

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING SEXUAL AND GENDER RELATED DIFFERENCES IN MARGARET OGOLA'S *THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE*, *I SWEAR BY APOLLO*, AND FLORENCE MBAYA'S *A JOURNEY WITHIN*.

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ABSTRACT

*This paper examines women writers (re)conceptualisation of the female self in postcolonial Kenya where women are generally viewed as relative to man and without autonomy. Patriarchy amplifies the biological differences between men and women by assigning men privileged status while women are subjugated and allocated subservient roles. Women are portrayed as fitting into gender roles before they start questioning their subjective place and clamouring for change to foster their new identity. Women writers attempt to establish the female self identity in relation to a series of differences between the 'self' and 'other' as demonstrated in Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*, *I Swear by Apollo*, and Florence Mbaya's *A Journey Within*. Their aim is to depict their perspectives on fellow women and address women's identity with regard to performance of nationhood and thereby consign agency to women.*

Key words: patriarchy, self, other, nation, identity, conceptualisation and (re)conceptualisation.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to examine female writers (re)conceptualisation of the female self in postcolonial which is informed by the hypotheses that female writers establish the female self-identity in relation to a series of differences between the 'self' and 'other.' Feminists' and women writers' conceptualisation and reconceptualisation of the female self is examined in patriarchal and contemporary societies by looking at the interconnectedness of the female self and national culture; examining insights that women writers bring on the literary table of literature and outlining the writers' contribution to both conceptualisation and reconceptualisation of the female identity.

The individual experiences of the women writers considered in this paper are taken as exemplifying the general situation in Kenya. Investigation of the reconceptualisation of the female self in the postcolonial Kenyan nation has been geared towards establishing the dialectical relationship between women's self and national identity. Interrogating the female self, fifty years after Kenya's independence, acquires relevance as an area that integrates women into the realm of the nation. For women to achieve a national sphere from where they can enact selfhood and nationhood, their conceptualisation as the other has to be challenged in a bid to reconstruct their self identity in relation to a series of differences and complementarities between men and women.

In the patriarchal order, the self is comprehended in the binary opposition of 'self/other' and the notion of the female self is either peripheral or totally denied. Self in this paper refers to self-identity, self-definition and self-assertion. These are aspects which are tied to the numerous identities which women assume in the nation, each of which is tied to social, economic and political structures in the nation. The nation, on the other hand, is a real, imagined and idealistic geographical space occupied by people who live collectively as a society. The identity of an individual becomes manifest in the role(s) that a person plays in respect to a particular position which enables her/him to realise self-definition. Thus, the development of the concept of the self in women enables them to point out who they are to themselves and to others even though the self keeps changing depending on situational influences. This is because views of self are gained by direct experience with the environment and also from references made to self by other people. Consequently, the core of an identity becomes the labelling of the self as inhabiting a role and incorporating that role into the self meaning and expectations associated with the role and its presentation.

Conceptualisation refers to the way of perceiving something. Reconceptualisation means changing certain perception. The term 'female' involves the biological aspect which differentiates woman from man while self refers to the identity or the individuality of the female characters depicted in the three works which are considered in this paper. Reference to self in this paper is geared towards answering the question of 'Who am I?'

1.3 (RE)CONCEPTUALISING SEXUAL AND GENDER RELATED DIFFERENCES IN MARGARET OGOLA'S THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE

Margaret Ogola upholds women's writings as best placed to interrogate the female self because the writers "[are] female. [They] understand better what a woman is, because [they] have grown up being [women. They] don't know much about men so [they] can't write as much about them as [they] could with women" (cited in Gitaa x). Thus, the project of women's writings, just like feminists' is to reconceptualise female selfhood.

The River and the Source can be considered as an outline of the (re)conceptualisation of women from the pre-colonial period, through the colonial era, to the postcolonial milieu. Tom Odhiambo points out in "Writing Alternative Womanhood in Kenya in Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*," that:

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

A discussion of the female characters in *The River and the Source* focuses on the (re)conceptualisation of the female self in a world that is principally feminine and women characters are portrayed as agents of change through the various roles that they actively and cleverly involve themselves in: motherhood, work and professional responsibilities. An examination of the main female characters in this text, Akoko, Nyabera, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Veronica and Wandia is aimed at investigating the kind of self that Ogola postulates in regard to the question of who am I in as far as women are concerned in Kenya in the 21st century. The examination of Akoko forms the background against which all the other female characters in the text under discussion are (re)conceptualised since she is the founding mother of the various generations that these women represent.

Akoko's identity is negated at the time of her birth. When her father, Chief Odera Gogni, hears his new born child yelling for the first time, he says, "another rock for my sling" (9). In his

wisdom, he supposes that the new born baby is a boy but he is surprised when the child turns out to be a girl. Robert Baker notes that “the most important thing to know about a person in our society is... sex” (cited in Johan Lyall Aitken 9). Is it a boy or a girl? The concern for sex category serves as a condition for differentiation between male and female. When the chief learns that the baby is a girl, he says that “a home without daughters is like a spring without source...” (9). Although this simile portrays Akoko’s symbolic position as the ‘other’ whom the community is dependent on for its perpetuation, her birth is treated as incidental. It is for this reason that in “Writing Alternative Womanhood in Kenya in Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source*” Odhiambo notes that Akoko is “appreciated in retrospect as a turnabout given that nature has defied human expectation” (240). Recognising the girl child after reconsideration is an endorsement of the female as the ‘other.’

Helene Cixous in “The laugh of Medusa” underscores women’s acceptance of themselves as the other in men and hence the need to accord the other a voice through which the self in women can be realised. This shows women resist exclusion and their consistent quest for inclusion keeps the other that is assigned to them alive. This is seen in Akoko whom the author presents as lacking in any inhibitions towards self-realisation.

Ogola (re) conceptualises the female self in postcolonial literature making women visible as part and parcel of any human history. She uses Akoko to historicise women in the society. This is necessary because:

To [historicise] is first to discover the woman where there had only been men, to see [the] woman in history, and recognise a fundamental experience which unites women, the experience of being ‘the other’... Such a reading obviously is no longer wholly within the discourse which produces history as man’s truth, no longer accepts that history has only to do with men...for where once history revealed the truth of man’s identity as a finite being, revealed man’s fate, now history reveals the truth of women’s lives, the fate of being a woman, of being ‘the Other’. The closed circle of recognition is still inscribed, for all women are women in the same way, and this discovery of identity is predicated on whole series of exclusions.... (Elam 37)

Ogola expresses Luo women’s self-definition and assertion of their identity as human beings while at the same time castigating the fate women have suffered in patriarchy. Despite the subjective space accorded to them in the postcolonial Kenyan nation, the author expresses their collective will as Kenyan citizens. Akoko makes an effort to stand out in relation to men in a bid to transcend the subjectivity of patriarchal tradition in the community and thereby becomes the prototype in the interrogation of the development of the female self and national identity. The loss of her husband and two sons, Obura and Owang, is devastating. Obura dies while fighting for the British government in the Second World War while Owang is choked by food. The deaths of the three make a significant contribution towards Akoko’s reconceptualisation as a woman. She refuses to be inherited by her husband’s brother as is the custom and desists from perceiving herself as desperate because of the loss of her sons. She shows strength of character and develops an independent identity as a woman, picks up her broken pieces and trudges on. The suffering she endures as a result of the deaths is not as a result of her own making, for she is not evil, does not deny food to anyone and generously participates in sacrifice and libation. As a woman leading an upright life, Akoko has a virtuous female self that is not deterred by the limitations of community life to realise her best.

Even though the author presents Akoko as suffering from retarded physical growth, she makes up for her lack of height with brightness and a determination that becomes the hallmark of her entire life. Thus, neither members of her family nor Akoko herself regret her presence. According to Cixous in “The Newly Born Woman” she is, therefore, depicted as “loving to be other, another without its necessarily going the route of abasing what is same, herself” (353). In other words, Akoko gains recognition as the concrete other and strives to define herself. This is seen when at ten months,

she utters the words.... “*dwaro mara*”, which means “want mine!” This ability, Odhiambo notes, “is an initiative set by Akoko in the text as she struggles to find a social niche and establish a personal identity in her immediate community from childhood through adulthood (pre) determines and foregrounds future similar efforts by other women” (239). Ogola (re)conceptualises Akoko’s female self in the society and propagates female agency.

Atsango observes that *The River and the Source* “suggests that gender roles are more culturally tailored than biologically determined” (76). Ogola refrains from perpetuating otherness by subscribing to gender roles. Instead, she uses Akoko to defy traditions that are bent on subjugating women by rejecting the existing social codes that subdue women as the other to construct equitable social relations. Leslie points out that women are not merely biological beings, “contrary to what [most people] think, [woman] is more than a biological aperture...” (5). Ogola submerges the biological aspects of women that fail to foster female selfhood. The metaphorical reference to a son as a rock as enshrined in this community suggests that this is a patriarchal society that assigns roles on the basis of gender. This practice is reversed by Akoko’s granddaughter years later when she makes reference to Akoko as the “steady rock of [their] lives” (135). Her daughter and granddaughter try to emulate her.

Ogola uses the pre-colonial patriarchal nation to position the female self’s responses to the socio-political demands of change and transition. She conceptualises Akoko as a model of the female self and a foundation of the progressive development in the postcolonial nation. Differences of self and other are exhibited in literature in both feminist and women writings which are feminist in nature. Cixous affirms the femininity of what women script when she points out that there is a relationship between women’s writing and women’s body: “more body, hence more writing” (353). That is to say that women’s writings become the source of whatever imagery they may want to paint of themselves. The female body, therefore, ceases to be the centre of a search for the female self identity since it is fostered through women’s writings.

The femininity of Ogola’s writing becomes apparent from the skills she assigns Akoko to enable her to survive in a household full of men; although she is puny, she is physically fearless. She also has a child’s instinct that senses her father’s affection for her which is unusual in this community that has already invented a tradition, “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1). The patriarchal order assigns the male child a special space in the community as the iconography of the family: a son means continuity while a girl marries to some other clan. That the chief takes notice of his daughter is remarkable, though abnormal, since he introduces a variance in the traditions of this community.

Akoko is presented as the embodiment of practices that require to be subverted when they are no longer “fettered by practical use” (Hobsbawm 4), and hence, the need for ‘invention’ of tradition whereby women play a major role in the community as we witness with the demise of Akoko’s husband and sons. She enjoys affection not only from her father, but also her brothers who defend her against any girl or boy who dares cross her. The author uses her special place in the self/other binary opposition to depict the male folk in this community as being at the forefront in the (re)conceptualisation of the female self. Thus, women perform selfhood and nationhood by ascribing to particular aspects of familial roles.

Through familial notions, women are integrated into the discourse of the nation and assigned roles within it. Under such circumstances, patriarchal notions are viewed as benevolent. Postcolonial feminism and women writers use such national discourses to construct female self agency and to write women’s selfhood and nationhood. As a result, the nation is gendered, and women’s writings foster gendered national construction to include themselves in the national canon from which they have

often been excluded. By so doing, women are able to challenge their established place in the postcolonial nation as the other. Ogola assumes the responsibility of assigning agency to the female self by conferring on the 'other' a prestigious status in the patriarchal nation. This is seen when Akoko not only refuses to be inherited as a widow as is the practice in this community, but also leaves her matrimonial home when living there becomes unbearable, to live with her brother, Oloo. He takes her into his house against the expectations of the traditional Luo society.

Ogola, in a bid to deal with the question of nationhood, constructs and portrays Akoko as a Luo and also a Kenyan national subject, patriarchal ideology notwithstanding. She creates the character of Akoko to personify women's struggle for national space from where they can agitate for a more equitable society. Thus, Ogola does not subscribe to patriarchal ideology that delineates woman as "the embodiment of Africa..., one of the enabling tropes of 'postcolonial male domination...' (Stratton 172). For that reason, she falls short of portraying women as passive and voiceless, a representation that serves to "[rationalise] and therefore perpetuate inequality between the sexes..." (Stratton 172). She reconceptualises Akoko by making her defy patriarchal ideology.

Ogola uses the convention of marriage to highlight the status of women in the patriarchal society. She singles out Akoko as a very beautiful girl whose physical beauty is appreciated and consequently many men seek her hand in marriage. However, there is an underlying negation for women's identity which is dictated to by the phallic tradition that perpetuates the male gaze. Thus, women acquire relevance only in their association with men through sex or marriage. Akoko's family asks for an inhibitive bride price, thirty head of cattle, that can be enough to marry three wives, not just one wife. However, her suitor, Chief Owuor Kembo, considers that the bride price is not too much for Akoko, for he has set his heart on marrying her.

As if to reinforce the notion of her privileged status, she defies tradition which expects a girl to paint the picture of shyness. Instead, she walks in measured steps, holds her head high, swivels her head around a bit and rests her gaze on Owour. Her being given out in marriage uplifts rather than debases her, and therefore, she enters into a dialogical relationship with the life of the community to chart her selfhood. For Akoko, matrimony does not reduce her to "an object of exchange along basically androcentric and patriarchal lines..." (Dorothy Leland Hypatia 3). The symbolic pact of marriage becomes an order of exchange in which object imagery is inundated when Akoko challenges traditional practices which expect a woman to compensate for the bride price paid for her by bearing many children.

Akoko exonerates women from unfair treatment by posing a rhetorical question: "now who in this assembly can tell me how to create a child within my womb? Is that not the premise of Were, god of the eye of the rising sun" (38). Her interrogation forms a challenge as well as a subversion of the status quo and hence Ogola postulates women as intelligent in their rejection of the existing social codes which limit a woman's role in the nation to procreation. In so doing, she reconstructs a new society where women's quest for recognition as distinguished selves cannot be ignored. Through writing, Ogola affords a woman's sunken self an opportunity to transcend the phallogocentric order that bestows the burden of the bride price on the female self.

Furthermore, the author paints motherhood as a state where women achieve fulfilment by depicting the heightened jubilation that accompanies Akoko's birth of a son, Obura Kembo. Ogola uses the biological role of a woman to embody the traditional family unit as synonymous to a nation. The dialectical relationship of self and other portrays maternity as the only social power open to women in the patriarchal symbolic order. Odhiambo points out that *The River and the Source* is a "narrative of a nation that is symbolically constituted at the family level" (3). The family is portrayed as the prototype of an imagined community, and it occupies a central place in the (re)conceptualisation of the female self. Akoko's domestic space is used to reconstruct the place of

women in the postcolonial nation, in which women can take advantage of the space assigned to them in the domestic sphere to curve a new identity for women that is more equitable, socially.

Akoko internalises gender norms that perhaps endear her to her husband. He upholds monogamy although it is scorned upon by the traditional society. Her in-laws accuse Akoko of bewitching him and this prompts her to go back to her father's home, but not before she designates her worth in the community. She posits:

I Akoko Obanda Nyar Yimbo (daughter of the people of Yimbo) came to the homestead of Owuor Kembo, chief, as a pure girl nineteen seasons old. In all that time I was taught nothing but the ways of Chik and how to conduct myself as a woman of impeccable birth. Never in all that time did my mother or father take me out in the dark for the purposes of showing me how to cast spells or to brew love portions to snare the hearts of men. (30-31)

Akoko puts a strong self defence before she returns to her father's house. Her movement from her matrimonial home gains significance as a woman's assertion of self identity and marks the evolution of women's self esteem. She challenges cultural and familial elements that seek to propagate her oppression and hence manifests consciousness in regard to the women's place in patriarchal ideology.

Her attempt to reclaim the fragmented identity that her in-laws bestow on her is an indication that women in the postcolonial Kenyan nation have realised the need to resist damaging aspects of patriarchy. Her self development is viewed from her family's background, her attitude, physical characteristics, self perceptions and socialisation experiences which assist her to delineate a female self beyond reproach. Her response to her in-laws' demeaning accusation is forceful to the embarrassment of Otieno, her husband's brother, who threatens to beat her up if only to subjugate her. The threat to subdue Akoko through physical confrontation points at the self/other binary opposition that is symbolic of the high-handedness that men in the patriarchal tradition exercise over women. Unfortunately for him, he retreats when she asserts her identity by daring him to beat her up and thus the symbolic significance of the dare to physical confrontation that women have to take courage and challenge men who threaten to subjugate them. Symbolically, Otieno's withdrawal marks a reversal of gender roles that depict man as courageous and woman as cowardly. His position in the society is threatened by a woman, perhaps due to the precarious situation he holds as a man who fails to uphold morals.

Ogola seems to suggest that undeserving males enjoy privileged positions in a patriarchal society by exploiting the subjective position of the female. However, Chief Owuor Kembo subverts this by giving his wife support to transcend gender prejudice. By so doing, he underscores the pre-colonial traditional marriages as fostering female agency. He battles it out with his brother and almost strikes his mother, which is a taboo in this community, when he learns that they are behind Akoko's disappearance from her marital home. He also impresses on them the important position that Akoko occupies in his life when he says:

Do you not know that a man's Mikai is the greatest jewel that adorns his compound? That her position is maintained and protected by taboos imposed by ways of Chik. That if I die, Were forbid, my body can only lie in state in her house before I am buried on the right hand side of her hut. And this would be so even if she herself was dead? To lose one's Mikai is to lose one's right hand. (34)

Ogola exploits some traditional practices to (re)conceptualise the place of women in the community for instance the reference to 'mikai,' a term used to define the position of the first wife, who enjoys certain privileges by virtue of her status. Akoko is portrayed as Owuor's first and only wife in a hyperbolic manner. He confirms his fulfilment in his monogamous marriage to Akoko and the scoffing from his relatives and the entire community fails to push him to marry a second wife. At the symbolic level, his behaviour uplifts women's status in this society.

Owuor's deviation from the traditional norm of polygamy helps the female self to acquire an autonomous space that energises her to carry out her responsibilities, which include taking actions and making choices. Ogola uses the conceptual self/other dichotomy which accounts for warring activities between genders to construct a male/female relationship that is complementary. The support that Akoko receives from her husband facilitates her achievement of an independent and fulfilled self that enables her to challenge her detractors:

Has anyone ever seen me gossiping with other women at the water hole? Do I always not rise early to till my land? Have I ever begged for food from you my mother-in-law as all your daughters-in-law do? Do I not always have enough to eat and more left to barter in exchange for cattle, goats and ghee? (31)

Akoko uses rhetorical questions to position herself as a woman who has high self esteem that has a dialogical relationship with the social-cultural context that gives rise to her unique female identity. Ogola uses first person narrative voice to enable Akoko to tell her own story and thereby the narrator (re) conceptualises the female self and national identity by apportioning women a central position in a postcolonial nation that repudiates complementary gender roles. Through narration, the narrator enacts selfhood and women's agency in the nation.

In the traditional setting, women are expected to be silent and Akoko maintains silence until she is provoked beyond measure and responds aggressively, a phenomenon that is tantamount to the rising consciousness among women. She signifies the obliteration inflicted on the women who dare to speak and think independently in a repressive nation. Her bid to confront patriarchal norms provides an opportunity for the conceptualisation of female agency and autonomy and thereby challenges the self/other divide between man and woman. This is necessary because in the discourse of postcolonial nation lack of complementarity between genders is detrimental to the development of the female self. Akoko fights back at a society that seeks to subjugate her and castigates the notion of a woman as the other whose self is denied to perpetuate female submission. She rebels against such acquiescence when she defies Otieno Kembo's authority over her wealth and she moves to Kisumu to report his misdoings. By so doing, she castigates cultural norms that inhibits her positive development and therefore struggles against the patriarchal society to find space through which she can exercise agency in her own life.

Ogola champions Akoko's cause in her endeavour to (re) conceptualise the female self away from perpetrations of women's subjectivity. Instead, she underscores the need for women to be intelligent because as far as she is concerned "stupidity in a woman [is] a sin only greater than stupidity in a man for a man can find an astute wife to cover his folly, but there is no man born who can cover the gaping hole left by a foolish woman..." (59). Ogola embodies the ideals of womanhood as the intelligent self who cannot afford to be stupid. She recognises men as heads of families, but in their absence women perform their roles fairly well. With the death of her husband, Akoko refuses to be inherited as is the tradition and thereby reverses a practice that subjugates women by insinuating that a woman cannot manage without a man beside her.

In her desperation as a widow, she finds ways of dealing with maltreatment from her brother in law, who robs her of her wealth. The struggle between the two is heightened by the self/other binary opposition since Akoko as a woman is pitted against a man who has little or no regard for women. As the war on wealth and power reaches bitter proportions, she realises it is time to clearly draw the battle lines between male and female. Through authorial intrusion, Ogola depicts the magnitude of the injustice when she says that Akoko feels "the weight of injustice that women have felt since time immemorial in her male dominated world. Even a half-wit like her brother-in-law could rob her of her hard earned wealth" (66). Ogola personally reacts to women's subjectivity and points at the need for women to assert themselves.

Being a woman, a widow without a son, she feels greatly disadvantaged and makes up her mind to enlist the help of the government. By so doing, she rebels against a tradition that treats women as “very low... mere objects ... systematically excluded from the political, the economic, the judicial and even the discourse of the community” (Stratton 25). Akoko’s bid to enlist the support of the colonial government in the fight between her and her brother in law marks the beginning of the restoration of her humanity and dignity. She seeks to participate in the realm of the community as a woman exhibiting extra-ordinary traits right at birth which designates her as occupying a special role and place in the postcolonial nation.

Tom Odhiambo in “Interrogating History and Restoring Agency to Women in *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola” underscores Ogola’s vision for women to resist patriarchy as follows: “women in the text struggle to find space through which to exercise agency in their lives... patriarchy inscribes stereotypes on females in the society and that this condition limits the progress of women in life” (52). Nevertheless, he adds, women in their wisdom make the best out of patriarchy so that “whilst seemingly submissive and subservient, women still subvert domination of their lives by men” (80). This means women have always struggled to be autonomous and have assumed the role of self-motivating agents of the female self. Akoko becomes the epitome of the autonomy that women in postcolonial Kenya endeavour to embrace.

Within the nation as an imagined community, roles for women are set and controlled by men as depicted in *The River and the Source*. Ogola’s writing aims at women’s inclusion to create agency for the female selfhood and nationhood by castigating irresponsible male supremacy that pits Akoko against her brother-in-law who finds it natural to subjugate women in terms of the functions and roles assigned to them. When she is stigmatised, Akoko seeks justice and her action provokes a reflection, raises awareness, challenges postcolonial blindfold on women’s selfhood and thus provides agency for women to be dignified in the family unit, working environment and social relationships.

When Akoko realises that the pre-colonial nation is unable to protect her from the abuse from her in-laws, she petitions the District Officer. Her appeal for justice is calculated. She says she is widow who has lost her two sons and that the first son died in the big war of the white people leaving behind a son who is but a toddler. Her concern is that her late husband’s brother has taken the chief’s stool, grabbed his brother’s wealth and he is at war with her. If this is allowed to continue Akoko reckons she will have wealth to pay the bride price for her grandson and reclaim the chief’s stool.

Problematic gender power relations take centre stage in Ogola’s narrative discourse at a complementary level. Anderson hints at the limitations that exist in a nation when she points out that “the nation is imagined as limited... no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” (7). Just as a nation is limited by borders, mankind is limited by notions of gender. Similarly, the gendered identity of an imagined community imposes borders between human beings through the binary logic of self/other. Ogola creates a singularly courageous and wise woman in Akoko who faces the white man unflinchingly and tells him her story about the greed and arrogance of her husband’s brother.

When Akoko goes back home she finds that Owuor has taken advantage of her absence to plunder her cattle in even greater proportions. Akoko becomes so annoyed that she has to appeal to reason to stop herself from murdering him. She realises that there is no sense in “knocking one’s head against a tree trunk, at best one may chip off a bark but in return get a large bruise on the head. If you want to cut a tree, take time to sharpen an axe. So she bided her time” (82). Being a wise woman, Akoko exercises a tolerant self for she realises that patriarchal order has failed to support her in the past and is not likely to do so now. Her only hope is the white man and she is convinced that justice is going to be accorded to her.

The relationship between Akoko and her brother-in-law is placed in a postcolonial discourse to point at the bond between master and slave. Akoko courageously seeks redress from a colonial government official who is also a representative of the colonial masters. It is a jubilant Akoko who

witnesses the arrival of a contingent of police, who come to the village to forcibly remove the Chief, Otieno Kembo, from leadership. He is also made to return all that he has grabbed from her and a council of elders is imposed to rule the village until the rightful heir comes of age. Ogola uses the warring activities between Akoko and Otieno to (re) conceptualise the female self in the postcolonial nation. Her victory over him is not only beneficial to herself and her family, but also opens “another world and the possibility of a different way” (85). Ogola envisages change that will favour national identity and the development of the female self in the postcolonial nation.

Marriage as a type of incarceration is reversed by Ogola who (re)conceptualises Akoko who leaves her husband's clan to dwell in the house of her brother, Oloo, with all the property she has salvaged from her brother-in-law. He condones her action even though it reduces her to living with uncertainty for she fears that before long his wives might start making insinuations. However, she does not “allow herself to descend to bitterness for yesterday is not today and today is not tomorrow. Each day rises from the hands of Were and brings with it whatever it will” (86). This implies that she envisages positive change and thus resigns herself to the will of God, who multiplies her herd making her wealthy.

In defining concepts of ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ in postcolonial Kenyan nation, Ogola positions women in the historical context in a way that fosters the (re)conceptualisation of women and thus portrays revolutionary consciousness as a means of (re)conceptualising selfhood and nationhood through Akoko whom she integrates into the Kenya's national history by naming a dam, *yap Obanda*, after her. The dam bears this name up to this day and it is located at Sakwa near Ndwarra village. Akoko and her contribution to her community becomes a legacy as she earns herself respect as a legendary figure among the Dholuo. She is a woman whose humility, prudence, diligence and commitment propel her to be part of their oral history. Her presence in the national matters promotes her selfhood. Narration underscores Ogola's recognition that woman marks a point of difference and asserts her identity to bear witness to the potential she has in the postcolonial nation.

Ogola invests power in women by positioning Akoko as a woman beyond reproach. Thus, she underscores women's resolute position in the nation, while at the same time positioning herself as a female author who narrates women stories. In other words, Ogola appears to be subscribing to gynocriticism, which Selden describes as the “field of feminist activity...deals with...genres of women writings; the nature of the female creativity...” (521). The implication is that gynocritics are concerned with the analysis of women's writing as pointed out by Showalter in “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” that, “the construction and representation of gender within literary discourse...not just the recognition of women's writings, but a radical rethinking of the conceptual literary study” (179-180). Thus, Ogola's writing and portrayal of Akoko become a struggle for artistic and female self-definition that differentiates Ogola's efforts towards self-creation from literary works created by men.

In her continuous search for identity, Akoko embraces Christianity and moves from her brother's home to live among strangers at Aluor mission. Using the self/other binary opposition, Ogola allows Akoko to gain favour in the eyes of the catechist as a distinguished woman who can never repeat anything she hears to anyone, never goes to anyone's house, or gossips with other women. If she is not in the church, she is in the fields or in her hut. Her ability to curv a virtuous disposition draws the attention of the catechist as a mature, diligent woman who is dependable and therefore, he starts seeking advice from her on matters pertaining to the church.

Her acceptability as a woman whose self-definition, self-esteem and self assertion play an important role in her Christian faith since the catechist, on his own initiative, builds a house for Akoko. This is due to Apparently, she has forged an identity as a committed believer, who is recognised and respected and thus it does not come as a surprise to us when her magnanimous self allows her grandson, Owour, to become a priest. This is despite the fact that she entertains hopes that

one day he will be a chief, marry and sire many children to continue the lineage of Owour Kembo. Her action is indicative of the fulfilled identity that she has assumed and the faith that she embraces in her life as Christian such that she does not close up her hope of the continuation of Kembo's lineage merely because her grandson is joining priesthood. Perhaps she considers that she also has a granddaughter, Elizabeth, who can also have children to perpetuate the lineage just as Owour.

Akoko's selflessness dictates that she will not stand on her grandson's way to be a priest, but asks him of only one thing, to change his name from Owour Sino to Owour Kembo. The desire to change her grandson's name is informed by tradition and also her love for her husband. Despite her courage, she still feels the void left by her husband and wishes to ensure that his name does not tarnish. Owour Sino is the only living son in the family lineage. This fact alone necessitates her reluctance for her grandson to become a priest, but she gladly allows him without making unnecessary demands courtesy of her level headed approach to life.

Ogola uses Akoko to portray the place of the female self in the pre and post colonial nation. She portrays a reciprocal relationship between her and the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial nation in that her life begins in the pre-colonial era moves through colonial period and ends in postcolonial epoch. She is influenced by the nation at its various historical times and takes up various roles through her experiences in the nation and emerges as one who is an embodiment of the nation's historical setting. Through her, Ogola portrays various discursive articulations of female identity that challenge or foreground a positive model of the female self. She is contrasted with her daughter, Nyabera who, though decisive and independent minded, is emotionally weak, sceptical and superstitious.

Akoko is portrayed as a woman of all seasons due to her wisdom as a woman who has clarity of vision and thus one cannot say she fits in that, this or any other century. The author's contention is that given an opportunity in a different era, Akoko is capable of being "a great intellectual, a pioneer and a leader of humanity" (133). Akoko turns out to be a (re) conceptualised female self full of knowledge. She does not, therefore, muddle in the confusion of the self/other patriarchal notions. As a female writer, Ogola aims at pricking the consciousness of women to enable them to challenge aspects of traditional society that are harmful to them. However, the battle lines among genders are not drawn on the combat self/other. Instead, there is complementarity between men and women. The relationship between Akoko and her husband attests to this. She considers him an extraordinary man who gives his wife monumental courage that influences her right from the beginning of her life in marriage.

Ogola tries to restore humanity and dignity in the patriarchal order through Akoko's husband who transforms Akoko by encouraging her to think positively such that she ventures into the traditional society and achieves dignified status. Because of the confidence that her husband bestows on her, she is not inhibited by the likes of her mother in law or brother in law. She therefore goes through life without submitting to subjectivity of women. For instance, when her husband dies, she refuses to be inherited by his brother, Otieno. When it becomes too difficult for her to live with her in laws, she leaves her matrimonial home to live with her brother, Oloo. When it is apparent to her that traditionally she will remain a stranger, although she lives with her brother, she does not hesitate to join the new religion. Her search for a fulfilled self becomes her guiding factor and she stops at nothing to achieve it. This 'go-getter' attitude in Akoko points at the need for women to traverse the nation and achieve what is humanly possible, despite their female gender.

Ogola's representation of Akoko appears designed to subvert the damaging representations of gender. Ogola challenges the status quo that suppresses women as shown by her experiences in regard to the "personal, cultural ... transformations"

(Lionnet 3) aimed at inclusion rather than the exclusion of women in the community. Akoko's acts of resistance are therefore statements to the effect that she should be recognised as a woman as

well as a distinguished member of the community. Ogola handles the contradictions between patriarchal delineation of women and other features of women's subjugation, as symbolically mediated through lived experiences and endows Akoko with a female self that is knowledgeable, providing her with an opportunity to transcend patriarchal symbolic order. She discovers and fights facets that interfere with the full self realisation of the female self.

Akoko's death, introduces another angle to the (re)conceptualisation of the female self. When she dies, she is buried at the church ground instead of being buried in her husband's ancestral home, as tradition would have it. Her departure from her in-laws home is for good. She rejects confinement to the domestic world that is debilitating. She assumes responsibility for herself, leaves her matrimonial home, body and spirit, never to return and hence there is therefore no need to return her body. In life and in death, Akoko breaks from a tradition that subjugates women. She refuses to be helplessly trapped in her husband's ancestral home because her female self does not enjoy any rest while there. She therefore goes back to her father's home, where she is received by her brother who nurtures her and her children's children. Through her, Ogola points at the inevitable (re)conceptualisation of the female self. Although beaten up by odds and ends in this life, the female self should not give up, for no matter how hard things may be in the present, the future could be more promising.

Women writers ascribe to their fellow women's fulfilment as we see in the case of Ogola's portrayal of Akoko as an embodiment of the fulfilled female self. She is also depicted as an epitome of the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras, as a strong, responsible woman, whom Ogola uses to assign agency to women's issues in Kenya today. She does not only re-conceptualise Akoko, but also Akoko's daughter Nyabera by intertwining story telling with women's role in the society. Akoko tells her grandchildren stories of the heroes of old and the history of the tribe while Nyabera tells them the stories of baby Jesus. Both of them are composers and disseminators of oral traditions, a gesture that incorporates the female perspective in the community as well as in the Kenyan nation.

Nyabera's mother plays the role of an omnipotent, omnipresent mothering figure who bestows love and nourishment to Nyabera as she brings her up amidst personal crisis and social dilemmas, which Nyabera also experiences in different ways and also rationalises them. Through her, Ogola makes a positive statement on the centrality of the woman to the life of the society through nurturing, a responsibility that women are charged with. She is industrious like her mother, with a charming personality. In a self/other binary opposition, Ogola depicts her as better than her brother, Obura, in riddles and storytelling and thus integrates women into the social realm of the society. However, her life right from youth is punctuated by moments of sadness: she loses her brother, Obura, when she is only fourteen. Perhaps her tender age contributes to the sense of loss that overwhelms her as she wanders away by herself, mute and quiet for days on end.

Unlike her mother, Nyabera does not come to terms with the transient nature of life. Ogola underscores the lack of permanence in this world and therefore uses death to point out the inevitability of change. Nyabera's emotional distress in the face of mortality does not undermine her strength. Instead, her analytical mind comes to the surface to impress on the reader the pain that comes with unrealised dreams due to either physical or spiritual death. Through internal monologue she poses a rhetorical question, "What use was this life if one could be snuffed out like a poorly lit fire, never getting a chance to blaze into a flame?" (58). The disillusionment that comes with death is analogous to the patriarchal society's denial of women's progressive development of their female self and national identity. In so doing, their full potential is not allowed to blossom. However, women in the postcolonial nation learn that this denial only brings "a little disharmony, a barely visible break in the continuity of the weave of life" (59). Nyabera's self is challenged to transcend obstacles that subjugate women.

Nevertheless, Akoko nurtures her to maturity and marries her off to Okumu, whom she accepts even though he is poor. Women's solidarity is seen when her mother helps her to set foot in marriage comfortably by giving her a sizeable herd of cattle, sheep and goats. Nevertheless, her denied motherhood of many children makes her downcast, depressed, rarely goes out of her home and hardly eats. In her bitterness, she reprimands *Were* for giving her children only to strike them dead at the threshold of life. Only one child, Awiti, is spared but before long Nyabera loses her husband. Unlike her mother, she is inherited by her husband's cousin, Ogoma, who already has another wife. She hopes to raise more children with him through the institution of *tero*, a kind of half marriage that though unfulfilling, provides supportive environment to have children. However, the widow has to take care of her children since the 'husband' has no other responsibility besides breeding. His responsibility is to his own wife. Nyabera gets two children with him, but they also die. Nevertheless, Ogoma is reprimanded by the council of elders for paying attention to her at the expense of his first wife. This prompts Nyabera to abandon both the marriage and a tradition that treats her as the 'other.'

Underscoring the nation's dialectic relationship with the self, Ogola redefines concepts of difference and otherness as she outlines the community in *The River and the Source* that "exists both inside and outside the values espoused by modernity and tradition" (Gikandi 79). Nyabera is portrayed as an individual, a subject who is unified, and a rational self who is the source of cultural, social and religious meaning in the postcolonial Kenyan nation. Her experiences are rooted in both traditional and Christian realms as she struggles to forge a hybrid female self. Ogola uses the textual world to develop a sense of self and national identity and thereby reconstructs Nyabera as a woman in postcolonial nation who represents "the new imagined community of the nation... caught between the threat of repressed traditions and the truncated identities created by colonial modernity" ((Gikandi 75). Ogola integrates her into the modern national discourse as Nyabera reorganises her submerged self when it is apparent that she is not likely to enjoy the comfort of a husband and many children. She makes up her mind to cut herself off from the traditional life of her people by seeking another different life through Christianity. She refuses to be, as Odhiambo points out in "Writing Alternative Womanhood:"

A woman whose life is eternally tied to that of the man in her life, even when that particular man is dead. Faced with the possibility of leading a life that consigns her to a lonely home simply because a woman is tied to her husband in life as well as in death. (240-241)

She, therefore, deserts her matrimonial home just like her mother, and by so doing identifies herself with her mother. The relationship between mothers and daughters is a common motif in women's writing and is especially significant to the concept of collective identity that mothers and daughters share. It is no wonder then that Nyabera emulates her mother as her model of existence. As far as she is concerned, Akoko is a good mother, whom she reveres since she is compassionate and intuitive and therefore Nyabera feels encouraged to desert her matrimonial home in search of her self- definition which the patriarchal institution attempts to curtail.

Nyabera rationalises her action by postulating lack of a son as a blessing in disguise. If she has a son, tradition obliges her to have him firmly rooted in his people from whom he inherits land and thus becomes inextricable. Since she only has a daughter, it is different for she can wander the world with her and no one will demand that she takes her back to where she belongs. In regard to Nyabera's search for peace to calm her troubled spirit and body, Odhiambo notes in "Writing Alternative Womanhood" that "She finds an alternative to her dreary existence as a widow... She breaks free of the prescribed domesticity ..." (241). She embraces Christianity and moves to Aluor Catholic mission. Through her, Ogola sets on a (re)conceptualisation of the female self through Christian religious beliefs. The contention that the new religion eases pain and bitterness drives

Nyabera to embrace Christianity at the encouragement of her mother. She hopes to salvage whatever is remaining of her daughter's female self and thereby prevent her spirit from withering.

Akoko, just like her daughter, has a flexible self which she philosophically expresses saying, "If you are walking along and you find your path leading nowhere, then it is only wise to try some other path" (95). This statement implies that there is really nothing wrong for Nyabera to abandon tradition in her search of a more fulfilling life. It is no wonder then that Nyabera and Akoko leave both their marital and parental homes and settle in Aluor. The journey motif is underscored by Atsango who observes:

... the female protagonists have travelled their paternal homes in marriage, back to Kisumu then to Aluor mission. These journeys are almost cyclic, therefore a manifestation of the protagonists quest to acquire identify and self-esteem deprived them in the traditional setting. (51)

Akoko and Nyabera move to Aluor mission to learn about Jesus Christ. Their search for identity becomes apparent in the yearning in their mind about the new religion and they seek more knowledge about it. With time, Nyabera is filled with hope and thus reclaimed from the threshold of despair.

Nyabera takes catechism classes and is baptised to become a member of the one, holy, apostolic and Catholic Church. She is allowed to partake of the body and blood of Christ and "becomes a branch, finally grafted to a tree" (99-100). Ogola uses this Biblical allusion to express the satisfaction that comes with acquiring a sense of belonging. However, she finds the church's law on marriage which advocates one man one wife difficult to keep. She feels disheartened in her Christian faith in that the church is not likely to compromise this yet she certainly knows that no one among her people is likely to marry her, a widow, as a first and only wife. Her perceptive self does not deceive her and thus her earnest longing for children is likely to be quenched only in a traditional marriage set up which conflicts with her new faith.

The conflicting role of culture in the situation of contact with Christianity marks an evolution of identity crisis in Nyabera. She experiences a sense of otherness due to her incoherent state of mind as she attempts to rationalise her new identity and the prospect of getting more children. She reckons that "children [are] consolation, laughter and security. Children [are] everything" (100). Her strong conviction about the need to get more children creates a sense of apprehension. She entertains the thought of embracing the traditions of her community which at least allow her to participate in a "kind of half marriage and not very fulfilling, but at least children would be forthcoming" (100). The implication is that she is likely to abandon Christianity if only to get children out of wedlock, a prospect that also bothers her mother, Akoko, who perceives children as the future. She is worried that Nyabera will have difficulties in getting off springs in the new religion that she has adopted. Both of them share the sentiments but they decide to put the matter on hold, if only to be happy presently by postponing a problem that makes them anxious.

The satisfaction that comes with the birth of many children is elusive to Nyabera and her mother, Akoko. The traditional formula of a fulfilment that comes with bearing many children undermines their womanhood. With the void that comes with longing for motherhood, she abandons Christianity in search of a man who can give her marital comfort and children. Thus, Christianity fails to fill motherhood gap and hence when she gets wind of the death of Ogoma's wife, she swiftly moves to forge a legitimate union with him. Her action fills her with premonition. She feels her soul trembling "on the edge of the abyss of fear of the future or longing for a part which could never be retrieved" (110). The emptiness that Akoko experiences in regard to her daughter's plight in motherhood haunts her. Ogola affirms motherhood as a full time occupation when she points out that, "It is a fact of life that once a mother, always a mother until the day of death, even if the child is seventy. Sometimes it means incredible pain and of all these pains, there is no pain like the knowledge that the child suffers and cannot be helped" (114). Her inability to help Nyabera gnaws at her heart.

As fate would have it, Nyabera succeeds in getting a child with Ogoma, but he neglects her as he courts another girl to make her his second wife. With the death of their child, Nyabera is devastated. She goes back to Aluor mission, a sad beaten up woman. There is nothing in the traditional milieu that suits her and she becomes a shadow of herself, unable to progress in the traditional family setting. She frees herself from her attachment to a man to realise her selfhood and for a second time seeks refuge from the church. Akoko's wisdom is seen when she consoles her daughter and helps her to regain her resilient self. Nyabera repents before God and with time her wounded heart heals. This comes after forgiving herself, an essential step in forging self acceptance.

A new name comes with a new identity. Nyabera's baptismal name, Maria, bequeaths a (re)conceptualised female self in the realm of the mystical. She becomes restless when away from the mission. Perhaps it is for this reason that she convinces her mother to go with her to Aluor mission who at the moment is living with her brother, Oloo, after she abandons her matrimonial home. She readily accepts to accompany her daughter since living with her brother is like being in exile where she is not likely to wholly belong. She moves to Aluor mission in search of a more fulfilled self in an environment where everybody is welcome, without anybody bothering which clan one comes from. Her decision makes Oloo unhappy for he enjoys having his sister around although his wives do not like it. The migration of both Akoko and Nyabera to Aluor mission becomes an act of faith. In reference to this epic journey to Kisumu, Ogola uses Biblical allusion. She says, "Like children of Israel, they left the flesh-pots of Egypt for uncertainties of Canaan" (104). Their life at Yimbo is more comfortable than the one at the mission, but both mother and daughter fail to find fulfilment both at their maternal and matrimonial homes. Their quest for self and national identity therefore inspires their movement and settlement in a lonely place.

While at the mission, Nyabera nurtures her only daughter, Elizabeth. However, her turbulent self threatens to interfere with the development of her daughter when she refuses to allow her to join a teachers' training institute for fear of losing her. Nyabera's worries are retrogressive. It takes the intelligence of Akoko to challenge and convince her. She reasons out with her:

You [Nyhabera] feel that other people may suffer but as for you, it is your right to be happy. You shake like a reed in the wind because you have never forgiven God for not giving you as many children as other women whom you consider less worthy. And you feel that God owes it to you to make sure that your only child lives and prospers. Learn my child that God owes nobody anything. He gives to all men, both wicked and good from his great bounty according to his will and mercy. You are no longer a child yet you understand nothing. (122)

Nyabera's possessive self threatens to hinder the positive development of the female self in the nation. It is surprising that her mother, Akoko, is full of insight and flexibility to realise what is at stake. She admonishes Nyabera for selfishness that borders on childishness. In an outburst of controlled anger, Akoko, admonishes Nyabera since her attitude is not in keeping with the (re)conceptualisation of women in the postcolonial nation. Ogola uses Akoko to point out that the female self can only gain relevance in the contemporary society through meaningful change that may not come easily and hence the need for personal sacrifice. The zone of female comfort in the patriarchal order is a deterrent as far as the development of the female selfhood and nationhood is concerned. Women require all that it takes to realise their potential. Erecting any form of obstacle on the path to their full self realisation is not only uncalled for, but also misinformed.

Due to her wisdom or lack of it, Nyabera obstructs, instead of perpetuating her daughter's self development. Akoko blames her for lack of understanding and counsels her to place Elizabeth's fate in God's hands. She considers divine intervention necessary at this particular time for the world is changing and Elizabeth is about to acquire what will make a difference in her life. Her grandmother's insightful self is able to fathom that there are changes that have come with Christianity and education.

She is not a fool to see the need to prepare oneself for any eventualities that come with change. Since at the moment neither she nor her daughter can go to school, she castigates Nyabera for not allowing Elizabeth the advantage of becoming a career woman, to be relevant to the impending changes in the postcolonial Kenyan nation. The author introduces a binary opposition between persons of the same gender. She uses mother and daughter to depict the difference that exists between human beings, be they men or women.

Ogola exposes the exceptions that characterise humanity pointing at the mistake that patriarchal society commits of appropriating gender roles without any regard to physical or psychological ability. She submerges the self/other notions among men or women by postulating the difference between Akoko and Nyabera through the eyes of Elizabeth when she says:

My mother is very kind hearted and quite strong though she has always been in the shadow of her mother who is a woman of iron. I like to think that I am like my grandmother but I know that if any of the things that have happened to her were to happen to me, I would die.(131-132)

Elizabeth's appreciation of her mother's benevolence is overshadowed by her preference to take after her grandmother whom she admires for strength of character, which is, as far as she is concerned, comparable neither to herself nor her mother. It is against this background that Elizabeth's re-conceptualisation is grounded in that both her mother and grandmother influence her development.

Through Elizabeth who is emotional, sensitive, understanding, brave, enduring and accommodating, Ogola re-conceptualises women through formal education and Christianity. Unlike her mother and grandmother, she is identified with her Christian name as a mark of change and new identity. She is enrolled for formal schooling even though it is not easy since the traditional setting does not uphold girls' education. Ogola posits, "if it was hard for a boy to get an education it was well near impossible for a girl. The purpose of female existence was marriage and child bearing and by the same token to bring wealth to her family with the bride price" (120). Ogola (re)conceptualises the female self by affording Elizabeth a chance to be educated although it is unacceptable in this community. It is for this reason that everybody looks at her suspiciously. They cannot fathom how a girl can be so clever and not make an effort to at least hide her brilliance. Their disputation is that she should be ashamed for receiving commendations and play daft otherwise no man will marry her. In the traditional setting, it is catastrophic for a woman not to marry.

Ogola (re)conceptualises the female self and national identity against a background of self/other. The 'self' feels threatened by the 'other'. However, the 'other' is not deterred by the fears of patriarchal society that is bent on subjugating the female self. The patriarchal society treats Elizabeth who is an educated woman as an object of curiosity for it is difficult to appreciate her because she is not married although she is twenty-two years of age. The society's expectations are that she should till the land, rear children like other women her age. Instead, Elizabeth is a career woman earning a salary of fifty shillings a month. However, Ogola points out that "the power of money in this new world [is] beginning to sink into people's mentality" (132). Therefore, her financial empowerment becomes a source of envy from her clansmen and women even though they taunt her at every turn.

At the training institution, the self/other relationship comes to the fore as the male students try to enter into relationships with the female students. Those who fail to comply are scorned for instance Elizabeth who is referred to "as 'the nun,' 'virgin Mary' and 'church mouse' or other insulting names" (127). These insults point at the new identity that Elizabeth curves for herself as a woman who is principled. Her failure to conform makes both men and women shun her but this does not distract her from her search for realisation and assertion of her identity as a woman.

Their behaviour neither influences Elizabeth into having irresponsible unions with boys nor does it prevent her from falling in love with the love of her life, Mark Antony Oloo Sigu, whom she

marries in due course. The marriage between Elizabeth and Mark is acceptable to both families. Unlike the traditional marriage where the bride price is of utmost importance, no exorbitant bride price is asked for Elizabeth, who is given away freely except for a token of a bull, two cows and ten goats. The issue of bride price is outlined to mark the difference between traditional society that asks for excessive dowry as a requirement for sealing marital relations and the modern society that merely asks for a token as a seal of marriage and thereby depicts the new identity of women as dignified members of the society who are not given out in marriage in a bid to extort wealth.

As if to pave way for Elizabeth to foster and exercise her self identity in the and national, her grandmother passes on as soon as she concludes the formalities of her granddaughter's marriage. Akoko is convinced that her granddaughter will carry on her work and pleasantly succumbs with joy to the prospect of dying. She dies a fulfilled, happy self. While Nyabera receives the death of her mother with calm, Elizabeth finds it difficult since she loves her grandmother so much that she desperately tries to identify with all her aspirations. Elizabeth's inability to accept the finality of death places her in a state of confusion and bewilderment; she almost breaks her engagement to Mark Antony, for she does not fathom how she will continue to live without her grandmother. Ogola, through Elizabeth, (re)conceptualises a female self away from tradition and patriarchal prescription. Elizabeth opts for a Christian marriage instead of a traditional one like her mother and grandmother. She settles in her marriage, but she loses her first child inadvertently through self-medication prescribed by her husband, Mark. Both are so naive that they do not realise that Elizabeth is experiencing sickness due to pregnancy.

After the first pregnancy, it takes her more than three years to conceive again. As expected in the traditional set up, her mother-in-law demands an explanation for she is suspicious that Elizabeth's failure to get children could be as a result of abortions she might have procured before her marriage. However, contrary to her expectations, Mark defends his wife. He tells her in no uncertain terms that she has to leave him and his wife alone. In the traditional society, the mother-in-law influences her son's decisions in regard to his wife. Mark objects to this when he puts his mother on the next bus to her traditional home to ensure she does not interfere with his marriage. Mark is a modern man who plays an important role in the (re)conceptualisation of the female self since he realises that making a baby depends as much on the male as on the female, hence the folly of blaming the female alone.

Just like her mother and grandmother, Elizabeth becomes a responsible wife bent on making her marriage work. She lives with them, two widows who, as Elizabeth observes are determined to hold the family together. Her identification with both of them gives her a sense of confidence in the way she handles her family and hence keeps quiet even though she gets wind of her husband's extra marital activities. As a mark of her mature disposition she observes that, "the first cardinal rule of marriage, not everything has to be blurted out" (160). Elizabeth is a modern woman facing the challenges of infidelity, but she does not confront him. Her husband, as if to redeem himself from any form of further estrangement from his wife, devotes himself to the marriage to the extent of doing things for Elizabeth that African men who have a low opinion of women will not do. He takes turn in taking care of the children for he appreciates that his wife is overworked. The assistance he gives to his wife earns him disrespect from his friends.

Focusing on motherhood, Ogola upholds mother/child relationship both in traditional and modern setting. When Elizabeth's mother is taken ill and eventually dies she experiences feelings that are not akin to her. The bond that exists between mother and child is finally severed. This explains the kind of devastation that Elizabeth feels at this particular moment in time which, in the words of Ogola:

...only comes to the surface of the conscious mind in all its primitive force when either mother or child is in some sort of peril-not surprising considering that as a child lies in its mother's womb, the first sound it hears is her heartbeat and the first human

voice it recognises is hers. For the next many months, the child's most satisfying experience will be next to her heart, nursing at the breast - so that the powerful connection is not severed with the cutting of the cord. (187)

Ogola underscores motherhood as more than just a biological experience. According to her, motherhood entails personal sacrifice to ensure the well being of the children. When Nyabera passes on with her only daughter at her bed side, the feelings that cloud Elizabeth's mind result from the fact that she is now an orphan, her forty-three years of age notwithstanding. It is no wonder then that Elizabeth feels a gap inside herself. She feels she owes her mother the care given to the old and ailing. Her feelings of doubt make her female self experience failure. Her contention is that she should have been seeing her mother more often and feels guilty, a reaction that is unjustified since hardly two months pass without Elizabeth visiting her mother. Besides, she has made a great sacrifice of giving up two of her children to live with her mother. The long silences, the irrational self accusation that Elizabeth goes through only point at the strong bond that exists between mother and child. We are not surprised, therefore, when she spends a night with her mother at Maseno hospital even though the latter is in a coma.

However, death, as far as Ogola is concerned, marks, on the one hand, the end, while on the other hand, a beginning. Elizabeth's feelings of desertion and loneliness following the death of her mother hamper the development of her female self and national identity temporarily. Ogola underscores continuity by taking us back to the source of the river, Akoko, the first daughter of Chief Odera Gogni. Ogola points out that this river at some point trickles to a mere rivulet just about to dry up, but in the person of Elizabeth, Akoko's grandchild, who bears seven children, the river is gathering momentum.

Elizabeth becomes a link between colonial and postcolonial Kenya through her fraternal twins, Rebecca (Becky) and Veronica (Vera) who in the course of narration represent different value systems. Rebecca who is fondly referred to as Becky is easy going without any inhibitions towards the opposite sex, but she is selfish and harbours intense hatred for her sister, Vera. She fails to appreciate Vera who forfeits joining a national school to be with her sister whom she passionately loves, but Becky accuses Vera of being jealous and thus joins Becky's school merely to spy on her. Worse still, she brands Vera a witch. This name-calling and lack of appreciation shows that the two sisters have personalities that are incompatible. Becky does not also get along with her younger sister, Maria, whom she views as a rival competing for her parents' attention. Her parents are not blind to Becky's pre-occupation with herself and hence their fears about what will become of her.

Becky's pouting, preening and extreme selfishness influence both her life as a child and as a grown up. She manages a Second Division at 'O' level and resolves to terminate her studies to look for a job. She longs for freedom, but her parents fear that their breathtaking daughter is going to be taken advantage of by men. They force her to go back to school and due to the fear of disobeying her father, she joins 'A' level to study History, Literature and Geography. She manages one principal and quietly disappears from home leaving a note for Vera that reads:

... I am leaving home to go and stay with some friends of mine in Nairobi. I am determined to become an air-hostess –and they can give me the connections that I need. Please tell mum and dad not to worry. You always know what to say to them while I have always felt like an outsider. I am sure no one will miss me anyway. (197-198)

The sarcasm in her note underscores a bitter self. She seeks to incriminate others to make up for what she does not have. Her contention is that she is always on the right while others rub on the wrong side. She is a selfish being and does not appreciate the comfort zone her parents provide in a homely environment. In Becky, Ogola conceptualises a hostile female self's quest for happiness and fulfilment in the twenty first century. However, we are filled with apprehension as to whether she will

succeed in life since her success can only come if she manages to shift attention from her subjective self to others. Only then can she notice how other people care about her and thus help her to (re)conceptualise an objective self. Unfortunately, she covets Vera whom she purports as possesses everything – “guts, drive, ambition and brains” (206). She thinks that all that is good and beautiful is found in her sister and wishes to be equal to her. This indicates that her physical prettiness does not give her satisfaction. Her movement to the city of Nairobi is in search of a fulfilled life and she succeeds in getting a job at the Kenya Airways.

Her happy-go lucky personality makes it apparent that she is too preoccupied with herself and loves “good things of life - comfort, expensive clothes, and good looking men” (204). It is no wonder then that she is living in an expensive looking block of flats, an indication that she is making or having a lot of money: her flat, from the carpet to the pictures on the wall are suggestive that she has a lot of money. Despite the affluent life style that Becky leads, there is an underlying sense of void. She seeks out a white man, John, to be her boyfriend, but that does not also give her satisfaction. She is hesitant to take him to her home because she fears reprisal from her parents and this puts her in an awkward situation. It takes Vera’s encouragement to take him home to seek her parents’ blessing. She impresses on Becky that there is need to do so for their parents are objective in the manner they view things. If they say no, it is because they care for her. She obliges and takes him home. The parents bless her marriage across racial boundaries as a pointer that they have accepted the changes that characterise the postcolonial nation.

The impending marriage between Becky and John calls for a critical look at inter - racial marriages. The two are likely to be ostracised and experience the loneliness that characterises mixed marriages. While it is clear that John has all the good motives to enter marriage with Becky, we are suspicious of her reasons. Brandishing a repellent female self who cares only for what matters to her, we notice she really has no resolve as to why she wants to marry him. His commitment to the marriage is seen in that he does not want to be taken as a white man who takes advantage of an innocent African girl. He wants to get married properly and have children, who will be prepared to cope with their double heritage. Unfortunately, the marriage does not work because Becky is unfaithful and when John discovers that she is having an affair she divorces him.

In the postcolonial nation, the female self is empowered economically but this does not automatically translate into happiness for some women. Although Becky is rich, she is unhappy and her promiscuous life complicates the situation since her children know about it and they feel disappointed and neglected. For instance, Alicia, her daughter, at one time voices her desire to leave home and live with her aunt, Vera. Her mother does not approve such arrangement. She is also reluctant to send the children to stay with their grandmother. Furthermore, they cannot stay with their father since he left without trace after the divorce. Unlike, Akoko, Nyabera and Elizabeth who consistently play their motherhood roles with distinction, Becky fails to nurture her children.

Once she divorces her husband, Becky throws all caution to the wind and moves openly with men without caring whether people will know about her loose morals including her own children. By so doing, Becky assumes a deplorable sense of identity that affects her children for instance, Johnny, her son, who hardly talks while Alicia acts as if her mother does not exist. Before long their mother contracts HIV. Having contracted the disease at a time when there was no antiretroviral medication, her condition quickly progresses to AIDS and she eventually succumbs to death and her brother, Aoro, adopts her children.

Being a rich woman, she leaves a hefty insurance and a large estate for her children. Ogola paints her as a wealthy woman who at the time of her demise has “a string of maisonettes, two bungalows in Spring Valley and actually owned a block of offices and shops in Westlands” (265). Her wealth makes it even easier for the guardians of her children for they only provide a home for them. One cannot but admire the way she handles her estate at the time of her death. She makes things

easier for her relatives for everything is clearly documented in a way that makes it easy to know what she has in her estate and also her debts.

Contrary to her family's expectations, she elicits a responsible self before she dies. She appoints a firm of trustees to run her affairs on behalf of her children and their benefit. She also appoints Vera as the guardian of her children and allows the family members who will be staying with the children to draw sufficient money to provide a comfortable life for them. Despite the incompatibility between her and her sister, Becky believes that Vera can make an excellent mother for her children as she points out in her will:

My sister Vera and I have differences, but I have no doubt that she would have made an excellent mother – much better than I [am]. The children love her, so it is with confidence that I leave every aspect of their care in her capable hands with the assistance of whichever family members she chooses for I appreciate that the nature of her calling may not allow her to establish her own home. I want her to know that I love my children though my way of expressing it may not have satisfied her. I [express] it by making sure that they will never lack in the things I believe in. It is true that money cannot buy happiness or I would have been very happy; but it can buy pretty well everything else. Ok. It cannot buy life either- for I am dying and will die in the slowest most painful way possible, but I am not sorry for the way I have lived. So be it; I will pay it. (266)

She dies at the age of thirty three. Her character is summarised as immoral, promiscuous, unappreciative, insensitive and self conceited. Ogola uses her will to (re)conceptualise Becky's female self. All along she seems irresponsible, but in death she is the caring and concerned mother of her children. She develops a reasonable attitude towards her children. Her wish to be like her sister rather than herself is affirmed when she entrusts her children to Vera whose self she covets. She is fully aware that her sister has no intentions of marrying, making a home and rearing her own children yet she appoints her a guardian of her two children. The faith she has in her sister's goodness and responsible, caring self, leaves Becky in no doubt that wherever Vera will be, she will make time to play mother's role to her orphaned children. While one may have imagined that she does not face things head on, the inevitability of her impending death does not resort to self pity because of her dangerous living. Instead, she braves death. However, she takes her lessons about vanity and wealth when it is too late. She goes out of her way to use nondescript methods to amass so much during her short life on earth.

The author portrays Vera as completely the opposite of Becky to serve her narrative purpose of depicting women as different at the private and public levels. Vera, the pet name that Veronica comes to be fondly referred to, is smaller than Becky as a child, but more vociferous. She does not like being held. Adults are afraid of her big flashing eyes which are restless and tempestuous. However, she is capable of loving passionately, has a serious mind and turns out to be brilliant girl. Although she is not as beautiful as Becky, she has an arresting face and graceful body. The strength of her personality can neither be ignored nor taken for granted. This information on Vera informs our discussion about her. Despite her brilliance and force of personality, she is open, friendly and ready to assist. She loves Becky so dearly that she refuses to go to a national school so that she attends the same school with her sister. Her parents are disappointed by her decision, but they realise that she is "the sort of person to make success of her life wherever she happens to be" (165). Their assessment is apt for Vera succeeds in her education up to university level. We are also not surprised when she becomes a school Captain, a position which is the reserve for boys. Her rise to leadership makes her father happy and he does not muse at the reverse of the patriarchal roles assigned along gender lines.

In a bid to develop and realise her identity, Vera makes informed decisions about her sister, Becky, and her love for her does not cloud her judgment anymore. She regrets the sacrifice she makes

earlier in life to be with her sister in the same school at her own expense. She resolves to make up for what she misses when she forfeits her chance at the national school to be with Becky. Her present desire is to go as far away as possible from her. She passes well at 'O' and joins a national school for her "A" levels to take Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. She gets three principal passes and decides to pursue electrical engineering at the university. Ogola gives us a detailed account of Vera's educational pursuit to show how education changes the identity of women in the postcolonial era.

At the university, Vera receives many offers of friendship from the boys at the campus, but turns them down. Her sense of maturity, dependability and moral dispensation is seen in that she remains faithful to her boyfriend, Tommy Muhambe who keeps her company on Saturdays and eventually proposes to marry to her. The proposal for marriage finds her unprepared and her mind is filled by unanswered questions and secret longings and therefore fails to make a coherent response to Tommy's proposal. When she eventually responds, she says she cannot marry just then because she feels unfinished, as if she is not completely formed and hence needs time to grow. She is indecisive and uncertain. Surprisingly, she advises him to date other girls, a phenomenon that astonishes us just as her lover while her refusal to enter marriage points to her future search for fulfilment outside the prescribed patriarchal notions of womanhood.

The choices Vera makes later in her life are a confirmation of her quest for a new identity which seeks fulfilment in Christian religion. While she boasts of a busy schedule, for her course is quite demanding, she does not miss mass on Sunday even though she wonders what it is she really believes in. This implies that she is undergoing an identity crisis and hence her education and faith in God fall short of making her a fulfilled person for she experiences a spiritual void in her heart that affects her identity. Mary Anne Ngugi, her roommate, notices Vera's spiritual emptiness and points out that although Vera habitually goes for mass she is not religious and thereby invites her for a recollection session, where she is expected to "turn out the external and turn into the inner [her], to see how that neglected part of [her] is doing" (217). This invitation forms the background against which Vera begins to forge her identity with regard to her spiritual well being even though she agrees to go merely to please her roommate.

It is while at the recollection that Vera feels the peaceful stillness of the place enter into her soul as the priest challenges her for practicing casual religion which negatively impacts on her identity. For the first time, she hears about work as a means of spiritual fulfilment whereby if one is not a nun or recluse to offer prayer to God all the time, one can use work to draw closer to God. Vera feels famished for this kind of enlightenment and goes for it with fervour and dedication as she endeavours to postulate work as a form of prayer which will annul her spiritual barrenness and thereby realise a fulfilled self as far as her identity is concerned.

Vera's formation of identity is closely linked to her joining of the Catholic Prelature of Opus Dei. Ogola describes the activities that Vera involves herself in when she eventually joins the organisation as a non- marrying member. She dedicates her life and her work to God fully and does not turn back and thereby realises an identity that makes her happy, loving and caring, a personality that endears her to her brother's wife, Wandia Mugo. Although they possess different types of personalities, they both have realised their identities and are able to embrace their differences and similarities without adopting a confrontational stance.

Ogola uses Vera and Wandia's friendship to highlight the collective support that exists between women despite their diverse personalities and hence draw strength from each other in spite of their dissimilarity. Perhaps that is why as the guardian of Becky's children, Vera confidently allows Wandia to stay with them and does not take offence when Wandia expresses her lack of faith in God even though Vera tries to convince her about the need to believe in God. The only time that Wandia comes close to trusting God is when she desperately prays for her son, Daniel, who is suffering from Down syndrome condition. Her discovery that her son is suffering from leukaemia makes her beside

herself with worry, abandons her agnostic demeanour and visits the church specifically to bargain with God for the healing of her son. Her action points to the notion that God's power transcends medical knowledge and that the role of a doctor is to protect, rather than give life.

The Opus Dei faith not only helps Vera to form her identity but to also realise and assert her identity as seen from the way she reacts to Wandia's yearning for divine intervention in Daniel's illness. As far as Vera is concerned, people can run away from God, but they cannot forget him, a premise that is informed by her deep insight about God that marks her self actualisation. Consequently, she now lives her faith, has time for everybody, exercises open mindedness and believes each person is free to choose whatever she/he wants.

This kind of disposition endears Vera to her brother's wife, Wandia, a woman who involves herself in an inter-ethnic marriage as a Kikuyu who marries a Luo. Marriage between these two ethnic groups is unusual since some kind of hostility characterises the two communities. This is a phenomenon that is witnessed soon after Kenya's achievement of independence when the Kikuyu and the Luo people are pitted against each other in their struggle for leadership. The ascension of a Kikuyu to be the first president of Kenya and subsequent Kikuyu presidents complicates the relationship not only between the Luo and the Kikuyu, but also between the Kikuyu and other ethnic groups living in Kenya, who feel that they have been locked out of the presidency.

Perhaps that is why Ogola is eager to curve a Kenyan nation that is cohesive by introducing inter-ethnic marriage in her narration. Odhiambo, in "Interrogating History and Restoring Agency to Women in *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola" states that Ogola "...attempts to 'imagine' both a Luo nation and Kenyan nation...The Kenyan nation a contested terrain with competing ethnic groups always striving to transcend its limits" (69). Ogola postulates mixed marriage between Wandia and Aoro as the prototype of the postcolonial Kenyan nation which often experiences warring trends between various ethnic groups. Her attempt to rewrite the Kenyan nation in the 21st century portrays her as a woman who is part and parcel of the Kenyan history and attempts to paint a positive image of Kenya as a nation.

Ogola uses inter-ethnic marriage to (re)conceptualise Wandia's female self. In her narration, Ogola intertwines Wandia with Akoko, the matriarch of Aoro Sigu's family, and thereby depicts Wandia as a mode of Akoko's continuity. Elizabeth sees Akoko in Wandia, her daughter in law, even though she is a Kikuyu. She is likened to Akoko who views life as if it were "a river, flowing from eternity into eternity" (279). Aoro points out that his wife is fascinated by his grandmother and asks endless questions about her. He insinuates that Wandia wills herself to take over her spirit. Ogola underscores Wandia as one who instinctively understands the "true destiny of a woman to live life to the full and to fight to the end" (286). That is the kind of life that Akoko champions for the women folk and Wandia positions herself to carry on this important task.

Wandia and Aoro Sigu meet at the university as they study medicine. She is bright and beats him in class to his utter disappointment. In his disbelief, he not only appreciates her as an intellectual, but also as a woman, another human being. The author uses formal education to highlight equal provision of opportunities for both males and females; and also to show the exceptional interpersonal relations between people from various ethnic groups. The relationship between Wandia and Sigu is unique in that the two come from ethnic groups that are culturally different and have long standing political hostilities which are detailed in chapter four of this study. Falling in love and possible marriage between them would be symbolic of the 21st century ethnic tolerance in Kenya.

The relationship between Wandia and Sigu is likely to raise eyebrows for she is a Kikuyu while he is a Luo. The Kikuyu refer to the West, where Sigu comes from, as '*ruguru*', a word that, although an innocuous description of the westerly direction, acquires derogative tribal connotations in postcolonial Kenya. It means people who are 'other' than the Kikuyu. Wandia seeks her mother's opinion on inter-tribal marriages. She informs her that mixed marriages are hard for marriage is not

always a bed of roses. Sometimes, she points out, it is necessary to talk to a man in a language that he understands thoroughly. Her mother views language as the only obstacle to inter- ethnic marriages otherwise she has no problem with marrying her off to a man from '*ruguru*.'

Wandia gets practical advice which satisfies her quest to settle down with Aoro. She is therefore infuriated with her elder sister, Esther, who insinuates that marrying a man from another tribe may not be workable. Wandia imprints on her sister that the union between her and Aoro is going to work because he is a Kenyan. She takes a philosophical stance to educate her on the need to transcend tribal boundaries as Kenyans. In spite of this, Esther points out the basic difference of language between them make Wandia become a stranger to her in laws. This falls on deaf ears for she is optimistic that Aoro's people are going to do whatever is humanly possible to accommodate her as one of their own.

The seriousness of the two lovers is seen when Aoro visits Wandia's family. He feels quite at home. Consequently, he organises for her to visit his parents. His parents receive her well, although they worry over the stereotypes they have heard about the Kikuyu greed for money. His father tries to dissuade him from marrying Wandia, arguing that she could be like the rest of her tribesmen. This insinuation irks Aoro who retorts:

Father, I don't know anything about the rest of the tribe, but I know Wandia. She is the one I have chosen. I love her, which is a feeling that I cannot just transfer from one girl to another at will. In any case, I have done anatomy and beneath the skin everyone is remarkably the same. Even the blood that is supposed to be thicker than water is all just a combination of iron and protein in every instance. Some people are good. Others are bad; it's got very little to do with their blood or tribe. 'It's all in the heart. I am sure you know that father. (254)

Ogola uses Aoro to (re)conceptualise the female self in the Kenyan nation away from tribal lines. As far as he is concerned, Wandia is not just another woman, another Kikuyu, and therefore attempts to dismantle the 'otherness' notions that his father, Mark Sigu, assigns to Wandia while at the same time questioning and challenging ethnic stereotypes that undermine common humanity. Language difference, therefore, becomes an excuse rather than a reason. Furthermore, Aoro informs his father that her mother has not asked for exorbitant bride price, instead she wishes that the two live in peace.

Unlike Mark, his wife Elizabeth takes in Wandia easily and thinks her son is a lucky man. As far as she is concerned, Aoro has chosen well. This female solidarity across different ethnic backgrounds defines the cordial relationship that the two forge right from the beginning. Elizabeth is able to respect difference without falling victim of ethnic stereotypes that divide Kenyans and hence her support for Wandia maps out positive articulations of identity. In addition, reframes identity issues in postcolonial Kenya by weaving a narrative of ethnic inclusion and thereby making it possible for the various ethnic groups in Kenya to coexist without objectifying a particular ethnic group.

While other people in the narrative worry about the impending mixed marriage between her and Aoro, Wandia wonders whether their marriage will survive the onslaught of medicine which is a very busy career. This concern on what she is getting herself into shows she is rational and reflective. Ogola uses her medical career as a springboard for Wandia's self (re)conceptualisation. To grasp the full impact of Wandia's identity, Ogola articulates Wandia's medical career which starts as a childhood dream. While her mother views medicine as an occupation for men and would like her daughter to be a teacher, Wandia endeavours to be a doctor. Her aspiration is not just to treat sick people, but to also be a lecturer at the medical school if only to fulfil her mother's wish of becoming a teacher.

Her career in medicine becomes an obsession that defines her identity such that "everything else [pales] into insignificance before her great ambitions" (244). Her strength of character comes strongly as illustrated by the fact that she does not want to take an easy option in medical studies:

“She [wants] to study pathology – one of the toughest, most demanding disciplines in medicine; ... become a lecturer at the medical school and thus become a teacher”(244 – 245). Wandia’s determination to actualise her full identity in the medical field is further seen in her desire to “specialise in haematology – diseases of the blood [fascinate] her” (245). Her commitment and hard work bears fruit when she finally joins the university as a lecturer after her master’s degree in pathology and thus realises her childhood dream to be a doctor, and her mother’s wish for her to be a teacher. This sense of fulfilment in her search of self identity defines her fulfilled self.

Wandia and her mother in law become good friends. It is no wonder then that they often retreat to the kitchen to bond as the only place they are not likely to be disturbed. This complementary relationship between the two supports Wandia’s quest for education. When she earns a scholarship to study in America for a year, Elizabeth encourages her to leave her five children behind with their father. That surprises her, but her mother-in-law rationalises the move saying, “you see if you don’t go, it’s something that will haunt you - a lost chance is very hard to live with. We will all chip in to give him a hand with the children.... Just organise your affairs and go do what you have to do” (277). Such consideration and support, more so from a mother-in-law, is quite disarming for Wandia. It is not surprising that she weeps brokenly at the demise of her mother-in-law whom she has come to regard her as a dear friend.

Ogola uses Wandia to reveal her faith in the female’s performance of selfhood in the medical career in Kenya in the 21st century. The support that she receives from both men and women helps her to rise to the position of the Chairperson of the Department of Pathology, University of Nairobi. She also becomes a professor, the first Kenyan woman to attain such an accomplishment in medicine. She appreciates her other self (her husband) without whose encouragement, she acknowledges, she may have faltered and even give up. She owes her good marriage, lovely children and professional satisfaction to his support and hence Ogola underscores the complementary nature of gender relations that should be the norm socially, culturally and politically.

Wandia does not only realise her selfhood in her medical career, but also in the social realm as a respected member of the Sigu’s family and by extension Kenyan society. The Sigu’s family have confidence in her and allow her to stay with Becky’s children, Alicia and Johnny, whom she readily takes into her house and performs motherly roles as if they were her own children. Her mature sense of identity is seen when the two voice their dissatisfaction with their fathers’ decision to keep off from them even after their mother’s death. Wielding selflessness, she advises Johnny against changing his name from Johnny Courtney to Johnny Sigu because by so doing he would be negating his European identity. She advises him to maintain both identities, African and European and appeals to him to be more understanding, cultivate his own selfhood, and avoid closing the door that defines his dual identity unnecessarily. She is a non-racist who becomes conscious that Becky’s children belong to two worlds and they should have the best of each. She therefore does not understand why Becky fails to see the necessity of giving her children African names as well and advises Johnny to take the name Sigu as a middle name rather than drop his European name.

The foregoing examination of *The River and the Source* puts forward Ogola’s determination to subvert the patriarchal ideology that constrains and disempowers women. She represents certain female characters in this text as fulfilled in their womanhood since they resist gender prescriptions that subjugate women. She therefore portrays both cultural and political emancipatory possibility for women to regain control over their destiny within the framework of culture and tradition. Awareness of the gendered cultural context within which Akoko and the other female characters in the text live in enables them to challenge traditional customs that are at the core of the construction of the female subjectivity. Within the patriarchal institution, women are socialised as passive, silent and bearers of children.

Ogola reconceptualises women as conscious subjects, and in a revolutionary shift, assigns them voices and also the right to be heard in the postcolonial milieu. By so doing, Ogola revises and rearticulates womanhood in a bid to underpin female iconography which comes to the fore with the dismantling of aspects of patriarchy that constrains and disempowers women. For Ogola, narrative discourse provides an opportunity to destabilise the male controlling gaze through Akoko who defiantly subverts the male iconography when she leaves her marital home never to return. In her marital home, she experiences deprivations when her husband's brother tries to lay claim not only to her body in his attempt to inherit her, but also her wealth. She rebuffs any attributes that seek to define her in terms of the objectifying gaze of her husband's brother. Her determination to fight against a tradition that denies her womanhood, earns her the position of the prototype of the other female characters in the novel. Thus, Ogola produces the narrative of the postcolonial Kenya that is characterised by complementary gender relations.

1.4 (RE) CONCEPTUALISING SEXUAL AND GENDER RELATED DIFFERENCES IN MARGARET OGOLA'S *I SWEAR BY APOLLO*

Ogola historicises women in the contemporary Kenyan nation in *I swear by Apollo*. The story of women in the contemporary Kenyan nation is an engagement in the (re)conceptualisation of the female self. She ventures into a new sense of national identity by assigning women intrinsic value in the postcolonial nation. Through narration, Ogola interrogates the question of the female self and national identity by expressing women's experiences in the postcolonial nation. The narrative is weaved around Alicia and Johnny.

The text revolves around women's lives touching on aspects of life that offer a wider (re) conceptualisation of women as agents of their status in the postcolonial nation. Some of the female characters in this text do not only share historical memories, but also adopt the ever changing attitudes towards them, continually restructuring them. They therefore assist other female characters to develop female selves shaped by consistent change depending on their perceptions and opinions. The author manages to conceive different identities of women in this narrative and their experiences are rewoven through live experiences that the various female characters in this book assume in their relation with Alicia. This is because their role in this particular narrative contributes to the development of Alicia.

Alicia, who has a fair share of identity crises, is the daughter of Becky Sigu and John Courtney. Our concern in *I swear by Apollo* is how female identity crises can be exploited to (re) conceptualise the female self and national identity in the postcolonial nation. According to Selden, the concern of the feminist as well as women writers is to ensure that "The female principle [will] remain outside male definitions of self" (519). This citation affirms that Ogola is not blind to notions of differences that exist between male and female since the woman is perceived and cast in the image of man's other. Nevertheless, Ogola uses writing to correct the perception that all problems of women are caused by men. It is Becky who deals the first blow on her daughter's female self and national development since she does not provide a good female model for her daughter. She neither shows love nor provides the emotional support that Alicia requires from a mother.

While she lives, Becky refuses to conform to the image of 'otherness' that in most cases women subscribe to. Theoretical analysis of Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo* attracts feminist criticism in the sense that through Becky, the author deconstructs women's subjectivity even though this has detrimental effects on Becky's children. Feminist discussion of the self provides a critique of the role played by views of otherness in the lives of women in African literature as portrayed in mother Africa trope. Florence Stratton highlights the trope's deep rootedness in male literary convention that enhances female subjectivity. She argues:

The embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman, one of the most enabling tropes of "postcolonial" male domination as well as of colonialism; the portrayal of women

as passive and voiceless, images that serve to rationalise and therefore perpetuate inequality between the sexes and the romanticisation and idealisation of motherhood, as a means of masking women's subordination in society. (172)

Stratton paints the picture of an African woman in bondage, one who needs to be liberated. The kind of liberation that Ogola bestows on Becky is destructive not only on her life, but also the lives of her children. In negritude and nationalist discourse, women are assigned the role of biological reproduction of the nation. Thus, motherhood, in the patriarchal ideology is merely an institution, a role that women are expected to perform in their passivity and voicelessness, but there is need for women to experience motherhood as a role that calls for skill and knowledge so that they can nurture their children to become distinguished members of the nation. Becky totally neglects her motherhood duties in her eagerness to be equal to men, and we read how she neglects her children and also divorces her husband who tries to fill in the gap in the parenting of their two children.

Becky's family is very disappointed with their daughter's demeanour and the collapse of her marriage even though her father surmises that "in all honesty one could never have expected too much from that girl" (119). He, therefore, does not blame John for the failure of the marriage since Becky lives "somewhere so far from the surface of her being that she [is] completely untouched by the pain of evil" (120) as she entertains several men in her life. While everyone expects him to divorce her, his strength fails him for he wonders "How do [I] divorce a little girl for hurting [me]?" (121). Becky works out all the divorce technicalities and just informs him that it is done, and that she has full custody of the children. Thus, Ogola's attempt to demystify the self/other logic as well as the negritude notions of the African woman especially the idyllic image of the African woman, crumbles in the character of Becky who lacks any sense of restful or pleasant abode that a mother should have to foster her children.

Although John finds fault with Becky he does not place himself in the realm of the angles and thus makes a hard choice to continue living with her. Her promiscuity nevertheless makes him lack the muscle or the aspiration to divorce her. To him, she is "a little girl" (121) hurting him. It is no wonder that John maintains silence and stays away from his children even after her death not because he is a bad man, but due to intense pain at the betrayal and the embarrassment of being a cuckold. Like her mother, Alicia is beautiful. Her father gasps when he sees her after a long time "Oh my God, it is Becky all over again" (104). The only difference is that she is reserved and withdrawn. Ogola describes her as a woman who is obviously accessible, but essentially unknowable. Such characteristics define her female self and are attributable to her interracial and unstable family background. She is a child of a mixed marriage between a Kenyan and a Canadian national. The marriage does not work due to her mother's promiscuous life which is ascribed to her astonishing beauty, exaggerated sexuality, pre-occupation with her ego and unadulterated love of self. After the divorce, her father goes back to Canada while her mother starts bringing her multiple lovers to their residence. This upsets Alicia who is not too young to understand what is going on. Becky's wickedness is of great magnitude.

When John meets Sybil, he hopes to know her and love her even more than he had loved Becky and perhaps live long enough so that at the end of her life he can tell her "truly you were my other self, my very self, only better than my mere self" (63). This is because Becky hurts John badly and he doubts whether or not he is capable of loving another woman. His marriage to Sybil cures this deep seated doubt for she nurses him in a bid to help him have his life back and he eventually tells her that, to "love a woman like you is to be alive, which is what I am and want to be, so that in loving you I may finally realise who I am..." (164). Through John and Sybil, Ogola fosters complementary relationships between men and women which is an eye opener for John who agrees to go back to Africa to check on his children at the advice and encouragement from Sybil.

John's reunion with Alicia marks the beginning of her (re)conceptualisation as she readily and happily receives him. It is apparent; therefore, that motherly care for Alicia and her brother was lacking for while their mother lived, she was insensitive to their needs. With the disappearance of her father and death of her mother, Alicia, who suffers a traumatised childhood, adopts a defence mechanism to help her cope with what Ogola refers to as plight of the soul "in this vale of tears" (10). Wandia comes to her rescue and helps her to overcome her identity crisis and thus Ogola uses gendered roles for women within the home and family unit to integrate women into national discourse. While her discourse may be perceived as propagating patriarchal notions in the nation, it is relevant for the (re) conceptualisation of the female self in the imagined nation.

Ogola depicts women as being at the core of the family and the backbone of the nation. This explains why she uses Wandia and Vera to help Alicia to (re)conceptualise her female self since in a way they provide the stable family unit for Alicia which she has all along been lacking. Vera becomes her guardian when her mother dies while Wandia is prized as a superb mother of not only her children, but also Becky's children. Wandia's strength of character remains intact even in the event of the death of her child, Danny, whom she fails to mourn properly because she is resigned to the inevitability of death. She realises albeit too late that mourning if bereaved is normal and reckons that "God himself makes mourning [an obligation] if one is to be comforted, be healed, perhaps my greatest fault is my utter sense of self sufficiency. I act as if nothing can shake me; I am always in control, always in charge" (141). This is the kind of woman who helps to reclaim Alicia from a broken family and consequently a fragmented identity. She helps Alicia to heal wounds which would otherwise be mortal, but which nonetheless leave rather deep scars. Vera also plays an important role in the (re) conceptualisation of Alicia's female self. Although her religious obligations make her withdraw from the public sphere of life to concentrate on her private life, she endows Alicia with moral meaning and integrity as the mother substitute.

Alicia experiences identity crises in relation to the opposite sex. As far as she is concerned entangling herself with men will damage her female self and she does not want to take the risk. She treasures her life such that:

...though she sometimes [feels] too afraid to live, she however [does] not want to die. There [is] some meaningful thing or person to whom she [can] commit herself and thus find self actualisation and peace. She [longs] for peace. (13-14)

This quotation points at a shattered self that rationalises life in order to (re)conceptualise a tranquil female self. Alicia's identity crisis is further compounded by the rejection she experiences in relation to her surviving parent, John, who plays a major role in inflicting otherness in her life. Ogola sets out to accord Alicia a self. Through her, Ogola demonstrates that a woman's denied self is something that can be subverted and thus works towards Alicia's realisation of self as a subject of enunciation so that she can use the pronoun 'I' in reference to herself. In other words, the author attempts to invoke the semiotic as well as the symbolic articulation of self. According to Noelle McAfee:

The semiotic includes both the subject's drives and articulation... The symbolic is the mode of signifying in which speaking beings attempt to express meaning with as little ambiguity as possible... the two modes are not completely separate: we use symbolic modes of signifying to state position, but this position can be destabilised or unsettled by semiotic drives and articulations. (17)

McAfee underscores the need for feminist counter-imagery to offset culturally entrenched, patriarchal images of woman as the other. The semiotic dimension of language, which is characterised by figurative language, points to intelligible utterances which rely on semantic conventions.

Wandia understands that Alicia's self is a dynamic interplay between the feminine semiotic and the masculine symbolic and therefore goes out of her way to ensure that Alicia realises her self. She writes to Alicia's father yet again to remind him of his responsibility to his children. She

categorically asks him to come for his children or to ask someone to send his death certificate. The point is that as long as he lives, John cannot afford to abdicate his responsibility to his children. Wandia feels that it has taken him too long to come and see his children even though “marrying across racial lines [tends] to put one’s personal integrity in question” (101). Wandia is sarcastic about marriage across racial boundaries. This is regardless of whether the relationship is based on genuine love or not.

As far as she is concerned, it is bound to fail no matter what is invested in it. Maria Elena Valdes points out that, “when Kristeva links symbolic language to masculinity and semiotic language to femininity she argues that both aspects of language are open to all individuals irrespective of their biological sex ...” (176). Language, both semantic and symbolic, is used to foster woman’s mode of constituting her selfhood. Alicia tries to use both when at the time of her parents’ divorce, she begs her father not to go. He is the only parent she has, both in life and death of her mother. Her mother is too pre-occupied with herself to pay any attention to her “once the basics such as being born [are] over” (106). Ogola uses Becky and Wandia to bring out two types of motherhood: Becky’s is merely an institution while Wandia’s is an experience. She has six children to the amazement of friends and neighbours alike who fail to:

...understand why an intelligent woman of the world might want to have six children ... her professional prestige was impregnable and who could know more about the techniques of avoiding or annihilating a pregnancy than a doctor?...her house was always open to her children, friends, nobody felt superfluous in that house, everyone, whatever their foibles was treated as if they mattered - as if they were important. (80)

Through Wandia, Ogola blends patriarchal institution and modernity by depicting children as valuable, especially so, to a modern career woman, a doctor who gets six children by design, not by default. She purposes to have children and brings them up to the best of her ability, even Danny who suffers from Down syndrome. Otherwise, as a medical doctor, she would have aborted some if she so wished, not because doctors are expected to abort, but because the profession provided her with expert knowledge to carry out the act, or at least to know the full benefits, if any, and consequences. Through authorial intrusion abortion is castigated thus:

But what do you give an aborted child in exchange for its life, or could death be considered a gift? Should only one person be given the power to decide whose life was worth living and whose wasn’t or should the life of any human being be a radical [irrevocable] right, irrespective of its accidental attributes and the circumstances of its conception and birth. (37-38)

Down syndrome is a form of sickness which comes in with a set of symptoms and hence the difficulties involved in treating it. The author uses this kind of illness to underpin the sanctity of life which Wandia’s experience of motherhood guards to the disgust of her husband who thinks it is not right for her to treat Danny, the drooling idiot “as if he were a perfectly normal child equal in every way to his perfect siblings” (31). The author perhaps brings in the diseased circumstances of Danny to chastise Becky for her negligence of two perfectly normal children. The question she is posing to the reader as well as the critic is: would Becky have allowed an abnormal child to live if she found it difficult to nurture normal children?

Drawing the contrast between male and female in parenting, Ogola posits, “if being a father is so deeply significant how absolutely elemental is motherhood, not just the biological act, but the deep meaning and connection and essence of carrying a living being within you, nurturing its body and spirit” (126). Becky lives in a world of her own, totally absconding her duties as a mother and fails to experience motherhood. Her daughter is denied motherly love which finds expression in Wandia whom Alicia hopes to emulate when her turn for parenting comes. She thinks “if I ever have children,

I pray that I will be half as good a mother to them as she has been to me' (115). In Wandia, Alicia's dejected self finds solace.

While Alicia is overexcited with her father's presence, Johnny refuses to accept him into his life. Alicia castigates him saying:

You think that you are God's answer to mankind. That you are too wonderful. Let me tell you- the mistakes you will make will make you squirm in misery. And dad's error will pace into insignificance when compared with the suffering you will cause. (113)

Alicia, unlike Johnny has a receptive and enlightened self. She points out to her brother that closing out his father from his life will only cause him more heartache. Alicia takes advantage of her father's return to, in the words of Valdes, "to assert [her] specificity as [woman]...." (175). The implication is that Alicia is determined to use whatever means available to her to reclaim her dejected self. Although her father's absence from her life is unbearable (and we would excuse her if she becomes callous and hostile to him for deserting her at the time of need), she opens her heart to him; forgives him for his neglect without any qualms. She says:

For a long time after you left and mum died, I felt quite frozen. I could feel nothing. I wanted to go and live with Aunt Vera whom I admired very much, but I could not for a number of understandable reasons. Unfortunately all I saw with my child's eyes was another rejection. Then aunt Wandia came along. (114)

Wandia plays a major role in Alicia's search for identity which is complicated by Alicia's family background as a mixed-race child who grows up in an environment that is lacking in affection. Wandia offers the much required love, affection, understanding and parenthood that Alicia lacks. Perhaps it is because of Wandia's influence on her that she becomes "an absolutely lovely person" (161) even though she is "very delicate, almost fragile" (161). Her father attributes Alicia's fragmented self to her start in life which is considered to be "a bit tight" (161). The dejection that she feels whether imagined or real, affects her adulthood. She develops a restrained self, which her father hopes is only momentary. She has an "inner radiance which is still fighting to come through" (162). With time, she will realise her real self and blossom. Her choice of a career in music points at this possibility.

Alicia's reference to her mother's death ignites in John nostalgic feelings towards Becky. His love for her is intense, almost consuming. He is not the only male in this text who loves a woman completely. Aoro Sigu loves Wandia immensely and he is "involved with her in exactly the same way a drowning man is involved with the sea inextricably... He [feels] very strongly that his very definition of himself as a man [is] somehow bound up with the way she perceives him" (33). His love for Wandia is complete, but not blind like the one John bestows on Becky. As a gesture of his deep love and respect for her, he names their house after her: Villa Wandia. In both love and marriage, Aoro and Wandia play complementary roles to each other unlike John and Becky's marriage which Ogola revisits through John's reminiscence:

Now I am old enough to recognise that there is always something self-seeking in loving anyone like that for it means that essentially you are in love with a dream and you don't want to wake up and face reality - you would much rather have the deception of the dream. (163)

His love for Becky is a kind of obsession which he fails to outgrow. Given an opportunity, he would love her all over again. Becky happens to be the first woman John loves completely and blindly. This explains the deep hurt he feels when his eyes finally open to see the deception in his life. Nevertheless, her beauty and innocence does not deceive her father who does not expect much from her. He is, therefore, not intrigued by his daughter's conduct and subsequent failure of her marriage. Unlike John, he realises that she lacks depth. He observes, that all she has is "on the surface only,

...something twisted within her, which [is] rather terrible considering her angelic face” (119). John’s obsession with her love obscures his intellect and hence his disappointment at the discovery of her lecherous life inhibits him from voluntarily coming back to Kenya. Her conduct deals an almost mortal blow on him. His love for her is intense, almost consuming and therefore blames himself for failing to reclaim her from herself. He observes, rather belatedly: “Is this perhaps the reason she turned so violently against me? Was I perhaps the only person who could have saved her, by first knowing her and then helping her escape from herself? Was this anger which almost destroyed us all” (163). We are rather surprised that John feels a failure for, as far as he is concerned, he did not save Becky from her destructive self.

John feels obliged to rescue Becky, but it is rather late in the day for he takes time to realise she lives somewhere so far from the surface of her being that she is completely unscathed by the pain of evil. In other words, she is not sensitive to other people’s feelings especially her husband. Nevertheless, he reckons that he is the only one capable of salvaging her and blames himself for failing her. Instead of blaming Becky for her violence and failure to nurture her husband and children, he exonerates her against the reader’s expectation. His ability to desist from apportioning blame to Becky marks him out as a man who can be very supportive to women not only to help them to acquire self definition, but also to assert their selfhood. Wandia venerates John as a good man who has received an almost mortal blow from Becky and forgives him for his part of neglecting Alicia and Johnny.

As stated earlier in this chapter, the project of women writers re-conceptualising female selfhood is a feminist project too. Moira Monteith echoes this notion when she says that, “feminist criticism like a solar oven has proved to be the mirror that focuses literature and concentrates its signifying energy” (3). Ogola uses her literary power to (re)conceptualise Alicia’s female self through her love for Brett. Alicia meets Brett, her step mother’s brother, while on a visit to Canada to see her father. Even though Alicia would like to imagine that she is not interested in him, she becomes emotionally involved, begins to pay attention to her looks, and develops a strong desire to dress attractively. However, due to her restrained and confused self she fails to rise to the occasion when Brett, who is head over heels in love with her, asks her out for a drink, but she refuses. As her confusion rages, the author uses oxymoron to heighten her plight. She wishes to forget him while at the same time longs to see and be with him as both of them hope that an opportunity can present itself for them to make a home.

Due to the rejection she undergoes right from childhood to adulthood, Alicia develops an inferiority complex. It does not therefore come as a surprise to us when she withdraws into herself and rationalises her behaviour saying that Brett is used to more sophisticated ladies and hence has no time for her. For the feminist as well as the women writer, the self is the centre of autonomous agency, but Alicia’s self fails to take action and she refuses to respond to his pursuit. She, therefore, closes him out and he takes the advice from Sybil to leave Alicia alone for fear that a continued search may be counteractive: he might lose her forever and perhaps damage her as well.

To cope with this disarming situation, Alicia adopts a defence mechanism to guard herself against show of love emotions towards Brett. Her fears stem from her mixed background and her feeling that she is timid and devoid of confidence. Furthermore, she is afraid of giving herself to him just in case he hurts her. It is this uncertainty that makes Alicia weak and lacking in strength to consciously involve herself in a love relationship with Brett. Her step mother, Sybil, understands her behaviour. As far as she is concerned, Alicia is a “poor fearful child with a woman’s beautiful body and a child’s night-time terrors” (197). Sybil tries to help her out of this unfortunate situation by giving her pieces of advice on lessons about life. She advises, “One cannot postpone life or avoid it altogether. If you do you die anyway. And to die from un-lived life is an unforgivable sin” (198). She cautions Alicia against the folly of failing to live her life to the full.

Sybil knows too well that Brett has awakened the woman in Alicia and thus provides an opportunity for her (re)conceptualisation. She hopes that with time her awakened womanhood will respond to Brett's love when she discovers that they are really meant for each other. In addition, she will realise that she and Brett are one and the same thing. Sybil foreshadows things to come and prepares us for what happens later in the narrative.

Through suspense, Ogola introduces a sense of foreboding by making it almost impossible for Alicia to reach out to Brett when she finally comes to terms with her female self. Brett resigns from Toronto University to take up a job in Switzerland. Unfortunately, he leaves no address. It becomes impossible to contact him to the utter disappointment of Alicia. However, there is nothing that she can do to alleviate the suffering and she is, therefore, left to experience the "the pain of becoming a woman" (199) alone. She resorts to self incrimination: "I am a fool and I have always been one, she [says] viciously to herself" (20). She regrets her failure to take up a golden opportunity that comes to her by acting in unintelligent manner due to her immature self. This is the price she pays for her unstable background, her narrow and self-centred way of dealing with things. To bow out honourably, she adjusts her outlook to life to accommodate other people in her love-life.

Back home, Alicia displays a distracted self, but she refrains from opening up to anybody. Although she goes back to her work and studies with dedication, the spirit that previously animates her life is lacking. She is shattered. As if to punish herself and also Brett, she enters into a relationship with Napoleon, a man old enough to be her father. She resorts to this kind of behaviour to exorcise Brett from her mind. The feeling that she is never going to have him pushes her to resolve that it really does not matter who she marries. Ogola uses sardonic humour in reference to the love relationship between the two. She posits that even Alicia herself is amused when she introduces her prospective husband. She almost laughs out loud at the prospect of what she is doing. Wandia and her husband are worried at her behaviour.

Using women's collective responsibility to salvage the female self, Sybil contacts her brother as a matter of urgency and he takes the next flight to Nairobi to save Alicia from her impending marriage to Napoleon. Brett's act of grace redeems her fragmented self and he enables her to realise a fulfilled female self. Her marriage comes as a relief to Wandia and her husband because it opens an avenue for their niece to enjoy a reconceptualised new self. It is therefore not surprising to us that Alicia names her first child Wandia in appreciation of the role she has played in helping her to finally achieve a positive identity.

The fuss that Napoleon makes, demanding to have his bride even though it means paying a high bride-price, reminds us of the traditional practice of paying bride-price. Through authorial intrusion, Napoleon is informed that the "family stopped selling women many generations ago" (234). Ogola wants to point out that there is more to a marriage than bride-price which has lost its historical-cultural value in the postcolonial nation. Women cease to be objects on display at the market for sale to the highest bidder. Marriage calls for mutual understanding between two people. She points out:

Marriage is a fusion of two people and that love is not necessarily something you feel despite the romantic literature around. There are some things which are transcendental. Marriage is one of them and that is why human beings attempt it again and again, despite all odds. (237)

She envisages marriage as an honourable institution both in the traditional and contemporary way of life. This explains why she exploits the family unit to postulate her vision about the complementary roles that men and women play in the perpetuation of the life of a community. When Brett marries Alicia she ceases to be the 'other' for in Brett she gains self-definition, esteem and is finally empowered to assert her female selfhood and nationhood. She achieves a fulfilled self that (re)conceptualises her female self.

However, Ogola suspends Alicia's bid to assert her selfhood and nationhood as soon as she is married and therefore fails to allow the reader to share Alicia's fulfilled moments as a mother and a career woman. Ogola portrays her marriage as if it is the height of achievement. We are left wondering whether she eventually completes her Master's course in music and goes into practice.

Nevertheless, Ogola conceptualises and reconceptualises the female self and national identity without assigning female characters masculinity in their bid to claim or reclaim their identity; instead, their representation emphasises the femininity of the female protagonists as they assert themselves both as women and inhabitants of the nation. This is aimed at inclusion of women into the postcolonial Kenyan nation. Through writing, the woman writer addresses the repressed circumstances that women live in and mediates upon the possibility of change through notions of self-consciousness on the part of women so that they can endeavour for their self-knowledge. The conceptualisation or reconceptualisation of the female self is explicitly and implicitly portrayed as a phenomenon that can either be nurtured or destroyed by other forces preying on woman.

(RE) CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE FEMALE SELF IN POSTCOLONIAL KENYA IN FLORENCE MBAYA'S *A JOURNEY WITHIN*

A Journey Within is a postcolonial manifestation of a woman writer's endeavour to portray the challenges facing women as they chart their lives as individuals in the Kenyan nation. The question 'Who am I?' seems to be the preoccupation of the novel and hence the text is semi-autobiographical in nature. The question of self identity is not only asked but also answered through self-description and self-expression. In a bid to depict the reality of women through textual representation, the author adopts an autobiographical mode to try and beget self to the protagonist. Mbaya's narrative discourse is aimed at serving a specific purpose in the female self discourse: subversion of patriarchy in favour of restoring women's selfhood by according voice to the female self. Thus, her narrative becomes a pernicious myth in the history of patriarchal gender relations which are promulgated in literature.

The question of women points at the need to place women in the historical context of the nation since in the patriarchal order, men hardly make reference to women in decision making for they are not treated as respectful members of the society.

Monika holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and is living with her sister Miriam while looking for employment. She is unlike her sister who drops out of school at the age of eighteen due to lack of school fees. An interpretation of Mbaya's novelistic discourse gives insight into the character of Monika and her ways of coping with her changing circumstances. While awaiting employment she participates in urban life which is portrayed as fragmented and alienated. Living in a community full of school drop-outs and unemployed persons, her level of education makes her feel estranged and opts to pass off as an "O" level school-leaver. The author describes her as "Quiet and with a pleasant disposition, she [has] that aura of confidence about her that [is] very admirable" (3). This explains her ability to cultivate a sense of belonging, for her adornment of amiable, flexible temperament enables her to fit into her sister's community. She identifies with them "in as far as she [is] unemployed, and like them she [scans] through new and old newspapers for those popular 'Situations Vacant – Situations Wanted' columns day in day out, rather hopelessly" (3). Although she remains alien to this environment, she participates in their singing without grasping the meaning, listens to their gossip without contributing and joins in their laughter without understanding their jokes.

Focusing on the text, the researcher's aim is to consider novelistic (re)conceptualisation of the female self in the context of enacting both selfhood and nationhood. In addition, the text is an enabling site for the reader and the critic to grasp another dimension of women's realities in the postcolonial Kenya: self determination and self fulfilment in the national circles. Monika is the narrating 'I' in the novel whose narration takes a first person narrative mode. The 'I' speaks on behalf

of the collective 'we' and frames a multiplicity of potential responses to the central question of the female footing in the postcolonial nation. The focus is on the identity of the modern educated postcolonial woman that is expected to create a new paradigm for female representation.

Through writing, Mbaya engages in an act of writing the self and the dialectic relationship between women and national identity. She presents women in the postcolonial nation as having self identity problems since their self is conceptualised in the image of the other. There is no regard to self as fundamental to the question of self and national identity in respect to women's self agency. Renan underpins the dialectic relationship between the individuals living in a nation and the nation itself when he points out: "to have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present: to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people..." (1). Essentially, the nation and its individuals have many things in common, some of which are forgotten in a self/other dichotomy.

The woman in the postcolonial Kenyan nation should share in the past and present glories of the nation. She has to be unified with the nation. In this regard, Mbaya historicises the female self in the postcolonial nation in her writing. Furthermore, she reinforces the female in the nation and emancipates her from patriarchal notions which undermine her selfhood. (Re) conceptualisation of the female self in the postcolonial nation, therefore, assumes a dialectical mode that unites both the woman and the nation she lives in. This dialectic relationship is expected to harness any differences and ambivalences between the female self and the nation and hence subvert the postcolonial inhibitions on the woman. This is seen when Mbaya (re)conceptualises Monika's development as an ongoing ideology right from her life at the university to the time she takes up a teaching job. We witness Monika's involvement in different aspects of selfhood and nationhood in a dialectic interaction with the postcolonial nation that gives rise to self and in turn the self transforms the nation whereby otherness is indicted.

Monika is positioned as a subject of articulation meant to evoke a universal protagonist. This is because she is the only female character who is developed fully in this text. The other female characters facilitate her growth and hence they are brought on board so long as they interact with her to aid her in the (re)conceptualisation of her female self. Through Monika, Mbaya portrays the interconnectedness of an individual and the nation as Monika searches for self and national identity. Her development is influenced by her education and her perception of the environment she is living in, both rural and urban. She enacts selfhood as she performs her duties in the nation, a phenomenon that helps us to determine her place as either the self or the other in the postcolonial nation.

Despite the problems that come with urban economic disability, Monika develops an honest self. She refuses to succumb to fraud when she goes to the city of Nairobi to buy clothing materials for her sister, Miriam. The shop attendant's conspiratorial voice tells her that she can pay twenty shillings per meter without a receipt or pay thirty and get a receipt. She opts for the latter. She is further exposed to the harsh realities of the postcolonial Kenyan nation when she comes across street children who struggle to get basic necessities such as food. Mbaya uses her to castigate a society that is unable to provide for basic needs when Monika forgoes her lunch and gives it to them. Her encounter with the less fortunate leaves her feeling exposed and vulnerable since she is forced to "become part of those hungry, sad, painful, begging faces..." (8), her level of education notwithstanding. She becomes aware of their dusty, dirty, smelly bodies and experiences an "acute wave of emptiness, hopelessness and an unexplained sense of shame" (8). The divide between the rich and the poor opens her eyes to the economic realities of a postcolonial nation which is characterised by the need to revamp its economy and create more job opportunities.

Mbaya interrogates the self-portrait of women in the form of a personal narrative. She uses this mode to create a female heroine while at the same time exploiting the journey motif which enables her to craft a novel of transformation from patriarchy to a more complementary society. This

is necessary if women and men are to enjoy more cordial relations in the contemporary society. Representation of Monika's quest for self identity in the postcolonial nation as a journey points at the heroine's progression from one aspect of her life to another in a hierarchal manner. Mbaya points out that "Born and bred in the village, Monika's first year at the university begins "a journey through a maze" (9). She struggles to find selfhood, self realisation and independence in the postcolonial nation where patriarchy is inadequate for the women to chart their selfhood and hence the need to reflect on female self national identity. Mbaya seems to have a fundamental interest to critically reflect upon patriarchal society and extend the space allocated to women through education. This becomes necessary to ensure that her protagonist does not succumb to the limitations imposed by the notions of other. Otherness works towards women's loss of selfhood due to the contradictions and challenges found in the postcolonial nation.

Life at the university, which is located in an urban environment, presents Monika with unexpected freedom since there are "no bells for summons and no rules for guidance" (9). The experiences that Monika goes through while at the university are symbolic of a journey towards self-discovery. For instance, she treasures the "glory of being an intellectual... [attends] radical students' meetings during which Karl Marx, Fidel Castro, and Mao [are presented as] the true heroes of anticipated and vaguely defined social change" (9). Monika's vision for the betterment of the society as informed by Marxist ideological crusaders, Karl Max, Fidel Castro and Mao, underscores her as progressive minded.

The protagonist's involvement in students' politics points at her quest for identity. There is something more than just being at the university and she endeavours to be at the core of major students' activities. However, she has more sense than plunging head on into activities that are peripheral to her studies. During her third year, she makes the library "her refuge and hide out. Tutorial papers that she [has] worked on hastily the previous year [are] laboriously analysed for personal upgrade" (9-10). The implication is that she knows that the attainment of a degree will change her fortune in the national footing even though life presents her with a new compounded meaning upon graduation; she finds it difficult to get a job and hence she momentarily feels the dejection that characterises unfulfilled wishes.

The challenges that come with unemployment threaten to submerge Monika's selfhood and nationhood. This sad scenario arises despite the fact that she has adequate education which assigns her transformative power to shape her personal and national identity. Her hope to get a job from the Public Service Commission in her area of study is compromised when she is offered a teaching job by the Teacher's Service Commission. It is against this background that Monika's (re)conceptualisation of the female self is investigated. She is offered a job that is other than the one she is looking for.

Wielding her deep-seated concern for a young woman, Mbaya creates a female protagonist whose space in the postcolonial nation is not limited by the notions of otherness either as a female or as a career woman. Monika resists notions of otherness that can work towards her loss of selfhood contradictions and challenges found in the postcolonial nation where unemployment is rampant. The author contrasts the reality and expectations of the postcolonial community when she says, "a university graduate, nobody [expects] her to search for a job, because the assumption [is] that she [is] guaranteed one" (4). Education in the contemporary society is expected to apportion certain privileges, job opportunities since a graduate "epitomised power and wealth and was therefore cut above everyone else" (4). A lingering question is whether she will get a job and transcend the poverty that comes with unemployment.

The writer depicts the means by which Monika strives to escape joblessness as she hankers for job opportunities that exist in the nation in order to exercise her powers of autonomy; and to also enact national duties crucial to the female sense of well-being and respect. Her failure to get a job in the field of her training inhibits her future prospects, but her flexible will influences her to take up

teaching. Her rationality compels her to take up the offer despite the discouragement she gets from friends. By so doing, she embarks on a journey to change her jobless status as well as acquire a new identity as an employee. Her educational standing becomes a tool that enables her to perform national duties as a teacher in a rural area. Thus, she responds positively to the contradictions of the postcolonial nation and integrates herself into national roles and obligations. Mbaya uses her to embark on national activism of the female self. This becomes necessary since women are not self-sufficient outside of nation. The postcolonial nation provides education and thereby promotes certain skills and values that help women to realise particular freedom and individual diversity.

Monika cannot afford to extricate herself from the national-social context. Elleke Boehmer views women's writings as "occupying an enabling position, from which to articulate selfhood [and nationhood]" (220). Boehmer further observes that women's writings, because of the "fascinating ways in which their writing addressed, redressed, and distressed the historical legacy of compounded oppression and survival ... it has become almost emblematic of postcolonial writing as a category" (220). In *A Journey Within* Mbaya uses her writing to articulate the history of Monika's struggle and survival within the postcolonial nation even though stories about women are unadventurously viewed as lesser in describing national mythologies.

Female writings have more often than not been disregarded in as far as issues pertaining to the nation are concerned. Nevertheless, Mbaya articulates Monika's selfhood and nationhood as a historical moment of struggle and survival that dismantles notions of women being on the periphery in as far as nationhood is concerned. Mbaya portrays women's centrality in national issues by bringing to the fore Monika's specific experiences as a woman and as a postcolonial citizen. In so doing, Mbaya addresses the notion of the realisation of Monika's nationhood alongside selfhood and asserts her distinct actuality. This is seen when Monika takes up teaching a job in a remote area. The rural environment in which Mbaya positions Monika as she searches for self identity is quite a challenge in that the people neither share her mother tongue nor speak Kiswahili. Furthermore, she has to use paraffin instead of gas while cooking. The emphasis that Mbaya puts on the rural location of the school is meant to show the kind of sacrifice that Monika has to make in her search for self and national identity.

Initially, her appointment as a teacher at Kostas Secondary school in Murwet region surprises her because she has a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Government and Geography. Her immediate reaction is, "I simply can't teach" (24). The voice embodied in the text corresponds to a cohesive sense of self identity. Mbaya portrays how women can be independent so that the 'I' realises selfhood. Creating the dilemma that comes with the offer for employment, Mbaya challenges Monika to make a decision in the interval between the self and the nation. Her embarkment on a journey to Kostas Secondary school symbolically points at the beginning of a quest for an independent self. She is adorned with education and is about to start disseminating knowledge. Mbaya paints education as vital in the (re) conceptualisation of the female self. It becomes, in the words of Nelson Mandela, "a great engine of personal development. It is through education that a daughter of a peasant can become a doctor" (194). Education gives Monika an opportunity to transcend the confinement of the home and bestows her power to explore and enact nationhood. Through her, Mbaya underlines education as a main factor in a woman's reconceptualisation and affirmation in the national arena. It enables the female self to acquire confidence and assert her worth.

Mbaya uses Monika's education to write women's lives on the national space. This is contrary to the women roles and function in patriarchal society where their status is exclusively tied to the domestic area. Her personal quest for identity exposes her to the vestiges of teaching as a career, in employment. Her quest is both at individual and national level. She takes up her teaching responsibilities and fully commits herself to do her best as a secondary school teacher. Mbaya assigns her qualities of independence, ambition and drive which enable her to perform exceptionally well in

the teaching profession. Although her situation is extremely difficult at the beginning, her self-determination enables her to achieve the best out of a career she is not trained in or prepared for. This is amidst caution from fellow teachers. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Katangi advise her, “this is no place for a young lady” (57). Despite the notions of the difficulties she is likely to go through in performing teaching duties, she is not cowed even though the deputy headmaster does not make it any easier for her. He immediately appoints her a class teacher and therefore she has to take up the responsibility of collecting fees when school opens.

A contemporary history of women that purports to tell the truth about the historical progress of the changing determination of women acquires prominence in Kenya in the 21st century. It is a means of narrating what women have been, are, or will be as far as the self and national identity are concerned. Monika’s quest for self and national development propels her to take up teaching and co-curricula activities in a remote rural area with distinction. She becomes the patron of drama club and also takes charge of the library. She assumes her teaching and co-curricular duties with accomplishment to the extent of achieving a rare opportunity of presenting her club for national drama festivals. Her school gets the best new entry award.

Through Monika, Mbaya provides a captivating model of a nation in transition and the achievements of women in a changing society in terms of the development of self and national identity. She underscores Monika’s self esteem and pride in being honoured as an outstanding teacher and patron of drama club. Consequently *A Journey Within* becomes a feminist rewriting of her story that is:

...not the recounting of the great deeds performed by women but the exposure of the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organisation of most societies. With this approach women’s history critically confronts the politics of existing histories and inevitably begins the rewriting of history. (Scott cited in Diane Elam 38)

Monika is depicted as playing a central role in contemporary Kenyan nation being a woman notwithstanding. Her commitment and dexterity in a bid to achieve a more autonomous identity and self fulfilment is met with approval by both Mulandi and Max. She succeeds in (re)conceptualising herself by negotiating a space accessible to the educated women in the nation through teaching and co-curricular activities.

Mbaya contrasts Monika with Stella who is an orphan living with her uncle and aunt. Although they treat her as their daughter, she always feels a stranger and longs for her parents even though she never knew them. These feelings of inadequacy show that Stella’s female self, like that of the narrating ‘I’ in Muthoni Garland’s *Tracking the Scent of My Mother* experiences non-fulfilment. The contrast between Stella and Monika is also highlighted by the different ways in which they respond to love relationships. Monika is depicted as possessing a mature disposition that is able to make rational life decisions while Stella is portrayed as emotional and lacking capacity to make mature decisions. This explains why she does not have lasting relationships with the opposite sex. She confirms her restlessness when she says, “I just cannot cope with emotional affections. I find them stifling” (17). With this kind of attitude it surprises Monika to learn of her impending marriage to a divorced man, with children. Her mature self sees through such folly and advises Stella against marrying a man she hardly knows. She draws her attention to the fact that marriage is not a place to check out first since it demands commitment and it is not easy to retract without suffering the consequences of a failed marriage. Furthermore, Monika quips “we both need to face real life...” (45). The two are no longer students on campus but citizens who need to take full responsibility of what they do.

Despite the advice given, Stella marries a divorcee and from the union, gets a baby boy. She blames her decision on the emptiness she feels following the death of her grandmother, who plays a

major role in bringing her up and she is attached to her as a child is to a mother. Although her uncle is supportive, Daniel exploits her feelings of inadequacy as an orphan and she agrees to move in with him without any hesitation. He is separated from his wife and he is taking care of their two daughters. However, the relationship does not fill Stella's void. She regrets her decision and wishes she had taken more time for no sooner does she move in than she realises that his children do not like her; that their mother comes to visit them and she does not know what may happen to her if Daniel makes up with his estranged wife. She is confused following the bombardment of so much at a go as a wife, mother and stepmother within a short while.

Mbaya exploits the differences between Stella and Monika to show the effect of the family background on the development of the female self. Monika has a stable family while Stella has an unstable one just like Alicia in Margaret Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo*. Stella entangles herself in a marriage to a divorced man only to realise albeit too late that walking out of the relationship is not the best solution at the moment. Her resolve is to take care of her son, the girls from her husband's first marriage and her job for a year or two before deciding what is best for her. She has to bear in mind that it is not always that things work out right from the beginning. Monika points out that although the marriage is causing her problems, there is no assurance that walking out of the marriage will bring her happiness. She challenges Stella to exercise patience in enacting both selfhood and nationhood.

The advice that Monika gives to Stella is put to test when Mulandi intensely falls in love with her due to her elegance, inner simplicity, confidence and intelligence. To him, she is the epitome of all he wants in a woman and hence views love as bearing no boundaries and challenges her rational response that "love as an emotion may not have limits, but we set them depending on what the society can allow, and depending on the environment and circumstances in which we find ourselves" (83). Monika turns him down on the grounds of work ethics, a response that shows her mature dispensation in handling love emotions in a logical manner, perhaps due to her sense of fore-boding that Mr. Mulandi may be trying to take advantage of a vulnerable young girl in a harsh rural environment.

The reader is tempted to view Stella as naïve for getting married without much thought, but her sense of maturity comes to the fore when she warns Monika against having a relationship with Mulandi who is a senior bachelor. As far as she is concerned, such men have something more than meets the eye and hence should be avoided. In spite of the affection that Monika has for Mulandi, Stella advises Monika to take Max. Stella's immature self is underlined when in the same breath she tries to match make Monika and William. Monika tells Stella that she is not ready to consider bringing in another man into her life.

Although her love life is at the moment complicated, she reasons, she can handle it. However, Stella's analysis of Mulandi makes Monika rethink her relationship with him and contemplates on the question: "What motivates marriage?" (113). Letting us into the realm of her private consciousness, Monika relates in her mind cases of unfulfilling marriages such as that of her own mother in which she experiences sadness when she is deserted by her husband because she is unable to bear him a son; her sister, Miriam, is always used and abandoned by men who promise her marriage; Stella is already showing signs of unhappiness; Mwendwa is suffering from something related to his marriage and Mr. and Mrs. Katangi appear miles apart; while Mulandi is unhappy in his marriage for he still cheats himself that his heart belongs to Monika. Mwendwa confides in Monika about his failed marriage as a result of his failure to have a child with his wife. To salvage the marriage, Mwendwa's wife uses love potions which poison him and on discovery of the same, divorces her. The thought of another woman does not cross his mind and he feels relieved when he shares his experience with Monika who tries to redeem him by telling him to reach out to other people instead of keeping to himself.

Monika seems to be disillusioned with marriage. As far as she is concerned, people are either putting up a show of being happy or making endless sacrifices. The contention that there are problems encroaching the marriage institution in the postcolonial Kenyan state is a pointer to the need for

women to reflect before tying nuptials. The contemporary woman requires all it takes to make her married life successful. Unlike Ogola who succeeds in making the family unit archetypal of an imagined community, Mbaya seems to be struggling to position it in the postcolonial Kenyan nation. This is attributable to the changing values and modes of life that portray marriage as an institution that is difficult to perpetuate. Although the desire to belong, have someone, something, someplace and children to call one's own still drives marriage, it has become unsustainable and hence the many failed marriages in society today. She points out that there is something deeper that keeps a marriage intact than mere declaration of love. Although love is supposed to be a pre-requisite to a union between man and woman for constant companionship, where children are born and bred, it is not synonymous to a marriage that works. Mbaya seems to be cautioning the female self to reflect seriously about marriage as a sacred institution in which family unions develop with shared ideals and happiness.

For members of the teaching staff at Kostas Secondary School the brewing of love between the Monika and Mulandi is an open secret. He almost succeeds in luring her into marriage, but not before Mrs. Katangi confides in Monika that Mulandi is a married man before his deceiving innocence completely wins Monika's heart. He is painted as unscrupulous and already entangled with Helen, a former school girl who is now the mother of his two daughters yet he does not feel obliged to marry her. He, therefore, keeps their relationship secret, but its repercussions continue to haunt him even as Monika reflects on the harm done to Helen's personal life. She does not complete her education for Mulandi impregnates her and to save his face, he invites her to live with him in an informal union without seriously considering marriage.

Monika is perturbed by Mulandi's attitude and his sexual exploitation of the female self is not lost on her. Mbaya uses Monika to redefine the power relations between genders such that she strives to run away from any eventualities that can make her intrude on the sphere of another woman and hence exhibiting gender solidarity. This is exemplified by her refusal to marry Mulandi and instead makes him reconcile with Helen and their two children. By so doing, she attempts to establish her selfhood in the public sphere as she strives to correct sexist views about women in the workplace by displaying a positive, dynamic image of women.

Mulandi is shocked by the realisation that Monika knows about his past. He blames the past for haunting his current life and dismisses Helen and her children saying, "She isn't really a wife. Just some girl I met. I made a mistake and she became pregnant. I have no intention of marrying her because I don't love her. I never loved her" (126). His emphatic denial of Helen points at the influence of patriarchy in contemporary Kenyan society where there have been attempts to silence women and to treat that which concerns them as peripheral. Peripheral treatment of women's issues in postcolonial Kenya is highlighted by Paulina Palmer who observes that "women's supposedly 'personal' problems...stem from a collective oppression originating in the imbalance of power between the sexes" (43). In this respect, we see Helen subordinated to the male power when Mulandi exploits and oppresses her by pushing her to the periphery. As a result she drops out of school and bears him two children yet he reckons that she is not good enough for him to marry.

Monika realises that Mulandi's love for her overruns the boundaries of human affection and as a result she opts out of her love relationship with Mulandi to give him a chance to resume his life with Helen and their two children. Her action opens up a new interpretive edge around marriage and the family unit. She imprints on Mulandi to put his personal life in order if he does not want to lose respect for himself in a society that still regards familial responsibility as an obligation rather than a choice based on individual whims. Furthermore, she points out to him that "running away from a problem by trying to fill [his] life with [her] or any other woman doesn't help. [He owes] it to Helen to do something positive for her and redeem [himself] in the process" (129). Her keenness to help a fellow woman is really an act of grace. She wants him to let Helen and the children come and stay

with him and also make arrangements to enrol her for examinations as a private candidate. Monika uses his relationship with Helen and their two children to help him rise to a new beginning; to change the predicament of Helen and her two children as she takes up the identity of both wife and mother. On the other hand, Monika's fragmenting self is (re)woven into a confident self all over again. Monika's endeavour to salvage Helen points at sisterhood and thus her action demonstrates the collective responsibility that women share.

Mbaya seems to portray women in the postcolonial Kenya as having more freedom to negotiate their identities and personal autonomy unlike in *The River and the Source*. The author indicts careless men like Mulandi who impregnate young females without assuming both husbandly and fatherly roles. Monika becomes the voice for the voiceless woman, Helen, who is assigned the characteristics of a woman who cannot speak. Nevertheless, her silence speaks since she becomes an appendage to Mulandi's life and affects his choice of a woman. Her silence becomes more than speech when Monika imprints on the headmaster that he has to take her as his wife. The silence imposed on Helen is oppressive and determines her destiny. Through her, the precarious place women occupy in the postcolonial nation comes to the surface and solidarity among women is underpinned.

Orientation towards an autonomous self pushes Monika to voice the ills perpetuated on women by men. Through her, Mbaya (re)conceptualises women's identity by constructing a more satisfactory account of the self that is compatible with respect for women. This becomes apparent in Monika's decision to withdraw from her relationship with Mulandi in favour of a young man, Max Kisura. By so doing, she embarks on the journey towards self knowledge, develops a new sense of independence and establishes a strong relationship with Max paving way for Helen and her children to reclaim Mulandi.

Highlighting the dialectic relationship between the postcolonial nation and the experiences of women as the backdrop against which female self is (re)conceptualised, the author makes Monika appreciate herself in the self/other binary opposition. Her awareness echoes Cixous' claim in "The Newly Born Woman" that, "the other that is confided to her, that visits her, that she can love as other" (353) is the backdrop against which women become aware of themselves. Mbaya portrays Monika as a woman who accepts herself as a woman and adopts an assertive disposition which binds up her personal experience with the postcolonial nation. She also projects women living in the nation as sharing in the postcolonial experiences which make their sense of self dialectical with the nation.

Thus, women's quest for identity gains expression in what they associate with in the postcolonial nation. This is evident in Monika's steadfast and zealous determination to embark on self discovery processes that make her realise the need to find out what teaching as a career entails, the co-curricular activities involved, and the need to have a serious love relationship. The teaching job comes to her in a more straight forward manner, but she finds it difficult to distinguish her other thoughts from the feelings of love. She realises the need to reconcile her mixed up approach to both Mulandi and Max. She settles for the latter and her gesture redeems both men: Mulandi takes in his wife and children while Max finds meaning in his life. Max confides in her his desperate predicament and contemplation of suicide following the demise of his entire family, but rescinds the decision for that is the last straw that would wipe his entire family.

Drawing the attention of the reader to the journey motif which is the concern of her narrative as she endeavours to historicise women in the nation, Mbaya ends her novel on a poetic note:

It had been a journey of sorts for Monika; a journey of challenges, heartaches, but best of all a journey of hope. There was hope for the staff and students of Kostas Secondary school, and the community at large. The future was set to brighten, breaking through the mirages and the dust- strewn environs and the distant horizons of Kostas in particular, and Murwet as a whole. Regrets she had none. (186)

The past tense the author uses in this text denotes a search backwards into time to discover the evolution of Monika's identity. The questions raised and answered about Monika are: Who am I? How have I become who I am? What may I become in future? These questions are answered since Monika's story is presented in the past, present and future tense. Her past is captured through acquisition of education; the present through social relations, teaching and co-curricular activities at Kostas Secondary School. All these endeavours legitimise Monika's future as a new social subject in the postcolonial nation, one who is eager to be a female (re)conceptualised as a coherent version of the nation who has a place in the nation as a career woman, a wife and a mother. As a result, she is able to function in both private and public spheres.

A Journey Within recounts Monika's experiences in her endeavour to perform both selfhood and nationhood. The narrative gains relevance in begetting self to a young woman, Monika. She doubles as the narrator of self and the narrated self and gains confidence, self respect, exposure and understanding as she performs both selfhood and nationhood at Kostas Secondary School. Mbaya uses education to (re)conceptualise the female self. She portrays the educated woman as being enabled by education to make the right decisions in the nation. Even when they fail, they are able to recollect themselves as in the case of Stella. She does this in recognition of education as enabling individuals to enhance development of the female self and national identity. Mbaya represents the quest for identity as changing in the postcolonial nation through what one can describe as the story of the woman only, to record the female protagonist's experience. Mbaya constructs the woman away from the patriarchal order that constrains women. Thus, *A journey Within* becomes a test on women's attempt to curve space within national discourse in Kenya. The novel is an insight into the ways in which women in Kenya have (re) conceptualised themselves as modern subjects of the nation and has made use of the ambiguous employment status created by modernisation.

Mbaya provides a window to show how young women perform nationhood, the challenges they face in their endeavour to take up careers in Kenya today. The writer historicises 'her-story' in contemporary Kenya. Her-story acquires prominence as a mode of the (re)conceptualisation of women's selfhood and seeks to examine how women's writings foster women's identity in relation to the contemporary nation. *A Journey Within* fleshes out a significant engagement of women in national issues in the 21st century. Through the main character, Monika, this her-story portrays the struggles facing young women in their effort to chart their selfhood and nationhood in Kenya in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

Women's identity as self or other is a debate that is gaining momentum in postcolonial Kenya where gender issues are prevalent. This paper has analysed perceptions of the 'self' and 'other' in *The River and the Source*, *I swear by Apollo* and *A Journey Within*. Reference to self in this paper has attempted to answer the question of 'Who am I?' Having knowledge of one's identity enables the self to point at the opposition between the self and other such that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness of another. In the patriarchal order, the self is comprehended in the binary opposition of 'self/other' and the notion of the female self is either peripheral or totally denied. The female self's conceptualisation in the patriarchal tradition gains relevance in the discussion of the woman as the 'other' since the male is given the attributes of 'self'. The feminist agenda is to alter the existing gender power relations between men and women that for instance, structure the family, community, education, economics, sexuality, and political systems.

Patriarchal society is depicted as assigning men privileged status while women are subjugated and allocated subservient roles in literary discourses that define women in relation to men. Even though the authors portray women as fitting into prescribed gender roles before they start questioning their subjective place, they categorically point out that woman is a different gender category from

men. Apparently, the self and the other are not peers and hence they cannot interact as equals. Thus, equality between men and women may not be achieved easily, but there can be reliance between gender categories for the betterment of humanity and the nation. This is possible because interdependence of men and women fosters women's self identity such that the female self does not have to become the other or lose itself in the other's essence. There is, therefore, the possibility of transformation of women in an environment that reduces the tension that characterises gender relations. Refutation of otherness aims at the transformation of women in the terms of conceptions of their abilities, values and personality. Before appropriating the question of the (re)conceptualised self, there is need to revisit how women are conceptualised in the patriarchal order.

Patriarchy conceptualises 'self' as the male, 'other' as the female. This casting of the image of the woman as the man's other overlooks women's selfhood and agency. As a consequence, even in instances when women's self is given attention, it is subordinated, diminished or belittled, when it is not outrightly denied. Conceptualisation of the female as the other fails to foster recognition of the female self and hence the patriarchal tradition does not provide an enabling environment for women to move towards realisation of fulfilled selfhood.

The female writer's perspective aims at according self to the female through reconceptualisation without objectifying women as the other or portraying them as the same as men. The concern is to interrogate how women writers view fellow women in their own narratives as they find meaning in their own experiences in the nation. The authors are perceived as articulating the female characters' relationship to the environment in which they perform nationhood and call for the need to analyse the ways in which women's narratives deconstruct or reinforce existing perceptions of the female self.

Ogola and Mbaya have particularly taken advantage of literary textual representation to resist patriarchal and contemporary modes that deny women their identity. Their writings set off the process of changing the notions on women in a bid to empower them so that they can understand and define their subjective position as well as brace themselves to redefine the patriarchal and contemporary orders that deprive women of their selfhood by creating new paradigms of the traditional and modern woman.

The writers' concerns are to retrieve the repressed dimension of the female self as evidenced by their selection of characters; characterisation and narrative strategies to demonstrate the choices women are presented with in the self/other binary opposition. It is worth noting that they do not assign their female character masculinity in their bid to claim or reclaim their identity; instead, their representation emphasises the femininity of the female protagonists as they assert themselves both as women and inhabitants of the nation. By so doing, the authors create narratives of inclusion of women into the postcolonial Kenyan nation. The texts under discussion portray the repressed circumstances that women live in and mediate upon the possibility of change through notions of self-consciousness on the part of women so that they can endeavour for their self-knowledge. In so doing, the women writers studied in this chapter, explicitly and implicitly explore the conceptualisation and reconceptualisation of the female self, a phenomenon that can either be nurtured or destroyed by other forces preying on Kenya as a nation.

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