Book review

Section: Literature, Linguistics & Criticism

Deconstructing gender myths in Margaret Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo* and Marjorie Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*

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Abstract

This paper explores how Margaret Ogola, in *I Swear by Apollo,* and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo,* deploy narrative strategies to debunk/(de)construct gender myths as perpetuated by traditional gender roles, marriage and family, and sexuality. It further interrogates how the authors champion religion and education as major factors to catalyse paradigm shift from tradition to modernity, focusing on the significance of location and culture in justifying the paradigm shifts in people's attitudes and conceptualization of gender and power concerns. Ogola and Macgoye's attempt to redefine family is examined by illuminating new perspectives that counter traditional concept of family. Within this conceptualization is the changing reality that destabilizes myths on roles and responsibilities of men and women, that is, division of labour by sex within family and society at large, against changing social trends. In so doing, the paper examines modernity, particularly the influence of location and culture, as factors that deconstruct gender myths. The concept of modernity, that is, myths behind modernity, relationship between traditional African and western/modern cultures, are examined in light of how it influences gender and power play. We consider the different approaches Ogola and Macgoye in *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo,* respectively, give to challenges of life supported by a new culture and modernity in a new cultural space provided by modern contexts.

Keywords: culture, family, gender, gender roles, marriage, myths, society

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1.0 Introduction

As a product of society, literature reflects the value systems and expectations of the society from which it springs, often embedded in myth. Roscoe (1981) observes that *much of Africa is still a land of myth, of people who continue to stay close enough to the earth to hear its pastoral symphonies and to feel strongly the spin of fate's wheel and to learn to endure* (p. 15). In this sense, as Roscoe points out, human relationships in Africa are determined to a large extent by myth. His argument however seems to imply that myth in Africa is connected to a kind of fate, a form of suffering that has to be endured. Though this argument is debatable, he brings out the idea that myth has power to determine one's behaviour regardless of the circumstances around it. Gender studies focus on relationships on the basis of gender, determined by cultural myths.

Through analysis of the selected texts, this study attempts to explore how Literature as a powerful tool that is used in articulating the experiences of a people, either propagates or debunks myths that define gender relations and the general way of life within the Luo cultural context, which informs the background of this study. Molyaer (1997) argues that good literature reflects the life and spirit of a people. Writers hold a mirror of their society; and a society finds expression through its authors, and in this way it is the co-author of literary works … in its literature and art, a society reveals its 'soul'. Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye are writers with such social commitment to their society. As Avvocato (2014) notes, culture, literature, and poetry have been regarded as revolutionary weapons, ideological tools through which African people could finally raise their voices and define themselves. The study evaluates this observation by examining how the authors provide an alternative voice through contesting myths that exist with regard to gender and power.

Marjorie O. Macgoye and Margaret Ogola use the novelistic form to articulate the experiences of men and women in the context of the Luo culture, describing their philosophy and general way of life. The study examines how they attempt to undo the mythic dichotomies that have been used to structure men and women's minds. Such myths are loaded with symbols, images and codes that represent the social, cultural and political agenda of the Luo culture and by extension a wider context as time progresses, which is the background or basis of their works. The authors are comparatively examined with regard to how they decode the symbolic presentation of the Luo world in so far as gender and power issues are concerned.

1.1 Problem statement

Myth offers a cultural and ideological foundation for gender traits, roles and identities. These in turn shape how each gender is created through performance. The use of myth as a mode of representing gender relations is thus complex, since, on one hand, myth affirms the existing gender relations while, on the other, it debunks them. This fluid and ambivalent nature of myth makes it problematic as a basis for gender description. Therefore, the study interrogated how Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Macgoye use their writing to deconstruct the myths on gender relations. It scrutinizes how the selected authors engage with myth as an ideological category to (de)construct the problematic representation of gender relations in history.

2.0 Literature review

Dhanappriya and Samundeeswari (2017) describe myth and mythology not as simple, innocent stories about old gods and goddesses, but as symbols and images, which bear political, social, historical and cultural meanings and codes. This implies that how we make sense of ourselves and our environment is encoded in myth. Myth is a powerful language through which we communicate, understand ourselves, relate and interpret our cultures. They further acknowledge that feminist thinkers and writers have used myths to lay bare the reasons, means, and consequences of the systematic oppression women have been suffering for ages. In so doing, they have tried to multiply the myths or rewrite them so as to enable

women to speak their genuine experience through female characters. This observation seems to imply that feminists attempt to exaggerate gender experiences in order to foreground the challenges faced by the female gender. If myth provides for hyperbolic presentation of gender relations as they suggest, then there is a concern on how truthful or reliable myth can be, since in its own nature it is believed to express an unquestionable truth. In this regard, it accords an opportunity to interrogate their (re)presentation of gender issues, and judge whether and why there could be any attempts of exaggeration in order to highlight the plight of the female gender. The study acknowledges that myth can be used as a tool for cultural manipulation, in order to place one gender at an advantage over another.

Cornwall (2005) argues that feminist attachment to certain ideas about women and about what is needed to improve their lives needs to be analyzed in terms of the affective power of the deeply held beliefs about women that come to be encoded in gender myths. She draws upon Cassirer and Cassirer (1946) to emphasize the emotional qualities of myth, arguing thus: "Myth does not arise solely from intellectual processes; it sprouts forth from deep human emotions … it is the expression of emotion … emotion turned into an image". Cornwall suggests that myths are narratives that do more than tell a good story, composed of a series of familiar images and devices, which work to produce an order-of-things that is compelling because it resonates with the affective dimensions of values and norms.

Myths form the basis for the formation of stereotypes. According to Bar Tal (1996), stereotypes are a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people (personality traits, attributes, intentions, behavioural descriptions). Images from stereotypes are often stable and contextualized (Moore, 2003). In the traditional African context, men and women had specific roles defined by culture. Despite the fact that men were considered privileged as in any patriarchal society, it is notable that women nonetheless play an integral role in societies, both modern and traditional. They are responsible for the upkeep of the household, agriculture, reproduction and the rearing and discipline of children. Therefore, women have consistently shaped the cultures and societies in which they live over the years. Cultural, religious and political movements have had significant effect on women with regard to their roles. In describing myths on gender and power, the study then examines how Ogola and Macgoye assign particular roles to their male and female characters, and how the characters transcend cultural expectations on gender.

It has been observed that gender roles have kept shifting with time. African women in the past, and to some extent the present, were responsible for household chores, tilling land, harvesting, caring for animals, keeping the home in order, feeding the family, caring for the children and so on. From Bar Tal's argument, such stereotypes may not be sustained due to the changing trends in society. As Moore observes, there is need to rethink about the context in which stereotypes are created, taking cognizance of the fact that changes occur with different cultural interactions. The study recognizes this gap as it seeks to understand how Ogola and Macgoye describe gender myths in their fiction, while examining how they debunk the same myths as they present changing trends in the society.

Cornwall (2005) also underscores the need to look at different domains of discourse that coexist within any single cultural setting since cultural identities are no longer fixed. Shifts in identity and power within and across the new landscapes of colonial Africa for instance gave rise to new configurations of masculinity as 'traditional' male identities were contested. Harris (1993) argues that cultural determinists strategies (cultural materialism) requires us to reject vague, subjective, and hypothetical sex differences such as innate aggressiveness, brain hemisphere dominance and innate intelligence differences. He observes that these differences are related in the most consistent cross-cultural features of the division of labour by sex. New world views in the colonial and post-colonial Africa (depicted in the fiction by Ogola and Macgoye among others) problematize the idea of specific gender identities demarcated by sex.

Appiah (1993) attempts to debunk the myth of African world in the 19th century saying:

> To speak of an African identity on the 19th century – if an identity is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology – would have been to give airy nothing a local habitation and a name (p. 174).

This assertion confirms that there is no definite African identity since there is no specific mode of evaluation that can be said to be absolutely correct. Similarly, gender identity cannot be absolute. Newell (1997) observes that gender images and ideologies constantly shift to account for their changing status. This has led to emergence of new perspectives, which interrogate, reformulate and analyse inherited popular codes. Newell looks at the impact of social changes in society and how the society responds to them. He interrogates how gender images are rewritten in Literature, pointing out that they are not static since they change with time. In agreement with his view of gender construction, this study focuses on how Ogola and Macgoye construct and reconstruct gender images in the light of changing trends within the Luo culture as portrayed in the selected texts.

Bruce (2010) also appreciates that concepts of maleness and masculinity are linguistically and culturally constructed, making them malleable and capable of shifting over time. He acknowledges that culture and environment shape these concepts, giving rise to multiple aspects of masculinity and maleness, which may exist simultaneously within any social construction. Those aspects a society favours become a privileged version of masculinity that provides a framework suggesting a hierarchy of masculinities in which one form would be idealized as hegemonic, thus receiving social privilege over other forms. Connell (2011) also appreciates that mass culture generally assumes that there is a fixed, true masculinity that exhibits signs of discipline and power. This idealized form of masculinity therefore defines it, and determines how it is performed.

Bruce further observes that men seek to obtain a level of manly respectability that would grant them social recognition and authority. He points out that men can function within the social structure in a manner that allows them more power to dictate how they might be perceived. Thus, the ease with which these discursive identities can be manipulated calls to question the instability of the seemingly established masculine authority they strive to locate within their history and socio-cultural context and subsequently seek to mimic. This is because the masculine components of these sought-after identities would appear to be the central aspect by which these individuals believe they will achieve social validation. However, the fluidity with which these figures seem to adjust their presentations of masculinity challenges any essentialist idea of masculinity as a fixed concept. There is need to reconsider the archetypal images of masculinity and femininity which the study seeks to interrogate through the selected fiction. This is done in recognition that notions of maleness and masculinity are themselves by products of the socio-cultural framework within which they exist.

Barret (2001) defines hegemonic masculinity as a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated. This masculine image is thus an ideological construction, whose identity embodies more favorable hegemonic masculinity of the period it exists, while its characteristics are constantly shaped and reshaped by an ever-changing culture. The idealized form receives more and more attention, becoming a myth that embodies the concept of masculinity. The study endeavors to explain how such myths enhance masculine constructions through the structures of power surrounding masculinity at the expense of feminine gender, and highlights changes in gender perception with the passage of time. As Barret observes, masculine identity shifts with time – its status is temporal – as it is influenced by cultural dynamism. In the endeavor to examine Ogola and Macgoye's feminine and masculine identities, the study evaluates how the language of myth makes this possible.

Odiemo-Munara (2010) appreciates that from earlier on in East African history, women engaged in various forms of resistance through the written and spoken word to seek to collapse a custodianship that ensures the woman's limited participation in the public sphere. For instance, they organized themselves and protested over socio-cultural and economic exploitation. He reiterates the assertion that colonialism enhanced the marginalization of the colonized women by 'reinforcing and extending some of the worst elements of African patriarchy' (Lihamba *et al*., 2007). Munara's observation implies that women have continued to suffer under the patriarchal African traditional rule, as well as the present. This then begs for a critical analysis of the nature of gender ideologies that have persisted over time, and how they have been perpetrated in spite of the changing culture.

Kimingichi (2000) evaluated women characters in relation to their flexibility to the changing culture alongside the evolution of a new nation, Kenya. The critic argues: "Margaret Ogola and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye build characters that break out of the community barriers that block their progress and venture into fields that are generally thought of as a male domain" (p. 86). Women are viewed as pioneers of change, probably because traditional customs and myths work against them, often restraining them from accessing opportunities for self-development. As the characters develop, they gain new insight into their situations and find alternative ways of self-emancipation. Jose also examines Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny* and *The River and the Source* as a presentation of women's emancipation, pointing out that men are insufficiently represented. While it is true that Ogola foregrounds female characters, men have a significant influence over their actions while in the background. The ideology of male domination and women subordination can thus be questioned by a careful scrutiny of the construction of male and female characters.

Barasa (2008) examines how Macgoye explores Kenya's post-colonial socio-political dynamics and their influences in the reconstruction of individual women's identities. She looks at how socio-political changes influence the formation of identities and choices of individuals in society through the example of Paulina. She also considers the strategies women employ for their individual emancipation within a society dominated by patriarchal society – especially interrogating the construction of the institution of marriage and motherhood. However, Barasa mainly considers political situation as a major determinant in the acquisition of characters' new identities that can be understood in terms of the political shifts and conditions that give rise to them. She fails to interrogate how the ideologies (cultural or even religious) drive the construction of these identities.

Barasa further argues that it is the political spaces and developments that initiate new definitions for individual characters in society. She considers women's images as closely linked to political developments in acknowledging the influence politics has on characters in their inexorable attempt to realize their potential in politics and general life. It is however notable that Paulina still holds on to her culturally defined position as a woman, and is passive in politics – which as the novel seems to suggest, is a men's domain. The changes occurring in characters' lives partly results from political changes, but majorly determined by new ideologies brought by colonial culture, which will be further examined in this study. Mboya (2003) in reference to *Murder in Majengo* also observes that men are active players in the society's politics, noting that their involvement is an opportunity to gain power. Their desire for power and control stems from the mythical expectations under scrutiny. At the same time, he notes that women are not sucked in the arena of power. Lois remains far removed from the arena of power. He notes, "Even among 'the common people', the women are underdogs". This explains why the majority can only survive by prostitution'.

Avvocato (2014) on the other hand investigates how Macgoye's female characters' identities are fashioned from different perspectives and how the women's choices and reactions to historical, cultural, personal changes and challenges shape their identities in colonial and post-colonial Kenya. She notes that women writing in Kenya represents women's criticism of a number of discriminating forces stemming from customary traditions, colonial and then post-colonial practices – as a form of contestation and

resistance. However, her analysis of these forces does not focus on myth/ ideology as the determinant of gender identity. She further observes that Kenyan women's life stories, both private and socio-historical experiences gain a new depth, being depicted and retold from a new and more authentic perspective. She acknowledges that though history does not help as a mere framework made of crucial dates and events concerning historical figures, all the main characters' stories are merged within the colonial and national story of the country. History plays a pivotal role as far as women's emancipation is concerned, by setting changes that shape and transform the novel's characters, and by designing for them new opportunities and modern spaces where to prove themselves. Avvocato here focuses on the role of history, which truly has significant influence on gender identities over time, but does not consider the power of myth in creating or enhancing certain identity/status desired.

Mboya (2003), in his study, comments that a woman's hope is not part of history; therefore she is not an active participant in history. He acknowledges that the woman cannot escape history, so her life will make intersections with history. Mboya's argument is limited to placing a woman's experiences in the context of historical events, and how these events affect her, but fails to consider the socio-cultural (mythical) contexts that are of a greater significance in the construction of gender and identity that Macgoye explores in her works. Contrary to Mboya's view, the study takes the stance that there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely. Thus unlike the historical perspective, this approach acknowledges the instability of myth, since the concept of myth is not historical.

In his study, Tawo (1997) argues that history does not impact homogenously on both men and women. He appreciates the progressive transformation of Paulina in *Coming to Birth*, as her husband Martin retrogresses. He argues that the key statement in the novel is change - and that the author, as an advocate of subtle feminist ideology, subverts repugnant socio-cultural structures that militate against women's progress. He notes that Macgoye sets out to undermine cultural practices that inhibit the women from achieving their full potential as citizens. He points out marriage of under-aged girls as a symbol of tradition with the acceptable as well as repugnant social institutions that include customs, social taboos, and overwhelming chores imposed as women's duties. He notes on the other hand that in the same context, the father-figure, brother, boyfriend, uncle and husband reign supreme – as a symbol of social oppression. He gives an example of Abiero in *Victoria* at fifteen, and Paulina in *coming to Birth* at sixteen who get into marriage life without consultation. It is the father figure that arranges marriages behind their backs. He sees the institution of marriage as an avenue to settle family problems, giving an example of the role played by Abiero as a 'sacrifice' married off to an old polygamous Otieno known to have lost his manhood. However, Tawo's study does not examine these traditions as a possible tool for power and control; rather, they are simply aspects of culture that are accepted as the norm. Unfortunately, this happens in the context of a culture whereby childless marriage has no place.

Lindholm-Csanyi (2007) in her research comments that:

> The main ideological function of Macgoye's novel is to undermine patriarchal political theory by creating space for the female subject. She has succeeded in declassifying the oppressor-victim dichotomy to demonstrate that agency and subordination are not mutually exclusive, to show that the oppressed are potential agents who can change their lives and affect others' in radical ways. In many respects this complexity is encompassed by the novel as she disconnects powerlessness and inferiority, portraying the heroine as endowed with strength and wisdom. The writer remodels the victim status tactfully, without highlighting the insurgent character of her heroine, and creates a smooth transition from an oppressive situation into a sphere of deliberate decisions and persistent actions (p. 36).

This study appreciates Csanyi's argument with regard to gender and power play in Macgoye's works, but considers this in the context of myth that guides the author's construction of the victim or heroine status of her characters. Languafe creates and shapes reality.

Jerop (2015) explores avenues through which women can engage in society in order to reverse beliefs and attitudes towards giving them equal opportunities. She observes that Ogola's narrative (*The River and the Source*) tries to correct the fallacy that conformity is an important aspect of traditional life and any girl who attempts to upset societal norms does so at her own risk. However, Ogola's female characters beginning with Akoko defy these myths, finding space for self-expression as they assert their presence. Jerop actually notes that Ogola does not disassociate her heroines altogether from traditional Luo practices and culture. Rather, she depicts the ways in which her female characters separate themselves from harmful cultural practices that limit their potential for liberation and independence. She argues that through the text, Ogola is contesting against traditional beliefs and patriarchy. This study builds on this and further examines how the authors contest myths on gender, by interrogating how gender ideologies can be used to propagate patriarchal agenda their female characters are fighting against.

Rinkanya (2015) observes that Margaret Ogola constructs her female characters in a chain of model personages, whose success in life is based on the set of values defined by Akoko, the legend in *The River and the Source*. These characters are able to survive cultural barriers and as Rinkanya notes, Ogola establishes a trend of heroines who draw their strength from Akoko, exceptional women, all through her novels. The reality of their struggle against patriarchy, their self-determination does not always meet significant support from their male counterparts, yet they themselves support their men where necessary. Rinkanya's article examines how women stand up to fight for themselves and their families. This study appreciates the power of women's bodies implied here, but also critiques possibilities of myths that continue to sideline women, while placing uncompromised expectations on them. Thus the motivation that keeps the women going, their uniqueness and the power of womanhood is examined.

Mwangi (2003) argues that in the novel, there is great tension between genders and the text focuses on the problematic war of the sexes. He observes that there is a gender war in the text, in which women win thus a deliberate effort to push the feminist agenda. He adds that '… *multiculturalism is predicated on feminism and is encouraged only when it is for the benefit of the womenfolk*.' In this, he sees the intrusion of other cultures working at the advantage of womenfolk, while destroying some patriarchal aspects of African culture. Mwangi observes a kind of deflation in the stereotypical association of men with invincibleness and women with cowardice, commenting on Akoko's sense of bravery and independence as opposed to Odongo and Opiyo's lack of self-assurance, yet they are to offer Akoko security on her way to Kisuma since they are men. This study appreciates his observation of gender stereotyping but proceeds to interrogate the power behind such formation of stereotypes which is in myth. He also notes a form of subversion of the norms and values by women, highlighting Akoko's accommodation of the cultural opposite when she allows Awiti to marry a man from Seme, considered a foreigner yet her lineage is essentially pure. He points out that the author deflates patriarchy and cultural purism, seemingly suggesting that if traditions are the breeding ground of misogyny, they should be done away with. This provides a basis for interrogation of the validity of myth, by examining how Ogola contests the existing myths on gender in the texts under study.

3.0 Methodology

This study took a qualitative approach; hence a textual analysis was done on the primary texts to generate data. The methodology involved a close reading of the selected primary texts alongside other supporting materials to provide relevant information on the contexts of the texts under study. Martin (2003) calls for methodological pluralism in the study of women (in this case gender in general), which promotes the use of new modes of inquiries such as focus groups, content analysis, observation techniques, participant observation and field research. This particular study, however, focused mainly on content

analysis through a critical and close reading of the selected primary texts. The research was largely based on library resources, as well as a wide reading of other materials from journals, newspapers, and the internet. It was centred on the study of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*. The two authors under study were purposely selected and compared with regard to their presentation of myth in terms of character construction and the literary strategies employed to foreground the concept of myth.

The study also employed a contextual approach in the study of myths to examine gender and power. As such, the relationships between characters of different gender, their position of social influence and the beliefs that motivated such relationships were studied within their cultural contexts. The perspective this study was dictated by the cultural set-up of the Luo community, which is paramount in the construction of myths, while being cognizant of the fact that such myths are continually constructed and keep shifting with time. Culture was viewed as a positive dynamic process that may be expressed through myth. The study therefore approached the understanding of myth from the point of fiction and fact. It tried to unravel the points of intersection between the two, particularly as far as the construction of gender and power relations is concerned.

4.0 Results and discussion

4.1 Deconstructing mythic conceptualization of gender

In *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, Ogola and Macgoye, respectively, explore the possibilities of gender relations, deflecting from the norms that define gender in the patriarchal society. Our reading of these texts confirms a paradigm shift in the definition of gender, and the roles and responsibilities attached to it. We further concur with Butler's (2004) argument that:

> To claim that gender is a norm is not quite the same as saying that there are normative views of femininity and masculinity, even though there clearly are such normative views. Gender is not exactly what one 'is', nor is it precisely what one 'has'. Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes (p. 42).

Butler here suggests a wholesome consideration of what gender entails, so that myths associating gender to 'what one is', giving unquestionable 'truths' about gender need to be re-evaluated. In *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, Ogola and Macgoye create circumstances that necessitate a shift from traditional gender norms, to the consideration of the actual process of normalization that may discount the very norms. As Butler (2004) further argues:

> Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. Indeed, it may be that the very apparatus that seeks to install the norm also works to undermine that very installation that the installation is, as it were, definitionally incomplete (p. 42).

Our examination of how Ogola and Macgoye deconstruct gender myths is in appreciation of the dynamism that exists in the cultural construction of the concept of gender itself; the production of the 'gendered self' and how prevailing situations undermine the binary of the feminine and masculine.

Ogola and Macgoye, in *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo,* respectively, reconsider Luo myths that traditionally regulate gender relations in the family, society, religious and political circles. Macgoye's description of how myths limit Abiero's self-discovery back in the village,

and the (re)construction of her new self as Victoria in the urban portrays many alternatives otherwise denied by traditional gender myths. These myths are discounted by emerging trends in modern society. Similarly, Ogola's description of the functioning of a multi-cultural family under the leadership of Wandia provides an opportunity to re-evaluate gender myths that form gender identities in the traditional Luo set-up.

We first appreciate the drift away from the view that gender roles and norms are deemed natural and tied to sex. However, we acknowledge the argument by Butler (2011) that the category of 'sex' is normative from the start, so that 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is also part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs. That is whose regulatory force is made as clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. In *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, Ogola and Macgoye illustrate the power of women's bodies to break away from the 'normative' and the forces that demarcate and differentiate them thus denying opportunities for self-optimization. Ogola and Macgoye's contestation of myths that attach specific roles and responsibilities to particular gender is fictionalized by considering the man and woman at home and in the marketplace. Ogola's women, in *I Swear by Apollo*, are academically and financially empowered; located in the professional marketplace, thus shifting them from the position of dependence that is traditionally expected of a woman. For instance, Wandia and Vera's professional prowess locate them in positions of authority and independence, and their actions are neither questioned nor controlled by the men around them. As Butler (1990) argues, 'sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, so that becoming a man or a woman in the cultural ideal requires compulsion often achieved through myth. Myth regulates practices that ensure this materialization takes place. These developments that empower women necessitate a reconsideration of myths that describe the cultural ideal of what gender entails.

We affirm Ogola and Macgoye's use of language to discount the linguistically constructed manhood/womanhood. They reconstruct the ideal gender, re-evaluating cultural myths and highlighting new possibilities. Social change necessitates reconsideration of the concept of womanhood that appears mysterious as Butler (1990) observes:

> To be a woman within the terms of masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men… For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency of a female 'object' who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place of authority of the masculine position (p. xxviii).

The deconstruction of gender thus becomes a question of power; a contestation between male and the unexpected female agency that responds to the patriarchal power over them. Through the success of Wandia and Vera's profession, Ogola gives voice to women both at home and in the marketplace. Macgoye also articulates the potential of women in the business and political world by empowering Victoria who controls many men. Ogola and Macgoye thus use their writing to explore how female agency prove traditionally held myths null and void, simply functioning to enhance unjustified power over women. They do so by empowering women thus giving a sense of independence. They show how myths are tailored to deny women opportunity for progress, and the false notions about femininity entrenched in community discourse. Such myths entrenched in the society's discourse have nothing in relation to being male or female, but is artificially constructed power discourses that regulate gender relations. Foucault (1972) acknowledges this:

> The univocal construct of sex is produced in the service of social regulation and control of sexuality, it also conceals and artificially unifies a variety of disparate and unrelated

> sexual functions. It also postures within discourse as a cause, an interior essence which both produces and renders intelligible all manner of sensation, pleasure, and desire as sex-specific. In other words, bodily pleasures are not merely casually reducible to this ostensibly sex-specific essence, but they become readily interpretable as manifestations or signs of this 'sex' (p. 18).

Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo* and Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* offer a critique on myths about marriage and family, and how it influences gender perceptions. Traditionally, marriage is a rite of passage that one must undergo to be socially accepted. The ritual is so elaborate and has cultural significance. Every man/woman looks forward to it in order to gain acceptance. However, Abiero'smarriage (in *Victoria*) is one of convenience that is motivated by social and economic factors, much less by myths given much significance in *Coming to Birth*. This marriage is partly motivated by her father's failure. Macgoye describes this in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*:

> …Abiero's father had not been very far-sighted. The cows just died. The crops rotted too. There were hungry days. And after all she was over fifteen…

Her family is in dire economic crisis, and she seems to be the available remedy for sacrifice. Macgoye indicates that she is not otherwise bound to marry at her age though. Her mother's attitude is different. As she describes:

> … Her mother would have liked her to help at home a bit longer – in those days girls did not marry so young because there was no need for modern fear that they would disgrace themselves if left too long. But something had to be done, and there was not much fun at home either, with many of the boys slipping off to Kisumu or even further in search of work. Some stayed in the army or away in the plantations and did not come back for a long time… (p. 10).

Abiero's mother's attitude indicates a shift from myths that require girls to marry as soon as possible. She however supports this marriage because of poverty and other kinds of social pressure. On the other hand, marriage is not a priority for men who are more eager to search for work in the urban.

Macgoye describes a society whose customary marriage allows polygamy but unlike in Paulina's case (in *Coming to Birth*) where her approval as the first wife is not required, Anyango in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* is the one seeking for a junior wife. The author describes:

> …when a message came from Gem that Anyango wanted a junior co-wife to keep up the respect of her house, and when negotiators came and the talk went on hour after hour, she was peased… (p. 11).

Kuria (2001) expresses Kabira and Ogot's description of polygamy as oppressive to women and their view of cultural tradition as serving the interest of men who have the power to apportion love to each of his wives. While this may seem to be the case in *Coming to Birth*, *Victoria* illustrates that women have the power to decide when they need a co-wife and take part in identifying one. As Macgoye fictionalizes, this is still within the Luo cultural tradition in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, but the myths become more and more fluid, allowing for other ways of working out marriages. Interestingly, in *Coming to Birth*, Martin's offer to buy Paulina a sewing machine is interpreted as '… a gift to sweeten the first wife for the arrival of the second' (p. 46). This is an indication that according to customary marriage, polygamy is permitted but the first wife's approval is not always required. More often, the second wife

is not welcome since in Paulina's case it is occasioned by the first wife's failure to meet her expectations in marriage. In Victoria's case, women have become active participants in the marriage process.

Ogola, in *I Swear by Apollo*, goes beyond cultural boundaries witnessed in the earlier sections of her earlier text where characters are keen on cultural puritanism and marriage happens only within the community. By focusing on the multi-ethnic marriage and family of Dr. Aoro and Wandia Sigu, Ogola shows how this marriage works in the face of myths and fears witnessed in the earlier text. Through John Courtney, we are also exposed to life in Canada in comparison to Africa – especially critiquing Courtney's attitude to the African concept of extended family and the value of children. The introduction of different scenarios that lead to a variety of families and gender roles necessitate a deconstructionist view of gender.

Ogola also interrogates the myth that a woman gains acceptance and identity through marriage. She acknowledges the value of children in giving identity to a woman. While she does not disapprove conventional marriage, she gives an alternative of successful single life. Aoro and Wandia's marriage thrives, depicting love and friendship as a key player in this success. The idea of love is strange during their grandmother Akoko's time. Through this, they discount the myth that love is not a necessary ingredient in a successful marriage. Macgoye, on the other hand, presents Abiero's marriage once again as a matter of convenience for both her parents and herself. She is willingly running away from the harsh life of Kano, but ends up in a loveless marriage to an old man. She describes the harshness of life in her home in Kano as "…always hungry, always suffering from either drought or flood … the same flat floor ringed with foreign hills and the lake behind, threatening to swallow you up…" (p. 9).

Ogola and Macgoye deconstruct myths that purport that marriage is a rite that gives fulfilment and social acceptance. Instead, *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* present the idea of marriage not necessarily as an ideal, but an option that can be approached differently. First, they demonstrate that there are new ways that men use to woo women and vice versa, as opposed to the traditional marriage negotiation rituals. While social, political, religious and economic factors play a crucial role in the decision for marriage and the choice of a marriage partner, Ogola and Macgoye give another perspective. Everyone makes decision according to their unique prevailing circumstances. The eagerness for marriage dwindles with time as men and women get so engrossed with career and struggle for survival.

In Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo*, Johnie Courtney is so preoccupied with his studies and profession that he does not seem to notice the girls around him who try to attract his attention. His fulfilment is in career achievement rather than getting married, as was the case in the traditional society. Alicia's choice of a fiancée is met with criticism by family members as he does not meet the threshold of a good husband for her. He seems full of prejudices for women, and finds it difficult to acknowledge Wandia as the professor while her husband is simply a doctor. He is too patronizing for the family's liking. He talks too much and likes to dominate – a show of masculinity that is outdated for the Sigus.

Macgoye and Ogola respectively highlight the African sense of value of children as a fulfilment in marriage. Ogola's *I Swear by Apollo* presents Prof. Wandia as an accomplished woman, both professionally and within her family. Ogola underscores the fulfilment she gets from her motherhood, better than her professional prowess thus:

> …PROFESSOR WANDIA SIGU, long serving chairperson of the Department of Pathology and a forefront authority on diseases of the blood, was known to her neighbours simply as Mama Danny – a title she cherished more than any other and which simply meant 'the mother of Danny (p. 17).

While motherhood is valued, Ogola does not overestimate its significance. She illustrates that in the modern society, one can still find fulfilment in career and religion. Through Wandia, she proposes a

balance between career and marital/parental responsibilities, portraying a woman as well endowed with the power to excel in both, as opposed to the traditional idea of engaging simply in homemaking and child bearing. Vera (although unmarried), on the other hand, finds fulfilment in her career as an engineer and her dedication to Christianity through her membership of the Opus Dei. She finds another family in the church and the services she offers to humanity gives her fulfilment.

Through these characters and events, Ogola seems to inquire about the concept of an ideal family, just as Macgoye does. There is a departure from the traditional concept of nuclear and polygamous family as the ideal, to possibilities of adoption and single and foster parenting. These new possibilities then discount the expectation of men and women to enter into marriage, and the pressure to have children. As Ogola and Macgoye's characters become more knowledgeable through exposure to Christian religion, education and urban contexts, traditional myths become more unstable. This creates a kind of contest, traditional myths being displaced in the way Foucault (1972) describes as pieces of knowledge attaining truth status over the course of history, and power legitimating itself through truth, hence people shaping themselves via producing truth. As witnessed in Macgoye's Victoria, for instance, such production of truth also leads to a paradigm shift from myths that define roles and responsibilities of men and women within the family. Women can stand alone and through history prove their capability as household heads. Through her, Macgoye also shows how myths attaching significance of children as an assurance of continuity in family lose value. Although she is eager to have a child, the old man (her husband) having failed to give her one, the possibility of her pregnancy betraying her makes her not only run away from her marriage but also abandon the otherwise valued baby. There is also another case of a child left in a taxi … Macgoye pointing out a shift from myths that attach so much value to children. In this case, children may be a burden, a shame or inconvenience due to responsibility that comes with parenting.

While Ogola and Macgoye deconstruct gender myths in their writing, there are also new myths constructed in the post independence dispensation that inform the setting of *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*. There is a kind of cultural hybridity, so that some of the traditional values are kept to some extent. The different cultures coexist, each of them somehow finding space to express itself. Macgoye indicates that while modernity may change one's view of life, there are cases of ambivalences in response to unique situations. For instance, Abiero in *Victoria* does not bear with the suffering in her dysfunctional marriage but cannot go back to her parents either, feeling ashamed of failing in her marriage. In spite of having gotten pregnant as expected of a married woman, she feels guilty and fears the baby may betray her for having cheated on her husband with a fisherman she has fallen in love with. Through her, Macgoye points out that besides having a baby; one needs love, friendship and acceptance for marriage to succeed. She shows a shift from myths that attach much value to children to the extent that one does all it takes to have one. Abiero in *Victoria* considers her baby a burden and would rather abandon it at the hospital and start a new life altogether. It is rather ironical that when she gets pregnant later on out of her prostitution, she feels so proud and carries herself with dignity regardless of her known occupation that has led to the pregnancy.

We also recognize that while deconstructing myths regarding gender within the family set up, Ogola still celebrates some aspects in the African concept of family, especially as she portrays it as inclusive and close-knit. She focuses on the role of women in raising strong families that are able to weather the storms of life. While she moves away from the traditionally accepted polygamous set up, she illustrates other ways through which the extended family stays together. She celebrates strong families showing how Akoko successfully raises a successful generation. As the story continues in *I Swear by Apollo*, she focuses on Wandia's unmatched strength in raising a large family, and acknowledges strong ties within family, albeit cross-cultural marriages witnessed. At the centre of the success in family is a woman; Akoko seemingly succeeded by Wandia as a source of inspiration for all.

By fronting women in the revolutionist agenda, Ogola and Macgoye illustrate the power of

women's bodies as a positive reaction to the power of oppressive traditional culture. Frye (1983) in her feminist studies argues that "… the exclusion of men insinuates that women have control over access; hence it fosters the assumption of power" (p. 104). Although it can be argued that Ogola deliberately does away with her male characters in *The River and the Source* to provide an opportunity for women to thrive in the patriarchal society, her agenda in *I Swear by Apollo* does not appear to be any contest between genders. We further note that the absence of men may not fully explore the power and potential of women. We appreciate that in providing men and women with equal opportunities in *I Swear by Apollo*, she illustrates that men and women can achieve anything in life, thus showing how families can be strengthened through gender complementarities.

4.2 Gender and sexuality

Sexuality is a matter that is handled subtly by many African writers, since it is riddled with myths and taboos. The concept of sexuality lacks precise definition since it varies with historical contexts over time, but we consider it as the way people experience and express themselves sexually. That is, their biological, erotic, physical, emotional and social or spiritual feelings and behaviours. The subject is handled with precaution, since sex is considered to be private. Ogola and Macgoye's concept of sexuality resonates with Foucault's argument that discourse on sexuality focuses on the productive role of the married couple, which is monitored by both canonical and civil law. Matters to do with sex are expected to be privately handled within marriage.

Ogola and Macgoye do not shy away from addressing issues with sexuality especially as they relate to the female subject. With the social change witnessed in the postcolonial society, there are other forms of sexual relations that necessitate conversations around sexuality. Social change occasioned by modernity among other factors appreciates human sexuality outside myths that describe what is considered the 'norm' within marriage. Foucault (1977) also observes that at some point, society ceases discussing sex lives of married couples, instead taking an interest in sexualities outside marriage: in the 'world of perversion'. Myths surrounding sexual relationships in the postcolonial situation thus become more and more fluid, as new cultures infiltrate the African culture. As Tamale (2011) points out:

> Sexuality and gender go hand in hand; both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central, crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies. They give each other shape and any scientific enquiry of the former immediately invokes the latter. Gender provides the critical analytical lens through which any data on sexuality must logically be interpreted (p. 16).

We appreciate Ogola and Macgoye's presentation of gender concerns as a question of power relations created and sustained by myths. They portray sexuality as one of the ways through which gender is expressed. Discourse on sexuality is justified in their texts by the deployment of narrative strategy that justifies the expression and appreciation of female sexuality. Ogola for instance in *I Swear by Apollo* describes the sensitivity of a girl maturing to puberty and beginning to experience her sexuality. She describes Lisa thus:

> "Lisa you have grown into such a pretty girl," Vera said looking at her. From anyone else Lisa would have spluttered with fury, but Vera looked like the kind of person who only uttered what she meant. The pretty miss looked down shyly. This was a sensitive subject for she had started puberty looking like a scarecrow with a bad case of pimples. One day the kind of thing that happens to the Lisas of this world happened to her. A boy – a huge hulk of a rugger player, the kind with a big body and not too massive head – followed Lisa home (p. 51).

The narratives as exemplified above bring out the acknowledgement of women's sexuality. The recognition of feminine beauty coupled with the girl's discomfort due to her physical changes mark an ambivalent approach to sexuality. Myths around sexuality make women shy away from freely exploring what their sexuality entails. Tamale (2011) identifies how such factors as highlighted in the narrative affect gender relations and interpretation thus:

> Things that have an impact on gender relations such as class, age, religion, race, ethnicity, culture, locality and disability – also influence the sexual lives of men and women. In other words, sexuality is deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems (p. 16).

Lisa's feeling of embarrassment is a case of self-doubt mixed with excitement. Her femininity is finally noticed. Although the interested boy is described in otherwise masculine terms '… a huge hulk of rugger player … with big body…', Lisa is still embarrassed to acknowledge her sexuality at this time. As Tamale puts it, there are many factors surrounding her exploration of sexuality, so that she feels she may attract wrong people or at the wrong time.

Macgoye on the other hand uses Victoria's experiences to illustrate the challenges facing women in the postcolonial period. Robertson (1995) observes that *'Colonialism facilitated prostitution as women in the urban were excluded from employment, except for being occupied as maidservants. Some women, for lack of other responsibilities engaged in prostitution in Kenya too'* (p. 44). Macgoye's narrative explains the circumstances that lead Abiero to prostitution. In her desperate situation, the woman who rescues her is a caring prostitute. Recognizing this trade as a source of livelihood she begins to appreciate this new dimension of her sexuality:

> She submitted dutifully as she had been taught, more like what she had experienced with the young fisherman, but different again, since it regarded her only indirectly. Soon she got used to it. The provocation was not difficult for her, as she revolted from the whole humdrum experience of her marriage. To be wanted was a pleasure. To draw from Sara the cash for a new dress, a bottle of hair oil, ear-rings, was a delight. She began to talk to the men… (p. 24).

Victoria's new self-discovery enables her to play out her sexuality and empower herself as an independent woman. This transformation in Victoria resonates Foucault (1998) who also challenges the commonly held assumption that power is essentially negative, repressive force that operates purely through the mechanism of law, taboo and censorship. Victoria's repulsion of myths and taboos that construct her sexuality and her eventual discovery of her sexuality empowers her devoid of any act of domination or coercion. She becomes more conscious of herself and appreciates her body and womanhood. This power is constituted through knowledge, the acceptance and understanding of 'truth' behind sexuality. As Foucault further argues, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. Myths ascribing power to specific people under specific circumstances do not hold as regimes of truth pervading society keep shifting.

Ogola in *I Swear by Apollo* approaches sexuality differently. She is more concerned with the aspect of morality so that women do not consciously or deliberately express their sexuality with the intention of exercising power over men. It is the power of femininity that she celebrates. For instance, she describes Alicia as follows:

> Though she was reserved and withdrawn, men were attracted to her in an irresistible but paralyzing sort of way – as if they must destroy themselves in order to achieve actualization,

> like the final ecstasy of a moth in a flame. They flocked her door, rather her vicinity, but then remained tongue-tied, racking their brains as to what to do or say next in the face of such passivity – she seemed to generate no currents whatsoever and met every proposition with a slight amused smile and a look which conveyed nothing more than an emphatic recognition of another soul in its value of tears. To know her would be to know all the joys and sorrows of manhood, and that woman, though so obviously accessible, was not only unknown, but was essentially unknowable.

Alicia's expression of her sexuality only makes her more mysterious to men, who gain more interest in her. The more mysterious, the more inaccessible, the more she gains power that attracts men helplessly towards her. Butler (1990) reiterates Beauvoir's explanation that *'To be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men'* (p. xxiiiv). Her otherwise helpless passivity is so powerful that it renders men speechless. The mystery behind her passivity is so powerful in a paralyzing way that is described as destructive to men.

Unlike Macgoye's Victoria who uses her sexuality as a means of survival, Ogola's women are independent. Their sexuality is within the moral standards she advocates for. The women in *I Swear by Apollo* appreciate their sexuality and are fully in control of their circumstances. Ogola's female characters engage in relationships leading to marriage. In her representation of sexuality, Macgoye portrays poor and middle class women who attempt to get out of their sexual relationships that result from their struggle for survival. Although she does not necessarily advocate for prostitution as a means of livelihood, she presents it as a possible alternative for survival in an environment that is so difficult for women. She shows that these women do not rejoice in their prostitution due to the myths surrounding the trade. Such women are shunned:

> 'In my country a Malaya cannot go home.'
> 'But I am not a Malaya. I am married. My husband is old and unkind to me. Also he is not very much of use as a husband. Therefore they must buy me back. But I was properly married. They received the cow of virginity for me' (p. 25).

Although Victoria's explanation of her circumstances seems justifiable, it is unfortunate that women are responsible for challenges of sexuality within a marriage. No one would easily understand Victoria's predicament. This is a challenge facing many women, which Macgoye explores in order to illustrate how women suffer silently and are condemned for their sexuality.

Macgoye's engagement with the issue of prostitution gives it a different outlook. Through Victoria, she illustrates how women can use prostitution as a stepping stone and move ahead to earn honest living, thus celebrating the power of womanhood. As Senkoro (1982) acknowledges, many African literary writers avoid addressing the issue of prostitution because it provokes universal condemnation and is imbued with taboos. Such myths/taboos keep pushing women further and further, so that they hardly find a way of expressing themselves and end up losing their self-esteem. Victoria's later life as a business woman is respectable. She gains a positive self-image as a successful businesswoman and would rather forget her old self. Her decision to start a new life (just like her daughter, Lois) shows the good intentions of many women who cannot access any other kind of empowerment but use what is at their disposal to survive in the patriarchal society.

Ogola and Macgoye also show sexuality as not simply addressing sexual relationships, but touch on a wide range of issues including pleasure, the body, dress, self-esteem, gender identity, power and violence. As Tamale (2011) further explains:

> … It is an encompassing phenomenon that involves the human psyche, emotions, physical sensations, communication, creativity and ethics (p. 17).

Ogola's characters have more alternatives of expressing their sexuality. She illustrates that one does not experience womanhood or manhood within sexual relationships. Vera's decision to remain single in spite of having been in a relationship that would have led to a promising marriage indicates the power that one has to decide his/her sexuality. The same case is expressed in Fr. Peter and later Fr. Tony. The family accepts their decision and look up to them because of their success. There is no ultimate truth concerning the ideal sexuality. Foucault (as cited in Rabinow, 1991) says this about truth:

> 'Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true'.

As Foucault puts it, the politics of truth are aimed at exerting power and control for the benefit of some and at the expense of others. The authors express a possibility of various forms of sexuality that can be freely experienced without being intimidated by myths that construct 'truth'.

Ogola and Macgoye use narratives in *I Swear by Apollo* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* respectively to highlight experiences of women in the postcolonial/ modern world. They portray how women play out their power in different ways. I acknowledge that women encounter more challenges especially with regard to acceptance due to their gender. As Bhabha (2004) reiterates, cultural, historical and racial background always hinder transformation to the new. This is true of Victoria. She wants to forget her old self as Abiero, but the arrival of Lucas Owiti and his claims of rights for care by Victoria is a thorn in her flesh. He not only reminds her of her past, but makes Victoria live through it over and over again. Lucas demands for work from Victoria, with so much confidence as he claims Victoria is obliged by virtue of her marriage:

> 'Odero – is he a big man, then? Still, he cannot give people orders.'
> 'No, but you have an obligation, he says.'
> 'What obligation?'
> 'You were married there.'
> 'Yes, but I was bought back. The marriage is gone, long ago. Nothing remains of it.'

Ogola shows how women can be freed from myths about marriage which comes with many obligations. In the new found freedom, women are able to reinvent themselves and express their sexuality without fear instilled by cultural myths that denounce such discourses. Sexuality is a power discourse that challenges gender myths as women and men grapple with unique day to day challenges in the modern world. Inasmuch as the African concept of sexuality portrays women as sexual objects, Ogola and Macgoye do not portray women as objects rather than subjects of sexual power. Abiero for instance is ready to fulfil her marital expectations but the old man who is her husband fails in his sexual obligations. This frustrates Abiero who seeks love and finds a way of expressing her sexuality outside the dysfunctional marriage. This seems to be consistent with Connell's (2011) observation that hegemonic masculinity is defined by physical strength and bravado, suppression of vulnerable emotions such as remorse and uncertainty, economic independence, authority over women and other men, and intense interest in sexual conquest. Macgoye uses Odhiambo's failure to fulfil his conjugal duty as shift focus from the celebration of male

superiority, showing possibility of failure by men. At the same time, Abiero's 'rebellious' attitude is an expression of women's sexuality: a form of power over men, rather than object of exploitation by men.

Ogola and Macgoye also highlight their concern for morality in society and indicate how gender influences matters relating to morality. We note that the concept of morality in itself is ambivalent, with every society determining what is considered moral or immoral. Every society can determine what counts for morality, etiquette, religion and law. In a way, morality is not in every code of conduct raised by society, but that which is generally acceptable and meets certain conditions deemed rational. The authors highlight matters of morality that relate to gender but may transcend sexuality. As pointed out earlier, Macgoye uses prostitution (which is considered immoral) as a stepping stone to a future life of integrity and success. She, however, invalidates myths that relate women's expression of sexuality to immorality, as she shows how women use their sexuality to deal with life challenges and attempt to emancipate themselves from such predicament. Lois (in *Murder in Majengo*) has learnt to accept her situation and attempts to get out of it. She says:

> Why shouldn't I upset anyone I please? Do you think I have to mind my manners with a houseful of Majengo tarts? And I am a secondary student. Victoria explained to me a long time ago that I had to keep my distance from them. I don't blame her for what happened in the past, but that's not the way I want to live or the way she wants me to. Victoria knows times are changing – you wait and see (p. 113).

Through Lois, we see the determination of women to make things right. Lois finds herself alone in a harsh environment with a myriad of challenges for the teenage girl that she is. Her ability to conquer is an indication of the power that lies within. She rejects several offers for sexual escapades in exchange of the money she so desperately needs to pay her school fees. Living in a brothel in the absence of her mother, her ability to manoeuvre through the hurdles illustrates how women can maintain moral standards.

Lois' determination to live a different life from her mother's is an indicator of hope that such a label of a prostitute will not follow her. She has to compromise her integrity by lying about her relationship with Obonyo, her benefactor. This concurs with Barry's (1996) claim that the inherent immorality of prostitution destroys the dignity of all women. The introduction of her teacher, Ms Vera Willet, to the scene is a short reprieve for her, as she temporarily takes up the role of a maid while Obonyo's sexual interest shift to Vera. Ms. Willet's dignity is already compromised by virtue of being a woman. Ms. Willet begins to understand the myriad of challenges Lois is trying to cover under her lies, and determines to save her.

Women are able to win the trust of powerful men and have become informants aiding their criminal activities. Victoria's sexual power enables her interact with influential politicians such as Wasere who need her help to escape prosecution. Feminine power in Victoria's case is not limited to her ability to attract men but also her acquired skill of extracting money from them. Victoria for one had hidden Wasere and arranged for his escape. The brothel turns out to be a place not only for sexual escapades but also a hiding place for criminals as well as a centre of power for women. Victoria becomes more and more powerful and dependable as *'the eyes and ears of a whole urban district and had great men briefly at her beck and call…'* (p. 58). The information Victoria possesses empowers her, besides her sexual encounters. She remembers these times as 'her days of power'. She however does not regret her decision to start a new life altogether. She ponders:

> Did any of the men she had used in the days of her power really know who she was? Did they know why she was like this? She had cut herself off from the old identities… (p. 59).

At the same time, women engage in criminal activities to gain more and more power, 'using men in their power'. Victoria is also said to have procured a dead man's identity card for a young man who had recently come out of prison and finding it hard to get a job (p. 59). Yet she experiences the strongest sense of potency when her pregnancy begins to show. In this, Macgoye celebrates motherhood as the most valuable expression of the power of womanhood. While Victoria's pregnancy results from prostitution, her decision to keep and value it is a representation of holistic view of feminism, implying that women should strive to preserve their womanhood regardless of their circumstances.

Ogola also deals with moral responsibility, focusing on the failed parenting by John Courtney. Johnny harbours bitterness. She illustrates the damage this irresponsibility can cause. Johnnie laments: *'But why doesn't he come just once to see us? It is killing me. It has probably killed my sister already.*' (p. 28). Ogola shows how Wandia has managed to cover up this missing link. She is so reasonable in her guidance. Her strength and wisdom is contrasted with Courtney's seeming lack of concern for his children.

> 'You are a man now, Johnny, and it is unworthy of a man first of all to make such rash judgment without bothering to get sufficient facts; for example, he could be dead. Secondly, I think you are having a rather unmanly attack of self-pity.' She was a very understanding and gentle person, but she was known to absolutely loathe whining and whiners – she dealt with such persons with a curtness bordering on rudeness. She herself possessed the tensile strength of steel and had the peculiarly feminine virtue of durability to an extraordinary degree (p. 29).

Ogola's narrative strategy in *I Swear by Apollo* focuses on individual characters in relation to the rest. She dedicates each chapter to specific characters, describing their innermost feelings and experiences. She portrays the western understanding of African sexuality and through Courtney illustrates the impact of myths on sexuality in the context of mixed race relationship. Commons (1993) says this concerning African sexuality:

> Rather than being a characteristic of African cultures, sexual obsession was a reflection of the repressed sexuality of the British. By describing the African as a lascivious beast, the Victorians could distance themselves from the 'savage' while indulging in forbidden fantasies. More importantly, by laying the blame for lust on women alone, colonizers made themselves blameless for their own sexual relations with African women (p. 4).

From this description, Commons shows how myths on sexuality are created to label Africans as savages while the British continue to exploit them breaking all taboos that forbid such sexual engagement with savage subjects. In the same manner, Ogola's focus on John Courtney's life reveals the circumstances that led to the disintegration of his family. The resentment his son harbours against him is due to the reasonable labelling of him as blameless, yet he abandoned his children when they needed him most. Ironically, he is utterly destroyed by his love for Becky, rather than hatred for her. In spite of her carefree attitude, he describes Becky as 'the beautiful woman who had made him want to make his home'. The kind of love he had for Becky is unique. Ogola describes:

> He had loved her perhaps more than one should love another human being, with his entire being. But in his heart he had suspected that she really did not belong to him or to anyone else for that matter. She was one of those people who belonged entirely to themselves, for the simple reason that they could, apparently, only love one person and that person was basically their own self (p. 98).

This description of Becky's self-centeredness should absolve Courtney of irresponsibility for his family. He loved her in a kind of self-destructive way. Ogola shows that besides Becky's betrayal, Courtney loved her and wanted to take his parental responsibility. She describes:

> Without bitterness, he could still remember the pain of her betrayal and the casual way in which it had been done, but nothing could really justify the way he had abandoned his children. He had wanted to come – oh how often he had wanted to come, especially when he had heard that she had died, and in such a terrible way too. But somehow his relationship with her had left him feeling like a maimed bird – with only one wing and therefore unable to fly (p. 98).

Courtney's love for Becky is so strong that it makes him helpless though he wants to take responsibility for his children. Ogola describes his feeling 'like a maimed bird'. This form of imagery describes the power of women's sexuality – how it can strip men of their power making them desperately in pursuit of women. When he comes back, Courtney hopes to correct his past mistakes and reclaim his position as a father. I take note of the role Sybil plays in this reconciliation. Ogola proves wrong myths that show women as enemies of themselves. Sybil appreciates Becky's exotic beauty without jealousy although she is not as beautiful, and encourages John to reconnect with his children. She is very welcoming and supportive of the duo. She encourages Courtney:

> … You will have to go and see the children, if you can call them that. Try to bring them back with you if they are willing. I would love to meet them (p. 102).

Becky and Sybil are described as different; the former preoccupied by her sexuality and the latter her creativity and art. This notwithstanding, Courtney finds his life complete with the women who are conveniently undemanding.

Ogola concludes the novel in a kind of a narrative closing formula indicating a life lived 'happily ever after'. The ultimate success in achieving a strong family, Johnny and Alicia married and living happily, with their father and stepmother back in their lives. All these is shown as the effort of Wandia, the legendary woman. The strength of the women in the text cannot be underestimated, and is the driving force behind the success and unity of the family.

4.3 Contribution of the paper

Koester (2015) acknowledges that gender is one of the most persistent causes, consequences and manifestations of power relations. She posits that power and politics in the private sphere shape power relations at all levels of society, adding that gender hierarchies mark wider economic, political and social structures and institutions, and the opportunities for peace and prosperity from feminized sources of power. It is notable that Kenya has made significant strides in the quest for gender equality, especially with the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010. The constitution is one way of generating power and control. For instance, affirmative action is one way feminists would applaud as allowing women opportunities to power as well as relieving women from male domination. Kenyan literary writers have portrayed how gender relations have worked out, as well as pointing out the desire for economic, political and social liberation of the female gender. This study attempts to show how power continues to be played on the basis of myth, and how it is considered as lying within a wider historical, political, economic, and social forces constraining opportunities for action. This provides invaluable insight for formulation of relevant policies on gender issues.

5.0 Conclusion

The postcolonial situation in Kenya as expressed by Macgoye and Ogola poses many challenges that necessitate re-evaluation of gender myths to avail equal opportunities for men and women. Having gone through a season of physical, social and emotional turmoil, Africans find a new sense of identity out of their desire for freedom. Alongside this, gender roles have been redefined, yet at the same time it is evident that some aspects of traditional culture still persist. By shifting their characters from rural to urban setting, Ogola and Macgoye allow for a new way of life, while their characters are still conscious of traditional myths that remind them of their cultural roots. This illustrates the fluidity of myth with regard to the nature of postcolonial cultural identities. In the novels, they demonstrate Foucault's argument that power is not wielded at all, but is expressed in various ways, each body being a potential vehicle of power.

I Swear by Apollo is Ogola's project indicating strive to achieve morality in family and profession, a desire for love, dedication and genuine concern and understanding of one another. Her focus on individual characters goes beyond personal/private lives to their profession. While she portrays women of excellence, she shows that gender is not a matter of contest, but appreciates the strength and contribution of womanhood in achieving a desirable all inclusive society. By handling her characters individually, she shows the need to consider the prevailing situations and thus become considerate, not passing judgement on one's acquisition of ideal manhood or womanhood. Through the text, Ogola shows the value of humanity and morality as more significant than gender considerations.

Macgoye, on the other hand, focuses on reconsideration of sexuality, also absolving women from myths that brand them evil with regard to their social orientations especially prostitution. She indicates the ability of women to rise up from the place of being objects of power, to becoming vehicles of power and earning respect in society. From the two authors, it is clear that gender myths have been maliciously appropriated against women, but they have managed to extricate themselves and start a new life altogether. They are shown as capable of total independence, focus, leadership and success at the level of family and society. They illustrate that traditional myths have been rendered powerless by many factors such as location, religion, education and other forms of empowerment that accords women opportunities for self-discovery outside the confines of myths that defined their being.

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