ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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This thesis has been submitted with my approval as university supervisor.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Masheti Masinjila, for his tireless supervision and constant encouragement even during moments of academic despair; to my academic mentors at Kenyatta University, Prof. Nana Wilson Tagoe, Prof. Francis Imbuga, Dr. Kisa Amateshe, Mr. Austin Bukenya, Waveney Olembo and Dr. Nyambura Mpeshsa for showing me the way: to my mother Ombewa nyar Yongo for whipping the first sense into a school boy: Henry Koweru, my untiring financial supporter and Jeniffer Wasiang’a for wearing her fingers typing the thesis: not forgetting all my colleagues in the academic endeavour, Mbugua Mungai and Elizabeth Kabui.
DEDICATION

To my beloved wife Zeruiya Kezia Abungu and my sons Tawo Nigel and Yongo Cecil for their patience, sacrifice and capacity to endure untold hardship as I sojourned in the book world.
THESIS ABSTRACT

This study investigates the extent to which the historical, mediated by Macgoye’s ideological disposition, shapes and determines character transformation especially when such characters happen to be marginalised women.

It argues that Macgoye valourises women characters detailing issues affecting them in order to sensitize the society to have a fresher glance at their plight. History, according to Macgoye, does not impact homogeneously on both men and women. This is clearly reflected in progressive social transformation of Macgoye’s model female character, Paulina of Coming to Birth while her husband Martin retrogresses.

Macgoye’s key statement in all her novels may be summarised as change, which is conceived of in the form of a journey motif. The journey is gradual and may occupy the whole of one’s life. The journey, begins in the village - a symbol of restricted space - where men rule supreme and ends in the city which offers economic and social space leading to a wholistic transformation. The city is seen as offering the much needed alternative choice for social and economic progress.

Macgoye shows clearly that the social economic and political transformation can never be divorced from the historical events that unfold within the larger area of the nation. That is why she ties individual freedom to that of a nation at large. Her characters are presented as tragic individuals consistently struggling to liberate themselves from the forces of oppression. It is their success against such forces that makes them heroic.

As an advocate of subtle feminist ideology, Macgoye subverts repugnant socio-cultural structures that militate against women’s progress. Women are depicted as rebelling against pre
arranged marriages which reduce them to mere objects of exchange. Mothers move away from old-age maternal instinct which strictly prohibits neglect of children, to abandon their children if such children are used by society to tether their spirits to unreciprocal marriages.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The development of characters in historical novels is defined by the historical forces that nurture their existence within the contexts of the novel. The fundamental assumption behind the representation of character within the historical process is that man's destiny is shaped by the historical forces within which he finds himself. The assumption is the basic assumption of historical realism whose view of characters within space and time also conceives of characters as progressing and growing in response to reality.

But the way in which the historical impacts on a character is also ideologically mediated and dependent on both the historical perspective of the writer and his/her personal history and experience. Questions then may be raised when the representation of characters occurs within a society in transition from colonialism to independence. What issues of ideology may involve the quest for freedom and impact on representation and characters. Where most of the characters involved in transformation through history are women, from whose point of view experience is explored, what necessary impact does the privileging of a female character within a patriarchal world mean for the representation of character. Thus our study explores the extent to which the historical, mediated by Macgoye's ideological disposition shapes and determines character transformation. But the boundary between history and literature as disciplines that strive to retrieve the past imaginatively is tenuous. For a creative writer, history ceases to be strictly and precisely the sum of what happened. A creative writer may infuse history with subjective meaning beyond the literal implications.

Thus a writer of fiction may use historical material in a number of ways to create works...
of art. He or she may choose to delineate as truthfully as possible the events of a historical epoch. The characters are modelled as true historical figures, performing on a realistic historical time frame. The early 19th century historical novelists relied on such presentation. However, this kind of representation is restrictive, for the writer of fiction is judged not only by imagination and novelty of representation, but also by the truthful portrayal of reality. Yet the truth of the past is almost unrecoverable. It is this kind of representation that has put Kenya’s best known author, Ngugi wa Thiong’o on a collision path with Kenyan historians. At a conference of the Historical Association of Kenya in August, 1984, at the University of Nairobi, William Ochieng and fellow historians accused Ngugi of distorting historical reality. Ochieng in a paper, "The Ghost of Jomo Kenyatta in Ngugi’s Fiction" claims that the writer in his early fiction, Weep not Child (1964) created a fictional Kenyatta from village tribal gossip and went further to say that Ngugi’s shift of focus in his later fiction, A Grain Of Wheat (1967) and subsequent portrayal of Kenyatta as a traitor may be traced to the authors earlier erroneous assumptions. Ochieng then concludes that Kenyatta never changed and that it is Ngugi who never thought "It necessary to do research before creating a novel. He believes apparently that poetic licence is enough to guide the writer to the truth" (Ochieng 1984:8). Henry Mwanzi (1984), even goes further to claim that Ngugi’s works lack originality because the writer lacks a philosophy of history and a theory of society.

The above historians must be reminded that literary writers do not write as if they are historians. Indeed Wanjala (1984) countered their arguments by noting that these historians lack literary insight. The same historians may borrow a leaf from Nkosi who reminds them thus:
It is important to note that we are dealing not with pure historical facts, if there is such a thing but with fact transformed into myth, out of the raw materials of history the novelists construct for us fiction. (1981:31)

Ayi Kwei Armah has successfully relied on myth and folklore to write *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978). For a writer, then history becomes a repertoire from which the artists extract facts which are finally recreated into a subjective vision after which the said facts never remain the same.

We may note from the above arguments that the truthful portrayal of historical reality is restrictive and problematic. The investing of reality with a subjective perception appears the better option. It gives the creative writers the leeway to imaginatively recreate a given historical reality and project new sensibilities for society.

Macgoye as a writer reconstructs characters showing how historical events impact and shape their ontological world view. This kind of representation provides her with room to manipulate historical events and hence valourise women’s position and status by subverting the patriarchal phallicism yet at the same time escaping scrutiny that goes with realistic portrayals.

Moreover Macgoye’s characters are not idealised. Macgoye believes that every individual in society given a chance is capable of making history. Ngugi’s characters in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), for instance lack authentic individualities. His main focus is on the historical impact of the events on its victims as a community. The individual dramas are not to be seen in isolation but as contributing towards the collective community experience. Characters then are reduced to types who fit into the author’s scheme of things to serve a purpose.

These characters, then appear to solely propagate the writer’s ideological dispositions.
Ngugi’s major characters are men. Women play the traditional roles of mother, wives or girlfriends. They act within a framework designed and executed by men. Macgoye’s women are the main players. But they are ordinary individuals who elevate themselves to heroic status through struggle.

Indeed by focusing on the individual as the centre of historical drama, Macgoye departs decisively from the beliefs of historical novelists; the individuals are insignificant viewed against historical landmarks that shape their perceptions. She weaves historical facts into fiction demonstrating their impact on her characters to show that man’s destiny is shaped by the reality that reside within a given environment. It is this unique approach, this revolutionary attempt at the use of historical material to create fiction that makes our study significant.

As a novelist, Macgoye has gained prominence not only in Kenya but also abroad. Her *Coming to Birth* (1986), having won the Sinclair prize for Literature in 1986. However, her literary prowess is unmatched by critical works. Our study has filled this important gap.

Moreover, Macgoye as a female author writing in a world hitherto dominated by male authors, has ideological differences with the likes of Meja Mwangi, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and David Maillu among others. Macgoye’s representation of female sensibilities is markedly sensitive and sympathetic to women’s plight. It is such a difference that prompted an enquiry.

To reveal Macgoye’s deeper insight, we chose to do an investigative study. Macgoye’s all four published novels have been thoroughly studied in the light of our topic. We have examined *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (1972), *Coming To Birth* (1986), *Street Life* (1987), *The Present Moment* (1987) and *Homing In* (1994). It is important to point out that *Homing In* has been given a scant treatment in certain chapters because its setting does not
blend well with the other novels. Moreover, the central character is white which makes her experiences completely different from those of the others. Some of the action take place in England and are of no relevance to our discussion.

Our study has been governed by several assumptions. That the progress of a character within a given historical reality illuminates the forces that shape its transformation and growth. That the transformation of a female character within a patriarchal world may be ideologically mediated by the category and gender.

The study set out to establish the link between character transformation and socio-historical changes, and we have established a one to one relationship between the two. That character transformation is directly governed by the events that unfold within a given historical epoch.

In our analysis of Macgoye's novels, we have adopted the theory of new historicism. It is futile to attempt an analysis and interpretation of Macgoye's novels without a thorough understanding of the historical context that has created them. This study had therefore used a theoretical framework that lays great emphasis not on the text per se but the text and its extraneous influence. Such a theory is what prompts Miller to write:

There has been a massive shift of focus in literary study since 1979 away from the intrinsic, rhetorical study of literature towards study of extrinsic relations of literature, its placement within psychological, historical or sociological contexts. (1989:102)

A theory that places such an emphasis is the theoretical framework of new historicism. Murfin defines new historicism as "a critical movement interested in providing a thick description of historical contexts of literature." (1991:331)

Structuralist critics believed that a text could speak for itself. They believed that the
meaning of a work of art is lodged in the words of a text as they appear in the text itself. This approach denies the important socio-cultural and ideological basis of a text which is very essential in a meaningful interpretation. This is the gap that new historicism endeavours to fill.

Post Structuralist critics have accused their Structuralist counterparts of neglecting this important area. They point out that reading the text per se "is vain because there are conscious or linguistic or historical forces which can not be mastered" (Selden 1986: 109).

New historicism views the discipline of history and literature as intertwined. It studies literature in the context of social, political and cultural history. New historicists "try to establish the interconnection between literature and the general structure of the period." (Selden 1986:107) They maintain that writing, for instance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is in itself both a political and historical fact. It is a comment by Shakespeare on the socio-political spirit of England during the setting of the play. The proponents of new historicism believe that works of literature are influenced by the reality of the day (Greenblatt 1980). They recommend that literature should not be treated as a special discourse separate from other texts by lawyers, theologians, scientists or historians. The theory advocates for a systematic approach to the study of literary text as follows.

(a) A consideration of the period in which the novel is set
(b) The history of the period in which the novel is produced
(c) The context in which we now read and interpret the novel.

New historicism then, has been the most suitable theory for this research. It is the theory that has helped us unravel the extraneous factors that inform Macgoye's writing. It is the theory that has helped us explicate the intricate inner ontological world of her characters as they grapple with change in its various phases.
But since Macgoye’s novels are dominated by female characters, it has been prudent to establish the authors ideology with regard to female characters and their sensibilities. The theory of gynocriticism has been of immense import to our study.

Gynocriticism was coined by an eminent female critic, Elaine Showalter 1977, to describe a reading of texts from a female centred epistemology. The theory advocates that women be viewed as constituting a separate community, with a separate culture and customs. Thus as a different community, women have faced a hurdle of oppression, socially, culturally and historically. To understand women as an oppressed community, demands a reading of literary texts from a feminist perspective.

Women writers, consequently, are viewed as engaging in a conscientisation process which aims at reversing this traditional patriarchal attitude and creating a new social vision for women in society. New historicism and its emphasis on extraneous factors and their influence on fictional works is the best post-Structuralist theory for this study. It emphasizes the relationship between a historical epoch and the fictional writings that are its products.

It is such a concern that makes Lukacs (1962) to underscore the importance of realistic portrayal in the writing of historical novels. History, in his view, is only important if the experience is not isolated. He argues for instance that the French revolution created a mass experience of historical events that writers find important to depict in their fiction. Lukacs advocates for a vivid recreation of the past, its people and the circumstances under which they acted. It is for this reason that he emphasizes what he calls “the specifically historical, that is derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age”. (1962;19). However, Lukacs advocacy for the typification of characters in history ignores the
tremendous potential that accrues from a manipulative and imaginative delineation. Thus while his discussion on the classical form of the historical novel is significant for the study, it ignores the fundamental tenets of Macgoye’s depiction: the rooting of fiction in the imaginary reality.

The non-reliance of Macgoye on the historical time frame and the typification of characters, affords her opportunity to expand the horizon of her female characters and yet escape the restrictions of the realistic portrayals.

Atieno (1974) sets the tone for this research in his stimulating essay “The historical sense and creative literature in East Africa”. He observes that both a writer of fiction and a historian are engaged in recreation of a past that is intangible. The yardstick for measuring success lies with individual genius which helps a literary writer or historian to transcend the apparent and recover materials that deepen the experience of the present. Atieno, believes strongly, that a writer of fiction must not ignore the historical context that nurtures his/her fiction. It is for this reason that he accuses the "expatriate writers", Robert Ruark, Elspeth Huxley and Isaac Dinessen of misrepresenting African viewpoint in their fiction. Macgoye’s strongest point, then, which sets her apart from these authors, is her mastery of historical context.

Ngara (1982) views Ngugi wa Thiong’o as a writer with a strong mastery of historical contexts of his novels. He says that Ngugi varies his narrative style to reveal two sides to his writing. At one point, Ngugi is the writer of fiction and yet at another level he is a biographer. In *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Ngara notes, Ngugi, weaves history into fiction in a way that a reader without the historical knowledge of - Mau Mau - may not embark on the interpretation of the novel. Ngugi, just like Macgoye, gives historical dates, actual names of historical
characters and events as if the historian has changed places with the writer of fiction.

But the mastery of context, does not entail the recovery of the "truth" of the past. Selden (1986) and Marfin (1991) concur that the truth of history is unrecoverable. According to this school of thought the meaning we give to a historical past lies with the current existing reality and the value of that past for the present generation. Thus they argue that the interpretation of the historical novel will largely depend on the meaning we attach to it in the present. This is an important observation because the meaning we give to Macgoye's texts accrue directly from the summation of contexts, the texts themselves and the present circumstances under which the texts are read.

It is this realisation that makes Miller in Cohen (1989) to call for a mediation between rhetorical reading of texts, (Wayne C. Booth 1961), and an extrinsic study as advocated by Tony Bennet (1990). According to Miller, literature is not merely language in operation, it is much more about human life and society. To ignore the extraneous factors that have a bearing on a work of art, is to miss the point. Graham terms it a false start when he writes:

Any criticism of the novel which neglect its ties with historical actuality is false to the novels real values and empty when it should be full. (1966:117)

Critics as well as authors must pay due attention to contexts if they are to be believed. Tagoe (1989) outlines the options open to writers of fiction and the use of historical material. In a paper that focuses on Ayi Kwei Armah's vision as a literary artist, Tagoe argues that a historical vision is a subjective vision that depends entirely on an author's perception of reality and personal ideology. Authors, then even, when using similar historical events to create fiction, will end up with subjective literary pieces. This paper helps us to focus sharply on our study.
Bukenya (1988), Kamotho (1989) and Kibera (1991) recognise Macgoye’s strong historical sense in writing fiction. They write that Macgoye’s use of historical reality in her fiction gives the text an air of convincing factuality. Unfortunately, these critics do not go further to show how the author achieves this. They also recognise Macgoye’s strong feminist message. Bukenya writes:

What is presented to us in *Coming to Birth* is briefly a strong assertion of the strength and dominance of women and the relative irrelevance and unimportance of men in social affairs. We note that Martin shrinks and dwindles to an appendage of Paulina in the story while she becomes a pillar of strength. (1988: 75)

However, the above critics fail to explain the author’s motive with regard to her deliberate bias for female characters. Our study has determined the motive behind this representation.

Masinjila (1995) in a paper presented at a seminar at the British Council, Nairobi, gives a feminist interpretation to *Coming to Birth* (1986). He traces the three different phases of ‘birth’ that Paulina undergoes to achieve social, political and economic recognition which plunges her to a hitherto unimagined prominence. He draws a comparison between Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Macgoye’s *Coming to Birth* (1986) and observes, correctly, that Achebe’s men struggle to transcend the historical situation while his women remain objects of history. This is the trend Macgoye reverses. Macgoye’s women do what Achebe’s men do without a backward glance. This is why Masinjila advises writers thus:

In view of this no writer has an excuse for leaving women out of history since as subjects, they always have an impact on events even when ignored. (1996:12)

This argument has been stretched further to embrace all Macgoye’s works of fiction.
to show that this deliberate valorization of female characters is Macgoye’s idea of subverting the repressive patriarchal society represented by the men of Things Fall Apart (1958).

Kurtz (1994) Ph.D. thesis is a study that relates the post colonial Kenyan novel and the representation of the city in these novels. In a chapter dealing with Macgoye, Kurtz observes that Macgoye’s major concern is with the place of women on post colonial Kenya:

All Macgoye’s novels feature ordinary women whose stories while not necessarily heroic, are a testament to more that ordinary accomplishments in the face of formidable obstacles. (1994:192)

In his view, Macgoye’s novels offer an alternative to the negative depiction of women by Kenyan male writers as twilight girls or prostitutes who symbolically represent the rot in the city as seen by David Maillu and a few of Meja Mwangi’s fiction. He points out that Macgoye’s vision is nationalistic and that her novels endeavour to appraise the social, political and economic progress of the Kenyan nation since independence. He contends that Macgoye’s rejection of the ‘feminist’ label, (Bukenya 1988) may be as a result of the author’s fear of getting embroiled in the raging gender debate. He criticizes Macgoye for contriving the endings of some of her novels. While Kurtz’s exploration of Macgoye’s writing raises pertinent issues for this study, his analysis is shallow and peripheral. It therefore fails to delve into the apparent contradictions that Macgoye’s novels embody. This may be pinned on the extensive scope of the thesis. We have gone further to unearth some of those contradictions.

Our major task has been a thorough reading and re-reading of the four novels in order to reveal the historical link they have with the historical context that nurtured them. The extraneous factors that have a bearing on these works have also been explored in detail through
the reading of historical documents from pre-independent to independent times. Most of our research has been done in the university libraries. Journals and critical publications have been read during the research for additional useful information.

Our study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction showing the genesis of our research, the objectives and assumptions of the study. We also review the theoretical approach adapted and the relevant literature for the study.

Chapter two examines the socio-cultural transformation of the characters in the four novels with a sharper focus on their relationship to the extraneous context. The result of the transformation is evaluated against the historical events that nurtured the change.

The third chapter examines the economic transformation and its manifestation in the lives of the characters. The economic change within the characters in the novels is related to the general economic transformation in the nation at large and their causes.

Chapter four is dedicated to the examination of political awareness, its ramification and the resultant transformation of the individual characters. Chapter five which is the conclusion, weighs the findings against the set out objectives and determines the success of our hypothesis. It also recommends an area for new research on the author.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION:
AFFIRMATION AND INVALIDATION

In this chapter, we shall argue that Macgoye as an author sets out to undermine cultural practices that inhibit the women from achieving their full potential as citizens. To achieve this,
her characters are not cast as lovers, wives or blood relatives of male protagonists but people empowered to initiate action and achieve a full growth. One such institution is the marriage of under-age girls. The process is usually rooted in the village—a symbol of tradition with the acceptable as well as repugnant social institutions. Such institutions include: customs, social taboos, and overwhelming domestic chores culturally imposed as women's duties. It is also in the village where the father-figure, brother, boyfriend, uncle and husband reign supreme. The father figure remains the metonymy of social oppression. The trend at times spills over into the city but in a diluted form. The city often creates the necessary space for a social transformation that brings forth complex women characters.

The long road to social cultural transformation is often triggered by a decisive action on the part of the victims to break away from the community-imposed oppressive custom. The victims, girls aged between 15 and 17 years are married off without prior consultation. A struggle with the forces of oppression ensues. In a twist of turns, the girls manage to break through and a relentless search for a new identity coupled with a capacity for economic independence becomes its new norm. The process evolves slowly but surely. It does not matter whether it is Abiero in *Victoria* at 15. It matters equally less whether it is Paulina at 16 in *Coming to Birth* or Wairimu or Rahel before their 17th birthday in *The Present Moment*. Except for Wairimu who runs away from home due to loss of her virginity, the rest are contracted into marriage relationships that offer least reciprocity. True to tradition, the father-figure arranges the marriages behind their backs. Claude Levi Stauss" (1975) argues that women are the people who circulate between the groups of men in traditional marriages. Women in this regard, remain mere commodities that men exchange between themselves as
if they were pieces of artefacts. Their views on who they would want to marry and a free hand to marry them is treated with contempt by the direct beneficiaries who are usually men. Rahel’s lament in *The Present Moment* sums up the dilemma:

Many of my father’s comrades used to come and visit us at home, and I dare say that some were especially picked to look at me and my younger sister. (The Present Moment: 1987: 10)

Such a marriage appears to have been conducted purely as a trade reminiscent of the slavery days. The relatively tender age at which they were married off disadvantaged their position in putting up a fight. Indeed protest against such a barbaric tradition was an anathema. The older generation would instil fear through threats to curse and ostracise the helpless.

In an attempt to right this wrong, Macgoye subverts the cultural demands by creating characters who deliberately reject such customs and escape "censorship". Her characters are ordinary souls who overcome traditional obstacles to achieve prominence.

Abiero in *Victoria* is the typification of this abhorrent tradition. The background to her story is the Kano Plains, Kisumu District, an area that is as unpredictable as the coming of Christ. At times, it is affected by the severe drought leading to the death of cattle. Alternately, when the rains come, the area is hit by flooding that compulsively leads to temporary migration. The choice of Kano plains for the setting is instructive: Whether in wet or dry season, inhabitants of the area suffer severe hunger. Hunger is the fodder for Abiero’s early marriage. To provide a most vivid picture, and motive for Abiero’s pre-arranged marriage, Macgoye fuses the harsh climatic conditions of Kano with sustained hunger. She writes:

The cows just died. The crops rotted too. There were hungry days. And after all, she was over 15. Her mother would have liked her to help at home a bit longer. (Victoria 1991:10)
The object of this marriage is to salvage the entire family from the affliction of hunger. The choice is easy. Girls in the Luo community were viewed in situations of drought as symbolically able to bridge the tension between the ancestral spirits and the living people. Oral narrative from the community has it that the living could sacrifice a virgin for atonement and rain falls heavily thereafter. Abiero appears to us as properly fitting such a role but in a different context. This time the salvation of a family from a marauding hunger.

She is ‘sacrificed’, for at the tender age of 15, Abiero is married off to an old polygamous Odhiambo who is known to have lost his manhood.

It is unthinkable that children who confer status to a woman in an African setting are hereby relegated to the back seat through this arrangement. A childless marriage has no place in traditional African society. Abiero’s father as well as her husband to be, stand condemned. The arrangement undermines the age-old tradition and continuity of race to which children are the central core. For the author, it is an attack on the repugnant cultural practice that offers the least reciprocity between men and women. That is why Macgoye undermines Abiero’s marriage to Odhiambo.

Rahel in *The Present Moment* was handed over to a soldier friend of the father as a second wife. Paulina in *Coming to Birth* crossed the bridge for 3 cows, food safe for the mother-in-law and a watch for the dad. It is only Wairimu who escapes this arrangement. However, her escape is as a result of loss of virginity. One cold morning on a forest path leading to the river, the 17 year old raw girl meets Waitito Njuguna who ‘sneaks’ away with the much cherished symbol of chastity. The loss is captured in charming symbolism:

She turned and the turning was slow and painful, stretched her left arm and found the bracelet gone... *(The Present Moment)*
The bracelet could symbolically represent the loss which is physically very painful but psychologically more devastating. Proof of virginity, one may argue, is an attempt by the patriarchal authority to condition women to remain loyal to tradition where the real beneficiaries are the men. Or else, what proof can women seek for their male counterparts before marriage? It is deeply ironical that the same men who are out to uphold tradition by glorifying virginity as proof of chastity and hence qualification for a respectable marriage, are the same ones who 'sneak' away with it, in impunity.

The salient sub-text is the total condemnation of pre-arranged marriage of under-age girls who are psychologically, physically and economically deprived. Indeed, Macgoye’s description of Paulina on her first visit to Nairobi leaves one deeply sympathetic not only to her but even to the equally youthful Martin whose honeymoon was cut short due to lack of bus fare for the two of them from Gem to Nairobi. The physical description of Paulina is akin to a child suffering from malnutrition: "She looked thinner than he remembered remembering with the hands rather than sight and pale with deep shadows under the eyes" (1986:2). The women in such circumstances are pawns in a chess like game where powerful masculine power is demonstrated. It is specifically for this reason the author undermines the traditional marriage institution. The whole process is subverted to reveal to the reader its flawed tenets. That little girls of between 15 and 17 years have no business being enslaved to marriages that yield little if any reciprocity. The underlying economic benefits do not spill over to the victims. Wairimu does not wait even to test the waters, knowing full well that no man worth his salt would marry a woman who has failed the virginity test. Paulina’s complex misfortunes regarding
miscarriages, her incompatibility with Martin at the initial stages are a living testimony to biological and psychological immaturity. Rahel reaps the bitter fruits of a lopsided marriage where one’s interest is totally ignored. She jumps from one wrecked ship into another until settling to ’die’ in the old people’s home. It is instructive to note that all these marriages take place when the characters involved lack conscientious identity. Their identities are extraneously imposed. Their choices are disregarded and substituted at the whims of autocratic, all powerful patriarchal authority. The incomplete development of their physical and mental faculties render them vulnerable to easy manipulation by men. Minogue (1990) in a well argued treatise views marriage as an institution used by men to subject women to patriarchy and that where marriage is abandoned, sexual submission is its replacement. The young girls are taught to view their predicament in marriage as ordained by God and hence never make an attempt to disengage themselves. This slave-mentality is reinforced by acquisition of children.

Marriage is incomplete in an African traditional setting unless it is accompanied by children. Children confer status to both mother and father. At another level, we may argue that children help to anchor their female parents to their matrimonial homes. The deep attachment to children means mothers will suffer at their behest even in cases of social deprivation. Because women are socialised to respect maternity, it is rare that they would even abandon them even where such a relationship leads to hardships.

The story of Abiero in *Victoria* defies such an arrangement. Macgoye sets out to undermine this belief. Abiero at only 15 years is married to a man who has no capacity to help her realise her sexuality. Abiero’s extra-marital sex may be explained as an attempt to seek fulfilment where non is readily available. A custom that ignores the biological needs of a
maiden wife must not be left to rule. The motive is to create sympathy for Abiero and view her friendship with a character without a name—he is referred to merely as "a fisher-boy from the island" as justified and legitimate. The boy whose origin is unclear rescues Abiero from contempt by confirming her child bearing potential thereby bestowing on her respect from fellow women folk. Macgoye suggests that custom subverts its own foundations by its inherent contradictions. It is these contradictions that she points out and exploits to set the characters free.

But Abiero is in effect practising adultery. Under the Judeo-christian tradition, adultery is prohibited and may lead to divorce. However, in African traditional systems, women could seek solace away from their husbands if they were known to be impotent. Macgoye’s contention here is to justify adultery in a case where natural justice has been ignored, through an imposed marriage to an old man who has lost his manhood. Thus Victoria’s first child is a product of infidelity but also a protest against an insensitive custom that ignores the biological as well as the psychological demands of a young woman. She demonstrates that society may be patriarchal but also manipulable. The question, then, is: Does Abiero have an obligation to remain glued to such a marriage? Will the traditional society, rigid as it is accept her child? Abiero rejects the maternal ethic that expects women to possess reverential respect for the process of life and abandons her scandal ridden child in a mission hospital. The act is a subversion of the belief that once women beget children, it is only death that may warrant their separation. Abiero and the other child mothers are not yet ready for such serious conjugal commitments especially where their consent was never sought at the beginning. These, then are the flawed customs that Macgoye undermines to offer her characters alternative choices.
With such contradictions inherent in custom, women must be empowered to seek redress outside custom.

This is precisely why Paulina has three unfortunate miscarriages. In a similar vein, Wairimu stays childless throughout her life. The other prominent character, Rahel, who stays in such a flawed marriage, becomes a living testimony to suffering and social death, (Orlando Patterson 1982). Slavery and social death in Patterson's view is occasioned by direct and insidious violence, namelessness and invisibility; endless personal violation and chronic alienable dishonour. Macgoye's characters suffer one or more of these. The violence Martin subjects Paulina to is a true testimony of such dishonour. When he confines Paulina to the little house without meals, the readers know what it portends. Even the Kenyatta National Hospital where Paulina is admitted without the element of personal choice may amount to a social strangulation. If women must give birth merely to degenerate into devastating physical and psychological 'deaths' then, let them halt the process until they are ready. But in subverting the process, Macgoye sets a precedent demonstrating that the welfare of the mother comes first.

Paulina's delay or rather her series of miscarriages is a deliberate effort on the part of the author to prepare her physically and psychologically for the difficult process of birth and its attendant economic demands. Amina's assessment of Paulina on her first visit to Nairobi elucidates this notion; "And the mother's milk hardly dried on her lips, poor young thing. We'll see that she learns to give him something to think about" (1986:24). It is ironical that society expects Paulina, a mere girl-child to take care of babies.

It is for similar reasons that Wairimu's loss of virginity just before marriage may be viewed as an escape route from culture that oppresses women. "She could not face either the
shameful disclosure of wedding day or the cloying sameness of all days that would follow" (1987:3).

The deliberate invalidation of traditional, almost mythical assumptions is Macgoye's strategy in effecting the necessary transformation in wait for more serious assignments. The characters must, as a matter of necessity, reject cultural norms that do not improve their conditions but merely tether their spirit to servitude. To show how ready Paulina has become for this respected prospect Macgoye describes her thus; "She had finished growing now. Her breasts were firm and her eyes knowing." (1986:33). The breasts' firmness signals her ability to nurture children. Her 'knowing eyes' represent the level of awareness henceforth attained.

There are two reasons that may be advanced to explain Abiero's strange behaviour of abandoning her child at the mission hospital. First, the child would socially stigmatise her. Second, she lacks the economic capacity to bring it up. Macgoye writes:

Since she was leaving her husband's home, she would have to leave the baby in any case, and if it had stayed there, growing tall and fair, it would cause talk. And there would be no milk. Nobody has supposed she would have to wait so long for another." (Victoria:22)

This picture sharply contrasts with that of a ready mother at 33: "A first baby at 33 was something of a wonder, and one that she took care to cultivate. She bought powder and baby soap, tinned milk and bottle, nappies and pins and fancy dresses." (1993:49). Unlike the first child, although this one does not have a father, Abiero is satisfied. The other child stood out like a sore thumb in the community because everyone knew that "Odhiambo was old cold and not able to make a baby at all and certainly never felt like doing so". (Victoria: 18)

It is with the rejection of this flawed marital arrangement which essentially constitutes
a rebellion, that the journey motif begins. A motif is a symbol that draws attention to itself primarily because of its dominance (Macharia: 1988)

A motif provides a writer of fiction with the basic idea upon which the larger narrative is written. The significance of the motif does not depend on its own meaning but rather on its role in the artistic structure. A motif dominates a work of art and affords a writer of fiction an opportunity to signify several layers of meaning.

The journey as a motif is an integral structural element in the works of Macgoye. It is a dominant feature that recurs now and again. The journeys are instrumental in broadening the characters ontological world view. The journeys embody human aspirations and hopes. Metaphorically, they represent a search for greater freedom and economic independence.

Structurally, the characters match in step with Kenya as a nation reaching out for self-rule and independence. The gradual process of Kenya’s decolonization leading to self-rule is juxtaposed with the gradual social economic emancipation of the characters, conceptualised as a journey.

It starts for most victims of the pre-arranged marriages, in the village and ends in the city. The village remains the epitome of repressive social structures, taboos, customs and other outmoded cultural practices that tether the female characters to vicious domestic chores, poverty and at times, savage beatings. It is remote from external influence.

The social transformation of the characters is never far from Kenya’s historical progress as a nation. Chelagat Sarah becomes of age to set up a brothel just as the Railway reaches Kisumu:

Victoria was amazed that this woman she found so beautiful must be more than 50 years old and had no children. She had just been
maturing when the railway passed through her country, and the railway required hospitality for its workers." *(Victoria: 25)*

The external influence may be blamed for the unfolding events but ironically, it is the same influence that offers social economic growth for those oppressed by culture. At the end of the novel, conceived of as the present, Victoria too has achieved tremendous growth.

Wairimu’s desire for expanded choices that see her take up a job in a coffee plantation so as to be "like a man" begin with a parallel demand by politicians like Harry Thuku for self rule. To be like a man is Wairimu’s metaphor for total independence from patriarchal authority. It is the ability of a woman to choose the best for herself. It is a search for economic existence that is devoid of suffering. Wairimu’s search for autonomy is exemplified in the country’s search for sovereignty from colonial rule, perceived of as a journey. Her bumpy and uncomfortable ride on top of coffee sacks on her first journey to Nairobi in search of greater social vision, dramatises Kenya’s rough road but inevitable match to independence.

But Paulina in *Coming to Birth* is the classic illustration of the journey motif. When she leaves home to join her husband in Nairobi, emergency is declared. Her subsequent complex problems mirror the country’s turbulent historical chaos during the emergency. She attains relative independence and tranquillity with the onset of independence. Independence, though, does not herald an end to the psychological problems she faces in marriage and the death of her son, Okeyo. But as Kenya grapples with political murders, one expects the situation to stabilise. This also is the best time for Paulina to conceive. The fruitful conception at 38 for Paulina becomes a symbol of hope and tranquillity in an otherwise near-broken relationship. On a larger national context, it represents a levelling out of political turbulence giving way to stability. The child remains a great promise for a better future. The journeys
conceived of as a means for self improvement necessitate picking up fresh ideas from the environment. Like we have already stated, such skills are already available within the urban set up. The level of awareness corresponds directly to the availability of places for its acquisition. Such places are readily available in cities than in the villages. The city is the centre stage where ethnic-based parochialism is shed and replaced with nationalism. At the end Victoria is poised to die in a city hospital having achieved a measure of success in River Road, Nairobi. Paulina in *Coming to Birth* has finally left Kisumu for the last time to declare Nairobi her new 'home'. In *The Present Moment* the long suffering women share their burden in a refuge in Nairobi.

The transformation is never complete if it is unaccompanied by a social awareness that is bestowed by a struggle for skills of reading and writing. While Macgoye’s female characters appear endowed with potential skills for intellectual tasks, no attempt was ever made by their parents to take them to school. Their ability and confidence for acquisition of knowledge is eroded slowly by the cultural beliefs that consigned them to marriage and childbearing as the ultimate possibilities. For those who missed out, this education must be acquired in old age and in piece meal.

The new knowledge embodies more than reading and writing skills. It is broadened to include the capacity to take cognisance of all possibilities for self growth which abound in the environment. Whether it is petty trade, selling of household items, exchanging one’s labour for cash, for Macgoye, this is the road to an economic empowerment for women.

The total transformation for Abiero is achieved within Chelagat’s house-a brothel within Kisumu town. The innocent, naive 15 year old girl-child reaches her transition point, a water-
shed in her life when she abandons her old name Abiero to become Victoria. On her way to Kisumu, she stops to eat guavas, growing wildly by the road side. The guavas symbolically represent the hazardous and difficult kind of life she has had in Gem. The owner of the brothel is a Nandi girl, Chelagat Sarah and her meeting with Abiero is an attempt by Macgoye to create a community of women who are able to help one another. In Chelagat’s house, Abiero’s social status is elevated. This is symbolically captured in the comfortable bed she is offered. The meals are a significant departure from those of Kano and Gem. Indeed after a meal of meat and ugali, Abiero now washes the food with a bottle of beer.

The brothel, "filthy" as the public may think, offers Victoria the only opportunity to know herself fully and totally:

And yet now she was aware-and conscious of her maturity in being aware that that day had been a turning point in her life. That day she had not only embarked upon a career, she had also begun to live with complete deliberation. Nothing that happened to her after that was completely independent of her own free will. Abiero’s survival spirit was laid. Victoria took charge. (Victoria:27)

She is totally a new woman. The transformation is accompanied by a new home, name and a sophisticated life-style and acquaintances. When she examined herself in the mirror just to confirm her new found social status, the conclusion is telling, "She admired what she saw-eighteen years as near as she could calculate, upright and full breasted."(1993:27).

Historically, the brothel is a by-product of the building of Uganda Railway. Just as the railway line from Mombasa to Kisumu opens up the country side for economic development, its disruptive influence is also noted. The brothel is specifically set up to tap the resources associated with the railway employees. Macgoye seems to treat prostitution as a necessary evil
that creates avenue for those alienated from mainstream society. The oppressive culture, the closed society and its denial of the female voice paves the way for a rebellion that eventually finds solace in a semi-independent institution like Chelagat’s house. It is a contradiction that such an institution, regarded by many as evil should become the centre of nourishment. The house creates a new revelation; a sense of economic independence and the ability to choose for oneself. Prostitution is regarded by moralists in society as anathema. One then wonders why Macgoye should devote so much time to its examination. Macgoye like Richard Rive in his book *Buckingham Palace* (1986) is asking a potent question; What are the women to do given the odds against their very existence? In Richard Rive’s novel set in Apartheid South Africa, the central heroine, Mary, uses profits accruing from her brothel to sustain victims of Apartheid. Macgoye’s presentation of Victoria as a prostitute is mainly different from the likes of Kenyan writers like Meja Mwangi. Prostitution for her is a means for survival. The ‘house’ becomes a centre of liberation viewed against repressive cultural experiences. Given the oppressive cultural norms militating against women, prostitution offers them the best opportunity to bargain with men on equal footing.

Roger Kurtz (1995) notes that Meja Mwangi "projects the evils of urbanization entirely onto women. The twilight women like the city they inhabit, represent the seduction and corruption of modernity." (1995:192). While some of these male authors blame women, for the entire rot, they fail to examine the role men play in it. While women would venture into prostitution to earn a living, a majority of men will be willing to venture for mere sexual pleasure. Macgoye then must be seen to reject this notion represented by the likes of Mwangi and David Maillu. For her, society is to blame. It drives women into prostitution, headlong
because of its unfair economic arrangement which favours men at the expense of their female counterparts.

For Victoria, the social transformation is accompanied by a capacity to learn a new language. Ironically, at this stage the transformation is cosmetic. On being warned by Chelagat that 'Malayas’ do not go home, Victoria vehemently defends her marital past:

But I am married. I am not a malaya. My husband is old and unkind to me. Also he is not very much use as a husband. Therefore they must buy me back. (1993:25)

The above statement is telling. Victoria would like to fall back on the institution of marriage if only for the purposes of affirming her social standing. The question Macgoye is posing is: Are women able to attain recognition within the society without necessarily having to marry? For Victoria, this prospect is haunting and is even unresolved at the end of the novel. As she is taken to hospital, the feeling of ambivalence on whether she did the right thing staying single vividly comes back; "Hospitals were the fate of those who had not followed the rules, who had no land staked out for them" (P. 103). Further more, her own son-in-law pays dowry reluctantly because Loise is the daughter of a single mother. According to Luo tradition, dowry in form of cattle may not be paid to a single mother without an established home. Macgoye perhaps could have been alluding to this awkward practice that discriminates against single motherhood.

In The Present Moment, the issue of marriage and identity comes up even more sharply. Wairimu visits her village after staying out for six years. First the father enquires on the possibility of receiving some dowry, a suggestion that Wairimu would be better off married. The prospect of staying single disturbs the mother deeply. For her, Wairimu should opt, just
for the sake of a husband, for a polygamous marriage. At the end of this exchange, Wairimu wonders what her social status is: "But I could see that I was neither child nor woman in other people's eyes and was soon restless to be off" (1987:62). True to her tradition, Macgoye as an author does not believe in changing tradition overnight. Change must be gradual. This is the dilemma both the author and her characters face.

It is deeply ironical that Chelagat, for instance, is prohibited by her clansmen from attending her father's funeral due to her prostitute status that makes her unclean and yet the same clansmen accept without a grumble her earnings to pay dowry for her brothers. This contradiction is as hypocritical as the traditions themselves. Such traditions are applied selectively by men to deny the women their rights. Such contradictions are what, Macgoye as an author, exploits to subvert tradition. With such outright discrimination her characters must seek other social avenues for progress.

This is why the brothel plays a pivotal role in raising the social economic status of women. It becomes the centre for learning the A.B.C.D. of life. The ladies learn to speak both English and Swahili, the two languages that Macgoye uses to catapult her characters into national limelight. The ladies learn to take charge of their lives, saving money for their future and more fundamentally, how to deal with the men folk. The transformation for Victoria almost goes full circle when she refunds the bride price to free herself from the marital claim.

In *Coming to Birth*, the home-craft school plays the same role as Chelagat’s house. But it is noteworthy that the home-craft school alone does not effect the necessary change. Paulina's social transformation is as a result of the cumulative acquisition of new knowledge that has been grasped through trial and error. It is best summarised as baptism with fire. From
a naive little girl-child who gets locked in the house for fear of getting lost, to being beaten unconscious and yet responding subserviently to Martin's commands: "As you say Martin", Paulina learns to crotchet, do petty trade, save for her house, self educate herself and eventually acquire a significant social transformation. Incidentally, Paulina joins the home craft school just as the politicians consolidate their power base and brace themselves for Kenya's leadership. The home craft school gives Paulina the much needed space to cultivate a sense of independence away from Martin-himself- a symbol of retrogression. The school elevated Paulina to a leader of women. The new social status is reflected in the furnishing of her house, neat and perfect.

For Macgoye, freedom for Kenya as a nation is integral to freedom for the individual and vice versa. The individual is not free unless the society is and the society will not be free unless the individual is. That is why Paulina's personal growth is juxtaposed to that of Kenya as a nation.

It is for this reason that the school is viewed as a major step towards Paulina's total independence from Martin. While the ring kept reminding Paulina of Martin, it is deliberate that Martin is slowly fading from her memory. Economically, her independence is seen in her ability to provide for herself and mother-in-law. It is instructive to note that Paulina up to this time, has not thought of being unfaithful to her husband, who she is very much aware, is unfaithful to her. However, as the nation races rapidly to independence, readers would be excused for wondering whether Paulina will remain the fool.

In 1961, Martin is described as independent and very confident. His salary now stands at Kshs.350. He can now afford to toss his house mate, Aduogi and live alone. One year later,
Macgoye describes Paulina as "So neat, so prim and delightful" pg.48. One African saying goes this way: "Two cocks cannot be cooked in one pot". Literally, Paulina has matured into a cock which Martin, the cock that he has been, would find difficult to intimidate and live with. Perhaps this is why Martin and Paulina found themselves apart at independence for Kenya. While Paulina's social life is tremendously transformed, it is not her who initiates the temporary separation but Martin. The straw that broke the camel's back comes when Martin, without tangible evidence at all, beats her for living adulterously. The beastly act then becomes a panacea for Paulina to seek total independence. It is unbelievable that Martin apart from beating Paulina, breaks her chairs, and takes her clothes with him to Nairobi. The act is beastly, inconsiderate and uncouth. At the symbolic level, the beastly act seems to be an attempt on the part of Martin to impoverish Paulina and return her to the dark days of social deprivation and unceasing violence. Paradoxically, it is at such a time that Martin is living with a concubine, Fausa even after swearing in church that Paulina would be his only wife. The point Macgoye is driving home is simple: this is a patriarchal society where the men rule. A man will have as many unofficial wives as possible while his wife waits patiently at home for his return. This practice is condemned by the author. However, what begun as a training school for Paulina, has posed as a source of total autonomy and this is positive enough. This is precisely what makes Wairimu to seek independence right from the word go: hers is a search for autonomy.

*The Present Moment* has one bold statement that summarises the conditions of women as follows:

To be eighty years old in Africa is to be tough. Particularly for a woman, because she has learned from childhood to look after others than to be looked after. *(The Present Moment:38)*
While this statement rings true for the majority of Macgoye’s female parade of women, for the central character and one whose story dominates the text, the statement is only partly true. Her earlier debacle, loss of virginity, incidentally becomes a blessing in disguise. It is the fear of being discovered and subsequent reprisals that send her to labour for cash in a coffee plantation. In perspective, the coming of the missionaries, trade opportunities they had created and the attendant administrative jobs made Africans aware of opportunities for earning a livelihood. Similarly the emerging ‘plantocracy’ that had established large plantations of coffee offered opportunity for the likes of Wairimu. All these had a big hand in dismantling the rigid tenets of culture.

The coffee plantation, in its diluted cultural composition, offered the best alternative for those dissatisfied with the society. It offered economic independence and unlimited freedom. It was an opportunity to escape the inevitable pre-arranged marriage. The coffee plantation fails to satisfy her social vision and Wairimu hits the road again for Nairobi. The journey on top of coffee sacks symbolically captures the difficult path to independence and self identity. In Nairobi, Macgoye takes the earliest opportunity to introduce Harry Thuku to Wairimu, a process that looks contrived. However the meeting becomes the initiation of Wairimu into politics. But in Nairobi, Wairimu’s transformation takes a firm root. In Nairobi, Wairimu learns that Kenya as a nation has several ethnic groups. She also comes face to face with colonial oppression. She later leaves the city to work in yet another coffee plantation in Kabete near Nairobi. Her reasons for leaving Nairobi find explanation in the apparent political uncertainties and fear of colonial reprisals after political riots when Harry Thuku was detained. One of the significant aspects of Wairimu’s developments in the plantation is the acquisition of reading
and writing skills. She engages the services of a driver, James to offer her such skills in exchange for partnership. But the relationship is symbiotic and not parasitic. Wairimu reflects upon the relationship thus: "Was it not better after all to be a woman, easy come, easy go. When they had no more use for you, at least they left you alone" (1987:54). One may accuse Macgoye of advocating for "a come we stay" kind of relationship. However, in this context it serves a useful purpose: freedom to quit the relationship if the woman’s interests are ignored.

However, a deeper examination of Wairimu-James relationship reveals an attempt at redefinition in male-female relations. Macgoye is inclined to offering choices and alternatives for women. Theirs is a gradual transformation of characters culminating into a new and reciprocal relationship. But this redefinition comes with a new social and economic power. The women, thus, are able to cultivate a sense of independence of men due to this economic power.

It is significant to note that the above social transformations are attained within the urban location. The rural areas with its heavy inclination to patriarchal authority offers the least hope. For Victoria, the much needed affirmation of self control and independence comes with a pregnancy at 33 years. Like the onset of Kenya’s independence uprising in 1952, the new baby marks the transition from a dark past to a hopeful one. The baby unlike the first child she abandoned at the mission hospital will have a mature mother both physically and psychologically. The new baby will have the best maternity for the mother has already saved in waiting for her. It is more interesting to note that Victoria is not bothered with who the father of the baby is. In a traditional setting such a baby is condemned. It is symbolic of a mother’s adulterous lifestyle. The mere fact that Victoria is unperturbed by it, is a demonstration of her social growth. The Victoria that we finally meet at the end of the novel
is a single minded tough business woman. She is respected by both men and women. She employs and fires people who work in her business networks that range from a shop in the busy Nairobi-River Road street to a partnership in a taxi business. She is confident and a master of business operations. She is fluent in both English and Kiswahili. She is motherly and full of wisdom. She is consulted in a variety of issues even by the men who hitherto may have regarded her as a mere 'prostitute'. She is now an expert in male-female relationships. She longs to impart this valuable information to her fellow women folk:

What she wanted to instil into such women was a certain insight into the working of the male mind, which was still dominant, an appraisal of the value of information, a reasoned survey of pressure points where this knowledge would be well applied and a lightness of touch which would improvise excuses, baits, escape routes, frames, charges a guerrilla movement of the spirit, not necessarily tied to a person. (Victoria:63)

It is the above knowledge that has made Victoria a successful woman.

However the exemplification of social transformation culturally, is Paulina in *Coming to Birth*. Paulina’s path to full maturity and independence is perhaps the most difficult. From a sixteen year old child-bride who waits for her husband to come and unlock her out of the house, Paulina grows into a mature woman who surprises her husband in all spheres of life. On her first appearance in Nairobi, Paulina strikes one as completely lacking in awareness. She thinks of collecting firewood to make a meal in the city. She fears sharing a bed with her husband and prefers to sleep on the floor. Her narrow mindedness is best illustrated by her attempt to relate to any Luo woman. "Paulina pulled herself to her feet and unbolted the door, still not sure whether she was doing the right thing. But as soon as she saw the woman, plump and homely, carrying her teapot and a plate covered with paper, She thought how wrong she
had been to give up hope. (*Coming To Birth : 7*)

The social transformation is dramatic. While Martin retrogresses into a tribal chauvinist, Pauline matures into a national figure with a clear grasp of the political events:

> Martin was still in essence the Luo boy who he had been when he got married seven years before, whose whole world picture revolved round an idealised 'home' to which he would retire in plenty and comfort after making his mark on the big world. (*Coming To Birth:54*)

Unlike Martin, Paulina accepts Nairobi as her home, a testimony to the author’s nationalistic vision where ‘home’ which to Luos is found in the villages and only houses in the city, is completely disregarded. Martin’s progress is stunted. His heroes are tribal leaders from his ancestral province.

Macgoye undermines tradition to elevate Paulina to a higher social status. It is unthinkable, for instance, that a highly obstinate and stubborn male Luo of Martin’s calibre leaves his own house-a symbol of traditional authority-to stay with Pauline in a servant quarter. According to Luo tradition, men do not join their women in houses where they were not initially involved at the start of habitation. Could Martin then, in the reversal of this natural order have realised that he needed Paulina more than she needed him? An anthropologist, Van Baal argues that "Economically men are in need of women more than women are in need of men" (1975:78) The cultural reversal of roles is Macgoye’s demonstration of the need of recognition of women and the role of reciprocity in male-female relations.

From a frail, lanky girl with a faltering step in Nairobi, Paulina is transformed into a beauty with the ability to make decisions and an endless retinue of resources to draw from. Like Victoria and Wairimu, she is very fluent in Kenya’s lingua francas, English and Swahili.
Her growth in social awareness is reflected in her ability to transcend ethnic definition and address the plight of street children.

Like in Victoria's case, Paulina's social transformation is accompanied with hope in pregnancy at the age of 38 years. Martin is unable to believe the news, what with growing disillusionment on the political front when his heroes like Tom Mboya and J. M. Kariuki are murdered. He wonders loudly "And was this what it had come to, the striking down of the best and the brightest" (1986:77). Away from politics, Martin's inability to fulfil his dreams of having children with his wife is a devastating experience. Contrarily, it is a humbling experience similar to Okonkwo's seven year exile in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall Apart* (1958). It is this humbling experience that gives Martin the precious opportunity to redefine his relationship with Paulina. The arrogance previously evident in his beastly battering of Paulina is slowly giving way to a humanistic existence. When the news of the baby is broken, Martin is delighted but sceptical. The baby will give Paulina a new identity—that of a mother and finally create social cohesion between Martin and her as it affirms Martin's potency and manhood. The baby becomes a metaphor of hope, a symbol of continuity and a hybrid of a new social awareness. For Paulina, the baby epitomises her complete change. It is suggested that Paulina and Martin henceforth will be a happy couple:

I have no reason not to be happy. All has not been well with us. You know it. There were women and none of them gave me a child. You had another child and this child was lost to us. I thought that you were only eager now to become a new woman—perhaps go into parliament. They both burst out laughing. *(Coming To Birth:147)*

The laughter is a symbol of a new rapport between the couple. It is a demonstration of the confidence built over a period of time. It is a positive demonstration of a hopeful future.
Wairimu’s short stint with James as a lover in a coffee plantation in Kabete, near Nairobi is a continuation of this legacy. First, her decision to quit the village may be read as an attempt to steer clear of the patriarchal authority and its attendant customs and taboos. She longed for a world where custom did not rule. Wairimu is so clear of what she wants and goes directly for it. She asks:

What must I aim at? First, to know Kiswahili, not in order to be a servant like Mr. John, even a rich servant but to enter a wider world than the Kikuyu world,...to go home with the power-that meant with the presents and knowledge, Like a baby boy. (The Present Moment:54)

To be Like a boy for Wairimu is to have leeway in decision making. It is the ability to choose for oneself a course of action. It is the ability to reject a pre-arranged marriage where women were viewed as mere slaves or extensions of children. It is the ability to escape a mule kind of existence:

So that even if they wanted to pair me, it would not be only within the daily tramp for water, digging and shelling, peeling and digging again, bent under firewood...my body too can be respected. (The Present Moment:55)

Her relationship with James is heavily determined by her will to stay in it. It is a symbiotic existence where James enjoys the pleasures of a beautiful woman and reciprocates by providing knowledge-writing and reading. When they fail to get a baby through such a union, they voluntarily part without much ado. Among the many women in the refuge, she remains very physically attractive. She attributes this ability to survive and remain 'young' to her rejection of male exploitation. Men would like to marry her, use her until she was "withered and shrunk like some of the women at the coffee plantations whose husbands went away... Whose strength is used up in weeping and protest, roadwork and terracing" (The
Wairimu’s ideals sum up Macgoye’s role as a defender of women’s rights. In her rejection of culturally inhibiting practices, Macgoye reveals clearly how the society uses customs and taboos to subject women to physical, psychological and economic dependence. In choosing to remain single, yet happy, Macgoye advocates for choice in either getting married or otherwise. It is only such an arrangement that will provide a happy existence to women. Women’s ambitions must stretch beyond the traditional definitions. Such customs as virginity must not be used by men for self aggrandizement, but should serve the interest of women instead.

In subverting traditional male roles of choosing literally everything for women, Macgoye articulates a fundamental tenet of feminist ideology; Men are not demi-gods with unlimited resource base; Women must stop thinking that men will do everything for them; that the answer lies in a mutual co-existence that does not relegate any member of the union to a peripheral or marginal existence.

CHAPTER THREE
THE MATCH TO ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION:
A GRIM REALITY

Somewhere in Macgoye’s sub text, ideologically, is the issue of female emancipation. The greatest obstacle to female emancipation in totality is the issue of poverty in general. Pegged close to this, is the fact that women remain in dire poverty yet they work for more hours than men. Because men control all economic resources from which social power derives, women are socially, economically and politically marginalised. They are workers without
The thrust of our argument in this chapter is that female emancipation will never be total unless women are economically empowered. For Macgoye, the solution lies with a redefinition of male female relationships economically. The relationship between men and women according to our observation is like that between Third World countries and world financial bodies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. While the Third world countries claim loudly that they are sovereign states, quietly they are forced to negotiate for funding if only for basic survival. Thus, women’s rhetorical claim to power will remain mere rhetoric unless they seek a strong financial base.

The marginalization of women may be traced back to unfair education system that put premium on boys education at the expense of girls education. How has this translated itself to an economic advantage? Ramphele (1994) has put it more succinctly:

> The cruel reality is that educational advantage is exceedingly difficult to overcome. Those who were privileged in the past tend to cumulatively benefit in both the present and the future. (1994:93)

In the works under study, Macgoye shows that women missed out on education through a strategic design by the colonial administration, a legacy that has been continued even after independence. Without proper foundation in education, those few opportunities available were automatically taken by men. Subsequently men had an economic advantage over women. All in all, a combination of oppressive traditional structures put in place through patriarchal forces and confirmed by colonial bias has inhibited women’s active participation in economic development. This is what Gerald Benaars calls a pedagogy of difference (Benaars, G.1996)

In his view, even after attainment of independence, things have not changed. While
outright discrimination of girls took a downward trend at least in public and private, the bottleneck to girls’ education and as a basis for economic development, had not changed. However, there has been more rhetoric which is unmatched by positive action. This is the kind of setting Macgoye’s characters operate in.

Macgoye’s earliest novel in historical time frame, *The Present Moment* remains the most realistic. It is also a perfect mirror of women’s economic woes before and after independence. The bottom line is that women are conditioned to content themselves with less rewarding jobs as home managers, peasant farmers, road sweepers, office cleaners. In *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, commercial sex work is viewed as an alternative to economic exploitation. However, *Coming To Birth*, then, remains the most progressive text towards women’s economic empowerment.

Macgoye advocates for a delinking of women from labour that least empowers them, economically.

First let us delve into the land issue. In traditional communities, land was regarded as the basic resource for the general welfare of the community. It is on land where crops were planted for basic requirements. It is on the same land where cattle were grazed. Cattle in turn produced milk, meat and more fundamentally, dowry for marriage. Land was an ultimate resource on which life rested.

Unfortunately while the ownership of this land was solely in the hands of men, women were practically the ones who farmed it. Women by virtue of their marriage had ‘permission’ to farm the land and provide food for the family. As for its ownership, their role stopped with the mere ‘care taking’. With the introduction of plantocracy, men planted coffee, tea, pyrethrum
thereby increasing women's work load. Incidentally, what was reaped from these plantations was sold by the men. Whatever money came from such transactions, benefited men only. Our argument is that land as a basic economic resource does not uplift women as individuals.

In Macgoye's novels under study, no single woman manages to use land as an asset for economic prosperity. What we have instead is unnecessary increase in labour which does not translate directly or otherwise to better life. The land then provides the best opportunities for a slave kind of existence. Land does not offer relief but confines women to more economic marginalization. It is illustrative that in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, Victoria only improves her status once she severs link with land. Indeed Macgoye suggests that the digging is done by women but to solely benefit the men:

They did not dig at all; non of them lived with a husband or father so they had no where to cultivate, but there was a pawpaw tree behind the house and tomato plants which were also strange to her. (Page 24)

It is amazing that Victoria comes to realize that life is actually possible and comfortable without constant digging. The close link between women and farm labour is forged by men and socio-culturally institutionalised to perpetually enslave women. The salient comment by Macgoye here is that women should sever this relationship as an eye opener to a greater vision and possibilities in more lucrative economic ventures. As it is, the psycho-physical link between farm labour and women is geared towards domestic consumption, a process that is never quantified, economically.

In *The Present Moment* the physical breakdown of the majority of the women is attributed to extreme domestic servitude. Fatuma is presented as having the best health. Fatuma as the Muslim name suggests, comes from coast province, a geographical region where
farming is far much less intensive compared to 'trade'. Although Wairimu worked as a farm labourer in coffee plantations for quite some time, she had several safety valves. She worked not for a large family but to feed herself. She could also rest whenever she chose knowing full well that repressive masculine forces were around. There is no suggestion that the coffee picking was tedious. What is, is that it gave one leeway for choice:

But once you were taken on, given a place to sleep in the long low buildings, a blanket and some staple food and taught which berries to pick and where to put them, they would not let you out even if your parents came to cry and shout for you. At the end of the month, you got some money, and so you were like a man and could do a lot of choosing for yourself. (1987:18)

To be 'like a man' is Wairimu’s metaphor for an expanded social power and vision. At another level, it is the ability to earn money and at the same time choose freely how to spend the said money. Thus if land would be used by women to empower them economically, then that would be perfectly in order. There is no gainsaying that traditionally defined domestic chores such as sewing, knitting and farm labour will only perpetuate the economic marginalization of women (Benstock:1987).

All Macgoye’s female characters who want to improve their lot must sever link with farm labour. Perhaps until such a time that land would be owned, farmed and the accruing resources controlled by the women themselves. As it is, land is not women’s space at all. In traditional African communities, land is the sole property of men. Women then work in these farms in trust for the men. The economic benefits accruing from such activities are first the property of men and may filter to the women via men’s permission. Viewed this way, land will never benefit women economically unless the 'rules' are changed.

In traditional African communities girls are, at times, viewed as economic assets in
themselves. Here the paternal forces involved benefit while their victims, the girls remain mere commodities in the 'trade'. Where poverty reigns, girls are married off to stem it. At times, they are given away to raise money for paying fees for their brothers who must go to school (Wanjama 1996). We have already demonstrated Abiero's role in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*.

Closely related to this is the issue of marriage and bride price. In certain communities, girls are basically regarded as saviours to their brothers and other male relations where the issue of bride price is concerned. Chelagat Sarah in *Victoria* is apparently banned from going back home because she is a commercial sex worker. But this does not exempt her from raising money for her brothers in order that they marry. She owes them a debt because according to societal norms, she was to be married in order that the brothers who would later do so, use such bride price. Wairimu's six year absence from home as a labourer in coffee plantations does not deter the father from demanding his share of bride price. To nullify her role in the 'trade' Abiero in *Victoria* has literally saved money as a commercial sex worker and returns the bride wealth. In an essay that elucidates his point succinctly, Van Baal, a Social Anthropologist writes:

> By agreeing to be exchanged, the sister allows her brother himself to marry. So by agreeing to be married, the woman renders to her brother an everlasting and important service which lasts at least as long as the marriage lasts. (1975: 78)

Let us once more put the issue in perspective. Prior to independence and even after, one of the most contested issues has been equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls. Researchers have argued that the sustained oppression of women was given impetus through divine theories and myths, especially the bible and the Koran (Fatuma 1996). This
discrimination reared its ugly head even in education. The churches, using puritanical principles deliberately perpetuated patriarchy. Benaars (1996) aptly observes:

> Part of the Christian mission was a gender ideology that had been derived from a Western religious context. This ideology stipulated that male and female roles and subsequent status had been divinely ordained and were therefore unchallengeable. A gender ideology often puritanical in character, pre-defined gender education and advocated a peculiar pedagogy of difference. (1996:28)

To get a job as a clerk in the colonial era, one needed some basic education. Women, because they lacked such basic education, remained in the domestic sphere doing menial jobs. Others did the most natural thing to do in such circumstances: opt to become a house help or in extreme difficult conditions, worked as commercial sex workers. At times, as noted earlier, the girls would do these jobs just to help their brothers to complete their education.

After the attainment of independence, the status quo persisted with men having an economic advantage over women. The educated men acquired the limited job opportunities. They then became policy originators, planners and implementers. Their decision as such was geared to serve male interest in most spheres of governance. This only led to further economic suppression of women.

It is therefore realistic for Macgoye to create characters like Victoria who wriggle out of a traditional marriage, set a goal as a commercial sex worker, save and finally set up a business to secure autonomy from men. With a bit of self denial and practical management skills acquired through trial and error, Victoria manages to set up a thriving business. She gets into partnership with James, a nephew in a taxi business operation that elevates her social status and confidence. She is contented, independent and able to hire and fire. But unlike other
well healed business people, her shop is located within Nairobi’s River Road. To set it up, Victoria had to secure a loan. It is noteworthy also that in her shop she sells mainly women’s requirements. What then is crucial is the development, socially, economically and politically. Women may still use commercial sex work as a spring board to total independence.

However, Victoria’s case may be viewed as unique in a way. Majority of the commercial sex workers end up acquiring incurable sexually transmitted diseases. Others are left at the mercy of the unpredictable male partners or the brutal police force that harass them day in day out. Nekesa as a commercial sex worker in *The Present Moment* suffers a sexually transmitted disease that renders her childless. Her experience is closer to reality.

Equally baffling is the fact that the said women at times enter into such unfair deals mainly to sustain the male segment of society. But their contribution is down-played by society, dominated by men, as it is. The crucial message for Macgoye is that women engage in commercial sex as the only alternative means of life. Unlike renowned Kenyan authors David Mailu and Meja Mwangi who project the entire rot on to the woman, Macgoye examines the possibility of women eking a fair and just economic satisfaction as an alternative to or escape from servitude: Chelagat’s rhetorical questioning of Victoria is Macgoye’s authentic voice:

*Will you again go to one of your round villages and bring water with your hair shaggy? Will you go as a fourth wife to another old man, you who sit poring at a newspaper as though you can read it? Will you make do with millet porridge in a good season and pounded cassava in a dry season? And when your old man dies, will you be able to tear your clothes off and weep upon his body, showing that you have done him no wrong?* (1994:26)

It is such an aberration that makes Abiero to safely stay in a world where she is her
own decision maker. Victoria is a classic character who seeks economic independence as a basis for liberty from patriarchal authority. Her relative comfort at the close of the text, her ability to afford a reasonable self satisfaction, food, clothing and access to modest medical facilities remain a strong testimony to what economic transformation will do to a character.

One may pose the pertinent question: As the country raced towards independence from colonial rule, were there more job opportunities for women? Strictly speaking no. Evidence available in the texts under study reveal that women remained at home completely engulfed in domestic sphere. For the women, their desire for economic emancipation even after independence is a still birth. And they are many.

One exception to the above is Wairimu in The Present Moment. Her loss of virginity which earlier appeared as a setback, becomes her greatest opportunity for economic transition. It is this setback, the fear of ashaming the family members that drove her to the coffee farm. Her labour is directed at self-upliftment. Her authoritative rejection of domestic work as suggested by a Mr. John is a total departure from the norm. Being Macgoye’s central character, Wairimu’s rejection is a pointer to Macgoye’s central consciousness with regard to domestic work. Her speech reveals her hatred:

I did not tell him that I thought myself too grown up to be looking after someone else’s babies or washing her dirty clothes, but I took note of the place he lived in case I should have more questions to ask (1987:53)

The above citation shows Macgoye’s ideology as advocating for the rejection of domestic work by women because instead of uplifting their social status, it leads to social degradation. But even within the coffee plantation, the dictates of inequality still pervade. Wairimu is paid less than her male counterparts despite the fact that they perform the same
While men like Mr. John in *The Present Moment* do serve as houseboys as well as girls, the latter suffer an indelible mark, physical and psychological in the hands of unscrupulous male employers. First, the women are paid paltry fees and as if this is not enough, they are also sexually molested. Mr. Robert’s sexual harassment of Mama Chungu underlies the universal nature of the problem which knows no race. Robert exploits Mama Chungu sexually and economically. He is a heartless brute without any feelings. Even after officially tying the knot, he still sneaks to the servant quarter to have sex with Mama Chungu.

Incidentally, Macgoye condemns the victim of such a dastardly act. She seems to be pausing questions: Why don’t women say no to such exploitation. Is it fear of where to go next? Or it is mere apathy? Mama Chungu’s attempted rationalization of the problem does not hold substance. Listen to her:

> She had no will of her own. She did not drive a hard bargain. She had never been very good at calculating. He got her foodstuffs reserved for Europeans and gave her an extra twenty now and then (1987: 113)

Perhaps what women like Mama Chungu ought to learn is to translate bitterness into hatred and learn to stand up to these men. On the contrary, the author seems to apologise: "One wanted to belong. But she was simply, an uneducated woman who would find it difficult to get away from her employer. He had spoilt her youth." (1987: 113) There is a suggestion here that majority of these women are constantly misused by men due to ignorance and general economic vulnerability. One then may go along with Macgoye’s conscience-stricken character, Wairimu and refuse to work as a house help.

Paulina’s representation in *Coming To Birth* serves a totally different purpose. First, she
takes up a job as a house help late in time. She is very mature and decisive. Her resolve to
work as a house help emanates from a series of problems she had faced trying to stabilize in
work. Mrs. M also cushions Paulina against dehumanization. Unlike many other house helps,
Paulina has space and room for decision making. Macgoye glorifies such a rapport thus:-

Mrs. M appreciated the qualities in her general factotum which
had been developed without the aid of female education. She
often took Paulina with her to meetings where women’s place in
society were being discussed, pointed her out as a person who
had achieved a balanced and contented life without a blessing of
children. (1986:110)

The above citation may reveal the fact that women may be better employers of their
fellow women because they do understand their plight.

It is the further exploration of such a situation that necessitated the writing of *Homing
In* (1995) Here, the central characters are both widows. Ellen Smith is a white settler while her
house help is Martha whose husband was murdered during the emergency in Kenya. Knowing
just too well how much they need each other the two women transcend the barriers of race,
class and culture to embrace one another in a life long harmony and peace. Theirs is a perfect
example of what mutual co-existence can do.

Macgoye’s running commentary is that services offered by house helps is without doubt,
paramount. What then should be done is to appreciate their role through respect and good
remuneration. It is such an understanding that prevails between Paulina and her employers.
However for Paulina, such stability comes after a serious struggle. The struggle is documented
in Paulina’s numerous journeys from Nairobi to Kisumu and back to Nairobi. The journeys
juxtaposed as they are with Kenya’s political progress towards independence, do reflect
Paulina’s psycho-physical immaturity. They show her relentless search for meaning in life. It
is a search for matrimonial stability which eludes her and Martin. At the core of this search is a total economic transformation and an independent identity.

When finally she attains economic independence, she attains a higher social status, demonstrated by Martin’s consent to join her in her house. But this economic independence comes along with much greater awareness. Paulina is now very articulate not only politically but is also able to voice issues that deal with the rights of women and children. Her agitation and mobilization of support for pressure to release the female politician, Chelagat Mutai, may be viewed in such a light.

The broad economic base translates into real social power that has ramifications in Paulina’s total lifestyle. Her ability to find her voice hitherto suppressed by male authority, creates social tension between her and her male employer who remarks sarcastically thus: "It looks as though you’ve got yourself a new woman, all right...I hope Martin knows his luck (P. 139) As Mr. M’s remark suggests, Paulina is now a threat to male ego. After all, men like Martin fear independent-minded women especially where such an independent mind is accompanied by a self-sustaining broad economic base. This is why Mr. M makes such a remark against Paulina.

The broader point is this: Beggars do not have choices. Women must first discard the beggar mask before they achieve autonomy. The road to such independence is full of starks and obstacles. In Paulina’s case, it began piece meal with petty trade, crocheting and a bit of sewing at home. During this period Martin regarded her as a nonentity, beating her and locking her in the house at will. Her resolve to attend the homecraft school is a demonstration of her determination and hard work. It is illustrative that Paulina leads an independent life as a teacher
after this training. Such a situation was totally unimaginable at the start of the novel.

When notified of her father’s death, she attends the funeral as a doer and not a recipient. She reminds her mother of her newly acquired social status in a language that smacks of power and freedom:

> I know mother, but you must see me as a man who must go back to work. I have no one else to support me and I have given the customary time. My brothers wives are not working. They will help. (1986:66)

The reference to being like "a man" echoes Wairimu’s comment in *The Present Moment*. As we have already pointed out, it is Macgoye’s metaphor for being able to choose for oneself. It is a search for social power.

Macgoye’s *The Present Moment* is a moment of utter hopelessness, humiliation and social degradation. The text is a realistic rendition of women’s total economic marginalization. The reality, grim as it appears, is a true reflection of what unjust economic policies can do to womenfolk. Rachel’s case is the epitome of such a process.

Shortly after marrying an army friend of her father, without her consent, the man is forcefully conscripted into the second world war. On his return, the man has suffered irreparable physical and psychological torture. He appears to have lost his manhood, too. War and its traumatic impact on its victims is Macgoye’s pet subject. For women, it becomes double tragedy. Apart from becoming widows, they also lose their sole bread winner. This is because once they retire, the retirees are paid peanuts in form of gratuity. Macgoye examines the plight of women whose husbands die in such wars but never receive any form of compensation.
For Rachel the army is responsible for her husband’s lacklustre performance as a husband after he is retired. The same army renders the first born son, Vitalis’, mentally incapacitated. Vitalis matches around the refuge mouthing incomprehensible military commands. Vitalis’ plight despicable as it is, underscores Macgoye’s loathsome view of military service.

With the death of her husband and mental derangement of her first born son, Rahel is left without any male economic protection. She and her co-wife decide to invest the husband’s meagre pension in a fish business. Rahel stations herself in Kisumu to receive and sell fish in Kibuye/Jubilee Market. Such a business is very popular with women in Kisumu especially the widows. Women establish contact with fishermen along the numerous beaches on the shores of Lake Victoria. The fish is loaded in to the buses as they wait in Kisumu to do the sale. The business, practically, is very lucrative and such women have benefited immensely. But for Rahel, it is as if the evil forces had conspired against her.

First her two step sons who were to man the boat capsize and die in a fishing expedition. More so, Rahel is hit by a fish basket as she prepares to receive it from the carrier of the bus. She is finally crippled. Thus Rahel’s economic adventures remain dead in the water. Her woes represent a typical drawback to a woman’s business venture that lacks security with heavy risks.

One does not require statistical evidence to prove that the economic disparity between men and women has been on the increase in post-independent Kenya. According to an economic survey done in Kenya in 1993, women’s employment statistics is alarming. Women constituted less than 25% of the regular wage earners and a mere 7.5% of casual labourers.
Majority of the sectors that employ women damp them within the traditional service oriented areas. The above statistics prove that Kenyan women are to be found within the domestic circles.

The Kenyan woman as depicted in *The Present Moment* resort to hawking, petty trade and the setting up of kiosks in the residential estates. Others succumb to pressure and join the commercial sex workers as a last resort. As depicted in *The Present Moment* the law enforcement agents, hawk-eyed but hungry and corrupt pounce on the unsuspecting women beating them and destroying all their savings.

The ruthlessness and beastly attack on innocent women, petty traders, is an indictment of the Kenya Government. We note here that women’s contribution to the attainment of independence can never be down-played. This fact is documented clearly in both historical and literary texts. But in a fashion reminiscent of the proverbial thankless donkey, the government now renders its citizens inoperative. Indeed Macgoye’s tone of condemnation is discernible on the brutal beating of a helpless woman:

> Arms and batons waving about. I leaned over, trying to protect the glazed portraits of the president whether out of loyalty or because they were best sellers at the time I did not stop to think. But too late. The whole pile came washing down. Myself a top in (1987:137)

The above citation is almost prophetic. Today in Nairobi and other major urban centres in Kenya, hawkers suffer constant harassment from civic authorities and the police. At times, the law enforcement officers are used by business rivals to have the latter deported from the streets where they do business.

Kihumba Kamotho (1989) has accused Macgoye of failing to create women characters
with great ambition. In *The Present Moment*, there is a constant rapport between the old women and the nurses who visit them for health reasons. As they share their experiences, it is hoped that the old people’s stories will act as an antidote to similar experiences for the young nurses. However, as pointed out by Kamotho the said nurses have chosen traditionally stereotyped courses like nursing that bestow on them virtues of empathy but with little economic gains. Such professions are responsible for women’s economic debacle.

However, one may go along with Macgoye and ask whether times have changed for women to take up more challenging courses. While this is desired, the reality is that it has not been done. If Macgoye was to project an alternative vision, then critics are bound to accuse her of falsification of reality. Pessimistic as it may be, educationists like Benaars (1996) view the disparity as an endless process:

> Girls in Africa who are taught in the same kind of school, by the same kind of teachers, and study the same kind of syllabus and display similar potentials as boys still lag behind the boys. Overall girls’ performance in schools and colleges tend to be lower than the boys. (1996:29)

Macgoye, one may assert with confidence, is playing to reality. This is as it should be. However as an author, she has also responsibility to create characters with greater ambition as models for society. Such characters however, must not distort reality.

In this chapter, we have noted that Macgoye’s strength as a writer revolves around realistic delineations. Nowhere in her novels is this better illustrated than in *The Present Moment*. She has shown in all her novels that women have been left out in education. Boys have been encouraged to attend school while women support them in various roles. Without this education, even the few job opportunities available have been taken by men. This has
serious ramifications on women’s economic state.

Faced with this kind of situation, women who still shoulder the greatest responsibility looking after the family, have engaged in menial economic endeavour if only to live. Macgoye has demonstrated that economic well being of women is a great prerequisite for total female emancipation.

She has shown that women fare better economically in the cities unlike the rural areas. She attributes such development to availability of opportunities within the urban areas and the accompanying awareness that such opportunities exist. The ability to read and write, to speak English and Kiswahili and to do some Arithmetic are integral in business management. Without these, success for women remain distant and elusive.

The author does not spare the government either. It has failed to set up good economic policies that would advance women economically. What is in place is cut-throat competition where women are outplayed in all spheres by the more aggressive men. In the same vein, the government has paid lip service to the issue of girls education a matter that perpetuates their marginal existence.

All in all, while women’s economic power is weak, the awareness is much higher. Like in all her other novels, this awareness is crucial for socio-historical development of both the individual and the society at large. The progress of the individual runs parallel with Kenya’s rapid development to independence.
CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AS A SYNDROME OF TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

In this chapter, we will argue that Macgoye female characters’ engagement with politics is a manifestation of a holistic transformation. It is a demonstration of their social and economic growth. From a concern with issues of daily survival at the domestic level, women now tackle politics to show a greater grasp of social and political awareness.

Active involvement in politics presupposes that the nitty gritty of social survival and existence had been fulfilled. Engagement with politics for women becomes an extra activity that also demands that one is economically stable. Only after the domestic front has been fulfilled, do women get a chance to compete with the men in a field that requires greater social space and energy. However, while men naturally join politics for personal aggrandisement, women join politics for pragmatic reasons. They do so for the purpose of solving their daily problems.

The transformation towards greater political involvement is informed by the social political development that takes place within the larger national sphere. The greater political activities that take place in Kenya, historically, have a great import and impact on the characters overall transformation. It is as if Macgoye wants to demonstrate that an individual’s social transformation is linked, strongly, to the historical epoch that nurtures him/her. The characters develop parallel to the society hence affirming the author’s ideology that individuals may not be able to transcend the social, economic and political milieu of his/her society. This explains why the political transformation is gradual.

At the initial stages, these largely female characters take politics for granted. Even mere
awareness of the main political events that may have a dramatic impact on their lives pass completely without reflection. Martin’s concern for Tom Mboya’s assassination hold little if any meaning for Paulina at the initial stages of her social transformation. Wairimu unconscientiously sings praises for politician Harry Thuku as a young girl in *The Present Moment*. Wairimu indeed learnt the song before setting eyes on Harry Thuku. Perhaps one exception here is Ellen Smith in *Homing In*. Due to her European descent and elitist background, she demonstrates a better grasp of local and international politics. All these acquiescent kind of existence evolves into a dramatic engagement with politics as the characters mature into adults.

Women’s active involvement in the political arena comes with the onset of emergency. All Macgoye’s novels demonstrate the author’s clear and incisive grasp of the traumatic events related to the emergency in Kenya. The impact of Mau Mau uprising on women is Macgoye’s pet subject. It is a historical fact, well documented, that women suffered severely in the hands of Mau Mau warriors during the state of emergency. Emergency then, could act as a catalyst to propel women to re-examine their political stand. Moreso, women’s involvement in politics receives profound treatment in the struggle to show that women were never left behind in the fight for independence.

Historians have observed that women provided logistical support as wives of the freedom fighters. Many others were used as conduits for information and military hardware used in the war. Mazrui (1984) notes that women and children died of starvation or disease in the overcrowded and insanitary fortified villages. Even more telling is the fact that Macgoye herself set foot for the first time in Kenya in 1954, at the height of emergency. Having
witnessed the dramatic event personally, her delineation is therefore accurate and truthful.

In this chapter, we shall posit that women’s engagement with politics is Macgoye’s affirmation of their mainstream existence. It brings an end to both social and economic marginalization. It is a process of emancipation that brings forth a new woman. The characters must first strive to overcome the issues of cultural inhibition that view politics as a male affair. However, true to Macgoye’s realistic delineation, none of the characters is romanticised. They are portrayed as joining politics for pragmatic reasons and not for self glory as would appear to be the case with men.

Of all the major players in Macgoye’s novels, two characters play an outstanding role in politics. These are Wairimu in *The Present Moment* and Paulina in *Coming to Birth*. Victoria in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* and Ellen Smith in *Homing In* participate peripherally. Like in the socio-cultural transformation, significant changes take place when the said women have left the village for the city. Politics requires an enlightened vision that is readily available within the city environment. Kurtz (1995) views the city as serving a dual purpose:

It is first of all the site of a new transcultural identity...Secondly, the city provides an opportunity for women to find a refuge or forge a new life in an otherwise oppressively partriachal society. The city, Macgoye shows, offers the space for women to reclaim the ‘authorship’ and ‘citizenship’ that they may be otherwise denied. (1995:204)

The political ‘space’ is reclaimed after several journeys made by the characters in search of individual identity and autonomy. Political involvement is an affirmation of the availability of space.

As a commercial sex worker in Kisumu town, Victoria receives a large number of
visiting clients with unspecified missions. The time is shortly before independence when Mau Mau activities are at their peak. The colonial authority was aware that Victoria’s house was prone to such visits because they suspected that some of the visitors may be political messiahs fronting for Mau Mau destabilizers. They kept surveillance on their activities. Victoria was mandated to eavesdrop on their conversations and report to the provincial administration. The target here were mainly the Kikuyu who were soliciting support for Mau Mau from other ethnic groups in Kenya. This was mainly to counter the negative image presented by Mau Mau detractors who felt that the Mau Mau was a Kikuyu peasant revolt. According to Tom Mboya (1963) there was an attempt to form branches of KAU throughout Nyanza in 1947. Mboya noted that KAU never took root in Nyanza because many people suspected that it was a Kikuyu organization.

If Mboya’s assertion is accurate, then Macgoye’s representation of Victoria is credible. But Victoria’s act of reporting these ‘visitors’ constitutes an act of betrayal but which may be justified on the above suspicion. The influence of Mau Mau in Kisumu may have been minimal. Victoria’s role as a spy for the colonial authorities coincide, incidentally, with her fruitful pregnancy at 33. The pregnancy parallels Kenya’s inevitable development to independence captured in the metaphor of the coming child. Ironically, Victoria fails to use her influence and social power over men to speed up the process to self rule. Historically, no records reveal any political heroine from the Luo community who participated actively in the struggle for independence.

It is even more ironical that after independence, Victoria’s house is used by those opposed to the government as a hide-out for clandestine activities. It is a mark of damning
courage for Victoria to use her resources to organise safety nets for political detainees like Wasere to escape to neighbouring countries. But why the shift in stand? Could Macgoye be playing to the reality of Kenya’s post independent ethnic politics. It is instructive to note that soon after independence, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga after falling out with Kenyatta, formed a bed rock of opposition politics in Kenya. It is therefore possible that Victoria was supporting these clandestine activities to demonstrate her ethnic solidarity with Odinga and his henchmen. Or at another level, Victoria could have overcome the political myopia and was now consciously and critically choosing an expedient political stand. This could point to her new role as an opposition sympathiser.

But Victoria of post independent Kenya is totally different. She is now economically empowered. She is able to contribute generously in funds drives for students proceeding overseas for further studies. By then she has become extremely articulate. She delivers a moving speech during Wasere MacOnyango’s funeral in Gem. She is confident and mature. She is of a higher social status. Her confidence emanates directly from her economic autonomy. The strong economic base affords her the much needed social power which subsequently gives her a voice and earns her respect from both men and women. Thus her engagement with politics conforms to our contention that to participate in politics, women must first seek liberty from inhibitive cultural practices. They must be able to overcome economic marginalization.

However, Victoria’s failure to make a political impact remains realistic and may be explained within the context of Kenya’s women’s failure to make an impact on politics. Women are represented as generally more concerned with the issues of domesticity as regards
the immediate survival of the family. While this is realistic, it does not augur well for the female folk.

Sophia in *The Present Moment* epitomises what we may call political myopism. During the Dock Workers strike in Mombasa in 1949, Sophia’s husband is arrested and jailed for his active role in the strike. He later dies in prison.

Unfortunately, Sophia, selfishly but rightly, feels that it is unfair to detain her husband to death in a movement whose beneficiaries are much larger than the family. Her major concern is the unit family. The element of sacrifice for the attainment of freedom makes little sense for her. For Sophia, then, this sacrifice cannot over ride family survival.

Sacrifice has been touted as an integral element in all struggles for political and economic freedom. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and other Marxist oriented authors articulate this now and again. Ngugi exemplifies this notion in his messiah like character-Kihika in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967)

But the question Sophia and by extension Macgoye could be posing here is: should this sacrifice be at the expense of the children? Sophia’s woes and agony demonstrate this ambivalence. Her portrayal is credible within the circumstances. True to Macgoye’s spirit as a writer, she pauses such contradictions for the readers to judge for themselves. But if children prohibit full political involvement, then Wairimu’s role in politics, childless as she is lends great support.

Wairimu’s youthful engagement with politics may be explained as emanating from environmental conditioning. The colonial settler farmers chose agricultural land mainly in the central province and Rift Valley. These areas have good soils and beautiful climate. Some of
these farms were however, wrenched from native Kenyans. As if grabbing of these farms were not enough, Africans were recruited forcefully to provide labour. The alienation of local people from their land created social tension that led to protests. Every Kikuyu child grew up knowing the enemy as the colonial authority and its agents. Growing up in such an environment, Wairimu had little choice but to conditionally be sympathetic to the Mau Mau uprising.

Wairimu's political transformation apart from being gradual, is informed by the harsh political realities that pervade her environment. The actual initiation into politics starts with her meeting with Harry Thuku on her first visit to Nairobi. Although the meeting is delightful, it is heavily contrived. It is unthinkable that Wairimu would on her first visit to Nairobi meet such an important individual who lives to his reputation and secures her a job in a hotel in Nairobi.

Harry Thuku was a founder member of Young Kikuyu Association, an organization that was formed to fight land alienation and forced labour. Thuku was arrested in Nairobi in 1922 and detained pending his deportation to Kismayu. A protest match was organised by Africans to press for Thuku’s release. During the protest, police fired at the crowd killing twenty Africans. Thuku was deported to Kismayu and the Young Kikuyu Association banned.

Wairimu attended the above rally. Her age: only 18. Wairimu, then, must have been politically very naive and ignorant. Macgoye reveals her narrow-mindedness thus:

> Mr. Wright the European padre was standing nearby. He didn’t throw himself down like others, and some of us girls got as near to him as we could, somehow thinking that the shots could not go near a white man. *(The Present Moment: pg.48)*

It is predictable that Wairimu attended this rally out of curiosity and not a strong will
to be involved. But for Macgoye, the event was memorable enough to become a launch pad into politics for Wairimu.

However, Wairimu’s real engagement with politics came in 1949. In the same year, Wairimu joined Kenya African Union and took the oath of allegiance. At the time of joining KAU, Wairimu is 45. She is therefore mature and politically conscious. She immediately began the task of recruiting people for the party. Her participation is discreet, cautious and tactful. She carefully concealed her identity to escape the ruthless arm of the law. Her duties consisted of passing secret coded messages to the Mau Mau guerrillas. At times, her house would be used as a hide-out for the same warriors.

To conceal her involvement, Wairimu deceptively went to church every Sunday. To the colonial authorities the mere fact of going to church meant that one is 'good'. The importance of religion here is noted. Religion was used as a tool of conversion of Africans into a subservient lot. It transformed one from being wild to being 'Godly'. To be godly carried the tag of being harmless, obedient and loyal to the powers that be. Christians, as they were referred to were thought to be free of any form of mischief.

Furthermore, Wairimu was never late for work. Her commitment to duty as a farm’s labourer exonerated her from any form of suspicion. The committed labourer had word put in for them by their white bosses hence stemming harassment from the law. Humorously, Wairimu pasted the pictures of the queen as the head of government on her wall as a sign of loyalty. Of course these acts were used to camouflage the serious seditious acts of destabilization that Wairimu secretly performed. Her ability to operate guerrilla-style is a manifestation of social-political sophistication which contrasts sharply with her naivety in
Nairobi in 1922. She understands the nature of oppression and identifies the enemies clearly. She demonstrates a clear understanding of the need for freedom.

The contribution of women towards the achievement of independence cannot be gainsaid. While it is agreeable that to fight in the bush was rather difficult for women, their logistical support was valuable. In her book *The Story of Kenya* (1986), Macgoye understands this difficulty:

> The fighters got no pay and submitted to very strict discipline. They had to be very quiet and cover every sign that they had passed along a track, footmarks, cigarette ends, broken twigs. They used animal food and animal skin to supplement supplies brought in from outside. They plaited their long hair to keep it clean. (1986:44)

Under such wild and difficult conditions women were the ones left with children as men left for battle. But whether they were at home or served in different errands, their contribution was valuable to the overall achievement.

But as expected, Wairimu’s contribution to the uprising is down-played by the patriarchal forces that would later assume the leadership of the country. After playing a central role in the fight for independence, women are relegated to the symbolic role of being mothers of the nation, a tag that does not carry a tangible economic or political gain. This, as succinctly observed by Elleke Boehmer (1986), is oppressive:

> Despite the promises of national freedom, women were therefore excluded from the full national participation on an equal footing with men. Even where women, as in Algeria or Zimbabwe, fought for freedom alongside men, national consciousness was composed by male leaders. Mother Africa may have been declared free, but the mothers of Africa remained manifestly oppressed (1984:7)

Wairimu is edged out of the political mainstream slowly but surely:
Jomo Kenyatta came back from England in 1946. In February, the next year, he went to address the people at Ruringa Stadium—Mbiyu Koinange and James Beutah were there with him. Of course I went. After what I had seen as a girl, I felt I had a right to be present at any political event. And I fell under the spell. But of course, I was only in their eyes, an ordinary member of the crowd. I did not get invited to the big dinner afterwards. (1987:97)

Wairimu’s lament recapitulates Macgoye’s disgust with political marginalization of the women folk even before the attainment of independence. It is this political marginalization that readily translates into an economic deprivation. It is the economic deprivation that results into total disillusionment in the post independence era. Wairimu then has missed all the dinners.

In Homing In, Macgoye through a white couple, Hellen and Jack Smith, presents general apprehension and fear that gripped the predominantly white settlers shortly before independence. Mrs. Ellen Smith is shown as having a finer grasp of politics than her husband, Jack Smith. The setting is a farm in Njoro and the period is the emergency. The central issue is whether the white settlers would enjoy the same privileges, they have been entitled to during the colonial era. Are the white settlers safe with the exit of the white rulers?

Macgoye juxtaposes the two characters, Jack Smith and Ellen to show Ellen as resilient, intelligent and patient while Jack is irrational and irresponsible. Unlike her husband, Ellen Smith from the beginning cultivates a sense of interdependence between her and the black majority as a process of ensuring her safety in case there is change in leadership. It is instructive that Ellen encourages her farm workers to form a co-operative to purchase her farm instead of selling the same to the white settler colleagues. It is such a close rapport with blacks that instils confidence into Ellen to face the future with blacks at the helm. Hers is a vision of racial integration where blacks live in mutual co-existence with the minority whites.
Jack Smith's unexplained escape to Kitale, leaving Ellen alone with the children in Nakuru, is a sure demonstration that he is ducking serious responsibilities. His escape to Kitale is explained as springing from the uncertainties surrounding the future. Having failed to cultivate a sense of brotherhood with the majority black, Jack's escape and consequent death in Kitale is Macgoye's contention that those who fail to live in harmony with blacks must give way.

Just like Mr. Benerjee who collapses and dies in his shop at the thought of change over leadership, Jack's death is a comment by the author that independent Kenya needed people with a reconciliatory approach and not racists. Ellen is presented as politically more progressive. She is optimistic of a comfortable future even in the face of the emerging black leadership.

Ellen Smith in our opinion embodies Macgoye's personal qualities. Unlike Jack, Ellen settlers in Kenya once and for all. Kenya becomes her country and Britain does not feature in her daily preoccupation. She does not harbour any nostalgia at all about her early childhood in Britain. Furthermore, her constant inclination towards the black majority is a process towards racial integration that will offer her a permanent place in her new country. Unlike her husband, who does not settle to stay, Ellen's friends are the majority blacks.

In essence, through Ellen, Macgoye demonstrates that women are resilient, patient and capable of adapting to situations better than their rigid and inflexible men. While Ellen faced the same uncertainties like any other white settler, her tactful approach saved the day for her.

Paulina's initiation into politics is slow but eventful. Through the story of Paulina, Macgoye gets a chance to examine the effects of emergency within the city itself. It is
instructive that Macgoye herself came to Kenya during the peak of emergency uprising in 1954. She writes of her personal experiences:

I remember being driven through Ziwani and the old Kariokor, amid the barbed wire and the notices and one of my fellow missionaries whispering "I expect all this is rather shock to you". (1991:4)

It is such an experience that later receives a fictional rendition, so accurately, in *Coming to Birth*. While Paulina sets foot in Nairobi during the emergency, politically this meant nothing to her. She took everything for granted.

Later in Kisumu, the death of her son Okeyo in our opinion is a consternation that catapults her to reflect afresh her political involvement. Okeyo’s death had something to do with politics. Kenyatta had visited Kisumu and exchanged bitter words with Jaramogi Oginga Odinga in 1969. Riots ensued and Kenyatta’s motorcade was stoned. Several people lost their lives. Out of her curiosity, Paulina too had lined along the road to view the motorcade. Unfortunately, Okeyo receives a single bullet that brought a sad end to his life. But why does Okeyo die in this way?

At the time of Okeyo’s death, Paulina had become an independent woman. She steers clear of her matrimonial and maiden homes. But Macgoye portrays her as suffering from acute loneliness. Okeyo restores Paulina’s confidence as a woman capable of motherhood. Ironically, the child also robs Paulina of mainstream existence because he is born out of wedlock. Essentially, Paulina has not divorced Martin. Okeyo’s death is perhaps Macgoye’s attempt to stem Paulina’s individualism and restore her mainstream existence. Macgoye uses Okeyo’s death to show Paulina that "Man" is not an island to lead a secluded life away from other members of the community. Paulina’s departure to Nairobi after Okeyo’s death is an attempt
at a reorganization of her life and an affirmation of Macgoye’s personal philosophy of “inclusiveness of vision - (Kibera:1986). Paulina needs Martin and Martin needs Paulina. That is why Okeyo becomes a child of ’sin’ and must therefore die and Martin may as well be excused just for reconciliation:

She twisted the wedding ring which she still wore. Of course he would be free to come if he wished. She did not assert any right in him but she was still his wife. Neither of them referred to the fact that there was only space for a single bed in the room. *(Coming to Birth:96)*

For Macgoye’s purposes of reconciliation and the need for the mutual co-existence, the previous differences between Martin and Paulina remain artificial and skin-deep. At another level, Macgoye could be affirming the traditional belief that women should procreate only with their legitimate husbands unless otherwise. She writes:

Perhaps his death was a punishment for being born out of wedlock. She brooded over it alone. There was no good discussing it. All around her babies were being born out of wedlock and legitimate babies were dying. *(1986:85)*

What is significant to the reader is the fact that Okeyo meets his death during political disturbances. Paulina who hitherto treated political matters as non-issues, begins to pay serious attention to the problem with her son’s death. The decision is taken, gradually, when she finally settles in Nairobi. It came at a time when Paulina had learned a great deal. She has also attained a certain degree of socio-economic transformation.

To demonstrate her new social vision, Paulina now attends public meetings in church. She is able to attend seminars at public universities and discuss issues affecting women at women’s seminars. The easy manner with which she finds her way out of the mess after a bomb blast in the city, contrasts sharply with her initial inability to find her way out of
Kenyatta National Hospital. The social transformation attests to her readiness to embrace more rigorous issues like politics. She has the social and economic space to tackle such intellectually rigorous engagements like politics.

For a start, Paulina needs the hand of such an experienced organiser like Mrs. M. an integral element in the socio-economic transformation of Paulina as an individual. In her own right, Mrs. M campaigns for her husband during parliamentary election extolling his virtues to fellow women voters. The power to organise women, speak to them, and be listened to, requires greater social awareness and a reasonable level of education. It is this awareness that plays a significant influence on Paulina.

But it is the arrest and subsequent detention of Chelagat Mutai that jolts Paulina into political action. The arrest of Chelagat Mutai is a historical fact that Macgoye has cleverly fused into fiction. Chelagat Mutai was an articulate Kenyan woman legislator who drew attention to herself as a courageous and selfless defender of people's rights. It is in an attempt to speak out over the detention of Seroney and Shikuku who had criticised the ruling party KANU that she got into trouble.

The authorial bias for Mutai is glaring. Macgoye's choice of adjectives to valorize the courage, resilience and determination of Miss Mutai against authoritative dictatorial male regime is not for nothing. She writes of Mutai: "Only one person asked a lot of questions about the new detention and that was a single woman MP, a rare bird indeed". (Pg.109) But it is such rare qualities in Chelagat Mutai that warrants sympathetic gesture from Paulina and Mrs. M. However, the failure of Paulina and Mrs. M to convince even their fellow women to lobby for Chelagat's release is significant. It demonstrates that women's political maturity is far from
the ideal. This falls within Macgoye’s realistic delineation.

For the reader, Paulina’s engagement with Chelagat’s political debacle is an affirmation of her total transformation. The mere fact that she can find a voice to articulate such grievances attests to this holistic transformation. Indeed Paulina’s pleas to Martin for action borders on commands. She literally shouts at Martin’s incapacity to act decisively in concert with her plans to petition the M. Ps for Chelagat’s release. This is a complete reversal of roles viewed against Martin’s absolute powers at the beginning of the text. While Martin pleads ignorance of any reasonable solution, Paulina’s suggestions are mature, decisive and smacks of intelligence: "Write to our M. Ps, make processions, sign petitions, strike..."(Pg. 111)

In Kenya’s political scene, rough and unpredictable as we know it in reality, Paulina’s suggestions remain idealistic. However, Macgoye’s underlying message is clear: Paulina and Mrs. M’s effort may fail to secure the release of Chelagat but they will have succeeded in mobilising women to act in unity in case of trouble:

Even if it failed, women might become politically conscious by making the attempt. And whereas six women or twenty making a fuss in Nairobi about a court case might be arrested and harassed, no one in these non-emergency days could arrest thousands of women.(1986:112)

However, the effort is idealistic in the sense that women may not succeed without involvement of men. This to us appears a contradiction. Without support from the men who form the bulk of the repressive authority, the procession would be dead in the water. This is clearly demonstrated in the questions the men ask. Indeed the questions asked are as awkward as they are patriarchal but essentially embody the reality of Kenya’s male dominated politics;

The men ask:
If the girl has no children to leave behind, no husband to misbehave while she is away, What is the loss? (1986:113)

The question is typically male-chauvinist and exemplifies the contemptuous attitude men hold against women with regard to politics. For men, then, women exist only as minders of children and husbands. It also demonstrates the fact that women fear joining active politics because children and husbands remain a great burden to such an activity.

The character of Mr. M. is satirised to reveal the insensitive nature of those in authority. As long as those who go to Parliament do so to champion their personal interests, freedom for the individual will remain a far cry. Mr. M vilifies rouble rousers thus:

He was furious. The constitution, he pronounced sententiously was not made for individuals. One person could sink or swim without making it right to put the rest in danger. (1986:113)

The above statement is a parody of a Kenya government statement at the height of unexplained harassment of those opposed to government policies during the single party era in the 1980s. It is paradoxical, but true, that Mr. M should react to the incarceration of a fellow legislator the way he does. His individualism is consistent with the majority of Kenya’s politicians whose first concern is personal aggrandizement.

The above events are made to coincide with Paulina’s deeper concern for the street children. Paulina’s critical appraisal of the malady goes beyond mere maternal instinct. It is juxtaposed with the unfeeling, reactionary and defensive position adopted and epitomised by Mr. M. Ironically, as a Member of Parliament one would expect Mr. M. to be at the fore front of the struggle to better the life of the street children.

In *Street Life* (1987), Macgoye dwells on the plight of one unfortunate young man, Simon Oluoch. Oluoch was involved in a motor accident that left him completely crippled.
Oluoch tells his story directly to the reader thereby creating intimacy and soliciting more sympathy for his misfortune.

But what makes the story unique is Oluoch’s attitude about his situation. He does not regret. He struggles to live positively within his means. He plays his flute and sings to earn a living. Days can be hard, but life must continue. This is Oluoch’s philosophy. He is the focus in a network of relations with other street boys that the author uses to reveal the plight of these children in Nairobi.

Oluoch plays a pivotal role in the lives of other street children. He advises them on how to live decently in the streets. He shares whatever accrues in his beggar’s plate if only to feed the unfortunate colleagues. Listen to him advising Hassani Miriuki, a fellow street boy:

But you can live decently even on the pavement. Not comfortably - no, that’s not possible. We all know about long hours spent sitting cramped up, no space to turn around, too hot or too cold, sick of people staring at you and sick of being ignored. We can’t save you from that. But you respect other people and then we can teach you a bit of self-respect.

Oluoch is presented as sharp, intelligent and extremely resourceful. He uses his network of relations to secure a job for a former classmate in a restaurant. He has an extremely good sense of humour which is the foundation for good poetry.

While Oluoch does not have the capacity to go to church because he has no legs, he lives religiously. His philanthropic gestures are way beyond those of ordinary beings. He is an example of people who face their destinies without any regrets. He is much more concerned with the progress of the others. What a better way to love one’s neighbour the biblical way!

Through him, Macgoye shows the reader that street children are normal people. That
it is perhaps the fortunate members of society who think otherwise. Macgoye in this short story is pleading with society to address the issue more urgently. She is asking that they be given a chance to develop and realise their full potential. Paulina’s concern for the street children in *Coming to Birth* is the first of such a step.

Paulina’s sympathy for the street children embodies Macgoye’s personal philosophy regarding the street children. As a writer, Macgoye’s royalties from her short stories titled *Street Life* (1987) go towards the rehabilitation of street children. Paulina’s ability to argue her case even with the socially powerful employer, Mr. M. attests to her overall social and economic transformation. It demonstrates that at long last the hitherto naive narrow minded Paulina has undergone a social metamorphosis. The process is in itself irreversible. She is now capable of handling more complex issues. The mere fact of speaking out also suggests that Paulina is ready to tackle the problems.

We have shown that women have participated fully in agitation for attainment of independence as exemplified by Wairimu’s positive contribution. However a greater chunk of these texts reveal the disillusionment of the women folk with ‘freedom’ that never changed their social beings or economic status. It is pathetic that people like Wairimu who fought side by side with the men are only able to run kiosks after independence. Kihumba Kamotho is at pains to point out this frustration:

> In post-colonial African societies, the woman contends with petty trade as hawking, prostitution and serving in houses of the well off as house maids. In domestic service, she is exploited and always survives in the economic periphery. (1989:57)

Worse still, the repressive post independent African regimes clamp down on populist politicians who symbolise liberty and who could be trusted to bring about lasting social and
economic change.

Macgoye, realistically, presents independence as having occasioned a change of guard and nothing more. Nepotism, corruption and all forms of vices rule the day:

At last we got our wish, freedom, a broadening of the ways much as you have all seen. But the same master stayed on the coffee. Until he grew old and wanted to retire, sought a purchaser, a Kikuyu and we rejoiced. But not for long, we found ourselves turned away, and new clansmen brought in. (1987:113)

Such despicable acts prompt Macgoye to wonder loudly with her characters whether there was need to fight for freedom at all. The post independent ills, detention without trial, assassination of populist politicians take place against a back-drop of land grabbing and unceasing corruption. During this notorious era, even the men and women were not spared the disillusionment. They are as frustrated as the women themselves. Post independent Kenya then has failed to restore hope for the individual citizens. The picture according to Macgoye, is gloomy and the country is sinking into political doldrum. Would there be hope if women abandoned political apathy and embraced politics to right the wrong? This perhaps is Macgoye’s essential point in presenting Paulina as taking serious interest in politics. As long as women remain politically disenfranchised, then the question of independence and freedom remain null and void.

Macgoye, in summary, has not created a political heroine with any larger than life character like Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Wanja in Petals of Blood (1977). What we have is a realistic delineation of women characters gradually trying to establish their bearing within the political arena. From characters who knew practically nothing in politics, we see progressive
movements in Wairimu and Paulina. The society may not be ready for women politicians but with a little push, women are likely to find their rightful position. That is why Paulina who is practically mute at the beginning of the novel is able to find her voice. Even Martin who hitherto was never ready to listen, shuts up for Paulina to make her point.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

We have shown that character transformation in Macgoye’s novels is guided by socio-historical forces that reside within the larger context of the novels. In all her works of fiction, Macgoye reconstructs fictional characters demonstrating the impact of the historical in shaping the ontological world view that consequently gives a vision and new possibilities to her characters.

Her novels are characterised by a very strong historical sense. History, in Macgoye’s perception, is never a remote past that is idealised. Her characters are presented as tragic individuals who are consistently struggling to overcome life obstacles that militate against their social progress. Macgoye does not write about heroes and heroines. She picks on ordinary mortals who in their daily engagements with daily business of survival, transform themselves into heroines.

We have demonstrated that Macgoye believes, strongly, that historical phenomena do not impact on women and men, homogeneously. This is typified in the social transformation of Paulina to a leading heroine in society. On the other hand, the historical circumstances, similar as they are, fail to effect any positive change in Martin. Macgoye’s attempt as a female author to valorise and centralise issues affecting women constitutes an orientation in feminist ideology, subtly presented. Although Macgoye has denied this, pointing out that she writes about women because she knows them better, we have noted that the bias is just too obvious to be ignored.

We have argued that Macgoye sets out to subvert repugnant socio-cultural structures
that tether women to domestic slavery and social death. One such structure is pre-arranged marriage. Macgoye shows clearly that such women are never consulted before such marriages. We have shown that in such marriages, it is the men who benefit economically while the women remain mere commodities of exchange. In cases where such marriages result in children, the women suffer more.

Macgoye deliberately subverts such inhibitive traditions. In undermining these structures, the author's central concern is the creation of alternative avenues for women's social progress. First her women are presented as rebelling against such marriages. She also delays the birth of children until the victims of such marriages are economically capable of sustaining their children. Where children come before the women are ready, Macgoye subverts tradition by presenting such women as abandoning their children against maternal instinct which holds that women would rather suffer than abandon their children. Most of these activities are rooted in the village. The village, Macgoye shows, is the epitome of repressive cultural practices. The transformation entails a decisive movement from the village to the cities.

Within the city, the female characters are presented with alternative choices for social progress. Most of them struggle to acquire education which Macgoye shows is the basis to economic marginalization. But in presenting these alternatives, Macgoye remains the true merchant of reality. Her female characters are totally never romanticised. They do such menial jobs as hawking, petty trade, house cleaning or become commercial sex workers. This is how they make ends meet. This is the reality as we know it in Kenya. Having missed out on education, women are more often conditioned to view such menial tasks as God given. But for Macgoye's characters, such menial tasks are used as a means for greater social transformation.
In *Victoria*, Macgoye is at pains to show that prostitution is a creation of society. It is partly due to discrimination and unfair economic arrangements that women resort to prostitution. Prostitution is not a pleasurable activity, but an institution that women join when all other sources of livelihood are blocked. Prostitution offers the best alternative in given circumstances. It gives the women the lee way to use their sexual power for economic gain. Where sex would be viewed in the limiting traditional conception of procreation, women are now offered the capacity to view it as a spring board for economic independence.

Macgoye’s prime concern is economic empowerment of the women folk. Macgoye understands clearly that independence and freedom for women will remain dead in the water unless they are provided with a strong economic base.

We have shown that land is traditionally an important source of wealth. But land traditionally belongs to the men. Women use land in trust for men. This has helped in perpetuating poverty for women because whatever accrues from these farms remain the property of men. Women must seek permission to use such products. The author has shown that land is not women’s space for economic progress. This is the reason why Abiero in *Victoria* must sever ties with land. More crucially, Macgoye has shown that land is used by the oppressive patriarchal society to enslave women. Women will farm that land never for personal gain, but for greater family consumption. Progressive women must spiritually resist such an arrangement.

Far from it, Macgoye is not a ‘reckless feminist’ author. She struggles to redefine male-female relations if only as an alternative for women to gain economic freedom. Her female characters are presented as seeking strong economic gains for social power. Such power is
subsequently used to solicit social respect that leads to a reciprocal co-existence between men and women. She does not advocate total severing of relations between men and women but a mutual recognition of their complementarity in life. Women, then, do not hold such power to ridicule and hold men in contempt, but to better their individual self.

All in all, we have shown that Macgoye as a feminist author is a cut above the others. She does not preach feminist ideology for the sake of it. She does not apportion blame unnecessarily. She does not harangue her readers into submitting to her ideology. She does not provide cheap solutions to complex problems affecting society. The new horizons merely open up gradually as the whole nation experiences socio-political transformation. Her characters remain true ordinary mortals embracing change as a means of creating new possibilities for a better society.

Her characters gradually grow from naive narrow minded village lot to mature national characters. To mark the transition, in addition to their ethnic language, they now strive to be articulate in English and Kiswahili. They drop narrow tribal definitions to embrace nationalistic views. Such awareness comes gradually but is irreversible. We have shown that once they are armed with such awareness, women are now capable of tackling more vigorous issues like politics. To engage with politics, we have posited, is a demonstration that the social, economic and cultural transformation has gone full circle. The characters have been born again after a metamorphosis. Political engagement systematically shows that women are now ready to participate in all spheres of development. But unlike men, women do not join politics for personal aggrandizement. Theirs is a pragmatic concern: to solve pressing problems.

We have also shown that Macgoye appears to offer a tone of apology where one is
‘undeserved’. For instance, Paulina is denied the comfort of living with Okeyo when circumstances point to the fact that Okeyo was deserved. Even when Paulina finally conceives, she apologises to Martin for their lack of a child as if the problem was hers in the first place. Victoria, we have shown, is less-respected by her son-in-law because of her background as a commercial sex worker. Wairimu suffers untold psychological trauma for her inability to marry and have children. While these contradictions point to a society that is at cross roads, it would have been better if the author gave a firm stand to provide direction to her readers.

Macgoye has shown that her European descent has not been a hindrance to an incisive grasp of national issues in Kenya. Her representation of issues is realistic and credible. As a female writer, she has made an indelible mark. She deserves greater attention from critics. One area that we would recommend is a feminist reading of her works. One may also need to do a comparative study of her vision as a writer of European descent and that of the earlier European writers such as Robert Ruark, Isaac Dinesen, Karen Blixen and Elspeth Huxley.
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APPENDIX

Interview with Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

This is an excerpt from an interview held with Macgoye on January 18, 1996 at her house in Ngara Estate, Nairobi. Clarifications were further sought on December 20, 1997. The interview was tape-recorded, transcribed and edited.

Q.1 Mrs. Macgoye, kindly state your life history, briefly.
ANS. I was born in England in a working class community. I went to school during World War II. I did a master’s degree on 19th century criticism at the University of London. I came to Kenya in 1954 as a Bookseller by trade. I married a Luo - a clinical officer in 1960. He died in 1990. We have four children and six grand children.

Q.2 Is your fiction influenced by your personal life experience?
ANS. Obviously it is. I do not know how you could write fiction without drawing on your own experiences. I have lived largely in urban setting. However, having married a Luo, there is a lot of ‘Luo’ influence. I had to learn things which people take for granted. However, as much as I have absorbed the community’s practices, I do not accept some cultural beliefs. A mother-in-law, for instance, is not allowed to sleep in her son-in-law’s house. This is wrong.

Q.3 As a writer do you have a theory of society?
ANS. I would not call it a theory but there has to be a premise on which the work is based. In Coming to Birth, you meet an immature lady who changes into a very mature one and you ask yourself, how does one change into the other? This becomes a theory.

Q.4 What do you regard as the most important function of Literature in society?
ANS. It appears to me that the most important function of Literature is to sensitize people, to work out the relationship between people and events. I am absolutely sure that the function of Literature is not to provide solutions. However, writers sometimes become lonely if they are ahead of their time.

Q5. Kindly explain why your fiction has a very strong historical sense.

ANS. History is there. It influences my writing accordingly. What I do is to try to understand it and show how it affects the daily life of people. In Kenya, I am interested in the way history affects the life of common people. History is there, all we can do as writers is influence it.

Q6. Do you have an ideology as a writer?

ANS. I am a Christian. I do not have an ideology as a writer but as a person. I am a writer and a Christian and I have told you I have things I desire in society like equality and pursuit of justice through social manipulation.

Q7. Critics like Valerie Kibera have noted that you possess an "inclusiveness of vision". What does this mean?

ANS. That may mean I am not gender sensitive. You cannot write of everything but you must be aware that whatever you write, there must be another side to it.

Q8. Kindly give us your assessment of the contribution of women to development in Kenya.

ANS. Achievement is an awkward word. However, there is some development, that Kenyan women have taken over the secretarial sector of the Kenyan economy. In 1954, only about 3 women were secretaries. Today we have almost all secretarial services being offered by women. Again considering education, the first Kenyan woman graduate,
Mrs Nelly Onyango graduated from Makerere in 1953, she had to be passed to a Boys' School. Today women are Headmistresses of several secondary as well primary schools. In politics in 1957 of the seven members of the legislative assembly none of them was a woman. Today it is different.

Q.9. In your fiction, you have given prominence to female characters. Are you in a way conscious of the gender issues involved in this glaring bias?

ANS. I believe in gradual change. However, at times there can be dramatic change. It appears that many times, women are poor and men better off. Members of society need to co-operate in realising their goals. For me I write more about women because I know them better. I know the ones in the city better than those in rural areas.

Q.10. Your characters are involved in a relentless search for personal freedom. May you explain how lack of freedom hinders personal growth in the light of your novels.

ANS. It appears to me that the status of a woman in the society is controlled by nature. Nobody has complete freedom. Choices are limited in most cases. But in society we try to help those who can do nothing for themselves.