

**NARRATING THE NATION: IMAGES OF KENYA THROUGH  
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE NARRATION IN *THE DRAGONFLY SEA*  
BY YVONNE ADHIAMBO OWUOR.**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT  
OF LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE.**

**2020**

## DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has not been submitted for examination or award of degree in any other university.

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This project report has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my late mum: Mary Chepkosgey Kosgey, your belief in my capabilities has been my inspiration. Your love for education lives in each and every page of this thesis. For the strict disciplinarian you were, you still send thunderstorms behind the wind, that is you mom.

To my dad: Samwel Kosgey Kipyego, for the sacrifice you've made throughout this journey. You live in our hearts dad.

To my Grandmum: Christine Leonida Kutto (BotTipTuwei), your fireside stories of yester years were not for nothing. I am bringing the cattle home.

To my siblings: Carol Muigei, Wyllinah Jepkorir and Victor Yego Kipchirchir, with love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Immense gratitude goes to God almighty, to whom I owe this life, for good health and protection during this journey

This research project would not have been possible without the guidance, commitment, patience and expertise of my academic supervisors and mentors Dr. Tom Odhiambo and Dr. Judith Jefwa. Notwithstanding the Corona Virus menace, their invaluable input has made this dissertation into this present form. Immense gratitude goes to them. To Dr. Odhiambo and Dr. Jefwa, I have learnt a lot from the two of you. To Dr. Tom Odhiambo, I lack words to express my gratitude for the kindness you extended to me. Thank you for the copy of *The Dragonfly Sea* that you purchased for me. Asante Sana!

I am forever indebted to The Graduate School, University of Nairobi, for offering me the scholarship to pursue this Master of Arts in Literature Course. To Dr. Masumi Odari, if I were to write my story from Medias res, I would particularly begin from the phone call I received from you that Wednesday afternoon of September 2018. Thank you Mwalimu.

I extend my thanks to my lecturers during this period: Prof Henry Indangasi, Prof. Monica Mweseli, Dr. Masumi Odari, Dr. Makau Kitata, Dr. Miriam Musonye, Dr. Jeniffer Muchiri, Dr. Joseph Muleka and Dr. Bhakti for the support they gave me during this academic journey. To Mr. Mumia Osaaji and Mr. Sean, I appreciate the immense scholarly interactions we shared together.

To my classmates – Wayne Otieno and Simon Munga whom we all earned ourselves the tag ‘The Three Musketeers’ Thank you. You guys gave me the courage to go on. I miss the trio class every single day. To my senior classmates, Otieno, June Chelule, Edna Dorine, Jurkuch, Ileri, Gitonga, Ochieng, Athnas and Ruth and to my juniors Spourtinah, Maxwell, Zeitun, Dan, Brenda, Laura, Sharon and Celia thank you for the material and moral support.

I also acknowledge the moral and material support from my friends Robert Tanui, Hillary Kipyegon, Mercy Cheruto, Madam Sarah Moss, Stanley Ngetich, Chief Munai, Vincent, Moses, Shadrack Biwott, Garisson, Dan, Andrew, Felo, Sammy, Evance, Chemu, Zippy, Jack, Munai, Meshack, Noah, Mathew Tai, Onger, Mwalimu Sam Otieno, Mwalimu Kanyari, Kimotho, Kevin Justice, Brian Letting, Kimotho Anke and Kendi Asanteni Sana.

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* and how individual and collective narratives in the novel mirror, interrogate, examine and reimagine the nation – particularly Kenya. This study contends that individual and collective stories provide enough canvas in which we can interpret and understand the nation, nation-state and nationhood. The argument in this research is that Owuor uses individual and collective stories to narrate the nation. This individual and collective narratives create a different platform that we can understand the nation away from the hegemonic narratives of the nation that ignores the stories of the 'othered' individuals who, according to this research, possess stories that are relevant in redefining the nation and nationhood. Therefore, the focus of this literary research lies in exploring how Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* documents narratives of individual and collective experiences within the framework of the nation-state. These individual and collective stories significantly provoke a conversation about the nation since they evoke the Kenyan nation's landscape on issues of ancestry and identity, profiling and terrorism, porous borders and transnationalism, family and women all which are relevant in understanding the nation. Admittedly, this study revealed that individual and collective stories provide the basis of redefining, understanding and negotiating the nation and nationhood.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### **Introduction**

One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same

*Song of Myself*, Walt Whitman.

In an interview dated 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2014 with Kingwa Kamencu in the *Daily Nation*, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor talking about her debut novel *Dust* remarked that, “I wish to understand something about my country, one that murders the best of its own. What kind of nation gets terrified of a great imagination? What kind of people annihilates holders of persistent and transcending dream?” Five years later, in her second novel *The Dragonfly Sea*, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor continues the quest of understanding the nation.

The question of a nation as a unified whole has been a controversial subject of discussion by scholars. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* authoritatively asserts that nations are “imagined communities that are artificially constructed and sustained and are not deeply rooted in History or some natural cultural identity.” (6) According to Anderson, nations are thought of as bounded, sovereign and horizontally uniform regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each. He argues that at the end of the day, membership of a nation requires people to carry out an act of imagination through which they identify with others whom they will never actually meet or even see.

Anderson's argument echoes Neal Sobania's projection of Kenya as a nation. According to Neal Sobania in *Culture and Customs of Africa*, Kenya is a country of many contrasts, defined by a complex medley of vast geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity (1). Sobania's statement is reiterated by Steve Akoth in *The Challenge of Nationhood* where he observes that Kenya was constituted by the British administration as a "Constellation of cultural nations" (16). Of significance in Akoth and Sobania's argument on the state of a nation lie in their submission and admission that a nation called Kenya exists albeit the diversity it boasts of. Akoth sees this diversity as constituting *nations*. [Emphasis added]

The quest for and the recreation of a nation in literature has been demonstrated by various scholars. According to James Ogude in *Ngugi's Novels and African History* elites like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his contemporaries in the 1960s generally imagined themselves as the creators of the nation (129). Ogude argues that history and literature invoke the principle of selection and derive their material from specific cultures and historical experiences. He states that fiction gives space to ordinary people like peasants who are marginalized from a country's history. He maintains that these spaces provided by fiction allows for the (hi)stories of (un)known individuals in a nation to be heard. At the core of this study is to understand how Owuor, shapes, orders and interprets a nation through restaging, mapping and appropriating individual and collective stories as constitutive narratives of nationhood.

This study is interested in showing how the nation has been narrated through individual and collective stories. I argue that individual and collective stories are constitutive narratives of nationhood. A reading of Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* evokes interesting questions worth interrogating. In other words, mapping individual and collective narratives in the novel creates a conversation on how we could see or rethink

the nation. For instance, the profiling of Ziriya, Muhidin and the general populace of Pate as terrorists provides personal and collective stories that can be mapped into the nation to facilitate its interpretation. In addition to the individual and collective stories, by placing *The Dragonfly Sea* in a conversation with a nation's histories, global pirates menace, Chinese upsurge in the continent of Africa, terrorism, narratives of tax evasion, marginalization and alienation among other issues, I seek to show how Yvonne Owuor deconstructs rigidities of nationhood and recreates a new arena where we can look at a nation.

Published in 2019, *The Dragonfly Sea* is a Kenyan novel authored by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor. The novel presents a coming of age narrative that traces the life of a young girl Ayaana Abeera Mlingoti. In the author's note, Owuor admits that the story is inspired by a 2005 historical event in which a young woman (Mwamaka Sharifu) from Pate Island, Kenya, obtained a scholarship to study in China owing to family claims and DNA tests that suggested that she indeed had Chinese ancestry. Sharifu was deemed a descendant of a Ming-dynasty sailor, believed to have survived the Admiral Zheng He's voyage in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. This historical sojourn provides the template for the narrative. However, the author warns against reading it as the story of Mwamaka Sharifu.

It is in no doubt that Yvonne Owuor has fashioned the protagonist of her novel Ayaana and Zheng He, another important character that aids in the plot development of the novel, on real historical figures and events. I contend that Owuor appropriates the historical stories to narrate the nation. Owuor ingeniously merges events of two historical periods and re-walks the sea journey restaging the very events, themes and even characters.

Ayaana, the protagonist, is first introduced waiting for a father. A father she has never known. In Ayaana's imminent search for a father, a search which cuts across the novel, we are introduced to narratives of single mothers—a case of Munira who has to raise her child alone. It would be interesting to investigate how the story of Munira as a person and as a representative of single mothers unfolds. When Ayaana later secures a scholarship as descendant to China, we walk her path together—her fears, wishes, tribulations, joys etc. These tidbits of stories that give us Ayaana's story among other such narratives inform the discussion on the implications of individual narratives on the nation.

The major setting of the novel is Pate, an island off the Kenyan coast. Owuor weaves a narrative that spans continents, places, cultures and even centuries but consciously maintains Pate as the centre. The deliberate rendition of the Island as invisible in the atlas, has been given exposition four times in the novel. This is important in navigating the idea of the nation. In addition, the invisibility of Pate is further given emphasis when the unnamed foreign affairs staff—who accompanies the Chinese in their archaeological quest to relive and revive the past—is baffled that Pate is still within Kenya. This study therefore focuses on the setting as a text and analyzes how such a globalized space that has been created by the author generates narratives that help in how we look at a nation.

The decision to have Pate or rather the Kenyan coast as the main setting of the novel cannot be gainsaid. In his unpublished doctoral thesis submitted to Stellenbosch University in 2017, Wafula Yanjela in “Narrated Histories in Selected Kenyan novels 1963-2013” states that “the Kenyan coast is one of the spaces in Africa that has experienced vigorous transnational contacts.” (23). On the same note, Chaparukha Kusimba in *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States* claims that the Biblical King Solomon

is reputed to have sent trading fleets to the coast of eastern Africa. (19) Kusimba goes further to state “By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when East Africa came under British and German rule, the Swahili had already experience over 350 years of colonial control. As a result their culture and ethnic identity underwent great transformations.” (27)

Kusimba states that the Swahili had been colonial subjects to the King of Portugal and to the Sultanate of Oman. Whereas scholars traces the formation of a country called Kenya to the British colonialism (Akoth 2011 and Hornsby 2013), Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* restores the forgotten story of parts of the nation having interacted with the world centuries ago. As a matter of fact, Ayaana’s DNA suggests that she is of Chinese ancestry. This study is interested in Ayaana’s individual story and how it can be extrapolated to interpret the nation. The question that can be asked here is: Which space can we best place Ayaana? Is she Chinese or Kenyan? Moreover, the Chinese cemetery in Pate evokes questions on how we look at Pate as a space within a nation.

It is not only the interaction of the Kenyan coast and the world at large that influences the trajectory of nationhood in this research. Isabel Hofmeyr’s argument in an article “Universalizing the Indian Ocean” also qualifies the significance of the setting of the novel to this study. Hofmeyr points out that the Indian Ocean now provides an arena in which global issues interact. For instance, the new economic superpowers; India and China, audacious Somali pirates, continued operation of the Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab in the Indian Ocean ‘compels our attention to the Indian Ocean’ (721). Similarly, Evan Mwangi and Tina Steiner echo this statement and amplify what other scholars like Lionnet (2011), Ojwang (2013) and Samuelson (2017) have emphasized. According to Mwangi and Steiner, scholars “have noted the centrality of the Indian Ocean literature to the rethinking of the way cultures interact with one another in modes of relations and do not necessarily regard the West as the centre of the universe.” (161). It will be

interesting to see how Owour in *The Dragonfly Sea* imagines a nation as such cultures interact.

The proliferation of transnationalism which includes the creation of transnational families has also been given exposition in the novel. Ayaana, the protagonist, is a child of two worlds. *The Dragonfly Sea* thus poses a riddle wrapped in historical mystery on the belonging of Ayaana. In the ship that Ayaana boards to China, strong ties of a multiracial and transnational family are forged. For instance, Delaksha from Kerala is buried in Pate. Lai Jin—the ship captain—travels back to Pate to marry Ayaana. In essence, an interrogation of how the transnational narratives contest the nation also informs this study.

In her fiction, Owuor has carved a special place for the question of a nation. In her debut novel *Dust* (2013), Owuor captures Kenya's history from the colonial period up until 2007-2008 Post Election Violence. In *Dust*, we witness the myriads of issues that the nation grapples with. *Dust* seems to be a call to listen to the haunting screams of patriots like Tom Mboya who were assassinated. Arguably Owuor succeeds in re-writing their stories even as they squirm in their graves. More importantly, the narration of the death of Odidi in the novel's prologue gives each and every page a scent of death and thus raises the question of corruption and assassinations that the author takes issue with. Odidi's death which has been juxtaposed with the death through assassination of other Kenyans creates a conversation about the nation. In addition, Owuor's choice of setting for her novels depicts a contestation of nation-state known boundaries. In *Dust*, Nyipir keeps asking about the news of Kenya and its leaders Agwambo (Raila Odinga) and Chibaki (Kibaki) as if he is not part of the country (89). This statement alone portrays a clearly ostracized person from the deemed 'Kenya.' The question of 'Kenyanness' is thus highlighted. In essence, Nyipir's case seeks to redefine a nation.

This has been echoed and intricately mapped into *The Dragonfly Sea* where the setting—Pate—feels itself alien and unknown to the Mainland discourse. To borrow Benedict’s definition of a nation, Pate seems to imagine itself as constituting ‘Kenya’ Muhidin remarks “*Pwani si Kenya*, the coast is not Kenya.” (282). This clearly portrays the feeling of alienation of the citizens of a margin, Pate.

Described as playful, easy-going, mischievous and one with a wild sense of humour, (*Daily Nation*, 3 Jan 2014) Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is a Kenyan author born in 1968 in Nairobi. She studied Linguistics and Literature at Kenyatta University. She has a Master of Arts in TV/Video Development from Reading University in the United Kingdom. Owuor did creative writing at the University of Queensland, Australia. She previously worked as the Executive Director for the Zanzibar International Film Festival. Her novel, *Dust*, offers a sharp critical commentary of Kenya. *Dust* won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 2015. She published *Weight of Whispers*, a short story, which won the Caine Prize for Literature. Her short story *The Knife Grinder’s Tale* was made into a short film in 2005.

In this study, I contend that Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* gives meaning to the understanding of a nation and nationhood and challenges the existing notions about a nation as a unified whole by creatively deploying various individual and collective stories. A critical evaluation of these narratives will help point out how we define a nation. In studying the how of *The Dragonfly Sea*, I will examine various elements of narratology such as narrative voice, narrative perspective, narrative order and others and their significance in telling the personal and collective stories.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be used frequently in this research, it therefore warrants some explanation at this stage.

### **Nation**

Defining a nation has proved a very problematic concept. The primary question that one seeks to understand in the discourse of a nation is; what constitutes a nation? Nwokedi and Ngwu avers that “At the most basic level, nation has been defined as a collective or large group of individuals that are bound together and therefore unified by commonalities like language, ethnicity, habits, behaviours and customs.” (3). On the other hand, Benedict Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them. Yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (6). It is this feeling of a shared identity that buys them into the wider membership of collective solidarity and of a history on a nation scale.

Anderson’s argument provides a significant starting point in the conversation of the nation. Anderson identifies features that define a nation as an imagined political community for instance, the collective recognition of time and standard language (256). He attributes this to the question of national identity; a collective identity so to speak. With this in mind, Anderson’s definition of a nation will be helpful in this study in that use of Swahili language and Swahili aphorism in the novel *The Dragonfly Sea* amounts to the language that curves the collective identity. In addition, mapping the narrative in the novel to independence eve ascribes to a time-centre. This centre becomes the nation.

However, two main issues demand our attention as far as Anderson's definition of a nation is concerned. Firstly, Anderson views all communities as basically 'imagined'. Secondly, Anderson presumes a blanket opinion about a 'collective identity'. In Anderson's terms, there is an aura and a strong sense of belonging within a specifically demarcated geo-political space. In this respect, this study finds it uncomfortable to fully adopt and deploy Anderson's definition. This is because we cannot ignore the fact that cultural differences and diversities may and actually do exist, not only within nation-states, but also among national communities that are dispersed geographically (Chagara 17). The fact that *The Dragonfly Sea* spans continents and transnational interaction and integration invites our attention to the cultural differences that are in play in the next.

To facilitate and accommodate this branch of thought about a nation therefore, this study will also borrow from the definition from Stuart Hall. Hall defines a nation as "a symbolic community." (612). According to Hall, both allegiance to categories of social identification like religion, tribe and others gradually and eventually shift to the nation with more inclusive representations. Taking the nation to mean a symbolic community in this study will allow and account for the cultural diversity and differences that characterizes several characters in the novel. This is putting in mind that within the story of a nation, Yvonne Owuor has given snippets of a multicultural and a transnational story.

### **Nationhood**

*The Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines nationhood as "the state of being a nation." This definition provides the starting point in thinking over the meaning of nationhood. The definition of a nation as "Imagined political community" (Anderson) and "a symbolic community" (Hall) that have been borrowed and adopted to provide

interpretive view for this research gives a glimpse into what nationhood is. In this respect, the state and belief of being a political community or a symbolic community amounts to nationhood. Nwokedi and Ngwu observe that “Nationhood involves some sense of political community. However tenuous, this allows for loosely defined bonds to be created, marked by affiliation to any number of qualities” (3). In essence, Nwokedi and Ngwu take nationhood to spell that which constitutes a nation. In this research therefore, nationhood is seen as the state or quality of being a nation.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Writers in the discourses of nation and nationhood portray different storylines that define the very notion and understanding of nation and nationhood. For instance, authors of works of fiction “imagine themselves as creators of the nation” (Ogude, 129). Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* uses various narrative techniques to expose narratives that are meaningful to the discourse of nation and nationhood but are often ignored. Such ignored narratives that Owuor has fashioned in her novel *The Dragonfly Sea* span individual and collective experiences. In so doing, she gives a new dimension, meaning and taste to the understanding of the nation. Therefore, by examining the narration of individual and collective narratives in Owuor’s *The Dagonfly Sea*, I contend that Owuor uses these narratives to give meaning to the discourse of a nation, challenge the notion of a nation as a collective entity and expose important but ignored or silenced facets of narratives of nationhood. In other words, this interrogation seeks to examine how *The Dragonfly Sea* can contribute to debates of national consciousness through an examination of individual and collective stories.

## **Objectives**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To examine the implications of individual and collective narration on the nation in *The Dragonfly Sea* by Yvonne Owuor
- b) To interrogate the effectiveness of the narrative strategies in the narration of individual and collective stories in *The Dragonfly Sea* by Yvonne Owuor

## **Hypotheses**

This study presupposes that:

- a) Individual and collective stories in *The Dragonfly Sea* define the nation
- b) The narrative strategies in *The Dragonfly Sea* are effective in narrating the nation through individual and collective narratives.

## **Justification**

The complexity of defining and understanding a nation has proved a challenge to many scholars. Hassan Wario Arero in “Coming to Kenya: Imagining and Perceiving a Nation among the Borana of Kenya” asserts that:

Studies of nations, and all the ‘-isms’ that accompany the attempt to unravel the concept of the ‘nation’, are as *complex as they are diverse*. Developing countries, and in particular post-colonial African nation-states, epitomise many of the problems inherent in the definition of terms such as ‘nation’, ‘national identity’, ‘nationalism’, and so on. The pursuit of the nation in the context of the developing world has been a turbulent and circuitous process. Not even the ‘invention’ of ‘historical continuity’, or the personification of ‘the nation’ in symbol or in image as a distilled and bounded entity, has saved independent African states from experiencing the severe disturbances which have stemmed

from divergent ideas, perceptions and imaginations of what should constitute the nation, and what the objectives of the ‘national process’ should be. (292)

Here, Arero contends that defining a nation is rendered problematic by the divergent ideas, perceptions and imaginations of what should constitute it. This view is reiterated by Boneace Chagara in his MA dissertation “Beyond Cultural Boundaries: Imagining the Nation in Malooned” who opines that, “Perhaps one of the most problematic concepts in the discourse of the nation is the term “nation” itself” (10). This is because, the most unfathomable question remains—what constitutes a nation?

However, this complexity has not inhibited conversation on this discourse. Scholarly articles about nation and nationhood have continued to be published. Hassan Wario Arero (2007), Peter Wafula (2010) and Margaret Njoroge and Gabriel Karori (2014) are just a few of some of the most recent publications on this subject. Scholars like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, (1977) James Ogude (1997) and Hassan Wario Arero (2007) among others have demonstrated how ethnicity contests the understanding of a nation. In a more positive tone, scholars like Ali Mazrui (1982) have even celebrated the diversity that defines Kenya. Despite the fact that these scholars have written about this discourse in their different forms and understandings, it is imprudent to authoritatively remark that their contribution on the discourse of nation and nationhood is utterly exhaustive.

Yvonne Owuor in her fiction has been outstanding in presenting her own creative view of the nation. An interrogation of her debut novel *Dust* (2014) reveals her preoccupation with the issue of the nation and nationhood, a subject that she carries forward, recreates and restages in her second novel *The Dragonfly Sea*. Commending on *Dust*, Evan Mwangi says that the book is an excellent depiction of Kenya’s history, betrayal,

mistrust and despair that have persisted since independence (20). In Mwangi's view, *Dust* is not a novel that should be taken for granted but instead, it should be taken with the seriousness it deserves for it provides a sufficient canvas in which we can look at the nation-state called Kenya. If *Dust* gives an excellent depiction of Kenya, *The Dragonfly Sea*, I contend, picks it up and restages the image of the nation. It is this light that I assess Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* in order to understand how she has presented her creative view of the nation in this second novel.

Further, it is important to note that a survey on the critical research done on the works of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, reveals a series of studies. First, Kosgei (2017) did an assessment of death as metaphor which majorly focused on language. Secondly, Boiyo (2015) and Karumba (2017) attempted to read Owuor's work as a historical record while Muriithi (2018) read Owuor's work as a feminist crime novel. However, all these previous studies have all been done her first novel *Dust*. In this respect, it is evident that Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* has not received much critical attention. Most of the critical assessments are reviews about it. Therefore, this study reads Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* with respect to how she weaves through a narrative about a nation specifically through narration of individual and the collective experiences. This warrants a scholarly examination on how Owuor has treated the subject of the nation in her novel *The Dragonfly Sea*.

Despite the fact that the characters depicted in *The Dragonfly Sea* are fictitious, their stories represent the day to day happenings within the nation. Therefore, in studying this novel, I attempt to investigate the stories of individual characters as such stories are the constitutive narratives of nation and nationhood. In essence, by extrapolating these characters' experiences to the bigger corpus of a nation, a fresh and new

understanding of a nation is realized away from the normalized hegemonic control of the discourse of nationhood.

### **Scope and Limitation**

The study is limited to Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel *The Dragonfly Sea*. My focus is in examining the narration of the nation through individual and collective stories. To achieve this, this research pays attention to the narrative strategies that the author employs in the novel in rendering individual and collective narratives. In essence, this research focuses on how the text presents an interplay between individual and collective stories and how they are extrapolated into the nation. To facilitate this, I confine myself to narratology as the theoretical perspective that will guide this study. Going forward, relevant secondary sources will be consulted to buttress this study.

### **Literature Review**

In this section, a review of critical and scholarly works will be done. First, this review begins with a review of the subject of discussion. Thereafter, focus will shift to the critical attention to the author and her works. The literature review that I seek to undertake will help offer scholarly insight to the current study about the subject of discussion and the author and also bring out the gap that I seek to fill. The primary focus for this review is to contextualize this study.

### **Critical Review on the State of the Nation**

Several issues that define a nation have been discussed by scholars. Some even contests the existence of a nation. One such concern is ethnicity that threatens to dismantle the narrative of a unified nation. In an article titled *Ethnicity and Nationhood* published by Marcus Garvey, the author contends that ethnicity undermines nationhood. Garvey's argument is that a birth of a nation's collective identity is contested by ethnicity as the

two merely opposes each other. Observing how ethnicity contests a nation, James Ogude in “Ngugi’s Concept of History and the Post-Colonial Discourses in Kenya” traces modern ethnicity in Kenya as a product of colonialism. Ogude observes that, “modern ethnicity is a product of the colonial history of divide and rule which helped to give the tribe its real identity by specifying tribes culturally within the context of a uniquely colonial sociology.” (102). This view of ethnicity as a colonial invention is reiterated by Sarah Ann Jenkins. Jenkins remarks that European administrative policies and practices of divide and rule, in association with the active participation of, and strategic collaboration by, African intellectuals, elites and local culture brokers, created rigid ethnic identities with distinct, reified customs and traditions did not only reinforced but also re-invented ethnicity in Kenya (579) The elite class later appropriated this ethnicity into competitive politics in the wake of scarce resources. At the end of the day, a thinking of ‘ourselves’ before others surfaced to undermine the dream of nationhood and national cohesiveness.

Yet Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Petals of Blood* sees a different set of ethnicity. In Ngugi’s view, the rich constitutes one ethnic community while the poor constitutes the other. According to Ngugi, the rich constitutes what he terms ‘the Mercedes family’. Through his character, Wanja, in *Petals of Blood*, we seem to be reading Nguigi’s mind about ethnicity. Wanja says:

For to us what did it matter who drove a Mercedes Benz? They were all one tribe; the Mercedes family: whether they came from the coast or from Kisumu.

One family. We were another tribe: another family (98)

According to Ngugi, this kind of ethnicity is invented and reinforced by the petty-bourgeoisie in their own quest to secure their interests. But the biggest question would

be whether such a projection of new- ethnicity by Ngugi talks to the dialectics of a nation.

Charles Hornsby in *Kenya: A History since Independence* remarks that:

Kenya was a ‘colonial invention’ in which her postcolonial story is not one of war, military rule, mass murder or state collapse; neither has it been one of improving living standards, industrialisation, growing national pride and the establishment of a key role in the world economy. It has been rather a story of endurance: of political and economic structures inherited from colonial days, of unfulfilled promise and weighty historical baggage. (1)

Hornsby argues that ethnicity has been very definitive in both individual and collective behaviours of the people of Kenya. He ties the question of ethnicity to what he calls diverse but genuine difference like language, culture and economic interests that define Kenyans (2). He argues that ethnicity has been the major problem threatening the formation of a national identity. He maintains that this issue of ethnicity has been extrapolated to political spaces and this often creates violence after elections as was witnessed in 1992, 1997 and 2007-2008.

Margaret Njoroge and Gabriel Karori investigate the implications of ethnocentrism on the Kenyan society. In their article “Ethnocentrism: Significance and Effects on Kenyan Society.” They note the consequences that ethnocentrism inflicts on a nation. According to Njoroge and Karori, in as much as ethnic groups have been living together since time immemorial and have even been symbols of ‘communal solidarity’ and ‘security’ (364). Ethnocentrism has also been the major player in the division and violent conflicts, ethnic or political that has been meted on and experienced amongst members of different ethnicities and social groups (365). Njoroge and Karori’s argument is that the

violence that has been witnessed in the past can be traced down to the problem of ethnicity.

Boneace Chagara in his Master's thesis "Beyond Cultural Boundaries: Imagining the Nation in Malooned." Demonstrates how Bob Nyanja's film 'Malooned' presents rigid ethnic boundaries that "increasingly threatens to tear Kenya apart" (3). Nevertheless, Chagara shows how film could be used to negotiate through these thick and rigid ethnic lines in forging an ideal collective nation. The nation that has been presented, Chagara contends, is very fragmented especially on ethnic dimensions. However, he points out the spaces and rooms created within the scope of 'Malooned' that portrays some hope on the development of a collective nation. Whereas I agree that ethnicity is an issue that contests a nation, this research is rather interested in examining the implications of individual and collective stories on the nation.

With regards to identity and the nation, Peter Wafula in an article entitled "Negotiating 'Kenyanness': Debates" demonstrates the fluidity of what he terms 'Kenyanness.' 'Kenyanness' as Wafula puts it "can be defined as an ethical and philosophical doctrine that inspires the Kenyan people into the love for the country" (4). Wafula puts forward two things that were done as a way of re-choreographing Kenyans into the nation. The two events which were chaperoned by Alfred Mutua, the then government spokesperson in 2004, were 'The Week of National Focus' publicized by an aphorism 'Najivuniakuwa Mkenya' (I am proud to be a Kenyan) and 'The Kenya National Dress.' In the words of Wafula, these two events were "to re-socialize Kenyans from all walks of life into reflecting on their achievements since independence and cultivate the spirit of togetherness and dedication to their country" (2). According to Wafula, the events failed to achieve its intended objectives but illustrated how seriously difficult it is to define nationhood. Whereas Wafula's argument seems to be grappling with the

idea of patriotism, the context of a nation is clearly brought into focus. Wafula contends that the rise of several militia like Taliban, Sungusungu, Mungiki, Sabaot Land Defence Forces among others within the Kenyan landscape contest the notion of a unified nationhood and points out that perhaps Kenyans have been living in a lie. Wafula pours cold water on the whole idea of the nation that:

‘Kenyanness’ is a facade since it seeks to homogenize anything Kenyan. Far from this, our historical experiences has ably demonstrated that as well as we, as Kenyans have many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant differences in what we really are or rather what we have become.

(17)

I contend that Wafula’s argument centres on the question of patriotism. He also focuses on how Kenyans have been trying to cultivate and curve this patriotic trait into their hearts and minds. Evidently, the quest for a ‘nation’ is an issue that demands attention. This research is interested in the personal and individual stories and how their quests for a nation contest the understanding of a nation.

Despite the fact that some scholars, like Wafula above, sees the question of a collective national identity as a facade, some other scholars have demonstrated instances when a collective national identity has been realized in the past. Steve Ouma Akoth is one such scholar. In *Challenges of Nationhood: Identities, Citizenship and Belonging Under Kenya’s New Constitution*, Akoth claims that there have been moments in which Kenyans have expressed if not celebrated a collective ‘Kenyanness.’ Akoth gives several instances to back his claims. He notes Madaraka Day celebrations or during sporting events as examples when one image of Kenya is projected. He particularly describes the elections of Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of

America and how it triggered spontaneous celebrations in the country. According to Akoth, the idea of Luo-ness and Kenyan-ness became re-enacted within public spheres following Obama's historic win (3). He links this collective celebration of Barack Obama's win to the rhetoric of 'Najivunia Kuwa Mkenya' (I am proud to be Kenyan) which is geared towards negotiating a homogeneous nation.

According to Maddox and Giblin (2005) most people in African countries have essentially been engaged in the futile search for a nation. Steve Akoth has similar thoughts about the quest for a nation. Akoth observes that the promulgation of the constitution in 2010 was a way of offering Kenyans a singular opportunity to distance themselves from a past characterized by various forms of human-made barriers. Whereas I argue out that these barriers include and not limited to ethnicity and identity as have been discussed, the promulgation of the constitution shows a nation in a journey of forging togetherness. Another instance where we see a quest to form a nation lies in the formation of the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) in March 2009. Following the 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence, the commission was tasked to investigate every act of injustice meted on Kenyans spreading its wings to the colonial period and recommend necessary actions that would facilitate healing of a nation. In 2013, the commission published its discoveries, conclusions and recommendations and handed it to President Uhuru Kenyatta. The document reveals brutality and violence meted on Kenyans from the British regime running through all the successive regimes. It also documented corruption, violation of socio-economic rights, land conflicts and ethnicity. Significantly, these issues in the document are issues that have been threatening to dismantle the nation.

Hornsby observes that Kenya as a nation is a living proof of the endurance of the Kenyan people as a collective community. Chagara wonders at a miracle that has held such a country for long despite the myriads of disruptive issues that it has witnessed in the past (87). Like the TJRC and the quest for a collective nation, search for a nation can be seen in the recent much publicized campaigns of the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), a move to overcome hurdles of ‘hatred,’ ‘suspicion,’ ‘bloodshed’ among other issues. Born out of a handshake in March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 between the president; Uhuru Kenyatta and the opposition leader; Raila Odinga, the Building Bridges Initiative popularly called the BBI has its backbone on ‘national unity.’ Goerge Tubei in “How Building Bridges Initiative Plans to Shape Kenya” observes that Kenya has several ethnic tribes professing unique history, culture, values, lifestyle, language, religion, food and are spread across the country. Tubei argues that this diversity is what poses the challenge of unity to the nation. He claims that The Building Bridges Initiative seeks to bridge this challenge and deliver a united country to Kenyans.

In my view, these institutionalised quests in searching for a nation—Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) and the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)—seem to be interested in looking at the collective issues that threatens to disrupt the nation. However, this research will not only look at the collective stories but also look at the individual dreams, wishes and fears among other issues and how they impact on the nation.

Mahmood Mamdani in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* decries the paradox that comes with this spirit of searching for a nation. Mamdani avers that African states in their quest and struggle to create a nation end up unknowingly being alien to or alienating the communities over whom they rule.

He argues that because postcolonial state draws its legitimacy from the urban society and modernity, its rural people remain more subordinated subjects rather than citizens endowed with democratic rights. He further points out that these rural inhabitants are seen as a 'burdensome appendage to the beauty of a nation.' To understand Mamdani's argument about formation of a nation, it is important to note David Carr's argument in *Time Narrative and History*. According to Carr, the first step in the invention of a community is the creation of the narrative of 'we.' Carr claims that a few of the members take it upon themselves to formulate such a narrative and the others accept it. Carr continues to point out that a new version of a community tasked with accepting the narrative of 'we' automatically emerges. However, argues Carr, a new version of this community and its shared story emerges. Carr continues to argue that this new version threatens the unified existence of the community because of the existence of a binary of the majority and the minority. According to Carr, a minority that feels repressed at the hands of the majority can arise and attempt to oppose such repression. Carr maintains his claims that within a society, there are members who feel that the country is just a geographical set-up and that they do not belong (156-159). This research seeks to demonstrate how *The Dragonfly Sea* by Yvonne Owuor depicts individual and collective efforts of surviving a nation.

In light of the arguments by Mahmood Mamdani (1996) and David Carr (1991), Ngala Chome in *Pwani Si Kenya* demonstrate how part of the nation is alienated from the unified whole. He decries the ostracization of the coast from the mainland Kenya. In Chome's view, whatever is happening in the coast is so much infused with a total abandonment, laxity of the state and foreign imagery that the coastal residents suffer at the end of the day. Chome observes that:

Since Kenyan independence, the coast as a cultural, religious and political entity has been the other, constructed as different from the rest of Kenya. It is a place not for work but holiday, a tourist's dream, for corrupt bureaucrats, Italian fugitives and middle class Nairobians. A place like this where leaders from Nairobi visit only in their casual clothing, cannot have real people with real political aspirations and needs. Instead, it is inhabited by smiling servants and beach-boys. And because Kenya is a secular country only in a nominal sense, with a political culture infused with Christian language and imagery, the coast has become a black spot within the Kenyan imaginary. (1)

Since the setting of *The Dragonfly Sea* is in Pate, off the Kenyan coast, an understanding of Chome's argument will shade light to the understanding of the nation which is the objective of this research. In as much as I do not agree with Chome with regards to his projection of the coast, it is clearly seen that his opinion about the coast is one that defines marginalization. According to Chome, the collective story of the people of the coast is that of alienation and marginalization.

This view of the coast as appended to Kenya is seen as precursor to the secessionist movement that rocked the Kenyan coast in 2010 and 2011. Justin Willis and George Gona in *Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya* recounts the collective voices and expressions of feelings through the emergence of Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). The MRC was seen by its founders and believers in its course as a tool to procure independence of the coastal region. Their quest for independence was motivated by a feeling of being alien to mainland Kenya. According to Willis and Gona, the MRC decried of the general black colonization of Kenya against the Coastal region. The coast seems to be accusing the mainland Kenya of its hegemonic status. The issue of total abandonment thus plays significantly and

will only be important to elucidate how well this shapes and influences the thinking of a nation. In line to this thought that is clearly an antithesis to the formation of a unified nation, a statement that even Muhidin, one of the lead characters in novel *The Dragonfly Sea* makes—Pwani si Kenya (The coast is not part of Kenya) (282) it will be important to critically analyse if individual or collective stories qualifies this supposition as I seek to understand how personal and collective stories contest the nation.

Scholars have noted an intersection between personal stories and the nation. Jeniffer Muchiri in “The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies” notes that autobiographies offer an opportunity to readers to read and scrutinize not only the lives of the autobiographers but also the stories of their respective societies. Muchiri demonstrates how various autobiographers in Kenya succeeded in retelling the (hi)story of the nation as they tell their own stories. Muchiri discusses several Kenyan autobiographies while demonstrating how they narrate Kenyan history. To pinpoint just a few that she discusses, Rosemary Kariuki-Machua’s *I am My Father’s Daughter* (2008) and highlights how Kariuki narrates in her autobiography the story of a nation the betrays its citizens. She shows how the author in her autobiography documents a journey towards a search for the truth regarding to the assassination of his father JM Kariuki among other political assassinations (89). Muchiri further discusses Njenga Karume’s *From Charcoal to Gold* (2009) and shows how it narrates the colonial and postcolonial history (90). Muchiri reads several autobiographies while striving to show how they intersect with the history of the nation

June Chelule Chebet in her MA dissertation “The Convergence of the Self with History in Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s *This Child Will be Great* and Joe Khamisi’s *Dash Before Dusk: A Slave Descendant’s Journey in Freedom*” also studies how personal stories

converge with the stories of the nation. Chelule contends that autobiographers do not only inscribe themselves into the histories of their nations but also use their life narratives to interpret the histories of their nations. According to Chelule, Sirleaf has used her autobiography to describe the history of Liberia (22). Chelule argues that Sirleaf inscribes herself into the history of Liberia by merging it into her life history through retrospection. She points out that Sirleaf has gone back to the nation's ancient history by narrating how the republic came to be centuries ago (50). In addition, Chelule has demonstrated how Khamisi has recounted Kenya's colonial and post-colonial histories (67). I agree with Muchiri and Chelule's argument that personal stories intersect with the stories of the nation. However, Muchiri and Chelule's study focused on autobiographies and how the narrated stories of the life writers they focused on narrated histories of their respective countries which is not the prime focus of my research. In this study, I focus on how personal and collective stories in the fictional novel *The Dragonfly Sea* by Yvonne Owuor narrates the nation.

### **Critical Attention to Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and her Works**

Since its publication in March 2019, Yvonne Owuor's second novel *The Dragonfly Sea* has not received much critical attention save for some newspaper reviews on some important aspects of the novel. Shaj Mathew in *The New York times Book Review* for instance, focuses on the protagonist of the novel—Ayaana. Mathew sees Ayaana as a bridge between worlds. According to Mathew, Ayaana links Africa and Asia. Mathew goes ahead to dig Ayaana's ancestry in justifying Ayaana's going to China. Mathew trails Ayaana through China to Turkey and back in Kenya. Mathew is interested with the protagonist. Whereas this research is interested with Ayaana's personal story as is Mathew, the line of departure between Mathew's view of *The Dragonfly Sea* and this

research is that this research seeks to extrapolate Ayaana's story in the discourse of nationhood and see how it interacts with the nation.

While reviewing the novel, *The Kirkus Review* admits that the setting of the novel, Pate Island, "is a palimpsest, a place where people come to forget or rewrite their life stories, and Owuor introduces us to a vivid set of characters who all want to begin their lives again in the island's embrace." This argument raises questions that demand critical attention. With the knowledge that multinationals travel to Pate for a reason or the other, a collage of multicultural identity cannot be gainsaid. In this light therefore, this research is interested with the collective and individual stories of those who come to Pate—the transnational community and how their stories help us interpret the nation.

Evan Mwangi in "Why University Dons Should Take a Second Look at Owuor's *Dust*" says that the book is an excellent depiction of Kenya's history, betrayal, mistrust and despair that have persisted since independence (20). In Mwangi's view, *Dust* is not a novel that should be taken for granted but instead, it should be taken with the seriousness it deserves for it provides a sufficient canvas in which we can look at the nation-state called Kenya. On the same novel, Tom Odhiambo remarks that 'to read *Dust* is to be jolted back into reality (56). According to Odhiambo, Kenya operates under a hypocritical cliché of a 'beloved' country yet beneath this rhetoric is a country that has normalized violence, deaths alienation and abandonment. Mwangi and Odhiambo in their respective arguments about *Dust*, in my view, point out the constitutive narratives of nationhood. In this research, I seek to read *The Dragonfly Sea* and interrogate how individual and collective narratives which are constitutive elements of nationhood have been presented.

Critical reviews on works of Yvonne Owuor might be scanty but important to this research. Amos Burkeiywo Boiyo (2015) in her unpublished thesis titled “Narrating Kenyan History through Fiction in Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust*.” reads Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust* with the aim of examining the historical narration of Kenya. Boiyo contends that Owuor fictionalizes Kenya’s history which allows her to present silenced history of what he (Boiyo) calls ‘the margin.’ In a way, this is a silenced place within the narrative of a nation. This thus pokes fingers on the question, understanding and definition of a nation. According to Boiyo, Yvonne Owuor in *Dust* recreates history and gives voice to not only the silenced stories in the dustbins of history but also to the silenced places. In retrospect, Boiyo has not failed in portraying how the author’s choice of a setting has influenced the narrative. He has further demonstrated how Owuor has debunked the myth of the normalized history. On the same lane with Boiyo, Julia Njeri Karumba in her unpublished MA thesis “Historical Consciousness and Character Formation in Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust*” investigates how Yvonne Owuor has thematised historical consciousness. Karumba also interrogates how historical consciousness influences not only character formation but also identity. According to Karumba, history defines and determines who the characters are. This research is interested in another of Owuor’s novel, *The Dragonfly Sea* and how individual and collective narratives narrates the nation.

In her MA thesis titled “Murder She Wrote: Reading Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust* as a Feminist Crime Fiction” Maryanne Wairimu Muriithi investigates how the novel *Dust* narrates the genealogy of state violence through three primary women characters. These women are Akai-Ma, Justina and Arabel Ajany. According to Muriithi, “*Dust* places heavy emphasis on the material conditions that inform impossible domesticity when it is juxtaposed patriarchy, apparently law-abiding personhood.” (6). Muriithi

seems interested with envisaging the narratives of these three women on individual and the collective level. Unlike Muriithi though, this research is interested in looking at how individual and collective stories narrate the nation.

Jauquelyne Kosgei also makes her contributions to critical works on Yvonne Owuor's literary works. In her unpublished thesis "Death as Metaphor in Yvonne Owuor's *Dust*" Kosgei reads Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* with the aim of discussing the issue of death as a metaphor. Significantly, Kosgei looks at it through the lens of language and style. Nevertheless, Kosgei contends that death is a form of loss (38) and has repercussions on the lives of characters.

From the reviews above, a number of issues are clear: First, the state of a nation is evidently contested and some of the issues contesting it include and not limited to ethnicity and identity. This has been projected from the reviews made. Secondly, despite the fact that the nation has remained contested, the quest for a unified or rather collective nation has been in the limelight within all the spheres of humanity. Furthermore, there have been studies which have attempted to critic the work of Yvonne Owuor, particularly her debut novel *Dust*. In as much as there are a few reviews on *The Dragonfly Sea*, it is evident that Yvonne Owuor has provided a space for voicing realities that nations have to live with. These issues have been boxed into the margins in which *The Dragonfly Sea* acts like a mirror that reflects them back. In this research I examine how Owuor has appropriated the very many narratives of nationhood which are depicted through individual stories and collective stories in understanding the nation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the theory of narratology. In *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Peter Barry defines narratology as “the study of how narratives make meaning.” (222). Barry further avers that narratology constitutes the basic mechanisms and procedures that are common to all stories. Mieke Bal in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narratives* says that “narratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artefacts that tell a story” (3).

Proponents of narratology use the terms narratology and theory of the narrative interchangeably to refer to the study of the narrative as a genre. Narratology involves the study of the narrative structure with close attention of elucidating what is common in all these narratives and what is entirely different from the other. Mieke Bal perceives of a narrative text as “finite, structured whole composed of language.” (8). The subject in a text conveys to the narratee a story through a given medium. This medium could be language, sound, imagery etc. According to narratologists therefore, the text and language are inseparable.

Theorists of narratology aver that a narrative is divided into the story which consists of events (what is being said) and the discourse (the process of saying it/ the how) which consists of elements like narrative voice, narrative modes, plot, time, focalization and style. Narrative time, for instance, is helpful in understanding the ship incident which propels the narrative forward.

This study particularly uses Gerard Genette’s typology of narratology. According to Gerard Genette, a narrative comprises of three basic components. These are the Story (the signified), the Narrative (the signifier, that is, the statements that comprise the

discourse in the text itself) and Narrating (producing the narrative action/the entire real or fictional situation in which the action/plot of the narrative takes place) (27). Genette has concentrated on how and in which way, a textual matter is presented. Genette sets apart the focalization (perspective) from the voice (the narrating agent). Focalization defines, from whose perspective the story is told whereas the voice defines the narrator. An understanding of the narrative perspective, that is to say, from whose point of view has the story been told helps in understanding individual and collective stories and how their implications on the narrative of a nation.

For narratologists, there is the ‘story’ on one hand and the ‘plot’ on the other. The distinction between plot and story is essential to narratology. A story constitutes the actual sequence of events as they happen. It is basically what happened. The plot on the other hand constitutes the packaging and re-ordering of the very events. Peter Barry while commenting on the plot argues that “It isn’t just the plot in the narrow sense which is at issue but style, viewpoint, place and so on, which is to say the whole packaging of the narrative which creates the overall effect.” (215). The narrative order dictates the event-story relationship. Narrative order is basically how the author has sequenced the events in the narrative. There are two forms of sequencing events in a narrative. These are chronological order and anachrony. The chronological order presents the story following the natural sequence of events. Anachrony on the other hand is when the events do not follow the order given in the narrative. This amounts to what Genette calls a ‘complex plot’ (37) Narrative order for the interpretations of flashbacks or analepsis and flash-forwards or prolepsis. *The Dragonfly Sea* is latent with flashbacks and an understanding of the same aids the understanding of the effectiveness of the narrative structure in rendering the individual and collective stories.

The use of the theory of the narrative for literary research demands that the literary critic must pay attention to ‘who’ is telling the story. The narrator or rather who Genette calls the narrative voice. This is because; the relationship between the narrator and the story is significant in discerning meaning out of the author’s text. Mieke Bal captures:

The narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts. This identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character. (18)

I find Bal’s argument important in this study since the narrative in *The Dragonfly Sea* is narrated through an omniscient narrator and on the narrator’s point of view. Through the theory of the narrative therefore, this study analyses various narrative strategies that Owuor has deployed in narrating the individual and collective narratives and their effectiveness in the narration of the nation in the novel.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is concerned with examining the narration of the nation through the portrayal of individual and collective stories in *The Dragonfly Sea*. To achieve this objective, this study employs a close textual reading of Yvonne Owuor’s *The Dragonfly Sea*. I particularly pay attention on how Yvonne Owuor has narrated the nation by presenting divergent individual and collective narratives in the text. To complement this research, a reading of Owuor’s other works has been made. This entails a reading of her fictional works like *Dust*, *Weight of Whispers* and critical works. In addition, secondary materials that detail the narration of the nation with a bias on those that focus on Kenya as a nation have been read. Such secondary materials include journals, books, articles from newspapers among others. However, the input from these secondary

sources only complement what I draw from the primary text. Theory of the narrative guides this study. Narratology outlines the concepts that qualify stories as narratives. Narratology helps me explore the narrative structure and its effectiveness in rendering the narrative in *The Dragonfly Sea*. In particular, I focus on the narrative order, narrative time and narrative voice and how they contribute in making meaning in the text while at the same time advancing the plot.

### **Chapter Outline**

This research study has four chapters.

**Chapter One:** Provides background information on the author Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and introduces the study. It comprises of the statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, justifications, scope and limitation of the study, literature review, theoretical framework and the methodology that has been used.

**Chapter Two:** ‘Re-defining the Nation through Individual and Collective Experiences in *The Dragonfly Sea*’ unpacks several individual and collective experiences while extrapolating them to the nation space to allow its interpretations. Here, I undertake an examination of how the author treats the subject of the nation and nationhood in the text. I closely examine how the author has presented the idea of the nation by parading individual and collective experiences that narrates the nation and nationhood. I also examine how the author has portrayed the nation as an abstract entity braving narratives of personalities and communities who have been (dis)membered from the collective picture of the nation.

**Chapter Three:** ‘Effectiveness of the Narrative Strategy in Narrating the Nation in *The Dragonfly Sea*’ entails a discussion on the effectiveness of some of the aspects of narratology that have been identified in the rendition of individual and collective

stories. Aim is to explore the role that these unique aspects of narratology play in the restaging the various narratives that ultimately narrates the nation.

**Chapter Four:** This is the conclusion. This chapter undertakes a discussion of the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RE-DEFINING THE NATION THROUGH INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES IN THE DRAGONFLY SEA BY YVONNE OWUOR

#### **Introduction.**

In his chapter, I examine the treatment of the nation through the narratives of individuals and the collective experiences in Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*. I begin this section by looking at how individual and collective narratives give meaning to the understanding of the nation through stories of family, homelessness, transnationalism, dreams, profiling and passing and women. I also examine how the novel challenges the notion of a collective nationhood through stories of porous borders, contested ancestries and spaces, terrorism and disillusionment. Most importantly, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that beneath the narratives of nationhood, stories of silent and common individuals influence the understanding of the nation.

#### **Understanding the Nation: Giving a New Meaning and Definition**

The concept of a "nation", as is popularly understood, implies a large community of people whose singular identity comes with a commonly shared territory, government, similar destinies and same set of goals even when there is observable differences in language, descent and history which give it a composite appearance. Paul Gilroy in his work *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* argues that although nations may appear natural and eternal, they have actually been constructed through "elaborate cultural, ideological, and political processes which culminate in feeling of connectedness to other national subjects and the idea of a national interest that transcends the supposedly petty divisions of class, region, dialect or caste" (49). Nations are therefore deliberately created by people who ascribes to these fundamentals

of a shared culture and the idea of a shared national interests which create a feeling of connectedness.

Whereas I agree with the opinion that nations exist because of a superficial feeling and attachment of a common culture, government and territory, a reading of Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* demonstrates that the fundamentals stated above only give the backdrop of what constitutes a nation. This is because the novel portrays individual narratives, which also make up the collective, that define a nation yet they have been silenced. Patrick Parrinder in his book *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* says that the rise of the novel goes hand-in-hand with the emergence of the modern nation-state. He also describes the novel as an exercise in nation-building as it helps to mould a shared national sensibility by holding a mirror to it. It is in this light that I argue that the narrative in *The Dragonfly Sea* gives a new meaning to the understanding of the nation as the author has narrated silenced facets of the nation and nationhood. In as much as a culture and a collective identity are the primary.

### **Representation of the Nation and Negotiating Nationhood**

In describing the origin of Kenya in "The Invention of Kenya", E.S. Atieno Odhiambo says that from 1895 to 1905, the land called Kenya today was transformed from a footpath six hundred miles long between Mombasa and Kisumu into a harshly politicized colonial state (xiii). The nation of Kenya can be traced to British annexation of it in the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. On the other hand, the conversation about the nation in *The Dragonfly Sea* portrays how the nation has been represented and further highlights how characters try to negotiate the idea of nationhood.

I begin by showing that Owuor begins the conversation of the nation by creating it. Haroun, Muhidin's father-in-law, tells Muhidin, "We are now Kenya" (27). Yet it seems it is an unfathomable depth in trying to understand the meaning of "Kenya." While we are being indoctrinated to acclimatize to the nation and nationhood through Haroun's mantra "we are now Kenya," we are being channelled into a discourse of unravelling the mystery of the nation and nationhood through Muhidin's remarks, "Will it improve the supply of fish?" (27). Yet "he (Muhidin) was not being rude; he had simply wanted to understand what "Kenya" meant" (27). Muhidin's reply portrays the abstract nature of a nation. Evidently, a nation exists but again it seems an entity that is far from the people. In Muhidin's remarks, we realize that people are entangled and enchained in their efforts to earn themselves their daily bread; a fact that a nation cannot provide.

While I agree that the Constitution of Kenya spells out how one can acquire Kenyan citizenship: through birth and by registration, with elaborate steps and measures for one intending to obtain citizenship by registration, *The Dragonfly Sea* presents a rather different way on how foreigners are initiated into Kenyan citizenship and becoming residents of Pate. The agency given to the foreigners as a tool to negotiate nationhood is elaborately captured in a tradition that initiates Lai Jin into being one of Pate's men; a tradition that quite a number of Chinese have embraced in the past. The narrator observes:

It was on this day that a visitor now living within these —the farthest edges of life inside an invisible, old, and ruined land —pronounced Shahada, reciting, 'Ashhadu anlla ilaha ilallah...' He cut his hair short. He took a purifying bath. He adorned himself in a clean white garment. He re-emerged transformed, and belonging to God and Pate. The Imam had told him that he really did not have

to change his name. He could still be Lai Jin. He replied that he could also be Jamal. And so he was both. Because of the seas in his blood, his name was preceded by “Nahodha” (475)

This elaborate way of initiating foreigners into the nation and whatever the nationhood possesses, far from the norm as prescribed in the nation’s laws, demonstrate a way in which individual narratives negotiate nationhood. Vincent Cable In an article entitled *The Asians of Kenya* articulates the uncertainties that surrounded the issue of attaining Kenyan citizenship by the minority races, particularly Europeans and Asians at the eve of independence. Despite the fact that the process was elaborate, easy and open for all and sundry, there was a striking lack of interest by the Asians and the Europeans. Cable pegs this to the question of leadership then in the country. Black Africans who had previously occupied the base in the racial hierarchy of colonial rule were now in power. The Africans on the other hand blamed the Asians and the Europeans of ‘fence sitting’, or a lack of confidence in Africans ‘ability to run Kenya (223). It is therefore no surprise that the question of attaining citizenship which becomes an issue with elaborate ritualistic procedures is documented in *The Dragonfly Sea*. The cultural indoctrination through rituals seems to carve a more accepted identity than the nation’s rule of the thumb –through paper and pen.

In *Nation and Narration* Homi Bhabha argues that a sense of mutual national belonging (nationhood) is manufactured by the performance of various narratives, rituals and symbols which stimulate an individual’s sense of being a member of a select group. Or, certain forms and symbols of national sentiment, iconography, collective rituals and places and objects of national significance are projected in order to construct a nation. Hence, nationalist icons and popular signs must be continuously rehearsed by the people in order to maintain a sense of deep horizontal comradeship (297). *The*

*Dragonfly Sea* consciously demonstrates the feelings of Ayaana when she sees the Kenyan flag in Beijing. The narrator captures, “From Beijing South Railway Station, she headed for the Kenyan Embassy. When she saw the red, green, black, and white of the Kenyan flag, she had to wait for a paroxysm of a most unexpected emotional yearning to pass” (359). Ayaana appears to be very conscious of the existence of her nation, Kenya, while she is in China. Yet back home, the same nation seems to marginalize her home —Pate.

*The Dragonfly Sea* portrays a nation as an entity that keeps appearing and disappearing from the people. A nation exists but again it seems to be so far an entity. A nation’s torturous acts against its citizens is captured by Munira’s remarks to Ayaana. Munira tells Ayaana, “We must go to Mombasa for your passport. You are lucky. Others here receive only *death certificate from Kenya*” (167) (emphasis added). If the government’s gift to the people is the death certificate only, then it negates the responsibility that a nation should have on her citizens.

Narration of marginalization as a force threatening the creation of a nation and negotiation of nationhood has been emphasized in *The Dragonfly Sea*. Whereas the citizens believe that a nation exists, their discontentment with the same nation has been highlighted. When Ayaana calls her mother, Munira remarks rather in Swahili that, “Kenya ni kosi” (267) which translates to “Kenya is a goshawk.” The irresponsibility of the nation to safeguard the interests of her citizens has been mocked through Munira’s spirited resentful remarks that “Kenya is a goshawk; it doesn’t nurture the hen’s chick. Nothing here...marines, al-Shabaab...They have chased our people away like goats. From their homes” (267). From Munira’s remarks, it is evident that a nation that has been represented in *The Dragonfly Sea* appears to be a torturous baggage to the people. In essence, the people from this part of the country believes that the nation

broke the covenant of protection and thus betrayed the people to all manner of alien hordes to buffet them. This marginalization makes Muhidin to declare his feelings that “*Pwani si Kenya* —the Coast is not Kenya” (282). To Muhidin, this is what Kenya as a nation says to him. Clearly, whereas the nation’s demarcated and gazetted jurisdiction spans the Coast, its actions destabilizes the dream of nationhood. Thus, the conscious believe of a collective nation and nationhood is s negated by Muhidin’s story that Kenya has ostracized the coast and therefore not part of what is known and deemed ‘Kenya.’

Ayaana returns from China to find a nation clothed with politics. The narrator observes, “The tide report, the Kenyan nation in its unending election cycle, preoccupation of the passing citizens with the character of their politicians... the familiarity of national discontent” (412). The character of the nation is dissolved and represented through this statement. Amidst the tides is the usual kerfuffle of politics and politicking. At the end of the day, matters of interests to individuals are pushed aside as the nation keeps politicking.

Evidently, belief of the existence of the nation cannot be gainsaid. Yet its representation seems to be betraying the ultimate dream of nationhood. Individual and collective stories precisely portray that however much the nation exists, her activities mock its foundation. To achieve the dream of nationhood therefore, a nation needs to pay attention to the stories of individuals who seem discontented with it and the actions of the same nation.

### **Family and the Nation**

The intersection of family life and the life of the nation in *The Dragonfly Sea* is intriguing. The tragedy that orphans Muhidin is the sinking of a Likoni South Coast ferry which claimed the lives of his parents and his five siblings (9). The author’s

deliberate rendition of this tragedy in which the government did not console with or compensate the bereaved shows the position of the government on matters of lives of its citizens. The conspicuous absence of the state can also be seen in Ayaana's persistent waiting for her father. The narrator describes it thus:

The dirty-white kitten wrapped itself around the little girl's tiny shoulders as she watched passenger boats dock. She was waiting for her father. She had never seen her father, nor did she know what he looked like. Everything she believed he was had arisen from her imagination, where she had demanded that he reveal himself in a tangible form today. (19)

The metaphor of the absent father is largely important in unravelling the relationship of the nation with its citizens. Tom Odhiambo in "The Romantic Detective in Two Kenyan Popular Novel" observes that "... a romance story that tells of a relationship between a man and a woman can also be read as an allegory of the relationship between citizens and their nations" (190). Despite the fact that *The Dragonfly Sea* does not portray Ayaana's need for a father through romantic eyes, it is evident that the relationship connotes some man-woman attachment. Therefore, the absence of the father figure in Ayaana's life can be seen as a metaphor of the absence of the nation in the lives of the characters in Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*. This is demonstrated through the narrator's talks of the absence of the nation (Kenya) in the lives of the residents of Pate, "They spoke often of Kenya as if they mattered to it, as if it had not once lost its memory of their existence" (23). In addition, this absence of the nation is portrayed through the eyes of Muhidin when he returns to Pate. According to the narrator, Muhidin's finds a new Pate upon his return. The nation of Kenya's half-century neglect of Pate had rendered it smaller, shabbier, more derelict, isolated and even more preoccupied with

trivialities (27). This collective story of the island boldly decries of abandonment and rejection by the nation-state that they subscribe to.

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor has decentralized the notion of a nation's headquarters as its umbilical cord by portraying relations of the characters in *The Dragonfly Sea* as global citizens. Fundi Almazi Mehdi's family lives in the Middle East. In addition, Muhidin remarks that he has family in Pemba. Arguably, Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* falls into what Salman Rushdie qualifies in *Step Across this Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002* as good writing. According to Rushdie, good writing assumes a frontierless nation. Rushdie maintains that, "writers who serve frontiers have become border guards" (67). The fact that a number of relatives of characters who live in Pate are global citizens further inform the understanding of a nation. For instance, Fundi Almazi Mehdi's family lives in the Middle East. As a matter of fact, Fundi Almazi Mehdi went to the Middle East with his family before returning to Pate. The question therefore remains: Is the nation a real, solid and palpable unit as everyone likes to assume or a fragile, inchoate concept? If the understanding of the nation is shaped by fundamentals of shared histories, government, destinies and even culture, why then would the residents of Pate seem more attached to other spaces than within the context of Kenya? I argue that collective experiences of family thus re-define the meaning of the nation by creating sets of nations within the known nation; nations of the oceans (23).

These "nations of the oceans" (23) demonstrates that family stories of the residents of Pate divorces the normalized centre of a nation as they ascribe to other spaces bound together by the vast ocean. It is important to note that these characters are not only Kenyans but also members of their new nations —nations of the sea as the narrator calls them.

## **Individual and Collective Dreams**

Here, I focus on how the aspirations of individuals narrates the nation. People have dreams and aspirations that are either tied to the goals of their nation or that do not relate with it in anyway. These individual and collective dreams may be greater than the nation's goals and jurisdictions. Some even conjure the global space. Munira's family is described as a patrician family with intricate and extended business tentacles touching most port cities of the world (21). Munira's family business evokes a conversation on the essence of a nation. Arjun Appadurai in *Patriotism and Its Futures* downplays the significance of the nation and deem it important to think beyond the nation a view that is also held in high regards by Donald Pease in "National Narratives, Postnational Narration" who consider the nation state an outdated liability. Pease's considers a nation "as a tolerated anachronism in a global economy requiring a borderless world for its effective operation" (1). Appadurai and Pease's opinion is exemplified by aspirations and dreams of Munira's family who have conquered the global space in their business enterprises. Whereas the border is one essential element in the understanding and definition of a nation, Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* demonstrates that individual and or collective dreams go beyond this border. While this in essence doesn't relegate Munira's family out of the fellowship of being Kenyans, it is baffling to think that their dreams conjure a global space.

Whereas the understanding of a nation as suggested by Nwokedi and Ngwu is defined as "a collective or large group of individuals that are bound together and therefore unified by commonalities like language, ethnicity, habits, behaviours and customs" (3), Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* has demonstrated that aspirations borne of individuals or collective efforts give a new meaning to the nation. Munira's father

seems not to be tied by commonalities above into engaging his businesses within the confines of his nation. He dares abroad.

Daring abroad on the springboard of business is further exemplified by Mama Suleiman. The narrator says of her, “Mama Suleiman was wealthy, with six commercial *jahazis* sailing northward to Oman carrying smuggled cloves from Pemba, to return laden with contraband goods including duty-free pasta, which wound up in Zanzibar and Mombasa shops” (109). It is evident that Mama Suleiman is not only wealthy but also engaging in illegal business. In addition to this backdoor dealings, Mama Suleiman is also rumoured to be a chief link in the tributary that sends girls to Saudi Arabia as maids. Kenyan girls that Mama Suleiman procures to Saudi Arabia as maids provide the picture of individual aspirations minus the nation. At one point, Mama Suleiman asks Ayaana to apply and go there as a maid. Furthermore, the fact that her business involves contraband and counterfeit goods means that Mama Suleiman is much attracted by her will to be rich rather than the laws governing the nation. Through Mama Suleiman’s ability to smuggle goods to other nations and even to the nation, the picture demonstrated by Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* is that of individuals struggling to survive rather than that of citizens bound by the national code of conduct and patriotism. Basing on Mama Suleiman’s story, I argue that she only imagines herself as belonging to a nation called Kenya. This is because, in as much as Mama Suleiman carries her underground business, she does so outside the purview of Kenya Revenue Authority (110).

Individual and collective dreams appear therefore to be the motivating factor in the survival story of characters in *The Dragonfly Sea* while the nation seems to be an intersecting baggage as individuals struggle to survive. Muhidin decides to go to

Pemba, Mozambique, a different nation from his home —Pate. Yet to Muhidin, “it is on our sea; our sea is home. Pemba is just next door” (279). Muhidin is attached to her sea “the nations of the sea (23)” rather than Kenya as a nation which sounds so abstract to him. Muhidin and Munira’s dream takes them to Pemba. Munira tells Ayaana, “And you know it’s been difficult in Pate, so Ayaana, we are going to Pemba. Mozambique.” (277). Whereas Muhidin leaves for Pemba, Owuor deliberately rules out any paperwork that would be necessary for individuals travelling and intending to be residents of another nation as per the requirements of the nation. Muhidin and family aspires for a better life and are running out of the profiling and marginalization of them by the Kenyan nation.

By defying the borders of the nation and the bureaucracy attached to travelling to other nations, Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* demonstrates that it is the individual or collective dreams that fire people into achieving their goals and that the nation appear an entity that demands performance of various narratives that stimulate a sense of nationhood only when circumstances requires. Where then would we categorize Muhidin? Is he a Kenyan citizen or a Mozambique? Where is the nation in all this? In a nutshell, the nation seem an abstract entity only invoked when circumstances requires.

### **Profiling and Passing**

“They proceeded to board boats and *madau* and seize people on the basis of a name and the shape of a beard” (Owuor, 84)

According to Michael Privot in ‘Ethnic Profiling’ an article in the *European Network Against Racism*, “Ethnic profiling is defined as the use by police, security, immigration or customs officials of generalizations based on race, ethnicity, religion or national origin –rather than individual behaviour or objective evidence –as the basis for

suspicion in directing discretionary law enforcement actions. It is most often manifest in police officers' decisions about whom to stop for identity checks, questioning, and searches and sometimes arrest" (2). Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* writes a bold statement on profiling and its relationship with the understanding of the nation.

Chapter Four of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) –the Bill of Rights — section 48 spells that the state shall ensure access to justice for all persons. It further states in Section 33 that individuals have a right to seek, receive or impart information. The same Bill of Rights in Section 28, states that every person has inherent dignity and the *right to have that dignity respected or protected*. Whereas these pronouncements are meant for all Kenyans of all walks of life, Muhidin finds himself in the wrong place by virtue of how he looks. When his son, Ziriya Raamis disappears, Muhidin's efforts in searching for him is thwarted by the police's questions, which in a way would land him in jail instead. The narrator describes the situation in the police stations for those searching for their lost-loved ones:

They discovered unbending strangers with inflexible questions, a parade of uniformed idiots from assorted nations, the terrorist seekers (the police): "When was the last time you saw him?" "Where did he sleep?" "Where did he pray?" "Who were his friends?" "Is he a terrorist?" As if the missing were guilty of fratricide. Aspersions. "And you, are you really Kenyan?" (120)

The Kenyanness in this context seem to include a given people while relegating some away from this collective union of nationhood. Apparently, the only thing that almost disqualifies the likes of Muhidin from this union of nationhood rests on their looks. As a matter of fact, because of such questions in the police stations, former civil servants advise Muhidin, Munira and Ayaana to take their quest in the search of Ziriya in the

most secretive way as possible. One of them even whispers “Camouflage your inquiries. Imagine the world as a salt road and yourselves as slugs crossing it” (120). The enshrinement of rights as a right to every citizen in the constitution therefore seem farfetched and just a paper pronouncement.

Muhidin’s attempts to report Ziriyaab’s case in Nairobi lands him in prison. The events leading to his arrest narrate the profiling of citizens by virtue of their names and looks.

The narrator tells:

Muhidin had gone to Nairobi, a citizen asking authorities simply to explain his lost son. Instead, he had been forced to prove he was “not al-Shabaab,” “not al-Qaeda”—that he was not part of the things he had not known. No voice was raised as a lament against the abuse of his person and the desecration of his dignity, history, profession, and people, the rubbing away of his “Kenyan” identity by those who had the least right to lay claim to its story, who could not even locate Pate on a map of Kenya. (172)

Muhidin is denied entry and fellowship into the union of nationhood which should include all the jurisdiction of the country.

After the bomb incident in Nairobi and Dar –es –Salaam, the citizens of Pate have to brave the beatings and imprisonment by the government in its incessant search for terrorists. As a matter of fact, Fazul’s wife’s brother and her old father are taken and imprisoned in Mombasa having been branded terrorists. The brutal way in which the soldiers handle the people of Pate renders the nation meaningless and obsolete in the hearts of these people. Describing the soldiers’ way of doing things in Pate, the narrator brings forth the image and understanding of the nation in the hearts of the people of Pate. The narrator puts it, “The howlers hurled themselves upon ancient doors,

upending ancient lives, smashing things, smashing the hearts of a people they would never get to know” (71). These undertakings made the people of Pate “to discover that the country that had appended itself to them had given them over to darkness” (71).

In *African Pasts: Memory and History in African Literatures*, Tim Woods contends that Imprisonment in Kenya was predominantly political during colonialism and even when the post-independence state targeted dissidents of various regimes. Although reform and justice are the goals of prisons in Kenya, —production of docile bodies was the goal during detentions of independence freedom fighters and political dissidents during the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi regimes (135). It is thus important to evaluate the dialectics of imprisonment and its implications to the nation. Whereas it is evident that imprisonment has pervaded two historical periods, as narrated by Woods, it is worthy to interrogate the imprisonment that Muhidin suffers.

Although the imprisonment is meant to pin down and apprehend terrorists, it is evident that Muhidin, Ziriyaab and the people of Pate at large are not terrorist but they pass to terrorists by virtue of a stereotypic attitude that sees people of Somali descent and Islam religion as terrorists. The narrator precisely maintains this thus, “they seize people on basis of a name and the shape of a beard” (84). At the end of the day, the nation’s mandate of ensuring the rights of her citizens, as enshrined in the Bill of Rights, is distorted by this profiling of some of its citizen. It is important to note that Muhidin’s decision to flee Kenya to Pemba, Mozambique is borne out of fear that the nation will soon catch him up having bribed his way out of prison in Nairobi. Talking about the events that led to his imprisonment in Nairobi, Muhidin says:

They said I was a ‘terrorist.’ No court. No judge. Every day, questions: What do I know, what do I think, what do I do? Where was I when this or that

happened? Who is my God? My identity card—it is not mine. I stole it, they said. One day they will come for me. (281-282)

While observing the effect of the imprisonment of people he calls the underdog, Tom Odhiambo argues in an article titled “Kenyan Popular Fiction in English and the Melodramas of the Underdogs” that, “In the very way that imprisonment emboldened Mau Mau freedom fighters, prison here becomes a space for mobilizing the underprivileged to fight against socio-economic inequalities” (81). In the same way the imprisonment emboldened the Mau Mau fighters to fight relentlessly, in Owuor’s *The Dragonfly Sea*, Muhidin’s decision to flee his home country for another is informed by his prior imprisonment. Even before the decision to run from the bigger prison that is his nation, Muhidin and co-accused had earlier on succeeded in bribing their way out of prison. In essence, Imprisonment thus becomes a metaphor that restructures and transforms Muhidin’s worldview. It is in prison that Muhidin learns that Kenya as a nation is not interested with his concerns.

Muhidin’s religion thus becomes the basis of his profiling as a terrorist a fact that also happens to the pirates who are seen as Muslims. The haunted feeling of the people of Pate shows that the people cannot live in peace and pride despite being in their mother country.

Collectively, the people of Pate decry profiling which has been narrated. This is because it disadvantages them as it acts as a ceiling that prevents them from assessing justice.

## **Women and the Nation**

A liberated nation's definition automatically encompasses a harmony in both genders; all enjoying the coverage of what a nation is plus all its rights and privileges. It is therefore compelling that I focus on the stories of women as one of the analytical lenses in the narration of the nation. Ironically though, most of the internationally renowned African writers on themes of national self-assertion have by and large been male. Such male authors who have dominated the scene in the writings of nationalism and national self-assertion include Ousmane Sembene, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka in West Africa, Ferdinand Oyono in Central Africa, Peter Abrahams in South Africa and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in East Africa to mention just a few. In addition, in the works of these authors, the emancipation of women has generally been rated as of secondary importance relative to the liberation of nations or of peoples. However, some authors have carved themselves a space and a name in the writing of the nation and nationhood while at the same time projecting a different image of the female characters —as heroes so to speak.

For example, Elleke Boehmer observes that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has been celebrated and considered a vocal and revolutionary Kenyan writer since he has exemplified in his writings that women deserve a space in nation building and struggle towards national liberation. In her article entitled *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, Boehmer says of Ngugi that, "even in the face of such gender polarization, we should pause to acknowledge that Ngugi's women characters do remain pioneers in the field of Anglophone African fiction written by men. In their strength of character, their spirit and self-reliance, they are undoubtedly unique. More often than not they demonstrate a firmer resolve and a deeper understanding than their male counterparts" (46).

As a matter of fact, Ngugi's portrayal of Wanja in *Petals of Blood* aptly captures Boehmer's thoughts. Wanja is motivated by an energy and a conviction in the execution of her plans that even the revolutionary leader Karega cannot match. This portrayal of Women doesn't stop with *Petals of Blood* alone. Ngugi does this in most of her works notably *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* where the redemptive group of central characters are dominated by a single woman. Mumbi is a case in *A Grain of Wheat*.

As noted by James Ogude in *Ngugi's Novels and African History*, Ngugi uses his "female archetypes" as "sites for contesting the desired nation" (109). Romantic relationships symbolize happenings in the wider society. According to Ogude, Ngugi's portrayal of women is akin to the now common "iconography of women in the nationalist literature...as a metaphor for the nation" (109). Romance is a figure of the ideal nationhood. Women stand for a state of the nation...state of degradation...." Romantic relationship could also be "a symbol of regeneration, hope and reconciliation... self-rediscovery in forgiveness and reconciliation lifts the burden of guilt from their hearts and shoulders and they are used to point to the possibility of renewal and the birth of a new nation" (112).

Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* writes on women while focusing on how their stories intersect with the story of the nation and nationhood. It is interesting how Owuor weaves the story of Munira and Ayaana as initially doomed women and finally liberating them to those that conjures the global relationship between China and Kenya. Whereas Munira is even branded by her father as an outcast who squandered the right to the family name (22), she is later branded the mother of pearl when Ayaana is being sort by Wa Mashriq—though for sexual exploitation—and later by the Chinese as a link to the distant past (133).

The abandonment of Munira in Pate by her family is made possibly because of her having a child outside marriage which is a source of shame to family and the nation. Arguably, Munira's life takes a nosedive immediately after being impregnated by the 'faceless' man who then disappears into thin air. This experience ultimately launches Munira into prostitution and sexploitation as a means to survive. This is seen in Mama Suleiman's sarcastic remark to Ziriyaab that the latter is begging for what is given free and if anything for a small fee (94).

Agreeably we have been treated to stories of single women and unmarried women who give birth to children and the shame attached to them. Nevertheless, Munira does not only raise Ayaana alone but she also gave birth alone. Munira's story thus serves as a representative of hundreds of women who raise their children single-handedly as the state looks on without help. Munira decorates the bodies of women for a living. If we are to recall and regard Ogude's suggestion in *Ngugi's Novels and African History* that state of women represents the state of the nation, the narration of the uphill task facing Munira tells of the relationship of the citizens to its nation. In the same way as that Munira lacks material and moral support from family and friends, the citizens of the nation are alone in the depth of understanding and negotiating nationhood.

In developing the real picture of single women and children surviving without father figures, Owuor demonstrates the complexities of nationhood that exist within a nation. Ayaana's situation of not having a father is the basis of marginalization that she has to brave. Being a daughter of a woman renders Ayaana susceptible to corrosive abuses from children and adults alike. Atiya's father's egocentric character does not only divorce Ayaana from being with her friends and playing with them but also portrays people as being self-centred in their ambitions. Clearly, Wa Mashriq's uses his economic muscle to ensnare unsuspecting Ayaana one Thursday. Allegorically, reading

Ayaana's story as a metaphor of the nation and as a metaphor of predation, we can equate it to the predation by the state and the foreign forces on the citizens.

It is interesting that the portrayal of Munira is negated through the projection of that of her nemesis, Mama Suleiman. Mama Suleiman's independence and her business tentacles which spread to several countries and Port cities qualifies her as a wealthy woman. If Munira is single, Mama Suleiman is also single. In fact, Mama Suleiman runs illegal businesses which includes smuggling girls—who should be on record that they are citizens of Kenya—to Saudi Arabia as maids. Ironically, the hardworking Munira gets admonished and is ridiculed, Mama Suleiman seems to be happy and celebrated. Ironically though, Mama Suleiman becomes the embodiment of the narrated corruption that eats into the nation.

Through these stories of women, Owuor constitutes narratives, patches and scraps of daily happenings that define a nation.

### **Narrating Transnationalism**

*The Dragonfly Sea* is admittedly a tale narrating not only experiences within the nation-state but also across the globe. According to Natasha Garrett, "... the refrain of the literature of globalization is that the world is experiencing unlimited movement of information and people across the globe" (19). The enthusiastic resurgence of globalization undoubtedly affects the thinking of the nation with critics like Donald Pease seeing a nation as a tolerated anachronism which is but a mere liability in the current economy requiring a borderless world. Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* sets in motion a debate on how transnational narratives re-define the understanding of the nation.

I examine how the narration of how the citizens of Pate converse on the English Premier League scores captures the day to day conversation of Kenyans. I contend that residents of Pate invoke football as therapy even as they wade into the conversation of their nation's politics; a nation that has forgotten of their existence. Commenting on the football tradition in Kenya among youth, Godwin Siundu in "European football worlds and youth identifications in Kenya" observes that:

There is a sense in which the emerging youth soccer cultures in Western Kenya camouflage their own deep-seated aspirations towards cosmopolitan citizenship within the wider dynamics of globalization by invoking tropes of fashion and mimicry to negotiate identities that are consistent with current notions of youthfulness. (340)

Siundi's observation clearly tells how youth are able to negotiate global identities. Apart from this ability to court global citizenry, residents of Pate use this loyalty to the English club as ice breaks as they wade into their nation's debates. Debates on how their own nation has neglected and forgotten of their existence. The narrator captures the situation on some of the Pate nights:

Children played, and women murmured and tittered, and voices gentled by the day's end debated Kenya's contorted politics, its brothel-opened approach to everything, and English Premier League scores. There were three main groups unfairly distributed in support of Arsenal, Manchester United, and Chelsea. A few clung to a much-mocked nostalgia for Liverpool. They spoke often of Kenya as if they mattered to it, as if it had not at once lost its memory of their existence. (23)

The support accorded to the English Premier League teams show how transnational happenings characterize the people of Pate and Kenya at large. It also curves an identity which negates the understanding of a national collective identity which forms the basis for the definition of a nation. Whereas these supporters are citizens of the same nation, it is evident therefore that cultural differences and diversities exist not only within nation-states but also among national communities that are in different geographical zones as exemplified by Pate. Precisely, the question of a collective identity seems to be defined by the subscription into the support of these clubs.

Discontentment with the nation has been exposed through exploration of opportunity in or relation with the transnational space by the people of Pate. Ziriyaab's admission that he is from Turkey is news that those on a boat to East Africa receive delightedly. Whereas the people with Ziriyaab in a boat to Mogadishu and even to Pate express their discontentment with the actions of the government in Pate, Ziriyaab is asked "Uturuki? (Turkey) How are our people there?" It is interesting to note that Ziriyaab's question of how 'our' people are in Turkey is an injunction in between a story about the army who had arrived in the Island, beating up people and smashing up things. The branding of a national army as "The Terrorized" (84) is rather an ironical name for those tasked with the liability of ensuring the safety for the citizens of a nation.

Issues of national resources has been a defining feature in the socio-political power balance in Kenya. In "Kenyan Popular Fiction in English and the Melodramas of the Underdogs," Tom Odhiambo argues that "class distinction has persisted in the Kenyan social terrain because of citizens' lack of or ownership of resources to structural hierarchies that separate them and the political authority that one group holds over the other and its consequent access to state resources and wealth" (74). As Ngugi argues in

*Moving the Center* that the break of independence was merely a shift from one form of domination (colonialism) to even “more vicious” neo-colonial domination (44), it is clear that a new power of domination are in total possession of the resources as demonstrated in *The Dragonfly Sea* as I have discussed below.

A nation-state sovereignty requiring autonomy on matters of a nation seems displaced as Chinese appear to be deeply rooted in Kenya. Every project appears to be Chinese made or are yet to be done by them. The planned harbour to substitute Mkanda Channel, an oil pipeline traversing Lamu and a coal factory in Lamu are all to be constructed by the Chinese (417). In addition, the standard gauge railway is Chinese made (423). As the locals narrate these developments, they are clearly left out. They even try beseeching Ayaana to talk on their behalf owing to the environmental concerns that the coal factory might render the island black and bleak (417). The seminar message at the Chinese embassy, “Seminar on Deepening China –Africa cooperation.” (423) tells of the transnational situation that the nation seems to be grappling with.

Ayaana’s return from China to Kenya exposes the change that has been enhanced by the transnationalism that has affected Pate. That the citizens of Pate have left for Mombasa or Nairobi or even global spaces like Oman, Zanzibar or Dubai (417) tells of the discontentment with the nation. These disillusionment and discontentment see youth join terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and al-Dawlah –*imagining paradise* (emphasis added). The nation’s inability to safeguard the interests of her people explains these running away for ‘better opportunities.’ The fact that these terrorist groups have roots in the Middle East but still have Kenyans joining their wars and other wars in the global arena like the Syrian war describes the feeling of the nation's citizens toward their nation.

A nation seems a vague and an abstract thing that only restricts and forcefully tries to define what its people do. The paradox of all these is that while the nation fights terrorism as is seen in the army's efforts in Pate, some of its citizens join the same terrorism groups that their nation struggles to fight. At the end of the day, a nation is rendered fluid and vague.

### **The Fluidity of a Home**

Yvonne Owuor's narration of the fluidity of home in the novel *The Dragonfly Sea* undoubtedly changes our understanding of the definition of a nation. The idea of homelessness is remarkably made through Koray Terzioglu, the Turkish student who befriends Ayaana in China, supposition that, "home is imagined" (307). The rigidity of a home or the seeing of a home as a solid and fixed abode is deconstructed or rather reconstructed by Koray who terms a nation an unnecessary thing with the current generation. Koray says, "We are another generation, a different people. We need a new imagination of and for life. Our home is anywhere and everywhere. Wherever we want it to be. The future is not a country, not for me, and not for you" (307).

Koray's argument renders a country an obsolete baggage that is not necessary in the current affairs of the world. According to Koray, a home, which translates to a country, is 'anywhere' 'everywhere' as a matter of fact, the future do not lie in a country (307). Owuor further presents the fluidity of a home through Ayaana's home island which is even not captured in most maps of the world. In essence, the question of a place being rendered minute or even deliberately left from representation poses a question on the solidity or rather fixity of a nation.

The dialectics of homelessness in *The Dragonfly Sea* is further exemplified by the actions of the families of Pate who have families beyond the nation's borders. Fundi Almazi Mehdi, for instance, has his family in the Middle East. In addition, Muhidin's decision to go to Pemba terming it 'home' further complicates the thinking of a home and a nation. This constant fluidity of home is what the narrator terms a situation that haunts Ayaana. The narrator says, "Ayaana was haunted by transience of the one thing that should have been constant—home" (279).

In a nutshell, rendering a home fluid complicates the definition and the thinking of the nation in general. Most importantly, this fluidity of a home has been narrated through individual and collective stories. Whereas we would want to see a nation as a solid and fixed entity, the homelessness which has been narrated in *The Dragonfly Sea* destabilizes this understanding as people seems to be moving into a state of not believing in the rigidity of a home nor a country. In other words, a nation seems to go beyond the understanding of mere border-lines to encompass a bigger margin so long as it befits and benefits the people.

### **Contestation of Nation/Nationhood through Personal/Collective Narration(s)**

The boundaries of the "nation" can never be ultimately fixed, especially if we regard Timothy Brennan argument who considers nations as "imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role" (157). If nations are imagined then, the question of collectivism in identity, culture, language among other fundamentals is undoubtedly a mirage. It is baffling then that nations amidst this façade of nationhood still exists. Although Eric Hobsbawm in his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition* gives an answer to this question by arguing that the existence of a nation depends upon the

invention of national traditions which are made manifest through the repetition of specific symbols or icon, individual and collective stories in Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* challenges, albeit paradoxically, the notion of collective nation and nationhood because in essence, the same nation seems to be under reconstruction in Owuor's novel.

Even though the understanding and definition of a nation seems to rest in the question of 'collectivism', a focus on the implications of individual narratives in *The Dragonfly Sea* seem to give a silenced and forgotten meaning to the nation; a fresh meaning. A discussion on the issues which challenges the notion of a nation and nationhood is of great importance in the reconstruction of meaning to the understanding of a nation. Whereas I agree on the existence of a nation, for instance Kenya— in which its narration has been given exposition in *The Dragonfly Sea* —I however maintain that various narratives challenges the notion of collective nation and nationhood. In negotiating and understanding a nation and nationhood therefore, as Owuor says in her interview with the *Daily Nation*, "I wish to understand something about my country." (no.page), a discussion of that which poses a challenge to the existence of a nation and nationhood is of great importance.

### **Porous Borders**

"This great and peaceful border must be open to business, must be open to people—and it's got to be closed to terrorists and criminals." President George Bush, 20023

In as much as a nation spans imagined borders of a collective cultural and political identity, it is evident that the porosity of the Kenyan border destabilizes its sovereignty rendering it anything but fluid. According to Freedom Onuoha in "Porous Borders and Boko Haram's Arms Smuggling Operations in Nigeria," a historical review of the

African borders reveals that while establishing national boundaries in Africa, the European colonialists arbitrarily used “latitudes, longitudes, geometric circles and straight lines to split several ethnic and cultural communities” to establish administrative territories of their convenience, which were not effectively controlled.

With Lindsay Scorgie’s definition of borders that they are barriers of penetration, lines of separation, and the legal limits of a state’s sovereignty in mind, the actions of characters in *The Dragonfly Sea* deliberately flouts the imagined borderlines thus distorting the known and the implicated definition of a nation. Peter Andreas argues in *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide* that borders should not only act as obstacles against Clandestine Transnational Actors, but also as filters that do not impede legitimate border crossing. Therefore, the porosity of a state border, which I cross-examine here, is indeed a challenge that threatens the collective sense of nationhood.

In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi argues that individuals often wrestle with both their natural and social environments, and even with one another as well, thereby evolving “a way of life” that is exemplified in their institutions and practices. In so doing, these individuals who make up the collective as well, attempt to form their own national identities within “wider, more inclusive boundaries of geography and politics” (4). Arguably, this explains why individuals collectively struggle to master their physical environments in the quest for a different and befitting social life. Ngugi maintains that any change in the nature of the struggle of individuals is bound to result to institutional change, which inevitably triggers a subsequent change both in the peoples “mode of thought and life” (4). Incidentally, this change in the people’s mode of thought and life also influences the people’s institutions and general environment.

Ngugi's argument captures the actions of Mama Suleiman and other characters whose actions demonstrate not only how porous the border is but also Ngugi's argument about people going beyond their borders behind the back of the nation's policies since the change in thoughts and life influences the institutions and general environment. Mama Suleiman's underhand dealings deal a heavy blow to the borders of the nation. Nobody seems to really understand her but her business is well known. She owns six *jahazis* in the high seas (109). The narrator conjures the image of Mama Suleiman:

Mama Suleiman was wealthy, with six commercial *jahazis* sailing northward to Oman carrying smuggled cloves from Pemba, to return laden with contraband goods including duty-free pasta, which wound up in Zanzibar and Mombasa shops. In the underground chambers of her grand house, she traded in gold and jewels, outside the purview of the Kenya Revenue Authority. (109-110).

The fact that Mama Suleiman is able to thrive in a business of smuggled goods ridicules the porousness of the nation's borders. In addition, she carries her business which evidently evade taxes. Mama Suleiman therefore do not only exemplify the distortion of the nation's boundaries but also boundaries within a state that defines its functionality.

In narrating the porousness of the nation's border through the business of Mama Suleiman, *The Dragonfly Sea* goes further to show how Mama Suleiman swims freely in her criminal undertakings. She does not only evade taxes but, "It was also murmured that she was a tributary in supply chain of girls to Saudi Arabia—as maids" (110).

The exploitation of the country which exemplifies a kind of a return of imperialism which has been narrated through a porous border of a nation, undoubtedly complicates the collective nationhood. Even as Mama Suleiman ships girls to Saudi Arabia, Ayaana

stands witness to the shipment to China of African treasures and wildlife in containers dubbed “scrap metals” (250). The omniscient narrator describes the treasures:

Everyone gathered at the top deck in the rain and was looking down at the contents of the three split containers. Five hundred death grimaces of African beings: Lions, leopards, pangolins, zebras, and gazelles. Ayaana counted and recounted the elephant tusks. Not the giant wants but the small, unformed ivory of young elephants. Some of the pangolin bodies moved—bot yet dead—and that was the most distressing of all. There were things she had not known she believed in, had not imagined she might feel for. Had not understood she might ever weep for this, the evidence, of the wasteful plunder of the treasures of her homeland. Heaving, she battled to keep her breakfast in. (250)

While it is evident that Ayaana is a pawn in a game she doesn't understand, it is beyond doubt that exploitation is apparent. When hundreds African wild animals are being shipped—in addition to the royal treasure ‘Ayaana’ who has been duped into the game of ancestry—to China without the knowledge of the state, who then is to blame? The porosity of the nation's border therefore is under ridicule in the text. In other words, corruption of a nation's culture, treasures and resources has been narrated. If the Chinese in one hand, and the nation's citizen like Mama Suleiman on the other hand seems to be conspiring to milk a nation of its resources—including human beings—where is the sovereignty and dignity of such a nation? Ultimately, the non-existence of a nation is ripe for nobody seems to be guarding the border of the nation with the seriousness it deserves.

Arrival of Fazul the Egyptian, Wa Mashriq, Mzee Kitwana Kipifit and even Nioreg Ngobila to Kenya all through some dubious and unfathomable ways further points to the porousness of the nation's border. Nioreg Ngobila's possession of multiple passports (189), for instance, shows the fluidity of nations. Whereas he (Ngobila) is believed to be a national of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he arrives in the port in a Mozambican licensed vehicle. Nobody knows where he is from nor his intentions. Such can be said of Fazul the Egyptian who shows up in Pate to exploit the unquestioning hospitality of Pate only to bomb Nairobi and Dar –es –Salaam a fortnight later. Wa Mashriq's escapades in Pate which culminates at his almost raping Ayaana (129), is only possible because he shows up in Pate without the knowledge of the nation-state apparatus who controls the coming in and going out of people from the nation.

It is not only the narration of arrival of people who are not citizens of the country which exemplifies the porousness of the nation's border but also the deliberate leaving of the Island by the citizens of Pate to other places through dubious and unacceptable channels. Muhidin's decision to flee Pate for Pemba exemplifies the porosity of the nation's border. Muhidin's first wife's family's going to the Middle East with Muhidin's children Tawfiq and Ziriya further points out how porous the border is. In as much as these people are running for better opportunities as Munira says of Muhidin, "Ayaana, we are going to Pemba. Mozambique. There's work there for Muhidin." (277), it is evident that there is no documentation that demonstrate the seriousness of the nation in regards to its border.

Ziriyab's disappearance contests the borders of the nation which ultimately contest the fixity and sovereignty of a nation. Disappearing people has been given exposition in *The Dragonfly Sea* and it appears to be haunting the residents of Pate. The narrator contends that there are rumours intended at explaining "abrupt human absences in the Island" (71). The narration of Ziriyab's disappearance poses more questions worth interrogating. The narrator describes the scene, "One morning, two years after the tsunami, as matlai dragonflies were on tiptoes waiting to catch the tail end of the kaskazi on which to cross the ocean, *they took Ziriyab Raamis away*" (118). The anonymous "they" who takes Ziriyab Raamis away poses questions like who are they? Where was the government? Why are they taking Ziriyab Raamis way? And many other questions. The narration of Ziriyab's disappearance exposes that three anonymous beings in black took him mistakenly for his twin brother Tawfiq to Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago for questioning in regard to terrorism. The fact that the three faceless people crossed borders to seize Ziriyab exposes the porosity of the nation's border. That terrorist operates across the globe without the thinking of the sovereignty and the dignity of nations make us doubt the existence of the nations in the first place.

Precisely, the distortion of imagined borderlines that differentiate nations in *The Dragonfly Sea* narrates the nation. It renders the nation a fluid entity rather than a solid and fixed thing. Here, I have examined that corruption, terrorism among other risks emanating from clandestine cross-border criminal activities withdraws the citizen's confidence on the ability of their nation to safeguard their interests. Yet I maintain that the narration of the porosity of the nation's border has been made manifest through individual and collective stories.

## **Contested Ancestry and Spaces**

The contestation of ancestry, origin and spaces in *The Dragonfly Sea* is literally summed up by Munira's remarks that, "As you can see on this Island all the world's blood flows. It is Pate" (156). Munira's statement pre-empts the notion of an absolute ownership of space and ancestry.

Charles Hornsby argues that Kenya is a colonial invention (1), in other words, Hornsby claims that a nation called Kenya didn't exist prior to colonialism. On the other hand, Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* debunks and refutes this claim of an absolute and fixed origin of the country by deploying narratives of Chinese interaction with the Kenyan coast. The setting of the narrative in Pate seems to be Owuor's quest for memories of human contacts before colonialism.

In defining a nation, Benedict Anderson avers that "a nation is an imagined political community —and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson further identifies features that define a nation as an imagined political community for instance, the collective recognition of time and standard language (256). Anderson's argument about standard time as a defining feature of a nation is perhaps captured in the events that intersects with Kenya's independence in the text. Three days after the birth of Ziriya and Tawfiq, Muhidin's children, Muhidin's father-in-law remarks to Muhidin that 'we are now Kenya' (27). Although *The Dragonfly Sea* recognizes the origin of Kenya as a nation, "Three days later, Kenya, the restarted country, lowered the Union Jack and raised a red, green, black and white standard" (26), individual and collective narratives portray a contestation of the known origin.

Chinese arrival in Pate and their quest in “looking for someone to walk the space between the past and the present... and to bring home the spirit of those who had entered the dark room” (154), exposes that Pate had been in contact with China six hundred years ago. In one hand, Owuor recognizes the historically fixed origin of Kenya as a nation to its colonial story while on the other hand, Owuor shows the existence of the same nation—though through parts of it, Pate—many centuries ago. If the story of Kenya as a nation should be tied to her interaction with the British during colonialism then the Chinese question contest this.

In addition, the existence of Chinese bones in Pate do not only contest the origin of the nation to a fixed abode but also contest Pate as a space. While in China, Ayaana is asked, “will the bones of our ancestors on your island be returned to China?” (270). Whereas Pate culturally and sovereignly belongs to Kenya, Chinese bones, world’s blood flowing in it and the contact with China spanning centuries raises the question of it as a space under contestation. Incidentally, it seems there is quite a good number of Chinese belongings in Pate than there is Kenyan.

Furthermore, the choice of the setting of *The Dragonfly Sea* being Pate, far away from the normalized centre, which in most cases spans the capital city and major cities; ordinary everyday cultural spaces, provides a new site within which the novel engages in the discourse of the nation and nationhood. Owuor revisits the thesis of her debut novel *Dust* in which the setting spans the Northern part of the country. In so doing, Owuor challenges the hegemonic and normalized account of a nation’s discourse as solely tied to urban settings. As a matter of fact, Ayaana is surprised at places that could be rendered invisible on the atlas as the narrator narrates:

One Friday, she picked up an atlas to, again, find out where she was in the world. On the map she looked at, there was no place marker for Pate Island. No color brown or color green to suggest her own existence within the sea. So she wanted to know about places that could be rendered invisible (43)

Pate's inexistence even in the atlases of the World, position it as a very important setting in the discourse of the nation. Pate is metaphorically and literally the ostracized part of the nation that demands attention in negotiation of nationhood. It is important to note that Pate is a revered cemetery of Chinese who perished in the shipwreck incident. The narrator describes the island, "Here (Pate) was the lonely humming of those who had died far from home and had for too long been neither sought nor remembered" (5). "The dome-shaped tombs" (109) bearing the remains of Chinese sailors who perished six hundred years ago appears to be a very important feature to the Chinese who visits Pate. In Pate, they all visit the domed graves and shed a few polite tears (152). It is the same graveyard that becomes the link between China and Pate through Mzee Kitwana Kipifit, a Chinese in Pate, who visits the grave site each and every day. A motivation that sees him write a letter thematised "Our emissaries are here" (113) to China.

Evidently, Pate being a burial site of Chinese exposes the silenced narrative of the nation. This is because, the Chinese seems to culturally lay claim over Pate since it has a graveside bearing the remains of other Chinese. Whereas the nation would culturally claim sovereignty over Pate, it being a burial site of Chinese spanning many centuries exposes it as contested space

Nwokedi and Ngwu suggests that "At the most basic level, nation has been defined as a collective or large group of individuals that are bound together and therefore unified by commonalities like language, ethnicity, habits, behaviours and customs." (3). While

Ayaana is by this definition Kenyan, her DNA question which renders her a descent of Chinese challenges the question of her Kenyanness. Several instances demonstrate Ayaana's appearance as Chinese. Mzee Kipifit's gaze at Ayaana evokes China in him. Whenever he sees Ayaana, a semblance of Chinese kindred is borne in his mind. The narrator observes:

He (Mzee Kitwana Kipifit) had wanted to see the moon on the water, but had been distracted by the sight of Ayaana, who was now standing on her tiptoes, demanding that Muhidin command the winds to lift them both up. The child's presence reminded him of a life he would rather forget, and when she turned her head, or gestured, or settled into stillness before the presence of the sea, she evoked for him something of a child of another China. (66)

If Mzee Kitwana Kipifit sees China in Ayaana, the old woman who speaks Mandarin to Ayaana is not mistaken (265). Ayaana's resemblance with the Chinese makes Lai Jin declare that "China will find China in you; you will also find your China self" (248). While it is evident therefore that Ayaana is of Chinese ancestry, the biggest miracle is—she is Kenyan. Yet Ayaana's admission and fellowship into the realm of the Chinese as a people; and to some extent a nation is further complicated by her inability and inaccessibility to find 'home' or to belong in China and with the Chinese as the narrator observes, "Of late, it (home) had become an ephemeral place she inhabited, which refused to guarantee its endurance. She did not speak of Pate's expectation for her, or the one thing she was beginning to sense she could no longer do: stay in China. She was not Chinese" (387). If Ayaana thought of belonging and even being home in China, it is evident that she is not Chinese as she contends. On the other hand, she isn't sure if she has a home in Pate either. At the end of the day, it is evident that Ayaana is at the centre of nowhere.

Munira's remarks that, "on this Island all the world's blood flows. It is Pate" (156) in conjunction with Ayaana's ancestry which is evidently Chinese as has been narrated contest the thinking that nation's people subscribe to the same identity and even ancestry.

The contestation of spaces and ancestry as has been narrated in *The Dragonfly Sea* demonstrate that the fluidity in ancestry; with no fixed and accepted origin and the fluidity of space evidently contest the known definition of a nation. Arguably a nation appears to be a collage of cultures and histories with one nation having parts of its soul in different places, times and histories. However, without a keen evaluation of individual and collective stories, this insight into understanding what the nation is cannot be possible.

### **Narrating Terrorism**

*The Dragonfly Sea* has documented narratives of terrorism. But what are the implications of these terrorism acts on the nation-state? UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004) defines terrorism as criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor recalls the 1998 historical event in which Nairobi and Dar –es –Salaam were bombed by terrorists. In recollecting and recalling this act of terrorism, Owuor does not only remind us of the act but also captures the thoughts of David Der-wei Wang (2004). Der-Wei Wang argues that fiction authors can collect and analyse historical accounts, more by resurrecting individual lives from the oblivion of

collective memory and public documentation in re-enacting the affective intensities of private and inadmissible truth (3). By telling the story of a historical event through fiction, *The Dragonfly Sea* probes the official history of Kenya to reveal the silent and neglected stories in the 'official history' to reflect on peoples' experiences. In addition, it creates a conversation on the discourse of the nation and nationhood in relation to such terrorism acts. In simpler terms, Owuor seems to be drawing us back to probe into the matter of 1998 bomb attack in Nairobi before embarking on a mission of unravelling the other attacks that have been witnessed in the recent past like Westgate and Garissa University attacks in 2013 and 2015 respectively.

In his MA thesis, Amos Boiyo remarks that, "For more than five decades, Kenyans have lived to believe that they share a common history and identity, but there are dissenting voices from people on the margin of the mainstream society" (11). This myth of collective nation-state and nationhood is given new impetus and understanding through narratives of terrorism and violence which has characterized every single chapter of the history of the nation. The question remains; are these acts of terrorism as has been narrated in the novel voices of dissent struggling to be heard? Betwell Ogot commending on the 2007-2008 Post Election Violence travails puts it in black and white the lie of a collective unity; a time bomb that Kenyans have been sitting on for long. He says:

Since Kenya attained its political independence, in 1963 the citizens have lived with a patent lie that they are one nation; that they are unique; and that the kind of conflicts that have afflicted most African countries could not happen here. So when the lid was suddenly raised, and the explosion occurred, they discovered that they are a deeply and perilous fractured society...the forces of intolerance, of hate and exclusion were on the rise... (191)

Arguably, Kenya's history has been laced with titbits of violence. I contend that these histories of violence often manifest in acts of terrorism as narrated. Peter Tirop Simatei in "Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations: Violence, Landscape, and Memory in Kenyan Fiction." Argues that, "Fictional representations of colonial violence in Kenya demonstrate complex linkages between colonial violence, the violent responses to it or decolonization, and the violations of the rights of citizens in the postcolonial/neo-colonial state" (85). Simatei further notes that one of the most persistent concerns of Kenyan literature is violence generated by colonial injustice and perpetuated in independent Kenya, through unaltered colonial structures and institutions. He observes that Kenyan writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sam Kahiga and Leonard Kibera, among others, depict violence in the two periods in their works.

As aptly captured by Simatei, the levels of violence that has been meted on citizens spanning the colonial and post-colonial eras has in my opinion embolden the people to fight back for their rights through whatever means possible. It is no surprise then that the collective story of the youth as presented in Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* are radicalized to the extent that they decide to join terrorist groups as an alternative home; paradise. The narrator says, "Yes, some of the young had gone over to al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, al-Dawlah, imagining paradise." (417). Suleiman on the other hand joins the Syrian war having declared that to him "Kenya is a small country" (135). The irony laced with the whole process of apprehending terrorists is that, it further marginalizes and alienates parts of it jurisdictions as seen through the boots travail in Pate. Undeniably, terrorism contests the notion of collective nationhood. But what motivates these terrorists to strike? Clearly, and as Simatei notes, violence as always been perpetuated and meted on the citizens in every single chapter of the nation's history. To fight back, youth, as *The Dragonfly Sea* captures, join terrorist groupings.

The nation as an imagined political entity, is without doubt a trial to harmonize and homogenize vast geocultural and geopolitical zone even as it appears that there is a great difference among the constituents of the nation. The division that threatens to tear away the nation springing from terrorism acts clearly portray the nation as a myth with the constituents of it not believing in it. The narrator captures:

Fazul the Egyptian stayed three years. Then, one night, in the middle of the rainy season, he disappeared. But two and a half months later, on August 7, 1998, at 10:35 a.m., in Nairobi and 10:39 a.m. in Dar es Salaam, bombs exploded and incinerated more than two hundred lives. A then obscure extremist asked, “Why complain? It was only kaffirs who were killed.” (70)

It is clear that hundreds of lives have been obliterated yet the terrorist says the Kaffirs are the ones who have been killed. The myth of a collective identity is thus broken through religious affiliation evident in branding others as kaffirs (non-believers). If the bomb is intended for the kaffirs, collective nationhood then is a façade since it is evident that the notion of togetherness in a nation seems farfetched.

### **Conclusion**

While it has been argued that Kenya is a colonial invention (Hornsby 1) in which the people within this imagined geopolitical dispensation have expressed if not celebrated a collective ‘Kenyan-ness’ in the past (Akoth 3), it is evident through the analysis of individual and collective stories in *The Dragonfly Sea* that the contradictions, complexities and the perplexing realities and experiences of lives of individuals have not only resulted to a sharp contrast with the notion of collective nationhood but also presents a different definition of a nation.

It emerges from the analysis therefore that a nation seems an appended baggage to the daily struggles of its people. Individual and collective narratives, I argue, give a new definition and understanding of the nation. Through the stories of fictitious characters like Ayaana, Muhidin, Munira, Ziriya Raamis among others, Owuor has attempted to put it in black and white that suppressed or rather the untold stories of individuals give a clear picture of the nation. Therefore, these set of stories need attention if understanding a nation is prime.

It is evident that individual and collective stories narrate the ironies that define a nation. It is clear that a nation is absent from its people. A nation is also the basis of marginalization of her people. Furthermore, this nation seems an abstract entity that infringes the people's freedom in the pursuit of their dreams. The key concern that emerges from this discussion is the global and transnationalism which contest the nation state borders.

This chapter has also pointed out that individual and collective stories in *The Dragonfly Sea* satirizes the myth of collective nationhood. The question of ancestry which is crucial in the novel poses a question on the oneness of the nation. Seen from this angle, a nation is an unnecessary baggage appended to the dreams, struggles, tribulations and fears of a people.

Yet again, the discussion presents answers to the trajectories of problems that bedevil a nation. For instance, through the narration of terrorism, it is clear that the problem starts with the nation itself. This is because, the youth in Pate who have been pushed to a cliff and tired of their own country decide to join terrorist groups: Imagining paradise.

The discussion in this chapter thus maintains that individual and collective stories is undoubtedly the basis of understanding and defining a nation because these stories are the constitutive narratives of nationhood.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EFFECTIVENESS OF SELECTED NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN NARRATING THE NATION IN THE DRAGONFLY SEA BY YVONNE OWUOR

“Even though traditionally, the novel, because of its form and content, easily opens itself, to questions of politics, philosophy, sociology or religion, it nonetheless remains an image.” (Kitata, 4)

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I look at the artistic crafting of the narrative in *The Dragonfly Sea*. To achieve this, I focus on some aspects of narratology that effectively narrate the nation and nationhood in the novel.

Chapter two focused on the analysis of how individual and collective stories bear meaning to the nation's question. Such an approach to studying literary texts that is, for socio-political and ideological debates, is not limited to this study alone. Owuor's works in the past, especially her first novel, *Dust*, have been studied as a mouthpiece for socio-political statements (Boiyo 2015 and Muriithi 2018). Therefore, the shift in focus in this chapter to the narrative strategies is entire because *The Dragonfly Sea* is an artefact of artistic ideology. This thus qualifies this focus on the evaluation of selected artistic elements in the novel. The approach in this chapter focuses on the vehicle that delivers the content. This, in my opinion, is a rescue mission from the suffocating mass of studies that squeezes literature for ethical, philosophical, and social issues, among many other such issues.

Here, I evaluate the ensemble of the narrative elements that are crucial in narrating the nation. Mieke Bal contends that narratology entails the study of how narratives make

meaning. This meaning is achieved through a biased focus on the structure of a text. For narratologists, a text structure is achieved through dissection of the narrative incident to parts and components that ultimately serve different functions. After all, narratologists rigidly maintain that the text and the language are inseparable.

In *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal defines narratology as a “theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that tell a story” (3). For Bal, narratology is a theory that helps us to analyse, evaluate, and understand narratives. Bal continues that a narrative is a tale of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee (a national figure). A narrative consists of a set of events known as a story recounted in a narration process in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order known as the plot.

Going forward with Bal’s definition of narratology, the question that this study answers is: how the images, spectacles, cultural artefacts recount the story of the nation and nationhood in *The Dragonfly Sea*. To achieve this, I focus on the narrative order, the narrative instance, scene and summary, the significance of memory in narrating the nation, and naming as a strategy of narrating the nation.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor weaves a narrative that spans time and space. Of interest in this chapter is how she artistically crafts the structure in re-imagining the nation.

### **Narrative Order in *The Dragonfly Sea***

Gerard Genette says of narrative order that it entails sequencing events in a story and the arrangement in the narrative. Narratologists contend that the sequencing of events entails two basic orders: chronological order and anachrony. Genette argues that in chronological order, the presentation of the story follows the natural sequence of events.

Traditionally it answers the question, *and then?* Edward Morgan Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* presents an absolute model of the plot that spells the chronological view of event and time in narrative sequence thus,

“The king died, and as a result of remorse, the queen died too” (87).

Here, Forster demonstrates a kind of structure that moves in one direction. The queen dies because she lost the king. Simply put, the question is: what followed the king’s death? Chronologically, there was the king’s death; then there was remorse that ended in the queen's death.

On the other hand, in anachrony, the order in which the events happen does not match the order in which they are presented in the narrative (36-37). According to Jahn Manfred in *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative*, Anachrony occurs in two ways. First is through flashbacks, which is also referred to as analepsis, meaning a temporal distortion between the story's time pattern and the Fabula's time pattern. The other is through flash-forwards, referred to as prolepsis, an order in which the narrator anticipates events that will occur after the main story ends. According to Genette, anachrony also occurs when a character reminisces through a story or tells the story though it is located in the present, and the events depicted in the story take the narratee to the past (48).

Unlike the chronological order in which events successfully follow each other, anachrony allows the narratee to indulge in the narrative to unmask the withheld information. The narrative in *The Dragonfly Sea* has been crafted with flashbacks. Although the event is set in the present, the narrator keeps re-visiting the past in order to illuminate the narrative.

Genette observes that to study the temporal order of a narrative is to compare the order in which events are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession (35). In *The Dragonfly Sea*, the story of a young girl who comes of age gives the chronological account of the narrative. Focusing on Ayaana's story, we would be a force to ask the question: And then? This question would be in relation to our protagonist, who is Ayaana. It is her narrative that moves us forward as we follow Ayaana from a young Pate girl adorning ragged oversized clothes to securing a scholarship to study in China many years later. It is Ayaana's individual story that anchors the story of the nation and even the global space. Yet, we cannot learn about the nation without flashbacks. Owuor deploys these flashbacks to flash out the concealed information.

Apparently and of significance in the narration of the nation, the narrator has recounted the events in *The Dragonfly Sea* through analepsis, thus eliciting a temporal distortion between the time pattern of the story and the time pattern of the fibula. The narrative is not content with a simple, one-way progression into the future but comes back to itself and finishes what was left unfinished. This artistic manoeuvre of the narrative allows the narratee to plunge into the narrative, thus unearthing the hidden card. A card that reveals information that had earlier on been concealed. For instance, the novel begins by telling us about Ayaana – a young girl waiting for a father. Yet the narrative later reveals through flashback the events leading to Ayaana's birth. A birth fused with challenges and negligence in equal force. The same way we are introduced to Mzee Kitwana Kipifit in Pate and later on through analepsis, we are fashioned with information on who Kipifit is.

A focus on the narrative order portrays that Owuor has crafted a narrative that goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Yet its relevance to present-day Kenya cannot be gainsaid. I have illustrated previously that scholars have suggested that a nation-state called Kenya is a creation of the British conquest in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Akoth 2011 and Hornsby 2013). However, through analepsis, Owuor artistically demonstrates that the bond with the outside world existed hundreds of years before. The narrator says:

*The past.* After a giant ocean storm, six hundred years ago, capsized an admiral's junks and drowned at least six thousand of his men, some of the survivors floated onto Pate's mangroves and dark sand beach, crossing thresholds. Years later, a few boarded kusi-powered vessels to return to China. However, most stayed on, having pronounced shahada and taken the purgative bath. They had re-emerged in white garments and new names, with new wives and a covenanted allegiance to Pate alone. It is said they conceded to the past by naming their living zone "Shanghai," their place of memory and ghosts. Time, decay, and pate abbreviated this to "Shanga," a necklace or a yoke, unrequited memory can be an adornment or a prison. (154) (original emphasis)

The narrator's recounting of this past event shows that Pate has had interaction for centuries with China. In addition, the narration of Ayaana's sojourns to China for being a 'descendant' owes the descendant tag to this event that dates centuries.

The survivors of this shipwreck incident that happened six hundred years ago are supposedly Ayaana's ancestors. It is the vehicle with which Ayaana wins a scholarship to study in China at present. Ayaana is thus portrayed as a child of two worlds. She is African, Kenyan, to be precise, and her past tells her she is Chinese. Even though we all know from the narrative that Ayaana is borne out of predation and exploitation of

her innocent mother by a faceless foreigner, Ayaana is situated to metaphorically walk the bridge of the past between China and Pate. Therefore, the question of ancestry, which has been enabled through a mirror to the past, becomes very important in the dialectics of nation and nationhood.

The fluidity of home and belonging, as has been narrated in *The Dragonfly Sea* through individual and collective experience, has given a new impetus to the nation's understanding. Interestingly, it is the recounting of past experiences that seem to create the detachment of characters from their perceived homes and identities. According to Lucie Guillemette and Cynthia Lévesque in *Narratology*, analepses often take on an explanatory role, developing a character's psychology by relating events from his past.

In light of the argument by Guillemette and Levesque, Muhudin and Ayaana are made aware of their existence in spaces they do not belong by evaluation of the past. The entanglement of Muhudin with Kenya, which is the reason he chooses Pemba – Mozambique, is revealed through a flashback. The narrator observes Muhudin thus:

Muhidin had gone to Nairobi, a citizen asking authorities simply to explain his lost son. Instead, he had been forced to prove he was “not al-Shabaab,” “not al-Qaeda,” – that he was not a part of things he had not known. There had been nobody to speak up for him when he was robbed, stripped, accused, charged, and remanded, no one to protest his detention. No voice was raised as a lament against his person's abuse, the rubbing away of his “Kenyan” identity by those who had the least right to lay claim to its story, who could not even locate Pate on a map of Kenya. (172)

The past entanglement with his nation-state haunts Muhudin that he chooses to go to Pemba. As Guillemette and Levesque argue, the analepsis employed by Owuor in

recounting Muhidin's escapades with the nation-state serves an explanatory role on why Muhidin has to leave Pate for Pemba. When Muhidin remarks that "*Pwani si Kenya*"—"The coast is not Kenya," it is because of the narrated horrendous past that he needs to run away from. It is what his Kenyan past tells him. It is a feeling of alienation from the nation that should be his home that makes him make such remarks. In an article entitled *Pwani Si Kenya*, Ngala Chome demonstrates how part of the nation has been alienated. Chome decries the ostracization of the coast from mainland Kenya. According to Chome, whatever is happening on the coast is so much infused with total abandonment and laxity of the state that the coastal residents suffer at the end of the day. In the same tone, Justin Willis and George Gona's see this alienation of coastal Kenya as the precursor to the secessionist movement that rocked the Kenyan coast in 2010 and 2011. In their article titled *Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents, and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya*, Willis and Gona recount the collective voices and expression of feelings through the emergence of Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). The MRC was seen by its founders and believers in its course as a tool to procure the independence of the coastal region. Their quest for independence was motivated by a feeling of being alien to mainland Kenya. According to Willis and Gona, the MRC decried of Kenya's general black colonization against the Coastal region. The coast seems to be accusing the mainland Kenya of its hegemonic status. Because of this hegemonic suffocation of Pate, Muhidin fights back by running away.

Remembering this bitter past, Muhidin himself tells Munira:

"We are leaving Pate...Munira... listen...when I left... when I went" —he lowered his head — "to Nairobi to find out about Ziriya... went to the CID... then, you see, they took me to prison. I was in prison. They held me there. You see, Munira." "They said I was a 'terrorist. '" "No court. No judge. Every day,

questions: what do I know, what do I think, what do I do? Where was I when this or that happened, Who is my God?" (281).

Before I continue delving into the issue of the fluidity of home in *The Dragonfly Sea*, let me discuss in-depth the artistic crafting of Muhidin and Munira's conversation. The ensuing dialogue between Muhidin and Munira above shows a distinguishable shift from the flow of the narrative to the author's artistic freedom. Here, Owuor has used ellipsis to paint the past that haunts Muhidini. Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* notes that an ellipsis, "the discourse halts, though time continues to pass in the story" (70). Ellipsis is the narrative device of omitting a portion of the sequence of events, allowing the narratee to fill in the narrative gaps. This can be used to condense time to allow the reader to fill in the missing portions of the narrative with their imagination. Genette argues that "...the analysis of ellipses comes down to considering the storytime elided" (106). The use of ellipsis means that the reader is left to infer the events that have taken place during the elapsed time.

In my view, the use of ellipsis is typical of Owuor's style that she incorporates to throw the ball to the court of the reader. In other words, by using ellipsis, Owuor's readers are forced to wander, guess, infer, and flash out the hidden card in the narrative. In *Dust*, for instance, Owuor employs ellipsis, thus forcing the reader to plunge into the narrative in a bid to infer the concealed information. To exemplify this in *Dust*, Owuor uses ellipsis in trying to capture the aftermath of post-election violence. As Ajany listens to the news on the radio, she hears Kofi Annan's voice uttering incoherent words that do not connect. "Parties... eminent person... bloodshed... peace... violent... peace... spoken... honourable gentlemen... war... tribal... politics..." (68). Here, this ellipsis

acts as a veil behind which painful experiences of people who lost their loved ones, lost their property, and even traumatized by the violence are hidden.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, as exemplified above, I argue that Muhidin's conversation is laced with an ellipsis that tells of the excruciating pain he feels when he remembers the past entanglement with Kenya. In other words, the elliptic marks are a veil behind which painful memory is concealed. Summarily, I contend that these ellipses that Owuor employs are gravestones of trauma.

Having focused on the ellipsis, it is important to note that Ayaana cannot find a home in China even though the past has been recounted in the narrative and tells her that she has Chinese blood in her veins. The narrative order is thus important in understanding Ayaana's contestation over ancestry and space. Her past says she is of Chinese ancestry while her present refuses to demonstrate this. In China, Ayaana seems to be confused and alienated. The euphoria with which she had welcomed the idea of being in China had been fired by Lai Jin's supposition to her that, "China will find China in you; you will also find your China self" (248). Yet Ayaana, as the narrator puts it, "was haunted by the transience of the one thing that should have been constant—home" (279). This is in relation to her inability and inaccessibility to find 'home' or to belong in China and with the Chinese as the narrator observes, "Of late, it (home) had become an ephemeral place she inhabited, which refused to guarantee its endurance. She did not speak of Pate's expectation for her or the one thing she was beginning to sense she could no longer do: stay in China. She was not Chinese" (387). If Ayaana thought of belonging and even being home in China, it is evident that she is not Chinese as she contends. Interestingly, she isn't sure if she has a home in Pate, either. It is evident that Ayaana is in the centre of nowhere. Evidently, Owuor seems to be using the narrative order ingeniously in raising serious questions of identity and belonging. Ayaana cannot

be admitted to China despite mastering expectations of the geography of Chinese bodies. Back home, her home is alienated.

By employing analepsis, Owuor fills the gaps existing in the narrative, thus well fashioning the narratee with the full story of the characters and therefore revealing the picture of the nation-state. The narrative order enables the narratee to experience and understand past events through the stories oscillate between the present and the past. It is evident in *The Dragonfly Sea* that the past shapes the present. Memories also allow characters to evoke their past. Individual and collective memories provide an alternative perspective on how we can read, evaluate, and understand the nation. By re-awakening the past in a quest to fill the gaps in the narrative, Owuor exposes a different reality of the nation since stories of alienation, violence, imprisonment, and fluidity of ancestry and spaces are vividly described.

### **The Narrative Voice and the Narrative Perspective**

According to Gerard Genette, a narrative comprises of three basic components. These are the Story (the signified), the Narrative (the signifier, that is, the statements that comprise the discourse in the text itself), and Narrating (producing the narrative action/the entire real or fictional situation in which the action/plot of the narrative takes place) (27). Genette has emphasized on how and in which way a textual matter is presented. Genette sets apart the focalization (perspective) from the voice (the narrating agent). Focalization defines from whose perspective the story is told, whereas the voice defines the narrator.

Thus, the focalization is as well called the narrative perspective and the narrative voice rather called the narrator, which forms the narrative instance. Genette argues that by examining the narrative instance, one can better understand the relations between the

narrator and the story in a given narrative. More precisely, a narrative voice depicts how the narrative is presented to the narratee.

The narrative voice of a story comes from the person telling the story. The term ‘voice,’ according to Genette, literally means ‘who speaks?’ that is, who is the text’s narrative voice? Genette further notes that a narrator is a speaker or ‘voice’ of the narrative discourse.

The narrative voice in Owuor’s *The Dragonfly Sea* is a third-person omniscient narrator. Genette looks at the omniscient narration as a mode of focalization where the “narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly than any of the characters know” (189). He uses the term zero focalization for the God-like knowledge of the omniscient third-person narrator.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, the narrator moves freely in time and space, inside and outside the characters’ minds. For instance, the narrator’s God-like knowledge spans centuries –an immortal awareness of time, so to speak – six hundred centuries (154). The narrator’s knowledge of six hundred years ago demonstrates his omniscience. The omniscient narrator oscillates from the past and the present and from one space to another. While trailing Ayaana in China, the narrator keeps taking the narratee back to Ayaana’s island, Pate. In so doing, this narrator places himself as all-knowing. That is, having one eye in Pate and at the same time in China where Ayaana is.

Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* has employed both subsequent and simultaneous narration. According to Genette, Subsequent narration entails the narrator telling what happened in some past time. It occurs through the unlimited omniscient narrative voice. On the other hand, simultaneous narration means that the narration occurs when a narrator tells a story as it occurs, describing what the characters see around them. In

*The Dragonfly Sea*, through simultaneous narration, the unlimited omniscient narrator maintains the trail of the protagonist's story – Ayaana. Yet the same unlimited omniscient narrator uses subsequent narration to fill the gaps existing in the narrative. This is seen by the narrator's decision to revisit the past.

By telling the story of the shipwreck incident which occurred six hundred years ago, the narrative voice probes into the beginnings of a nation. In other words, the narrator invites the narratee to listen to Ayaana's story, which then allows the same narratee a space to probe into the silenced story of the nation-state. This is because, and as I have argued earlier, Ayaana's individual story is laced with the nation's story.

As I have illustrated, the unlimited omniscient narrator employs simultaneous narration to narrate the events as they unfold. The unlimited omniscient narrator is also able to look into the minds of all characters and tell the narratee about their thoughts and feelings. It is this quality of the omniscient narrator that allows the narrator in *The Dragonfly Sea* to probe into the feelings and minds of Muhidin and Munira while Ayaana is in China. Narratologists argue that an omniscient narrator can move freely into and out of the minds of characters. Through the dialogue between Munira and Muhidin, we are made aware of Muhidin's fears and discontent with his nation-state. Fearing that he might be imprisoned again, Muhidin decides to flee his home for Pemba (281). Clearly, the narrative voice has chosen what to reveal and what not to say. It is largely the discontentment with the nation-state that seems to be gnawing Muhidin's mind.

Whereas Fazul, known in Pate as 'Fazul the Egyptian,' appears mysterious to Pate's people, the narrator reveals to the narratee who Fazul is. While the nation-state is faced with a riddle to unearth the terrorist responsible for the bombing of Nairobi and Dar-

es-Salaam, the narrator reveals to the narratee that Fazul is to blame. Yet throughout the narrative, it appears that the nation-state fails to apprehend the right person. Ziriyaab's seizure, Muhidin's imprisonment, and the profiling of the people of Pate on the "basis of a name and the shape of a beard" (84) become the rhythm after the bomb attacks. The narrator succeeds in portraying the inability of the nation-state to do her homework well, which is her greatest undoing. This is because, years later, many youths in Pate, having been pushed to the cliff by their nation, decides to join terrorist groupings like al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. Not to mention Muhidin's running away to Pemba.

Narratologists see narrative instance as a conjunction of the narrative voice and the narrative perspective. Here, I delve into the question of the narrative perspective in Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* and its significance in the narration of the nation and nationhood. Precisely, the narrative perspective describes the point of view. In other words, it reveals the point of view that the narrator chooses in relation to the events being told. It is a perspective from which the narrator witnesses the events of a narrative. It is necessary to note that while explaining the narrative perspective, Genette coined the term focalization to mean a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters, or other entities in the story. Mieke Bal sees focalization as the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen or perceived' (145). I focus on Ayaana, the protagonist, and the setting as narrative perspectives that have been aptly deployed in the narrative discourse, which eventually narrates the nation.

The narrative in *The Dragonfly Sea* has been revealed majorly through Ayaana's perspective. One gaze at Ayaana makes Mzee Kitwana Kipifit to draft a letter that he mails to China. Through this letter, a bond boasting of six hundred years ago is re-

established between China and Pate. Pate thus becomes a culturally cum socially contested space.

Apart from using Ayaana as the point of view in revealing the contestation over Pate, the omniscient narrator in *The Dragonfly Sea* also uses Ayaana as the narrative perspective to reveal the terrorism escapades of Fazul the Egyptian. Young children's predatory instincts make Fazul engage in his campaign of radicalizing youth to join his terrorism activities. Of great concern, Fazul's radicalization campaign is brought to the limelight through his conversation with little Ayaana.

In narrating the fluidity of home and belonging, the omniscient narrator in *The Dragonfly Sea* has chosen Ayaana to deliver this message. Whereas Ayaana is alienated in her home island, she is even further confused when she fails to find a home in China. The narrator observes, "She (Ayaana) was haunted by the transience of the one thing that should have been constant—home" (279). This is in relation to her inability and inaccessibility to find 'home' or to belong in China and with the Chinese as the narrator further observes, "Of late, it (home) had become an ephemeral place she inhabited, which refused to guarantee its endurance. She did not speak of Pate's expectation for her or the one thing she was beginning to sense she could no longer do: stay in China. She was not Chinese" (387). In addition, Koray's conversation with Ayaana reveals the fluidity of home, which, in my opinion, is a microcosm of a nation-state. It also reveals Ayaana as the point of view as Koray has directed his advice to her. Koray says, "We are another generation, a different people. We need a new imagination of and for life. Our home is anywhere and everywhere. Wherever we want it to be. The future is not a country, not for me, and not for you" (307). Koray seems to buy Donald Pease's suggestion that one should see a nation as a tolerated anachronism,

which is a liability in the current economy requiring a borderless world. In crafting this issue of the fluidity of home, Owuor has aptly used Ayaana as the point of view.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor has also used the setting as the point of view of assessing the question of the nation and nationhood. This choice of the setting being Pate provides a new site within which the novel engages in the nation's discourse and nationhood. By making the narrative oscillate around Pate as the center, Owuor challenges the hegemonic and normalized account of a nation's discourse as solely tied to urban settings. As in her first novel *Dust*, in which the setting spans the Northern part of the country, Pate in *The Dragonfly Sea* is metaphorically and literally the ostracized part of the nation that demands attention in negotiating nationhood. The profiling and alienation of Pate's citizens, which has been narrated through discontentment of characters like Muhidin, Munira, and then running away to terrorist groups by youth in Pate, reveals the feeling of the people towards their nation-state.

The narrative instance, which entails the narrative voice and the narrative perspective, allows Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* to reveal silences in the individual and collective stories of characters. This silence is the bridge in which we can access, evaluate, and understand the nation.

### **Significance of Memory in Narrating the Nation**

“Memories are ghosts that do not rest easy at all.” Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor

When Wolfgang Müller-Funk argued that “...all forms of memory are explicitly or implicitly based on retrospective narratives that seek to cross the unbridgeable gap between the time of narrating and the time of the events that will be narrated” (208), he meant that memories are re-awaken in justification of any narrative that leaves gaps

unfilled. Memory is one useful strategy that Owuor has deployed in *The Dragonfly Sea* to navigate the meaning of a nation, challenging the notion of a nation as a collective entity and exposing important but ignored or silenced facets of nationhood narratives.

While commenting on Yvonne Owuor, J. P. O'Malley says, "In Kenya, we are particularly good at repressing memories. I am aware of the fact that memories are ghosts that do not rest easy at all." In *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor probes into the question of haunting memories of the nation and, by extension, those of characters – a quest that narrates the nation. Undoubtedly, memory is selective. It does what Tim Woods calls "destabilizing dominant histories" (21). It picks on the ignored individual memories over the hegemonic accounts of stories. In so doing, it fills the gaps existing in a nation's story.

In a larger scheme of explaining the genesis of profiling, which undoubtedly is the basis of alienation of Pate citizens, Owuor re-awakens the memory of the 1998 terrorist attacks of Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. In his MA thesis, Simeon Mokaya Momanyi contends that "Kenya, specifically, has been hard hit by terrorist attacks during the past twenty years or so" (1). Elijah Odhiambo et al. observe that Al-Shabaab attacks in Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi in 2013 and Garissa University attacks in 2015 are some of the recent terrorist attacks on the nation-state. Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* ingeniously ties the new terrorism militia (al-Shabaab) to the 1998 bombing of Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. When Ayaana arrives from China, she inquires of old acquaintances. To her surprise, some of the youth have joined al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, an imagination of paradise to them. The narrator remarks, "Yes, some of the young had gone over to al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, al-Dawlah, imagining paradise" (417). The question that one asks is – what pushes these youth to accept the radicalization campaigns which ultimately take them to these terrorist groupings? Owuor clearly answers this that the

alienation and the profiling of Pate residents, especially after the 1998 bombing of Nairobi is the reason behind the youth joining the terrorist' groups. While the youth joins terrorism groupings, those who cannot fight like Muhidin decides to flee country. Yet all these happenings can be mirrored back to the bombing of Nairobi and Dar-es - Salaam.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, the omniscient narrator reveals memories of imprisonment that haunts characters. It is important to note that the narrator has decided to invite the narratee into the story of imprisonment of Muhidin when the latter goes to Nairobi in a quest to find his lost son. The narrator picks on imprisonment alone while deliberately leaving the whole journey that Muhidin covers. In so doing, the traumatic memory of imprisonment is exposed. It is this haunting memory of imprisonment that catapults Muhidin to Pemba, Mozambique. Ironically, Muhidin runs from his own nation. A nation that should instead be providing security for her citizens.

The sea, Chinese crescent tombs and social media become the stores of archiving memory in *The Dragonfly Sea*. The narrator deploys the memory of centuries ago shipwreck incident. By re-awakening this memory of the shipwreck incident, the narrator demonstrates the genesis of the bond between spaces. Again, the narrator demonstrates the importance of the sea as an archive of this shipwreck incident. Despite the fact that this incident dates six hundred years ago, it still haunts the island to date. Further, the crescent tombs in Pate are scars that remind – everyday single day– that Pate has been significantly attached to other spaces for centuries. These crescent tombs are memory marks of the shipwreck incident.

Through social media as an archive, the omniscient narrator navigates into the worries that baffle Mama Suleiman upon her son's joining the Syrian war. The narrator

observes, “You Tube, Facebook, Twitter, memory: the ephemeral maps a mother and a girl she loathed were using to search for a soul caught up in a war of worlds that should never have touched their lives” (456). By narrating the fears of a mother for a son, Owuor has used memory to give a human face to the war in Syria and how its wings are spread down to individuals in Kenya. Why would Kenyans join the Syrian war? A war that should never have touched their lives? A nation-state discontentment explains this scenario. Yet memory, stands tall in the narration of this war.

Significantly, Owuor has used memory to narrate the nation. *The Dragonfly Sea* demonstrates how memories explicitly tell silenced stories that explains, deeply, the nation.

### **Naming as a Strategy in Narrating the Nation**

Naming is one strategy that Owuor has deployed in *The Dragonfly Sea* in rendering the narration of the nation. As I have illustrated earlier, characters in *The Dragonfly Sea* grapples with alienation from their nation-state and as well as identities. Naming is thus a strategy that motivates characters to re-invent themselves. This re-invention of self through adoption of new names facilitates the courting and negotiation of nationhood. But then, what is motivation in literature? According to Wellek and Warren in *Theory of Literature*, motivation is that element in the narrative that increases the illusion of reality. To overcome alienation, Munira gives herself and her daughter a name – Wa Jauza (Orion). Orion refers to a constellation of stars. In this case, Munira achieves her goal of making little Ayaana believe that they too have a name and consequently a family. The name, Wa Jauza in this case increase the illusion that they really have a family and thus navigating issues of alienation. Many years later, Ayaana uses this name in her passport while planning to go to China.

Initiation of foreigners into Pate citizenry is sealed with a name. *The Dragonfly Sea* documents quite a number of characters who are renamed upon entry into Pate. Lai Jin is named Nahodha Jamal. The Chinese sojourner who arrives one morning to Pate is named Mzee Kitwana Kipifit. A rather quasi-allegorical name alluding to his morning runs and jogging. Surprisingly, the remains of Delaksha's body are interred with an additional name; Ra'abia. This tradition of bestowing names to foreigners is not reserved to the present alone. Six hundred years ago, Zheng He was christened Haji Mahmud Shamsuddin. These names allow for admission of these foreigners into Pate. Owuor thus demonstrates how characters negotiate issues of identities and nationhood through naming.

Lai Jin's ship *MV Qingrui* is renamed *MV Guolong; The Dragon of the Nation* which, according to Lai Jin, alludes to the stereotype of his nation —China—a dragon nation. To Lai Jin, this de-idealization of his ship from *MV Qingrui*, which to him is the ideal name, to *MV Guolong* serves to re-invent the purpose of the ship in conjuring a journey that happened hundreds of years before. De-idealization of names in *The Dragonfly Sea* demonstrate a creative departure from the ideal. An ideal casting is faithful to its original. Yet Owuor has departed from the ideal name in trying to navigate issues of nationhood and the state. Ayaana for instance is drawn into a debate of the exact name of the Indian Ocean in her class in China. While Ari, the Indian student, confidently maintains that the ocean is called the Indian Ocean, Ayaana battles for name supremacy by rigidly calling it Ziwa Kuu; a vast ocean. Both their efforts in crafting their nation's ideologies as superior are crushed by the Chinese teacher who rules that the ocean is the Western Ocean for they are all in China.

The narrator in *The Dragonfly Sea* further crafts the idea that names suggest a contestation over space. When the narrator hypothesize that Shanga is arguably the

place that the Chinese of the shipwreck incident lived thereafter, he backs it using the name Shanga. The narrator says:

*The past.* After a giant ocean storm, six hundred years ago, capsized an admiral's junks and drowned at least six thousand of his men, some of the survivors floated onto Pate's mangroves and dark sand beach, crossing thresholds. Years later, a few boarded kusi-powered vessels to return to China. However, most stayed on, having pronounced shahada and taken the purgative bath. They had re-emerged in white garments and new names, with new wives and a covenanted allegiance to Pate alone. It is said they conceded to the past by naming their living zone "Shanghai," their place of memory and ghosts. Time, decay, and pate abbreviated this to "Shanga," a necklace or a yoke, unrequited memory can be an adornment or a prison. (154)

To the omniscient storyteller in the novel, the ideal name for Shanga is Shanghai. Yet time, decay and Pate itself abbreviated it to 'Shanga'; a Swahili word meaning a necklace. Allegorically, the people of Pate have to wear this necklace of memory that reminds them of the bond between a different space and time of vast magnitude.

Clearly, naming is a strategy that facilitates negotiation of issues that characters are grappling with in *The Dragonfly Sea*. As I have discussed, these issues are hindrance to negotiation of nationhood. Naming in *The Dragonfly Sea* therefore becomes a strategy of overcoming such hurdles.

### **Scene and Summary**

Guillemette and Lévesque in *Narratology* say that scene refers to a 'dramatic' method of narration that presents events at the same pace as that at which they are supposed to be occurring. Guillemette and Lévesque continue that scene usually presents events in

detail and with substantial use of dialogue and vivid descriptions. In a work of fiction, scene occurs when an event is presented in detail. On the other hand, summary occurs when a narrator tells the story as a condensed series of events, summarizing in a few sentences what happened over a longer period of time either done in elliptical, one word or short sentences. Owuor deploys this strategy well in her work to fill the gaps in the narration of the nation.

Unlike her debut novel *Dust* that she uses summary quite explicitly, Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* capitalizes on the use of scene in trying to negotiate the discourse of the nation and nationhood. A scene is important for it creates a reference point for the narratee. Dialogue is often considered the best instance of scene. This is because in a dialogue, the narrator almost disappears from the story thus giving the characters an opportunity to interact. As the characters share their experiences, they unearth issues from first-hand experiences. Several scenes in *The Dragonfly Sea* have been highlighted as reference point to issues that give meaning to the understanding of the nation and nationhood.

I argued earlier that having porous borders is one such thing that contests the collective wholesomeness of the nation. Here, I maintained that the shipment of the country's treasures satirizes the fluidity of a nation's border. Charles Hornsby notes that 1970s was the worst period of poaching in Kenya's history. According to Hornsby, senior government figures were involved in slaughtering Kenya's abundant wildlife for the export of ivory and skins to the Middle and Far East. Hornsby adds that in mid-1973, at least 500 elephants were killed legally each month (312). By restaging this poaching activity in *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor amplifies the issues that break trust of citizens on its nation. Yet in this argument, I focus more on how the scene has been narrated. The narrator presents this scene thus:

Everyone gathered at the top deck in the rain and was looking down at the contents of the three split containers. Five hundred death grimaces of African beings: Lions, leopards, pangolins, zebras, and gazelles. Ayaana counted and recounted the elephant tusks. Not the giant wants but the small, unformed ivory of young elephants. Some of the pangolin bodies moved—bot yet dead—and that was the most distressing of all. There were things she had not known she be lieved in, had not imagined she might feel for. Had not understood she might ever weep for this, the evidence, of the wasteful plunder of the treasures of her homeland. Heaving, she battled to keep her breakfast in. (250)

Apparently, the narrator conjures a scene in which exploitation of the nation’s wild game is done. By creating a vivid picture of the scene, the narrator masters the ability of making the narratee sees for himself how their possession are –with impunity – shipped to foreign lands.

Another important scene that Owuor develops in *The Dragonfly Sea* is the description of the situation of things in some nights in Pate. The narrator describes the scene thus:

*On some Pate Island nights*, conversations among men converged on the island square. In the absence of a reliable television service, these mabaraza were Muhidin’s news roundups. The men, mostly retired civil servants with rolled-up- two-day-old newspapers whose every word they pored over, merchants, nondescript workers and scholars talked. Children played, and women murmured and tittered, and voices gentled by the day’s end debated Kenya’s contorted politics, its brothel-opened approach to everything, and English Premier League scores. There were three main groups unfairly distributed in support of Arsenal, Manchester United, and Chelsea. A few clung to a much-

mocked nostalgia for Liverpool. They spoke often of Kenya as if they mattered to it, as if it had not at once lost its memory of their existence. (23) (Emphasis added)

The phrase “On some Pate Island nights” describe the repetitive scenario that happens in Pate Island during some of its nights. The biasness with which they converse on the politics of the nation-state and how the nation-state has forgotten of them demonstrate the author’s commitment in portraying a scene that conjures the understanding of the nation and nationhood.

I have stated above that dialogue is often considered the best instance of scene because the narrator nearly disappears from the story thus giving the characters an opportunity to interact. One such scene in which characters converse and in their conversation navigates around the discourse of the nation and nationhood is when Muhidin revisits his imprisonment. The dialogue is portrayed thus:

One day, two months later, Muhidin told Munira, “We are leaving Pate.”

Her eyes widened. Fear, and then a subtle thrill. “What’s this, Muhidin?”

He did not answer at once.

Munira deflated. “Ah! You wish not to be seen with me.” She pulled away.

Muhidin grapped her by the shoulders. “Munira...Listen...When I left...When I went” –he lowered his head—“to Nairobi to find out about Ziriab...went to the CID...then, you see, they took me to prison. I was in prison. They held me there. You see, Munira? Muhidin broke down.

“Why?” Munira whispered.

“They said I was a ‘terrorist.’” Muhidin wiped his face. “No court. No judge. Every day questions...” (281)

In this dialogue, Muhidin explains the issue that catapults his decision to flee his home and island. In this dialogue also, Muhidin decries the injustice that he has to brave while searching for his son. In this scene, Owuor co-opts summary in trying to put it in black and white how the nation-state treats her people. In explaining the role of summary, Chatman Seymour says that, “The novelist is permitted to conflate into a single speech what must probably be supposed to have been uttered as several separate speeches” (68). Summary condenses happenings of longer periods by using single words or even ellipsis. While the dialogue vividly presents the scene, Owuor has employed summary to vivify the situation. Muhidin enters into elliptical narration thus revealing the pain he has to withstand while recalling this haunting memory. Muhidin enters into one word conversation in trying to abet the missing justice as he struggles to find his son. He says, “No court. No judge” (281). Interestingly, Muhidin utters two words yet revealing volumes on the injustice that Muhidin faced. At the end of the day, Munira accepts Muhidin’s plea to flee Pate. As I explained earlier and as in this case, Owuor has used scene and summary to amplify the issues that break trust of citizens to their nation.

I argue that scene in *The Dragonfly Sea* creates pictures that are important in narration of the nation. At the end of the day, these scenic moments put a narratee in a position to see for himself the pictures as if he (the narratee) is in an art gallery rather than listening to the storyteller in a fireplace or a king’s courtroom. These pictures narrate the nation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined some aspects of narratology that are significant in narrating the nation in *The Dragonfly Sea*. I have analysed aspects such as the narrative order, narrative voice, narrative perspective, scene and summary, significance of memory and naming and how they contribute in telling the story of the nation.

In this analysis, I contend that the use of analepsis or rather flashback and the omniscient narrative voice significantly voice the fears and concerns of characters within a nation-state. In other words, this study contends that, though the narrative is set in the present, the omniscient narrator keeps oscillating between the very present and a distant past. In addition, the same narrator manoeuvres in different spaces. In so doing, this allows us to have a glimpse of not only what happened in the past but also what is happening in different spaces. This thus reveals silenced stories that are important in negotiating and understanding the nation and nationhood.

I also note that memory and naming are important strategies that Owuor has fashioned in narrating the nation. Here, Owuor has put together and retrieved pieces and fragments of memory that help in understanding the nation. In addition, naming is a strategy that has been used to facilitate negotiation of nationhood in *The Dragonfly Sea*.

Precisely, this analysis reveals that Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* has used the identified and discussed narrative strategies to voice, illustrate and narrate the nation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

This research project examined how individual and collective stories in Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* narrates the nation. By the phrase 'narrating the nation,' this research project sought to investigate how individual and collective narratives give meaning to the nation's understanding, challenge the notion of a nation as a collective entity, and expose important but ignored or silenced facets of narratives of nationhood.

This study hypothesized, first, that individual and collective stories in *The Dragonfly Sea* define the nation. I have noted that individual and collective narratives give meaning to the nation's understanding and disavows the idea of the Kenyan nation-state as a homogenous entity.

Evidently, Scholars have decried the ostracization of the minorities in narratives of nationhood. Tom Odhiambo's in "Biography of a Trade Unionist" argues that "nationalist discourses are generally disinclined to celebrate the achievements of minorities or the contributions of such groups to the nation" (87). Badri Narayan maintains such tone that:

There is no unified narrative about their remembrance of the national movement and the contributions of different castes in it. It may not always be true that each community remembers the nation in the contemporary period with identical emotional fervour. Moreover, the individual caste and the group interests of the narrators are usually reflected through their narratives. Often, the existing communities on the fringes of mainstream society use it as a space to voice their grievances with the ruling classes (67).

This study revealed that *The Dragonfly Sea* portrays the importance of examining such minorities' narratives and how their stories impact the nation-state.

First, Owuor portrays how individuals try to negotiate the idea of nationhood. For instance, stories of fictitious characters like Munira and Muhidin tell of people struggling to understand their nation. In trying to forestall the belief in a nation and its existence, Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea* presents two starting points of Kenya as a nation. Owuor reminds us of the existence of the nation from its past engagement and interaction with the other continents. Even though she writes a novel whose time setting is the present, she ingeniously weaves a thread that ties this past with the present through artifacts like the Chinese tombs and even blood ties through Ayana, the novel's protagonist. In so doing, Owuor does what Homi Bhabha terms manufacturing a sense of mutual national belonging (nationhood), which is achieved through various narratives, rituals, and symbols that stimulate an individual's sense of being a member of a select group. This past portrayal of the existence of the nation is juxtaposed with the eve that Kenya gained her independence as Haroun, Muhidin's father-in-law, tells Muhidin, "We are now Kenya" (27). In understanding the nation, therefore, *The Dragonfly Sea* calls for scrutiny back to centuries before the British annexation of Kenya as espoused by individual narratives rather than fixedly trying to understand the nation-state from her independence or her British conquest towards the present as history might demand.

While analysing how individual and collective dreams narrate the nation, the study finds that a nation is an entity that a people struggling to survive and meet their dreams invoke when circumstances require. Through the stories of Munira's family, Muhidin and Mama Suleiman, it is evident that these characters' dreams conjure global space regardless of their status as residents of Pate. When Ayaana wants to travel to China,

Munira's utterances reveal the feeling of these characters towards their nation. Munira tells Ayaana, she (Ayaana) is lucky that she is receiving a passport from Kenya, a nation that has bequeathed a number of Pate people death certificates only.

I have argued that the narration of the nation-state's absence on the lives of characters as has been revealed through stories of family demonstrate the view of the nation-state by the residents of Pate. I submit that the absence of the father figure in Ayaana's life can be seen as a metaphor for the absence of the nation in the lives of the characters in Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*. This is demonstrated through the narrator's talks of the absence of the nation (Kenya) in the lives of the residents of Pate. Through Muhidin's eyes, Pate is described as a place that has been rendered smaller, shabbier, more derelict, isolated, and even more preoccupied with trivialities. In summary, therefore, Pate's collective story is undoubtedly a story of abandonment and rejection by the nation-state that they subscribe to.

I have also noted that *The Dragonfly Sea* narrates transnationalism and that this transnationalism gives meaning to the understanding of the nation. Here, the study finds out that Pate's citizens invoke the conversation about the English Premier League even though they are miles away. Therefore, the study contends that the conversation about the English premier league serves as an escape from the notion of a nation that has forgotten about them. It also portrays how the residents of Pate court global citizenry, which negates the understanding of a nation as a homogeneous collective unit. In addition, the upsurge of Chinese in Pate and Kenya as a whole, as depicted in *The Dragonfly Sea* and as examined by the study, demonstrates a transnational situation that the nation is grappling with. The Chinese seem to be the masters of every aspect of development, while the people of Pate seem detached from their nation. The people are therefore discontented with the way its nation operates.

Aside from understanding the nation, my analysis revealed that *The Dragonfly Sea* portrays that individual and collective narratives contest the notion of the nation as a collective entity and the idea of nationhood. Through the narration of the porous border in *The Dragonfly Sea*, it is evident that quite a number of clandestine cross-border criminal activities emanate. Such activities include terrorism, as has been narrated through Fazul's entry into Kenya through dubious means. Furthermore, the seizure of Ziriya and his subsequent disappearance has a porous border to blame. This, I argue, withdraws the citizen's confidence in their nation's ability to safeguard their security.

The study also notes that contestation over ancestry and space has been discussed reveals that the fluidity of ancestry and space contests the idea of a nation as a collective entity. On ancestry, Ayaana is presumed to have Chinese blood in her veins. Her ancestry is seen as spanning centuries ago. On the other hand, Pate Island seems to be an archive that has Chinese artefacts spanning centuries. The idea of the nation is thus punctured by this demonstration of the fluidity in ancestry. On space ownership, Owuor uses alienation to narrate it. To depict alienation, Owuor locates the narrative in the coastal margins of Kenya – Pate Island. Characters feel estranged from the 'real Kenya' where the government is based. This is revealed through Muhidin's remarks that the coast is not Kenya. To demonstrate that the coast is alienated, Muhidin runs away to Pemba, Mozambique. This discontentment borne out of individuals feeling toward their nation contest the feeling of collectivism in nationhood.

Secondly, the study hypothesized that the *Dragonfly Sea's* narrative strategies are effective in narrating the nation. Owuor uses some aspects of narratology, such as narrative order, narrative voice, and narrative perspective, to narrate the nation.

Although the narrative is set in the present, the study found out that it keeps shifting from the present to the past through flashback. Owuor employs analepsis to fill the gaps existing in the narrative, thus fashioning the narratee with the characters' full story and therefore revealing the picture of the nation-state. In other words, the narrative order enables the narratee to experience and understand past events through the stories that oscillate between the present and the past. It is evident in *The Dragonfly Sea* that the past shapes the present. For instance, the narrative order portrays a story that Owuor has crafted that goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Yet its relevance to present-day Kenya cannot be gainsaid. Through analepsis, Owuor weaves a thread that ties the shipwreck incident to the discourse of the nation today. In as much as scholars have suggested that a nation-state called Kenya is a creation of the British conquest in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Akoth 2011 and Hornsby 2013), through flashback, Owuor reveals that to understand the nation, individual narratives dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century are very relevant.

Apart from the narrative voice and order, the study finds that memory has been used significantly as a narrative strategy to narrate the nation. In *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor re-awakens memories of the silenced past in trying to understand the nation. Such memories include the 1998 bomb attack of Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. By re-awakening this bomb attack, Owuor gives a face to the terrorism menace that the nation-state is grappling with. Therefore, the study finds that such stories of vast unfathomable magnitude could be understood by reading them as stories of individuals, as in the case of Fazul, who is responsible with the attacks in *The Dragonfly Sea*.

I have also argued that the use of ellipsis is another important strategy that Owuor adopts in telling the story of the nation. The study discovers that Owuor uses elliptic marks as a veil behind which painful memory is concealed. In *The Dragonfly Sea*,

Muhidin's conversation is laced with an ellipsis that tells of the excruciating pain he feels when he remembers the past entanglement with Kenya.

Furthermore, the study establishes that the third person omniscient narrator is apt in presenting individual and collective narratives that conversely narrates the nation. This omniscient narrative voice is aware of the occurrences and characters' thoughts and the events happening in different spaces and times. Thus, this is an effective means for Owuor to communicate individuals and collective experiences and how well these experiences impact understanding the nation.

Moreover, Owuor uses subsequent and simultaneous narration, thus creating scenes that depict and narrate the nation. I argue that the scene in *The Dragonfly Sea* creates pictures that are important in the narration of the nation. Several scenic moments have been appropriated, thus placing the narratee in a position to see the pictures that define the nation. I argue that the aspects of narratology that have been examined in the study reveal that individual and collective stories that are neglected or silenced are equally important in understanding the nation and nationhood.

Given that individual and collective narratives are undoubtedly the constitutive narratives that are imperative in understanding the nation and by extension nationhood, it is a strong submission of this research therefore that individual and collective narratives should never be considered insignificant in discourses of the nation and nationhood.

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