenya as a whole. For better governance, women needed equitable access to decision-making positions. (122)

The Kenyan women are another community that is important to Asiyo and it is their needs that inspired her actions in parliament. She realised that this was a difficult task because the Kenyan parliament was traditionally a masculine space. She points out that her agenda as a politician was to achieve social justice and social inclusion hence her commitment to the Affirmative Action motion. She narrates of her motion:

> In my Affirmative Action Motion, therefore, I recommended that the government introduce legislation that make it mandatory for all registered political parties to nominate women to at least one-third of all slots to participate in competitive parliamentary and civic elections. I also proposed the amendment of the Constitution to allow the setting aside of at least parliamentary seats for the women in each of the eight former provinces of the republic: Nairobi, Rift Valley, Coast, Nyanza, Central, Western, North Eastern and Eastern. (155)

Asiyo recalls that although the male dominated parliament shot down her motion, it reawakened the need for inclusivity in the country and her dream was actualized when the 2010 constitution instituted as a law.

When Asiyo eventually decided to join politics, she chose to contest for the Karachuonyo constituency yet by that time she was working and living in Nairobi. The Luo people, the citizens of Karachuonyo constituency, are another community from which Asiyo draws her inspiration. She points out that it was the needs of this community that she wanted to serve. She recalls, "My interest in politics was to serve the people and not self-service. In order to serve, I had to reach

these people who were in most cases humble farmers and fishermen who earned less than a dollar a day" (125). Asiyo observes that many of her political competitors for the Karachuonyo parliamentary seat were driven by selfish and individual interests. She recalls, "Indeed; some of the leaders had focused in achieving their individual economic success at the expense of the people and the country" (125).

Asiyo confesses that the needs of her constituents were the driving force and that the glory and honor she achieved as the Karachuonyo Member of Parliament was secondary; serving the people was her main aim. She narrates that as a first time Member of Parliament for the constituency, she managed to initiate the construction of water dams to ease the water problem that her community had experienced for long. She also recounts that working with development partners like the United Nations Programme (UNDP), a United Nations branch that works to eradicate poverty and inequalities through sustained development; she educated the women of Karachuonyo on value addition for their fruits and fish in order to make more profits and become economically empowered. She also recalls that being the member of parliament for Karachuonyo, she established the only school for special needs children in the constituency, the Nyaburi school for the physically challenged in order to enhance inclusivity in education; to take onboard children with physical challenges aboard the education system and give them agency, hitherto, children with special needs in her area were usually hidden at home and never given an opportunity in education. By narrating about this experience Asiyo demonstrates her commitment to serving the children and this further helps her to claim her identity as a mother. She is involved in nurturing others throughout her life narrative; she nurtures prisoners and their children, nurtures young offenders, women, her community and the country.

Asiyo recounts of the irrigation schemes that she helped establish in the constituency: *Seka-Bondo*, *Nyabiage* in *Kanyipir*, *Awach Tende* and *Kamser Seka*. She takes pride in what she managed to achieve for the people of Karachuonyo:

> Looking back now, I am gratified that I was able to meet most of the promises I had made to my constituents with the support and involvement of the community, professionals from the constituency and partners from around the world who readily came to support the projects. (145)

Irrigation schemes are about livelihoods and the provision of food as a mother, Asiyo is concerned with the provision of basic needs not just to her nuclear family but also the larger family that is her constituents. This helps her to construct herself as a mother, to her children, community and the country.

Asiyo looks at Kenya as her other community and she took the various needs of the country as her inspiration. She narrates that the needs of the Kenyan child during the difficult period of the state of emergency pushed her to join social work. She played the role of a foster mother and counselor to the many children whose parents were either killed or imprisoned during the war. In so doing, she saved the future of the country because children form the foundation for a country's future as citizens, human resource and leaders. She recalls:

> I remember one of the largest swoops in Nairobi was codenamed, 'Operation Anvil'. It especially separated many Kikuyu families. The mass arrests, detentions and killings created untold suffering to children, women and young adults. Some of the young men were eventually detained in Langata Quarry prison, which I visited from time to time. This aroused in me a tender spot for the children. It breaks my heart to see children suffer; this explains why I ended up fostering eight Mau Mau orphans. (45)

Asiyo did not look at the ethnic extraction of the children she chose to foster and serve; as a servant to the Kenyan community, she was blind to tribalism because she considers it a form of exclusion. She even risked her life to save the life of Agostino Theuri, a Mgikuyu mechanic and

friend to their family. She serves the needs of Kenyans of all tribes because the country is her community. She recalls of the incidence, "In the height of the emergency period, we risked our lives to save the life of Agostino Theuri" (45). When she introduced the Affirmative Motion, she was seeking to serve Kenya by ensuring that it became an inclusive society where the unity of men and women would ensure the country developed in all areas and the fruits of independence would be enjoyed by all citizens. Of her desire to change the situation of all Kenyans, Asiyo narrates of how the colonial experience made her set out to look out for the welfare of all Kenyan. She recalls:

> I interacted with a population that had been discriminated against through oppressive land policies, substandard education, poor medical services and trade. The suffering that Africans went through aroused my desire to question systems that perpetuated such cruel and inhuman practices. (47)

Through her service to the people, Asiyo comes out as a different kind of an epic hero, a heroine was does not harbor tyrannical traits unlike a majority of male epic heroes. She makes it clear that her quest, to end exclusion, is a matter of life and death; exclusion based or race, gender and ethnicity has the potential to destroy the Kenyan state. Asiyo gets her glory not through violent military excursions but through peaceful means like diplomacy and legislation. She does not resort to violence when confronting racism and patriarchy; she uses the power of reason. When discriminated against by the European members of the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation, she opts to form a parallel union and this threat of another women outfit forces the racist M.Y.W.O officials to open the membership to include African women. Through the use of diplomacy, Asiyo is able to save the life of a woman who had been prosecuted for a murder she had not committed. The said woman had pleaded guilty to save her son who had killed his father, her husband, while trying to defend the mother. Asiyo narrates:

> Reverend Kamau and I sought audience with Margaret Kenyatta who we knew was in a position to approach her father and plead our case. I also spoke to the then Attorney General who told me that the case had already cost the Kenya Government Shillings 80,000 which was a lot of money then. Still, through the combined efforts of the clergy from the Catholic and Anglican churches, the NCCK and Kenyatta's daughter, Margaret, we were able to reach President Kenyatta who commuted the death sentence. (67)

She uses education and the law to fight patriarchy by introducing the Affirmative Action. Asiyo's achievements are epic but they are not watered by spilled human blood or violence. As a result of her servant leadership, the Luo council of elders in Karachuonyo conferred her glory by admitting her as the first and so far the only woman elder to sit in the council. Owing to her service to the country, her fight for inclusivity in parliament, Asiyo is conferred by the country the honour of being part of the Team of Eminent Persons who were tasked by the country to lobby for the implementation of two-third rule after the supreme court of Kenya ruled on December 11, 2012 that the two third gender rule had to be implemented progressively.

Male epic heroes such as Achilles, Sundiata, Gilgamesh, Beowulf and Aeneas achieve their glory through violent campaigns. Achilles led the siege of Troy that eventually led to the mass murder of its citizens and the razing of the city to the ground. Achilles also practiced the dehumanization of those opposed to him by practicing sexual slavery; he enslaves a Trojan girl he captured during the war. He was also hot tempered and given to violent fits. When Agamemnon suggested he would be willing to give back Chryseis, the daughter of Cryses; the prophet of Apollo, the girl he had captured as a war trophy, in exchange for Achilles' sex slave, Achilles exploded in anger and came out to kill Agamemnon. Had it not been for the intervention of the goddess Athena who held Achilles by his hair, he would have killed Agamemnon. Gilgamesh is said to have been a tyrant who was given to a fiery temper, "walks back and forth, /like a bull lording, head held

aloft" (163-64). He was also a sexual predator who was said to have regularly sexually molested girls and women because no one in Uruk could confront him owing to his battle skills. He is described as, "One who, lets no girl go free to her bridegroom" (187-91) and that, "By day and night his tyranny grows" (169). Sundiata achieves his glory by defeating the enemies of the Kingdom of Mali through violent military campaigns. Aeneas has an uncontrollable temper and thirst for revenge. He confesses that the desire to kill Hellen serves no national purpose but is born out of selfish and personal feelings of revenge. In "The Fall of Troy" chapter of Virgil's *Aenid,* Aeneas confesses, "A passion to avenge my fallen town, and punish Hellen's whorishness" (340-41).

Asiyo's friends use epithets that emphasize on her mental faculties unlike in the case of the male epic heroes where the focus is on physical attributes. Wanjiku Kabira points out Asiyo's "advocacy skills" (xv), "passion for people" (xv), "pathfinder". (xiv) While Margaret Snyder describes Asiyo as, "A great story-teller" (ix), "a delicate humourous soul" (ix) Charity Kaluki Ngilu describes Asiyo as, "a person with a visionary and holistic outlook" (xvi). A close look at most male epics will depict the epic hero as being more of brawn that brain. *In Beowulf,* Beowulf is described as, "combat-hardened" (1539), "battle furious" (1539), "tall and truly strong" (196). Achilles on the other hand is described in the chapter "Rage of Achilles" of *The Iliad* as, "the headstrong runner" (174), "the swift runner" (141) "the matchless runner" (99). In *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* Gilgamesh is described as, "a wild bull" (163) and "has no equal when his weapons are brandished" (182). In *Sundiata*: *An Epic of old Mali,* Sundiata is described by Balla Fasseke as, "young lion" (4) and the focus is on his physical strength like the ability to bend a metal rod and to uproot and carry a mature baobab tree single-handedly.

A closer examination of Asiyo's epic story shows a focus on softer attributes such as love, empathy, diplomacy and a brilliant mind as the new concepts of epic heroism. Asiyo also introduces the idea of an epic hero, in her case, heroine who has no known weaknesses. Sundiata was crippled until the age of seven years, Gilgamesh is a depicted as being a selfish tyrant for some time before he is changed by the realization of his own mortality after Enkidu's death, Achilles has a problem with his temper, and Aeneas has an obsession with revenge. Asiyo structures her life narrative as an epic as a way of claiming and perpetuating her identity as a revolutionary political leader who played a great role in the widening of the democratic space in Kenya and championed for inclusivity from the village to the world stage. Her battle with both patriarchy and racism is epic because she was fighting entrenched hegemonies that were not keen on having the status quo changed.

Asiyo uses foreshadowing in the first chapter to signal to the reader what to expect in the rest of the book. She narrates of her paternal grandmother, Odete Magungu Nyar Olonde's military exploits and this signals to the reader that she intends to follow in the footsteps of her grandmother; a female warrior in her adult life. She narrates that her name Muga was originally for her father's cousin. She narrates:

> She was a renowned philanthropist who had spent her days caring for the destitute children in the village. This is why my parents found it befitting to name their daughter after her as a way of paying her homage. Muga's benevolent work in the village earned her another name – Obisa. Many years later, I have an inkling that I did not only inherit Muga's name, but also some of her attributes. (3)

The explanation about the character and achievements of the original owner of her name provides clues to the reader that Asiyo will turn out to be a dedicated servant of the community. This is another attribute of the epic where the hero is predestined to follow a particular path or/and name

While narrating about her entry into politics and her confrontation with both Okiki Amayo and the KANU government, Asiyo makes allusion to the story of Antigone by Sophocles. She compares the state of political exclusion of women in Kenya to that of ancient Greece. She narrates:

> The subjugation of women is the one thing for their involvement in decision-making. This goes a long way in illuminating the social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men. Women in our cultural and national setting in Kenya were in some cases, perceived in the same terms as existed in ancient Greece. (182)

Like Antigone, Asiyo confronts a powerful hegemony that subordinates women to men; a system that excludes women from political leadership and decisions. Asiyo like Antigone rises to correct ills in a society where tyranny rules supreme; the KANU government had shrunk the democratic space and president Moi had become a tyrant surrounded by praise singers. She recalls:

> In joining elective politics, I had no illusions about what I was up against. Fossilised strong practices of sexism and one-party system in Kenya starkly stood in my way. Pushed by a personal responsibility to correct such gender imbalances that had consigned women like me to the margins of political leadership, I drove myself hard to dexterously navigate this treacherous landscape. (115)

Although Antigone was the daughter of King Oedipus, she is not considered for leadership, only her brothers Polyneices and Eteocles are, because they are men. Antigone becomes political when she chooses to cover Polyneices' body with dust as way of burying him; she disobeyed King Creon's degree to have the body left for carrion birds. Asiyo's entry into politics puts her

life in danger just like Antigone but it also helps transform the country albeit slowly; brings some form of inclusivity in the leadership. Antigone ends up making Creon and Thebes accept divergent views , especially from women, the same way Asiyo makes the KANU government realize it could not exclude women from leadership and governance forever; she defeated the then member of parliament for Karachuonyo, David Okiki Amayo was the national chairman of the ruling party, KANU. This allusion helps Asiyo claim her identity as a voice of reason in Kenya and at the same time helps her signal to the reader that she is a widely read individual. This allusion also makes the reader understand that like Antigone, Asiyo's entry into politics was inspired by her love for her country and people and not personal interests.

The writer employs intense symbolism as a literary strategy while narrating her story. Several characters in the story are used symbolically. Asiyo's father is a symbol of change: he treats women and girls as equal members of the society by giving them opportunities, respect and dignity. He takes his daughters to school at a time when men were the model of being and his contemporaries were only concerned with educating their sons. Asiyo and her sisters all went to school because the father had broken away from the patriarchal philosophy of his Luo community and accepted Christianity. He encouraged his son-in-law, Perpetua's husband, to appreciate the idea of his a wife achieving economic independence. Asiyo's grandmother, Odete Magungu Nyar Olonde, is used symbolically in Asiyo's text. She subverts the patriarchal social structures by becoming a warrior in a community that traditionally maped out the battlefied as a masculine space. Asiyo narrates about her grandmother, "she was a warrior, a fighter" (4).Asiyo's coronation as a Luo elder is symbolic of a new dawn in her Luo community; the beginning or the era of social inclusivity. The curved rod given to her by Akal Kwach, a

respected Luo elder symbolizes leadership and undescores Asiyo's capability to lead the Luo nation. Kenya's parliament is used symbolically to represent the epitome of patraichal philosophy. She narrates, "The Standing Orders expressly talked of, "Mister Speaker," (a practice inherited from the former British and Commonwealth tradition). It was understood that the Speaker of the House would invariably be a man" (147).

The title, *It is Possible*: *An African Women Speaks* acts as a cohesive device in this text. It foregrounds the idea of subversion and affront to institutions and philosophies that propagate social exclusion such as patriachy and racism. The title helps project Asiyo as a daring, courageous and determined character who refuses to be silenced. As an African woman born during the colonial period, she is silenced by both patriarchy and racism but she rebels against this silencing of women. Asiyo chose to tell her story, to chronicle her epic exploits and not let others speak for her.

Lastly, Asiyo employs journey motif to chronicle the events and experiences of her life. Her life is a series of journeys and this helps build up the idea of an epic quest undertaken an epic heroine. The several journeys she undertakes metaphorically represent the learning process. In her childhood, Asiyo undertakes a journey from home to Kamagambo School to further her education. There she learns that patriarchy is entrenched even in the educational spaces and that she has to fight for what is rightfully hers. She is delegated to the position of a deputy school captain on enquiry she learns that the captaincy is reserved for men. She vows to keep fighting for all forms of exclusion from an early age because of such experiences. To train as a teacher, Asiyo is admitted at Kangaru Teachers College and she has to travel by train for the first time.

Along the way, Asiyo learns about the existence of other nations/communities that make up the political edifice called the Kenya colony, later the republic of Kenya. She narrates:

> One thing I can still vividly bring to my mind is the dynamic shift in language across the small towns during my journey. It was surprising that Dholuo, my parents' language, was no longer the only currency of communication, which was quite illuminating to a young girl who had spent her entire childhood in the village where Dholuo was the default language. The deeper the train snaked its way towards Nairobi, the more language I heard people speak. In particular, I heard people speak, Kikuyu, Kipsigis and limited Kiswahili. (25)

This journey also brings her in direct contact with the ugly reality of racial discrimination during the colonial period; train stations were demarcated along racial lines. She recalls her arrival in Nairobi on her way to Embu, "Pastor Robinson, the other black passengers and I, waited at our designated 'black only' waiting area" (26). Asiyo narrates about this incident to highlight the rampant racism and discrimination of Africans during the colonial period; racism was institutionalised as a governance policy by the British colonial administrations in Kenya. Before her entry into active politics in 1979, Asiyo travelled to Washington DC in the United States of America where she attended a workshop. The workshop and training had been organised by Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). She narrates of the lessons she learned during the trip, "The training opened my inner eye and ear, to visualize and listen to the other reality, often hidden from public discourse – the reality that women live day and night" (114). Asiyo here confesses that education empowers people and that it should be a continuous process.

When Asiyo becomes Member of Parliament for Karachuonyo and later the Goodwill ambassador for UNIFEM, she makes several trips around the world. Her journey to Ghana, Mexico and Philippines makes her realize that women world over have common problems like

political exclusion. As global leader, Asiyo is appointed into many international bodies and this necessitates travel. Her travel to Palestine as a representative in 2005 and the journey helped her learn that the Israeli- Palestinian peace talks to address the conflict that goes back to 1947 did not include women or seek for the opinions of women from both nations. This made her to push the International Women's Commission to have Israeli and Palestinian women sit and talk about peace and their intertwined destinies. The use of journey motif makes Asiyo buttress her identity as an epic heroine, a champion for inclusivity around the world.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I find that Asiyo engages several autobiographical strategies to narrate her life story. The structure of the autobiography is meant to signal to the reader about the particular identity that Asiyo wants to project to the world. She structures her autobiography as an epic and introduces new concepts to the traditional epic structure as a way of constructing her identity as a modern epic heroine; a revolutionary politician and a servant leader whose life mission is to dismantle all constructions – cultural, social, political and economic that propagate acts of exclusion among human societies. The discussion on this chapter also finds that Asiyo inscribes herself into the Kenyan narrative by recalling history and narrating about her contribution to the country. I discover that Asiyo is concerned about the failure of the country to achieve nationhood or unity and that she feels the necessary intervention measures should be introduced at the national level, through legislation and political representation from where they can then trickle to the village and individual level. Asiyo points out that the current national problems have their foundation in the country's past and that for Kenya to develop economically and achieve national unity, there is a need to examine history.

The chapter also finds that Asiyo considers herself an exceptional achiever and thus she narrates her life story as a way of inspiring others; she is offering herself as a role model for the entire world to emulate. The chapter also notes that Asiyo intertwines her life narrative with Kenya's history as a way of reminding the country that the present; failures or/ and successes are tied to its history. Asiyo uses the autobiographical narrative voice to comment on issues that she considers important such as servant leadership, inclusivity and the value of children as a country's major resource.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study aimed at examining how contemporary Kenyan women autobiographers in privileged positions narrate their publicness. The focus of the study was on three autobiographies: *Run Gazelle Run, Mirrors of my Life* and *It is Possible*: *An African Woman Speaks* by Ciarunji Chesaina, Rebeka Njau and Phoebe Asiyo respectively. The three writers have been public figures in contemporary Kenya and thus the study aimed at interrogating how the three women employ their life narratives to paint a portrait of Kenya. I further sought to examine how the three autobiographers use various autobiographical strategies to explore and assert their private and public identities.

The study objectives were: to interrogate the autobiographical elements in the selected life narratives, to explore the strategies of narrating self the three writers employ and to examine the issues the three writers comment on in their autobiographies. The study hypotheses were: the selected writers employ various autobiographical elements in their life stories, the contemporary Kenyan women autobiographer employs various narrative strategies to inscribe themselves into the Kenyan narrative and that the three autobiographers use their life narratives to address both personal and national issues.

The study was guided by three theories: the theory of the autobiography, feminist literary criticism and narratology. The theory of the autobiography was informed by the fact that I was dealing with life narratives. The theory makes reference to the nature and functions of the genre of the autobiography as a unique form of writing. The Feminist literary criticism came in because

I was examining gender relations in the three texts. I employed Black feminism, Ecofeminism, liberal and Marxist branches of feminism. Black feminism observes that Black women are 'othered' on the basis of skin colour and race, ecofeminism examines the connection between women and the environment as both are oppressed by patriarchal philosophy, liberal feminism advocates for political and legal reforms to help achieve equality of men and women in the society and the Marxist branch of feminism that looks at economic inequality as the source of all forms of inequality in the society. The third theory was the theory of narratology that examines how stories are constructed.

The study is of the view that the three autobiographies take the form of confessions. They invite the reader to examine very intimate and private details of their lives; they engage in intense self-revelation. The three writers narrate intimate details of their lives in an unrestrained manner. Rita Felski in, "Confession" defines this form of autobiographical writing as, "A type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" (83). The study found that the three writers engage in a variety of artistic strategies to narrate their stories. I noted that Chesaina wrote her autobiography as an African folktale or oral narrative, Njau structured her life story as a hybrid of a poem and a play while Asiyo has written her life narrative as an epic. I observed both Chesaina and Njau have fragmented plot structures and that the fragmentation was achieved by the intense use of digressive units, specifically poems, songs, oral narratives and analeptic narratives. I determined that the plot fragmentation was influenced by the content of their stories; both writers are narrating pain and trauma and the fragmentation in narration was a reflection of pain and the loss of inner personal equilibrium. I established that Asiyo's life narrative has a coherent plot

structure; this could be tied to the fact that she has a solid family and that unlike Njau and Chesaina, she did not experience the pain and trauma that comes with family disintegration. Njau suffers trauma induced by domestic violence and her family disintegrates through divorce, while Chesaina suffers the pain of rejection and an unsupportive husband. Both Njau and Chesaina did not find acceptance and love in their matrimonial families and they confess that this left them with feelings of self-doubt and depression. Their marriages therefore left them with a degree of emotional imbalance and pain. Asiyo on the other hand marries the man she loved and who loved her back in equal measure. Asiyo's husband supports her to achieve her dream of political leadership and forms the foundation of her support system. She does not experience family trauma as her marriage was a source of inspiration and stability in her adult life. Asiyo's coherent plot structure thus reflects her sense of emotional and psychological stability. By narrating her story as an epic, Asiyo therefore manages to construct herself as a revolutionary political leader.

I discovered that the structuring of the narratives was also tied to the construction of identity; especially the prominent identity that the three autobiographers wanted to project to the reader. Lourdes Torres in, "The Construction of the Self in U.S Latina Autobiographies observes that life narratives by non-European women, who she calls women of colour, tend to exhibit characteristic disjointed narrative units. She points out, "The seeming subversive elements include fictional tales, myths and fantasies as a way of constructing themselves" (qtd in *Autobiographical Voices* by Francoise Lionnet, 6) Chesaina's appropriation of the African folktale structure is meant to help her project herself as a literary artist whose key trajectory is the African literature; this structure therefore helps her to construct herself as an African writer.

This is in my view the principal identity she wants to project to the world. I discovered that Njau tells her story as a lamentation that ends up in a victory song. She however, structures the autobiography to reflect a hybrid of a poem and a play. I noted that this was meant to help her construct herself as a versatile artist; a poet, a novelist, a playwright and a tie-dye specialist. While reviewing her autobiography, Tom Odhiambo had this to say about her narrative structure, "As poet and a dramatist, Rebeka Njau writes her life story in *Mirrors of my Life* as if it is stanzas of a poem or acts in a play. Because of this style of the work, in which one stanza seems to have been merged with an act, we can read the memoir as a story told in cycles" (29).

Narrative structure is central in identity construction by the selected contemporary Kenyan women autobiographers. The study noted that journey motif is a principal autobiographical strategy employed by the three writers and that it was a metaphor for the learning process. The autobiographical narrative voice was used to create coherence in the autobiographies and thus it helped in creating the element of autobiographical truth in the three life stories. I noted that the three autobiographers use intertextuality, specifically allusion as a way of constructing themselves. Reference to known literary artists and texts by both Chesaina and Njau was meant to help them project themselves as widely read individuals and internationally acclaimed artists. Asiyo uses allusion to construct herself as an epic revolutionary leader whose quest is to achieve inclusivity in the society.

The study discovered that lamentation is a running motif in the three autobiographies; it acts as a figuring device in the three texts. The three writers are involved in some form of lament; Chesaina bemoans the destruction inflicted on women by patriarchy. She decries family disintegration and points out the damage it leaves on the members by narrating about her

marriage that she confesses was not a happy one; that she suffered rejection and lack of spousal support. Njau laments about domestic violence that she experienced in her marriage. She bemoans the trauma induced on Kenyans by the colonial policies and experience. Asiyo bemoans the exclusion of women in Kenyan political leadership due to patriarchal social structures and philosophy. She laments about the shrunk democratic space in the first two post-independent Kenyan governments under presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi. I discovered that the use of paratextual elements like photos and legal documents is meant to help the writers authenticate their memories as well as construct micro narratives within the main narrative. The paratextual elements also help in the cultivation of autobiographical truth because the readers can independently verify the claims made. The study also established that the use of photographs is a strategy of self-inscription by the autobiographers.

The study observes that the three writers intertwine their personal narratives with the history of Kenya as a way of inscribing themselves into the national narrative. The three autobiographers reconstruct the history of the country by recalling it, especially the colonial history. They detail the events of the State of Emergency that happened between 1952 and 1959 when Kenya was still a British colony. They narrate about the struggle for independence and the historical injustices committed against Kenyans by the British colonial administration. Having been born during the colonial period in Kenya's history, the three autobiographers give us an insider's perspective since their lived experiences transcend the colonial and post-colonial Kenya. They reconstruct the country's history by narrating the roles that women played in the struggles for independence. The intertwining of their stories with the national history also helps the three autobiographers to cultivate credibility in their stories. The three writers also narrate about their

contribution to nation building as a way of inscribing themselves into the larger Kenyan narrative. Chesaina and Njau narrate about their contribution to education and art, Asiyo narrates about her public service ; her efforts to reform the prison department, her role in saving the children of Kenyans who had been either killed or detained by the British army on suspicion of being Mau Mau fighters and sympathizers. Asiyo also narrates about the roles she played as a political leader such as the introduction of the affirmative action that sought to increase the representation of women in Kenya political leadership. The selected contemporary Kenya women autobiographers use their life narratives to construct their identities as daughters, sisters, mothers, wives and public servants.

The study finds that the three autobiographers also inscribe themselves into the larger Kenyan narrative by highlighting what they consider as impediments to the creation of a united country and the concept of nationhood. They all point out that the country needs to look at its history to address historical injustices that were committed during the establishment of colonial rule. Both Njau and Chesaina observe that the challenges of achieving development in all sectors and nationhood can be addressed at the family level. To the two writers, many of the problems the country faces are value oriented; the necessary social and moral values should be introduced at the family level so that children grow up to be responsible citizens who have embraced values like honesty. Asiyo looks at the national challenges as being legal and political and that if the two are addressed at the national level, they will trickle down to the family level and people will be responsible citizens because there is a guiding constitution and support from national leadership. The study demonstrates that the writers use their personal stories to comment on issues; private and national. The three writers celebrate formal education as an empowerment

tool especially for women. They see education as giving women agency to become economically empowered thus making them contribute significantly to family and national development. They use the narrative voice to champion for environmental conservation, political inclusion for women; to highlight the effects of gender based violence/ domestic violence, to talk about the role of family in nation building, the role and place of art and the artist in the society.

The study achieved its objectives and proved its hypotheses to be true. Further, the study discovered that the contemporary Kenyan women autobiographers look at the British colonial rule of Kenya as a paradoxical historical event; at one side they look at it as a tragedy that greatly traumatized the population and entrenched many of the problems that Kenya faces up to today; divide and rule and economic and political exclusion of a part of the population while on the other hand, they look at colonization as having played a role in empowering the Kenyan woman by introducing them to education and by discouraging some of the cultural practices like female circumcision.

The study also discovered that the three writers look at the city as a paradoxical space; they travel to the city, which is a metaphor for modernity to achieve either education or employment. However, later in their lives after self-actualization in terms of career, the three women autobiographers make a journey in an effort to reconnect with the village. The village was treated as a metaphor for traditional life, which was largely patriarchal and thus unfriendly to women. Chesaina reconnects with the village through philanthropy in Embu and Baringo counties. Njau leaves the city to resettle in Ongata Rongai while Asiyo reconnects with the village by contesting for and serving as the Karachuonyo Member of Parliament and later by being crowned as a Luo

elder. This is noted to be an indication that the three writers experienced feelings of alienation in their adulthood and this was occasioned by their exposure to formal education.

This study cannot claim to be conclusive on the topic of autobiographies by Kenyan women and it therefore suggests further research into the area of life narratives. The study proposes a comparative study of autobiographies by Kenyan women in public spaces with those of ordinary women to examine the strategies of self-construction and narrating the self. A further study could be undertaken that specifically focuses on Kenyan woman occupiers of privileged spaces who have been born after Kenya's independence.

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