THE USE OF NARRATIVE VOICES IN THE
PRESENTATION OFIDEOLOGICAL DISPENSATION IN THREE
NOVELS BY MARJORIE OLUDHE MACGOYE

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DECLARATION

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

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DEDICATION

To Agripina Masitsa, and my beloved children: Ann Atieno and Emmanuel Kinda – for the patience and sacrifice; to all the teachers whose words of counsel have moulded me; and also to the memory of Moses & Teresina Achebi and Celestine Aloo Oyugi.
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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

The study proposes the following working definitions of key terms:

**Narration**
Form into which words provide the base metal of fiction, whose purpose is to relate an event or succession of events involving characters, plot and setting.

**Narrative**
A semiotic representation of events which is meaningfully connected in a temporal and casual way, hence the organization of a series of events that combine to form a story.

**Narrator**
This is the 'linguistic subject, a function and not a person, which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text', and usually seen as "the one who tells".

**Narratee**
The person who is narrated to.

**Narratology**
A multi-disciplinary study of narrative which negotiates and incorporates the insights of other critical discoveries that involve narrative forms of representation.

**Portrayal**
The description given about a woman or anybody in order to project her / him in a particular way, either to demean, raise her / his stature or show her / him as a normal human being.

**Voice**
The act of narrating - the situation involving a teller and an audience - and answers the question: who speaks?

**Ideology**
The systemized value systems which accompany a writer's efforts to explain the nature of the reality of the narrators' experiences and through which the writer commits the narrators to action.
Womanism  Belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the confines of sex, class and race.
Feminism  A theoretical construct whose primary goal is that of female empowerment and centrality. It seeks to give women a ‘voice’ while liberating them from the obligations to men (and family) as it gives them visibility in the public space.
ABSTRACT

This study investigates Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's use of various narrators to portray female characters in Coming to Birth, The Present Moment and Homing In. By focusing on the narrators' self expression, the study investigates the writer's ideological position as well as the organizational skills used to construct the unique experiences and realities of the female character. The thesis investigates the implications of the narrative discourse that underlie narratorial voice in Macgoye's selected texts in an attempt to identify how these are mediated by factors such as gender relations, social concerns and cultural values. These are the essential concepts underlying the ideology which informs the medium through which the textual reality is presented in the selected novels. The analysis has been facilitated by the theory of the narrative as understood within the larger stylistic approach to literature. The theory sees the novel as a story with a storyteller who can take several positions. This is a conceptual study that has relied on close readings of the selected texts. The study has taken the format of discussions and reflections guided by illustrative data collected from the selected texts. The analytical process is based on the premise that the nature and interactions of the various narratorial voices will foreground Macgoye's ideology in the texts under study. The study establishes that Macgoye uses different narratorial voices and strategies to present her ideological dispensation. Finally, the study makes some recommendations for further research on Macgoye's literary works.
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Author’s Profile

This study of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye’s literary works is based on three of her literary texts; Coming to Birth, The Present Moment and Homing In. These texts are part of Macgoye’s larger works through which she explores how women have responded to social constructs that define their roles in society. The selected texts allow Macgoye to undermine these roles through female characters in ways that portray them more as partners to men, rather than competitors. This thesis, then, is an investigation of how she uses the female narratorial voice to highlight different ideological dispensations in order to advance the woman’s position.

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye is British by birth and Kenyan by choice. She was born Marjorie Phyllis King in Southampton, England, on October 21, 1928, where she was raised and educated. She holds a Masters degree in Literature. She came to Kenya in 1954 at the age of twenty-six, as a bookseller for the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the mission arm of the Anglican Church. Six years later she married Daniel Oludhe Macgoye and when Kenya attained independence, she became a citizen of the Republic.

Macgoye’s legacy includes poetry collections, novels and children’s literature. She has also written essays and several unpublished works. Besides writing, Macgoye has been instrumental in organizing poetry reading sessions in Nairobi. She has also taught creative writing at Egerton University.
Macgoye has won several awards such as the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature (1995) for *Homing In*, the Sinclair Prize of Fiction (1986) for *Coming to Birth*, and the BBC Art and Africa Poetry award (1981) for the poem “Shairi la Ukombozi”. She has also received favourable newspaper and journal reviews. Her novels and poems have been used as literature set books in schools and colleges in Kenya.

Besides writing novels and poems, Macgoye has also edited books, for example, *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* (2007). In all, Macgoye has published eight novels; three short stories; four children’s literature; two poems; five non-fiction works and several essays. Her poems have also been published in anthologies.

1.1 Background to the Study

Literature draws its inspiration largely from the community in which it is set. It is in most cases aimed at reflecting that particular society. As a result, the social set up of a community affects the perspective from which the reflection occurs. In turn, this affects the perspective from which the narratorial voices in the texts portray characters.

It has also been observed by scholars that African communities are largely patriarchal. In these communities women had been relegated to a secondary position while men were foregrounded. Uwakweh confirms this (1998):

> Gender identity and its exclusionary potential for the female are deeply rooted in the fabric of traditional and modern African societies. Gender determines women’s status, roles in the domestic / private spheres and the levels of their participation in the political / public spheres (9).
In some communities, women were regarded as wealth or commodities, and even names given to the girl – child (and therefore women) were a pointer to this fact. Titi (2000) observes that, “There seems to be general agreement on the fact that in all human societies, including Plato’s, women are not treated as equals of men” (1).

Part of this treatment stems from the fact that many communities are materialistic. As a result names given to women, as well as titles assigned to them, reflect this, for example, ‘Nwanyibuego’ (Igbo) – woman is wealth.

Rosenblatt (1968) says that literature is more than just a mirror of society and that “it sometimes offers a realistic description, at other times it may represent an escape from, or compensation for actual conditions” (83). This view acknowledges that literature can be modified to suit trends and situations. To be meaningfully representative, women’s voices must come from, and be about, women. It is for this reason that narratives by women do not just aim at reflecting society: they also attempt to change it, especially the way in which female characters are represented. Davis (cited in Verba 1997) posits that women as artists have ‘the power to create new realities (in which) women are neither victors nor victims but partners’. This effort has been very effective in the West through the works of the female writers, and especially the feminist writers. Feminist writers have had a big impact on the way women are viewed in the world today. Their contribution is taken to be representative of the universal experiences of women. However, many feminists have had a limited perspective of the African experience.
When female writers, both indigenous and migrant, emerged in Africa, they wrote on issues that continue to be important to women. These issues include polygamy, childlessness, growing up, motherhood and economic empowerment. They present general ways in which womanhood has been treated and show women having opportunities and openings, especially from the roles they perform in the home. Indeed, in the African context, gender roles are dynamic and forever evolving (Titi 2000:8). Such presentations shift radically from the ideas of feminism which reflect the Western social constructs that had clearly defined gender roles and restrictions. Women in the West were expected to stay at home rather than go to work, to be passive rather than objective, and they were viewed as impractical. It was therefore abnormal for a woman in the upper classes to pursue a career, or to be assertive. As a result, white Western feminist writers have sought to influence the negative social constructs that give women in the West less power, status and respect than men (Griffith 2002: 142).

The black feminist in America, on the other hand, has had to grapple with even more problems including that of self definition since she did not feature in the conventional definition of ‘woman’ in this context as recorded by Carby (1987):

First in order to gain a public voice as orators or published writers, black women had to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition ‘woman’ (6).

The African woman’s experience differed considerably from that of the European woman. She did not have to worry about work or a state of being unemployed, or being
regarded as a lesser human being. In fact, the idea of a full-time housewife is alien in Africa where the woman is involved in various crafts and domestic production. In conventional Western economic terms, however, such women are not working because work is equated to salaried employment.

In addition, the African woman was not excluded entirely from the decision-making and democracy in her community. This is in spite of the existence of patriarchal social structures that appeared to discriminate against the woman, while offering parallel social organizations for both sexes. In fact, where women appeared to have been left out such as during rituals, when it came to the final decision and implementation stage, the men could not exclude women or else the decisions made by men would fail (Titi 2000: 4). The ‘marginalization’ of women actually came with colonization and was abetted by Christianity which made women ‘submissive’ to their husbands.

The colonial ranking positioned African literature at a lower pedestal than other ‘world literatures’. It took long before published works of literary value by Africans appeared and these carried with them certain biased readings and writings, especially by white readers. When these emerged, they were largely concerned with correcting the misrepresentations in the earlier works. Later, the writings incorporated the disillusionment of post-colonial era among other emerging socio-political and economic issues that affected Africa. Da Silva (2004) explains how writing by women remained largely invisible in spite of the emerging anthologies and new creative space during the post-colonial literary era: low literacy levels and few had acquired university
education (1). The growing volume of literary works from Africa was analyzed using theoretical paradigms developed in the West which for some critics like Amuta (1989) were quite ‘not only defective but ultimately dysfunctional in the contemporary African context’ (x). Thus arose the need for theories, especially an African theory, which would guide African scholars in their interpretation, evaluation and analysis, while still appreciating the contribution made by the emergence of a plethora of theories in Europe, such as Freudian psychoanalysis, phenomenology, semiotics, structuralism, new criticism, formalism that have contributed to literary studies being taken as seriously as other disciplines devoted to the understanding of different aspects of human society (Amuta 1989:59).


Other theoretical frameworks have also been advanced and put to the test. Some have been useful and others have not. A popular theory is feminism. Critics of this theory have asserted that it does not consider other non-Western women’s unique backgrounds but rather focuses on the unique European experience. The result of this is that it isn’t
sensitive to other women such as the marginalized women, women from minority cultures, non-Western cultures and women who come from different economic levels (Griffith 2002: 142).

In response to gaps in feminism with respect to the experiences of African women, both in the West and in Africa, some scholars subsequently prefer to use the term ‘Womanism’ instead. ‘Womanism’, as a term, was coined by the novelist Alice Walker (1984). It was later developed by among other scholars Clenora Hudson – Weems (1997, 2004) and Ogunyemi (1985, 1996) who see it as meeting the needs and demands of African women and therefore ground it on African culture, therefore focusing it on the unique experiences, needs, struggles and desires of African women. Hudson – Weems (2004) lists the characteristics of (Africana) womanism as: self-namer, self-definer, family-centred, in concert with male struggle, genuine in sisterhood, strong, whole authentic, flexible, role-player, male compatible, respected, adaptable, respectful of elders, spiritual, ambitious, mothering and nurturing (v). African Womanism seeks to enable women to re-define and name their experiences. Through this, she ‘reclaims security, stability and nurturing of a family-based community’ (25). The proponents of this theory have sought to challenge African male chauvinism, but do this without eliminating men as allies in the struggle for liberation and family-hood. From these assertions we observe that Womanism and feminism may share strategies for ending sexual discrimination. However, these differ on the methodology adopted to end the discrimination since Womanism is not as combative as feminism and it views women
as companions to men. Womanism acknowledges that gender problems exist in society and that these are critical issues which must be resolved.

On her part, Ogundipe – Leslie (2003) in advocating for ‘Black feminism’ in ‘West African Review’, argues that feminism need not be in opposition to men and that woman need not neglect their biological roles. She idealizes motherhood as a strength in African women. She argues that the total configuration of the conditions (experienced by women) should be addressed, rather than the single obsession with sexual issues. Indeed, women’s condition in Africa involves men and children (3). In all these, the theorists stand out for not being anti-male and gender-exclusivists, concepts that are highlighted by mainstream feminists as well.

Sisterhood has emerged as a dominant model for feminist intercommunity relations. Its proponents base their argument on factors such as shared oppression, common victimization, solidarity and collective activism (Oyewumi 2001) and view it as an alternative to feminism and womanism. However, like feminism it does not go beyond the experiences of the white women although its ideals are couched in the rhetoric of kinship and family bonds.

The protagonists in Macgoye’s texts selected for this study are not fighting for space that has been grabbed by men, neither are they advocating for fair representation and treatment of all persons of all genders. They, therefore, do not fit within the classification of feminism.
According to Griffith (2002), the female writers are calling attention to the unjust, distorted and limited representation and seek to expose the politics of self-interest that have led to the creation of stereotypical and false images of women (141). Our readings reveal that Macgoye’s characters do not stand out for being anti-male and gender-exclusivists. Their concern has more to do with the struggles that bedevil their communities. The traits exhibited by the main protagonists: Paulina (Coming to Birth), Wairimu (The Present Moment) and Mrs. Smith (Homing In), are largely in concert with those advocated for by (Africana) womanist theorists as outlined above.

As writers, women have had to overcome more barriers than men. Hawthorn (1985) observes that publishers have gone out of their way to look for male authors – and even when the women are published, critics still do not give women writers much attention (145). Zilboorg (2004) notes how studies on the sociology of authorship reveal that of 1,100 British writers between 1800 and 1935, only 20% were female (8). She also observes that samples of booklists for study in universities and colleges – of works taken on the basis of interest – indicate an even smaller number (8). In assessing recent developments in the literary landscape in East and Central Africa, Musila (2010: 553 - 568) notes that there were many new publications covering different genres in 2009. These include: poetry; drama; biography / autobiography; criticism (general studies) and journals. Among the many writers Musila highlights are female writers, some of whom have received international acclaim such as Yvonne Owuor (Kenya) and Monica
Arac de Nyeko (Uganda). This is evidence that women’s writing in Africa has been developing steadily.

The marginalization of female writers is partially the result of widespread patriarchal cultures, for example, women in Europe were traditionally supposed to stay in the background or else face condemnation or laughter if they sought to do more than custom had pronounced necessary for their sex. The result of this was that few women were brave enough to dare the norms and demonstrate their creative skills in writing. Among the early women writers in Europe, for instance, it was common to find the courageous few using male pseudonyms such as George Eliot (whose real name was Mary Ann Evans). Jacobus (1979) observes that women writers who chose to be writers during this era paid a heavy prize and some gave up on the institution of marriage altogether (10, 11). In Africa, women have been influential in the propagation of oral literature. However, the number of published women writers’ remains low compared to that of male writers.

Writers, being members (and mouthpieces) of society are also influenced by it. Achebe (1974) states “...the writer and his society live in the same place” (42). It is difficult to ignore the influence that one has on the other, especially the society on the writer. The writer’s response to this influence in a way shapes her / his ideological position. The novelist artistically organizes a diversity of social speech types, voices and even languages which serve specific socio-political purposes. According to Bakhtin (1981:
The social diversity of the speech types and the flourishing individual voices that a novelist uses become the means through which ideology is presented.

The way society views women is of interest to this study because of its influence on literature. Ngugi posits (1972):

> Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society (16).

The literature from a particular society therefore reflects the views and values that are upheld by that particular society. This in turn influences, shapes and gives direction to the writings coming from that community. The characters with whom the readers interact in their novels are therefore portrayed as fulfilling certain societal expectations and the activities of these characters are therefore ideologically demarcated. This is often reflected in thematic concerns by women writers which revolve around the family and cultural concerns while shying away from controversial political, social or economic issues which dominate writings by males.

African literature was largely concerned with correcting the misconceptions that pervaded the writings of the pre-independence era. As such, its themes had been mainly social, historical and political with little attention being given to domestic themes. Male writers have mostly articulated these concerns. The result of this was that names like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Sembene Ousmane, Nurrudin Farah, Okot p’Bitek and Francis Imbuga featured more than Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye or Grace Ogot in literary discourse. The dearth of the female writers also led to male
writers presenting the African woman within a male-dominated and male-oriented society in which they 'complacently continue to fulfill the roles expected of them by their society and to accept the superiority of the men' (Palmer, cited in Durosimi 1978: 38), for example, in the works of Achebe, Amadi, Armah and Soyinka.

In this environment, the relative absence of the female writer contributes to many male writers sustaining a subverted image of the female characters. Kenneth (1980) classifies the images given to the urban woman in African literature by male writers as: good time girls, wives, 'free' women, mothers, courtesans & prostitutes, and political women and workers (2). On the same level, Davis {cited in Verba (1997)} argues that the women in Soyinka's writings are not treated so differently and fall into three categories: 'the foolish virgin in rural settings, the femme fatal in urban settings and the masculine matron'. Such presentations enhance the stereotypical / symbolic function which never aim at realizing the women's full potential, or reduces them to objects or risky influences to men. Conde {cited in Taiwo (1984)} concludes,

"... the personality and inner reality of African women have been hidden under a heap of myths... and patent untruths" in the appraisals made by most male writers in which the woman is portrayed as being subordinate to man. When women writers began to represent themselves well in the scene, many male critics also began to take their works seriously. Indeed, some male writers have given female characters depth, depicting them as strong, resilient, resourceful and, of course, supportive of their men – folk (2).

On the other hand, Muriungi (2004) adds that many male writers in Africa such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Cyprian Ekwensi, among others, people (or woman) their texts with prostitutes, a metaphor that encodes women as agents of moral corruption and
contamination in society (1). In the works of many of these male writers, the prostitute is viewed as a home breaker and a carrier of disease (1). Women writers have therefore sought to counter this homogenic depiction by casting prostitution in a different light: the unattached female figure that migrates to the city should not be singled out as the cause of societal indiscipline (26). Macgoye in Murder in Majengo (1993), and Genga-Idowu in Lady in Chains (1993) actually present this ‘new woman’ living in the city in a human light. Oluoch - Olunya (2007) laments that the generic condemnations of women manifests itself in the later works of great and respected male writers such as Ngugi, when he adopts an ambivalent attitude and uses the metaphor of the prostitute (80) while making a comparison between the Ngugi of The River Between and the Ngugi of Petals of Blood.

We have noted above that publishers seem to “hunt” for the male writers, thus privileging this gender in actuality. Since both male and female writers are part of the same society, the foundation of their writings is not different. Their bone of contention is in the emphasis given to some of the problems that affect society as already noted such as political, social or economic. The other notable difference lies in the preferred genre of writing. Amandina (2007) observes that due to their social roles, women have tended to write letters, diaries and journals while men write novels (27). The work done by the various strands of feminism has led to the mainstreaming of the woman’s importance so that more women are getting published in spite of the challenges leading to Griffiths (2000) to conclude that what women writers say about themselves is being
given the serious attention it deserves (281). This endeavour has been recognized by scholars such as Odiemo-Munara (2010) who observes that:

Women writers have continuously been setting for themselves goals of representing the woman’s experience (in East Africa) in unique ways. Women’s voices of the late twentieth century to the present dynamically confront the questions of patriarchy, politics, history, culture / tradition, production and formulation (2).

Besides the increased number of women writers in the East and Central African region, there have been several forums created that give space for upcoming writers, especially women, such as Kwani?, Story Moja, Twaweza Communications, among others. Already some of the literary works emanating from these ventures have gained international recognition besides winning respect from the academia in the region.

The focus of this study is narrative art, which Gikandi (1987) sees as ‘the essence of African art’ (x). The novel, which best exemplifies narrative art offers several modes of narration through which a writer can express certain insights and viewpoints. Macgoye herself admits the importance of the novel when she says in “Catching up with MOM, the author” (Sunday Standard 23rd May 1999):

The immense strength of the novel as a form is that you can assert more knowledge to your subject than in actual true life narrative. In fiction, you can push beyond what the character is aware of or prepared to admit and therefore give a fuller picture (8).

The narrative therefore becomes important as a literary testament. The choice of the kind of narrators by a novelist, how various modes of narration between characters are mediated and the various degrees of ‘telling’ open a variety of perspectives through
which the novel’s message is conveyed and grasped besides giving an insight into the ideologies that shape the novel.

The novel, as a form of art, offers writers avenues for various thematic explorations. Concerns such as the woman’s position in a patriarchal society enable Macgoye to explore various forms of narrative techniques which reveal her ideological position as well.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Even though press reviews of Macgoye’s works have appeared in many parts of the world, she has not received as much critical attention in comparison to other female writers from Kenya. Wasamba (1997: iv) attributes this to her dual cultural heritage which has led critics to ‘consign her to a literary no-man’s land’ as they are hesitant to treat her as an African writer or a European one. Even after Wasamba’s lament there has not been much critical attention accorded to her. With the exception of a few theses done in Kenyan universities and South Africa, most critical works appear in newspaper reviews and seminar presentations. This is more or less the same attention she has received internationally, especially in the United States of America where she is generally regarded as a feminist writer.

This thesis is an appraisal of the process of narration which seeks to understand and appreciate how the mediation between the narrative techniques, types of narratorial
voices and the communicative process work together to reveal the subtle details of narrative.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Female writers have emerged as strong defenders of the image and stature of female characters and issues affecting women in novels through the diverse modes of narration that they employ. It is with this focus that this study aims to make a contribution to the mainstreaming of literary works by female writers.

The study has achieved the following objectives, to:

1. Investigate how various modes of narration are maintained
2. Establish how Macgoye uses narrative voice as a vehicle to express her viewpoint, perception and vision of life
3. Describe the narrative method observable in the selected texts by Macgoye

1.4 Research Questions

This thesis has investigated:

1. How Macgoye establishes a relationship between the narrative voice and the character's voices and how the interplay foregrounds the portrayal of both narrator and characters in the text
2. How and to what effect Macgoye uses the narratorial voices to present her ideological positions
3. Why Macgoye selects particular narrative strategies

4. What meanings are derived in the mediation of interaction between the various characters

1. 5 Research Assumptions

The thesis has been based on the following objectives:

1. Macgoye uses narrators who are more sympathetic to female characters than to male characters

2. Macgoye uses narratorial voices to express her viewpoints, ideology and world view

3. There is a complex relationship and interplay between narrative method and theme as shaped by the diverse narrative methods in Macgoye’s selected novels

4. Macgoye uses various modes of narration between characters to convey several messages that give new meanings to the perspectives accorded to women in patriarchal societies

1. 6 Rationale for the Study

Macgoye deals with real historical, geographical and cultural issues that affect the lives of the common woman in the East African region. She uses narrators who present the picture from an insider’s point of view and through these narrators she manages to amplify the matters affecting female characters by presenting the issues from a
woman's point of view. These narrators are sympathetic to the cause of women and, as they try to empathize, they bring out the character's point of view.

Mikhail Bakhtin (cited in Onega and Landa 1996: 32) in describing a state of affairs, which he calls heteroglossia, sees the self and society as being in dialogical relationship and adds that the novel has a host of voices jostling for attention in the text. An analysis of these voices as well as the perspectives through which the narratives are conveyed will enrich our knowledge of how Macgoye uses the narrators in the presentation of her ideological positions.

Macgoye's ideological position is manifested not only through the effect of narrators, but their speech and language. Bakhtin (1981:313) says, 'Behind every narrator's story we read a second story - the author's', and it is through this second level that we can realize Macgoye's intention: to explain the change affecting the existing social order and how power relations between the sexes are influenced by this change.

The thesis also shows the conflict in meaning which may produce the radical otherness which shapes a work of art. It is our belief that such a dissertation which focuses on the various narrators enables us to analyze the multiple voices, for example, narratorial voice and perspectives through which the narrative is conveyed, hence reveal how the 'narrator' extends from the narrative. It also avails different sources of knowledge, for example, cultural and historical, and these enrich the narrative strategy through which the story is told.
From the literature reviewed it emerges that there is too wide a gap between the recent advances in the theory of narrative and the application of this theory to studies of individual works of female writers. This study attempts to bridge part of that gap as far as studies on Macgoye are concerned, given that no study of the narrative voices and ideological disposition in her works has been done. Our conviction is that our choice of theoretical framework is appropriate to anyone interested in the narrative strategies that inform a writer’s ideology as brought out through the use of various narrative voices.

1.7 Review of Related Literature

Sartre (cited in Martin 1986: 158) suggests that one of the chief motives of artistic creation is the need to feel that we are essential in relationship to the world. The writer consciously produces relationships by introducing order where there was none and by imposing the unity of mind on the diversity of things. Through his philosophy, Sartre develops a phenomenological view of the work of literature, existing by virtue of collaboration between writer and reader. According to him, the creative act is only an incomplete and abstract moment in the production of a work.

Sartre indeed implies that the process requires the effort of both writer and reader to bring life and reveal ‘reality’ which exists in the minds of both. The writer has to appeal to the reader’s consciousness to collaborate in the production of the work through arousing the reader’s feelings, shaping these feelings and attributing them to an imaginary character.
On the other hand, the writer expects that the confidence he/she gives to his/her readers will be reciprocated through recognition and demand for higher standards. This is the point at which criticism begins.

We have endeavoured, in this thesis, to understand the text by examining the thematic concerns and aesthetic qualities that make each work individual, and also the connecting thread within each text through which the various narrative voices work to present Macgoye's perspective.

This thesis has benefited from other works by scholars who have made an invaluable contribution to the study of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye in one way or another. Kurtz has probably shown more interest in Macgoye than any other published scholar. In *Nyarloka's Gift* (2005), he seeks to present 'the literary legacy of Macgoye, to evaluate its prominent features, and to argue that she holds a central place in the history of Kenya's features, and to argue that she holds a central place in the history of Kenya's literature' (vii). He, therefore, demonstrates her importance in the development of East African writing. In *Nyarloka's Gift* (2005) Kurtz documents Macgoye's struggle to overcome great difficulties to make her way in a male dominated society. Kurtz equates the births in *Coming to Birth* to the birth of the nation of Kenya and its subsequent development which is portrayed through Paulina. Thus his comments on narrative perspective (114 – 115) are limited to the foregrounding of Paulina's strong character trait i.e. as she becomes successful in life, Martin's prospects shrink.
The chapter on *The Present Moment* discusses the place of history and literature and concludes that these complement each other. Kurtz sees *The Present Moment* as a version of *Coming to Birth*, but with a more national outlook, hence, 'more ecumenical in its view of recent Kenyan' history than any of Macgoye's writing' (144). Kurtz traces its sources – from history – as seen in the life in 'The Refuge' which becomes a microcosm of Kenyan society, and explores more of the national consciousness and conscience than communal identity from its style. This chapter reads as a comparative study of the two novels, especially the style in which the nation's historical experience is presented. Kurtz gives a very good background reading to the life and person of Macgoye which has helped us in this study.

In addition, Kurtz in an earlier work, *Writing the Colonial City: The representation of Nairobi in the Kenyan Novel: 1964 – 1993* (1994) recognizes Macgoye's concerns with the place of women. He observes: 'all Macgoye's work feature (extra) ordinary accomplishments in the face of formidable obstacles' (192). In Kurtz's view Macgoye's novels offer an alternative to the depiction of women by some Kenyan male writers. In Meja Mwangi's and David Maillu's earlier books, for example, women appear as twilight girls or prostitutes.

For her part, Macgoye challenges this tendency by male writers in order to elevate the female characters by reversal of traditional roles. In *Urban Obsessions Urban Fears* (1998), Kurtz posits that the women in Macgoye's novels serve as symbols of
nationhood and that Macgoye’s female characters are the most complex and compelling of characters in Kenyan writing (152). Such a conclusion has been made in regard to all the female characters in Macgoye’s texts. Such an assertion takes into account the complexities of describing nationhood in Kenya given the diversity of Kenyan people and their historical experiences.

Kurtz’ contribution on the works and life of Macgoye is invaluable. However, these are broad textual commentaries which are not grounded on specific theoretical frames, thus focusing more on ‘reasons’ for the content. This study differs considerably from Kurtz’s works by focusing on Macgoye’s narrative method as the most significant constituent of aspect of her fiction - a great shift from ‘content’ to ‘form’, thus adding value to Kurtz’s works.

Mboya (2003:34) in a journal review of *Coming to Birth* notes how Macgoye subverts history in order to valorise the woman’s experience. This is done through inclusion of historical events casting it as a realistic novel, while at the same time relegating history to the periphery by focusing on and foregrounding Paulina’s story. The narrator does this by expounding on Paulina’s physical and psychological reactions to events in and around her life.

Mboya’s approach is systematic i.e. governed by temporal and causal principles. He argues that through the character’s reactions to events, the writer develops her in order to further the theme of feminism. Mboya, therefore, foregrounds the events over the
other elements of the story such as time, in order to advance a popular literary position: feminism. On the contrary, our view is that Macgoye’s treatment of the female characters’ struggle in their day – to – day life is much closer to the tenets of womanism than feminism. We observe in particular the absence of confrontation between the genders and the importance of the historical events which played a role in setting in motion the changes that contributed to the emancipation of women. That is the point of divergence between Mboya’s study and this one a it goes beyond the structural organization of the narrative which we regard as being the minimal requirement of a story and more or less the plot of a story.

Bittner (200) in a conference presentation views Macgoye’s literary works as being neither Kenyan nor genuinely British, but a ‘distinguished’ brand of literature that takes elements from both literary traditions and turns them into something new and unfamiliar (5). In addition, she does not view Macgoye as either a feminist or womanist but rather a post – colonial writer. In this regard, this study adds value to her work which views Macgoye’s works from a post – colonial prism where she is blending history and fiction to recreate and chronicle Kenya’s collective past, rather than empowerment of women which is our focus.

Critical works on Macgoye have also been conducted by other scholars such as Tawo (1997). He lays emphasis on the extent to which the historical events shape and determine character transformation, especially of the marginalized woman.
The theme of Tawo’s thesis is change which he conceives through a journey motif. He argues that socio-economic and political transformation can never be divorced from the historical events that unfold and tie individual destiny to that of the nation at large. The study is based on New Historicism and Gyno-criticism, and shares Mboya’s views about the valorisation of women characters.

Tawo’s study focuses on the time element of the story where the events are narrated after they have already happened. He uses specific historical events in order to valorise female characters and focuses on change. Tawo does not dwell on the narrative process but relies on Historical Realism in order to investigate character transformation and socio-historical awareness. This study differs from Tawo’s in that it interrogates the various narrative voices in the text and how these relate to Macgoye’s social vision. Tawo highlights the plight of women as marginalized and in constant struggle to liberate themselves from the forces of male oppression. He credits them with some ‘sense of awareness’ of the socio-historical events taking place around them. Our study acknowledges that women have been disadvantaged but recognizes that Macgoye does not present the genders as being at war – hence, investigation of the ideology influencing this presentation, thus adding value to Tawo’s work.

Ikonya (1998) focuses on the value Macgoye attaches to freedom, thus exploring the quest for freedom in her writing. Ikonya investigates how Macgoye expresses the value she attaches to freedom, both in her personal life (through interviews) and in the style used in her writing. She posits that Macgoye is determined to search matters affecting
society and their impact and value. In this way, she is able to focus upon Macgoye’s philosophy or ideology as limited to a specific time frame. As a result, this study being generalised benefits from some of her insights. Ikonya’s study is based on Sociological Theoretical framework thus differs significantly from this one. Our study, therefore, not only offers some explanations to any ‘gaps’ that may be seen in her work. Moreover, there is a difference in the texts upon which these two studies are based.

Mutuota’s (1998) focus is on Macgoye’s reading of Kenya’s history. This is through a combination of individual growth and national growth. His work is grounded on historical events upon which style is used to highlight a relationship between The Present Moment and Coming to Birth that centres on an equation of Macgoye, her characters and the nation of Kenya. In his assessment he says ‘Macgoye is seen to have shown a marked development as a writer very much akin to her characters’ development to maturity’ (vii). He believes that ‘a parallel could be drawn between Paulina and Macgoye, however simplistic this might be’ (21) and extends Paulina’s marriage to parallel Kenya’s independence. Mutuota echoes the views expressed by Kibera (‘Weekly Review’, September 1986) that Macgoye’s writing has ‘matured’ and compares her to Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head. Whereas Mutuota seeks the person of Macgoye in the texts and juxtaposes this image on the national history, this study shifts radically from that approach by seeking the influences on the narrators’ ideologies as portrayed through the use of different narratorial voices. This allows for a more comprehensive approach than that taken by Mutuota.
Wasamba (1997) shows how Macgoye uses language to reveal a ‘fresh’ awareness of familiar themes such as religion, freedom and gender issues. In his study, Wasamba is concerned with specific stylistic devices to foreground character and themes. In particular, he focuses on lexical and syntactic preferences together with symbolism to relate to and enhance character. In recognition of the linguistic inclination of the analysis, Wasamba uses stylistic criticism to demonstrate the literariness of the works he is studying. Symbolic patterns are only a small element of narrative theory (Genette 1980:10 – 12) thus our study covers a wider scope than Wasamba’s. We also acknowledge the fact that in his recommendations, Wasamba suggests a study of the writer’s social vision – which is an integral part of this study.

Much of the critical attention given to Macgoye has focussed on exterior relations as seen through reliance upon background information, especially historical, and social, to justify some of the thematic concerns and critical approaches used. From the review of the available literature it is established that a study that examines the use of narrative voices in the works of Macgoye has not been carried out. Studies that focus on the narrative, process and discourse, and voice among other narrative techniques in her works have also not been carried out. It is our conviction that the universality of the issues faced by women is best portrayed in the three texts selected in this study if read metaphorically with a view to establishing the unifying vision of the narrators to reveal the author’s ideology. As a result, this study attempts to bridge the part of that gap as far as Macgoye’s works are concerned, while making a significant contribution to literary scholarship.
1.8 Theoretical Framework

Irele (1981: 22 – 23) posits that literature involves our deepest responses to the facts of human existence and intervenes in those areas where we assume consciousness of our situation with regards to others and to the world. To be meaningful, any kind of discussion of literature implies responsiveness not only to the text, in its inherent capacity for suggestiveness through a unique structure of signs and meanings, but also to those areas of experience; of feelings, attitudes and insight. For this reason formal analysis of text is aimed at enabling us to get into the work so that we can penetrate its significance.

Formal approach to narration can be traced to Plato in The Republic where his spokesperson, Socrates (cited in Onega and Landa 1996), says;

All mythology is narration of events, either past, present or to come... and narration may be either simple narration, or imitation or a union of the two (13).

The statement thus breaks the ground for discussion of narrative voice as it suggests that the poet may speak in his own voice (simple narration) or through the voice of a character (imitation, mimesis). Aristotle builds on this when talking about ‘serious literature’, which he classifies on the basis of enunciation in which he distinguishes between dramatic performance and epic narrative. He identifies elements of tragedy as plot, diction, thought, spectacle and song then advances: the plot is then the first principle and as it were, the soul of tragedy: character comes second (Telford 1961: 13). Thus, the two scholars indicate the centrality of narrative in literature was identified centuries ago.
While many scholars have previously concerned themselves with analysis of elements of the novel; for example, E. M. Foster, Aspects of the Novel (1927), P. Lubbock The Craft of Fiction (1957), the primary statements concerning narratology proper are traced to Russian formalism and French structuralism. These scholars reworked the Aristotelian insights and enriched them with concepts borrowed from developments in theoretical linguistics.

The theory of narrative originates from structuralism and its main proponents have been Roland Barthes (1975), Tzvetan Todorov (1977) and Gerard Genette (1980). In Genette’s (1980) opinion, the purpose of the theory was:

to develop a poetics which would stand to literature as linguistics stands to language and which therefore would not seek to explain what individual works mean but would attempt to make explicit the system of figures and conventions that enable works to have the forms and meanings they do (8).

Proponents of the theory have emphasised certain elements leading to the existence of several theories, each closely associated with its proponent. Such aspects include author, story, narration and action among others. As a result, there have there have been attempts by some scholars to bridge the gap especially between narratology, which is more of linguistics, and the theory of narrative, which is more of stylistics. Onega and Landa (1996) assert that in its ‘etymological sense narratology is a multi-disciplinary study that involves narrative forms of representation’ (1). This view is also shared by
Martin (1986) who acknowledges the contribution and impact of the interdisciplinary character of narrative theory since 1970 (26).

The impact of this line of thinking has been to open up new frontiers in narratology such as psychoanalysis, gender-studies, reader-response and ideological critique. It has led to the existence of many approaches to narratological analysis: historical, stylistic, thematic, archetypal and deconstructive. While looking at all these approaches, we must still bear in mind that the goal of narratology is to "discover and explain the mechanics of narrative, elements responsible for its form and functioning" (Prince: 1982: 4).

In order to demonstrate the significance of ideology in Macgoye’s texts, the analysis has been facilitated by the theory of narrative as understood within the larger stylistic approach to literature. The theory has been advanced by Booth (1961), Todorov (1977), Genette (1980, 1988), Stanzel (1984) and Bal (1985) among others. The theory sees the novel as a story with a storyteller who can take several positions. The novelist is therefore engaging in a process of communication and employing various mechanisms in this regard.

Genette’s (1980: 10 - 12) approach to the theory focuses on the complex relations between the narrative and the story it tells. It therefore takes up and organizes the structures and codes studied by structuralists (such as suspense, character, plot sequence, and thematic and symbolic patterns). However, the main areas of interest are:
point of view (mood and voice); focalization (internal and external); iterative (the possible relationships between the time of the story or plot and the time of the narrative i.e. order, pace / duration and frequency) and norm and anomaly.

According to Stanzel (1984) the central task of a theory of narrative is to systemize the various kinds and degrees of ‘mediacy’ that result from the shifting relationship in all story telling between the story and how it is being told. Mediation in this case means the usage of various characters to convey the story. He identifies three essential elements of narration; these are the person (distinctive fictional character telling the story), perspective (i.e. the mediator outside the fictional world of other characters) and the mode (figural narrative situation) (xi). In his opinion the story comes to the reader through the perception of a reflector character who sees as s/he experiences. The argument is a development of Booth’s (1961:149) position on the various methods of narration operating at the level of the teller and the tale. It is for this reason that the theory of narrative becomes useful to this study as it offers an insight into the method of mediation in narrative literature.

Genette (1980, 1988) and Stanzel (1984) provide this study with the necessary tools with which to interpret the selected texts with a view to making the description about portrayal and extension of the narrator, such as who is doing the narration and how the events are narrated.
In applying the theory of narrative within its broader stylistic approach to Macgoye’s works, the study looks at among other elements; structures, point of view and presentational mode. We will use the theory as “an instrument for making descriptions” (Bal 1985: 10), which is an integral part of this investigation.

Stylistics as a literary method involves the linguistic investigation of expression in fiction. It is derived from style: the manner of expression. Stylistics specifically has to do with the analysis of language as discourse, that is, the way in which texts create contexts with their operation as part of a dynamic process between participants (Carter and Simpson 1989: 14)

In the examination of the style we have focused on the narrators (omniscient, first person, authorial intrusion among other manifestations) where these manifest themselves and viewpoint, in particular shifting viewpoint, and distancing effect as well as the modes of narration. We have also looked at the resources of language that create a certain texture and tone through which the theme and meaning are expressed. Through stylistic criticism the ideological orientation in the selected works may be understood by looking at different narrative voices in the context of the works. This study therefore becomes an investigation of how the author’s ideology manifests itself in the selected texts. Through cracks and fissures Macgoye reveals her ideological dispensations from the modes of narration she employs or other traces evident such as first person pronoun which marks the oneness of character and narrator or a verb in the past tense which might indicate that a recounted action occurred prior to the narrating
action. Stylistics therefore offers a foundation upon which the medium of communication can be evaluated. It offers an avenue through which communication in an entire work of art is realized.

This study observes that Macgoye writes in a male-dominated culture, with its deeply ingrained presentation of the female character. She, therefore, works hard to deconstruct it and examine women's experience on its own terms. She focuses on a woman-centred inquiry and considers the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women. Her treatment of history includes an account of the female experiences too.

The study also appreciates African Womanist literary theory for the distinction it enables us to make between Macgoye's literary works and other feminist writings. The study, therefore, adopts the theory of narrative as outlined within the larger stylistics approach as its main theoretical framework that would offer an objective analysis. However, the analysis bears in mind that there are shades of other theoretical frameworks that contribute to the understanding of Macgoye's ideology. These are not necessarily subordinated in order to elevate chosen theoretical framework. The choice of the main theory is also grounded on Kaplan (cited in Lodge 2000) in the essay 'Language and Gender' where she argues,

any new theoretical approach to literature that uses gender difference as an important category involves a profoundly altered view of the relation of both sexes to language, speech, writing and culture (315)
It is our belief that the best writing about women by women has been fiction. Fiction has a narrative structure and gendered characters in which the writer can locate and distance her own ideologies. Kaplan (ibid) posits that the novel makes use of the domestic scene, or the life of feelings, or ‘trivial’ observations, all those things supposedly close to women’s experience because its scene is the world of social relations. Hence, our adoption of the theory of the narrative as the main theoretical framework in this study.

1.9 Method of Study

This is a conceptual study that has relied on close readings of the selected texts. The analytical process is based on the premise that the selected texts are more fully understood and appreciated to the extent that the nature and interactions of the various narratorial voices are perceived.

The reading process has been guided by a particular point of view of the world offered by the texts. Attention has also been paid to features which contribute to Macgoye’s individual style and use of narratorial voices by looking at the structural elements, cultural references and rhetorical features used.

The analytical process required data collection (i.e. recording my readings) and reflecting on what these add up to. In this case, the theory of narrative supplied the guiding points of view. The data has been sourced from the representational resources constructed through reading the narratorial voices employed in Macgoye’s selected
texts. This data formed the basis of interpretive discussions of Macgoye’s ideology in our study.

The study has taken the format of discussions and reflections guided by illustrative data collected from the selected texts. The discussions take the format of six chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction and demarcates the problem, specifies the objectives and identifies the limitations of the study. The theoretical framework, justification of the study and methodology are also discussed in this chapter.

In chapter two we see how Macgoye uses the omniscient narrator to explore the attitudes and problems experienced by women. We also see how she uses the female narrators’ voices to subvert the systemized value systems and roles assigned to women in order to elevate and portray them positively.

The third chapter focuses on how Macgoye has used a multi-voiced narrative approach to explore the social and geographical status of women in Kenya over a sixty year period. We observe how the multiple narrators have been used to corroborate and enrich the story by the main narrator, thus allowing Macgoye to present a rich diversity of voices and ideology while at the same time condensing these into a resounding protest against the marginalization of women.

Chapter four presents an insistent and forceful voice influenced by historical experiences that white settler women went through and through this Mrs. Smith
discusses the 'tensions' between the ideologies of the young settler and the older settled version of the settler. It also discusses how practical experiences combine to produce ideological tension between the narrating self and the experiencing self, while invading and subverting male voices and projecting Macgoye's dominant ideology: the empowerment of women.

Chapter five presents a wrap up of the three novels in which we observe that Macgoye is not creating a new image of women, but instead uses these symbolic women who have managed to slay the dragon of patriarchy to assert that women are capable of taking care of themselves and must indeed deal with their problems when these arise.

Chapter six gives a summary and conclusions of the thesis and makes recommendations of areas for further research.

1.10 Scope and Limitations
A study of narrative voice requires detailed close reading, which on its part invites interpretive problems that are historical, sociological and cultural rather than textual or structural. The study appreciates the blurred borderlines between various forms of criticism and its textual emphasis does not imply a deprecatory view of the historical and socio-cultural dimensions of Macgoye's works.

Macgoye has more than twenty published works (novels, short stories, poems, essays and non-fiction) to her credit, targeted at a wide range of audience / readership. Our
study was necessarily selective and focused on only three of her serious novels, namely *Coming to Birth*, *The Present Moment* and *Homing In*, on the grounds of their literary quality and narrative variety.

These novels have also been selected due to their focus on narrators / female characters who are part of a transformation or transition in their society. The novels transcend historical, geographical and cultural barriers in a way that 'reflects a consistency with the tenets of the theoretical framework adopted. The three texts have been selected because Macgoye's ideology is discernible as a thread running through, and informing the point of view of the narrative.
CHAPTER TWO

Ideological Authority of the Omniscient Narratorial Voice in

Coming to Birth

Wendoh (1988) states that, 'a writer develops characters as individuals and, reflection of the various social problems and attitudes to which he addresses himself' (17). This in essence implies that a writer will definitely select a narrative technique that is closely related to the themes that s/he sets out to develop.

On the other hand, Bal (1985) has underlined the importance of characters in the text when she says:

This character is not a human being but it resembles one. It has no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act, but it does possess characteristics which make psychological and ideological description (sic) possible (80).

It is characters who comprehend the narratorial voice and their contribution to making the text complete cannot be ignored. We believe that by relying on close readings of the texts for analysis we can arrive at Macgoye’s ideology in the texts under study.

Characterization and narration are influenced by a writer’s ideology. This has been acknowledged by narratologists; for example, Rimmon-Kenan (1983) says ‘ideology plays a part in the story (characters), on the one hand, and in the
narration on the other’ (82). This chapter appreciates the value that this combination adds to a work of art in its analysis of the ideological dispensation in the works of Macgoye.

In *Coming to Birth* the ideological dispensation is dependent upon the varying degrees of insights shown by the novel’s narrators. These narrators offer a general system through which the textual world is viewed conceptually, thus enabling the scholar to evaluate the events and characters in order to reveal the ‘norms’ that define the textual world, hence the ideology propagated.

A reading of *Coming to Birth* reveals how the omniscient narrator’s voice subverts cultural and social roles, and expectations to foreground the interests of women. The text is not forceful in its articulation of feminism. It is evident that the guiding idea is the centrality of the woman’s place in society, which blends with (Africana) Womanism which upholds family values (Hudson - Weems 2004: xix - xx) which, while challenging male chauvinism, does not eliminate men in the day to day struggles of life.

The omniscient narrator’s voice describes Paulina as being humble and collaborative. In this light, Paulina’s struggle can be viewed as one in which she seeks to be liberated to serve her community - not just Martin, her husband. For example, she offers a lot of assistance to the extended family such as Martin’s sisters’ for whom she buys uniforms (48), besides the others who constantly call
Paulina is also able to establish order in her life as well as in the lives of those around her because she is able to withstand the sufferings that life holds. Paulina does not view Martin as an enemy, however. She is not fighting to clinch some of Martin’s power. Mrs. M. acknowledges this when she points out Paulina as a ‘person who had achieved a balanced and contented life without the blessing of children’ and ‘stressed her great usefulness to society though she was not competing directly in any man’s field of achievement’ (110). Paulina seems to understand that Martin too is a victim of such external factors as customs, historical events, alien cultures and urbanization, which contribute to his sense of insecurity, as a result of which he resorts to violence as a means of subjugating Paulina. And then there is his own failure to get a child (110).

In addition, Paulina demonstrates a broadened understanding, speaking with many voices: as a mother, wife, worker, neighbour, sister and daughter. At this point we are also able to understand Paulina’s desire to be a mother despite the miscarriages given that motherhood offers the kind of ‘transformation’ that Akujobi (2011) describes as:
Fulfilling cultural and religious meanings of motherhood i.e. what the society thinks a mother should be and religiously, what the practiced faith of the society attaches to motherhood (2).

Speaking with many voices gives Paulina a collective quality and also makes her a complete human – not one isolated from the goings on in her society, hence making her a realistic and reliable character. By assigning Paulina many voices, the omniscient narrator gives her a representational role of the dominant ideology: (Africana) Womanism, which enables her to ‘mix’ these diverse voices and therefore act as a focal point of the things that a woman embodies.

Macgoye’s choice of characters, their names, backgrounds / social status relations with others as well as the transformations they undergo all serve as pointers to the dominant ideology - the subversion of gender roles in order to foreground the positive attributes that women (who have been otherwise despised) have. All the female characters in the selected texts are ‘socially’ obliged to follow an established set of maxims: to give the right amount of information, and to tell something worth telling. Hence, their stories are quite relevant to the ideology propagated.

Coming to Birth is the story of Paulina. At the age of sixteen she is married off to Martin Were whom she joins in Nairobi’s Pumwani area. This year is 1956, and the Mau Mau revolt and state of emergency are in their final days. Paulina knows little about life, especially city life. On her second day in town she suffers a
miscarriage, is rushed to Kenyatta National Hospital where upon discharge, she is naïve enough to think she can find her way back to Pumwani. Her traumatic journey to locate her house lasts two days and two nights, and earns her a beating from her husband, Martin.

Paulina is anxious to learn the ways of a proper wife. For his part, Martin is condescending and determined to control her. This leads to a tense relationship filled with silences, misunderstandings and unfulfilled expectations. Paulina soon realizes that being married is all about getting used to things. For her age, Paulina doesn’t find the institution of marriage intimidating. On the contrary, it opens up her potential in different ways. For example, her movement to Kisumu, coming at a critical moment of despair in her life serves as an actualizing action that changes her life forever.

Paulina’s inability to bear a child in a way liberates her from the traditional woman’s life. As the country moves towards political independence, she manages to get her own kind of freedom. Her quest for education takes her to Kisumu where she is employed to teach at a community centre, which requires that she live separately from Martin. Her desire to conceive propels her into an illicit relationship with Simon (68), leading to the birth of her first son. The joy and contentment she has is shattered when Kenya’s turbulent history intrudes into her life in the form of tragedy: her son is shot dead. The event provides yet another test to her quiet courage and determination in her struggle for survival. She
therefore moves back to Nairobi where she is employed as a house-servant. Both successive employers find her services invaluable. Meanwhile, Martin makes a quiet comeback in her life. The tensions that had characterized their earlier life are now a thing of the past: Martin accepts her for what she is. This acceptance is rewarded with the expectation that soon there will be a ‘coming to birth’ in the family, more than two decades after they had met. From this, it is indicative that the human bond that enables them to transcend their individual circumstances and isolation is the desire for a child. However, indications are that had the child / children come earlier, Paulina’s position, in relation to Martin’s, might never have changed and they wouldn’t have transcended the expectations of the extended family and traditions.

The two main characters in Coming to Birth are Paulina and Martin. It is through their interactions as husband and wife, and through their relationship with other subordinate characters that we can sense cracks and fissures through which the ideological position may be detected. Focus on these two as opposed to all the characters in the text is because they articulate Macgoye’s position.

The story begins with Paulina in an inferior position in relation to Martin. Her acceptance of this position gives her the potential for asserting and developing a counter vision for the society: a vision for gender equality. She, for instance, rises to the occasion upon her father’s death and ensures he is given a decent burial – a role traditionally reserved for men but which her brothers cannot perform.
Macgoye therefore undermines the gender construction of traditional communities which was concerned more with social esteem for males (and valued females for continuity – procreation). By the end of the story, Paulina is at a higher level than Martin. She’s no longer enclosed in a private sphere: she has a global outlook, and is neither confined by tradition nor limited to gender roles: she is the new breadwinner.

Macgoye has chosen the omniscient narrator to present the predominant point of view in *Coming to Birth*. The choice affords her the advantages that accompany this view such as the ability to describe and analyze from a distance, or descend momentarily to the level of the action within the story and open the consciousness of selected characters, revealing action from their isolated vantage points for a given period of time. An immediate impact of this approach is the creation of a monologic effect: all voices sound more or less the same. This further serves to demonstrate that they share similar ideological orientations.

An omniscient narrator is not only removed from the characters in time and space but is capable of entering their minds and explaining what they themselves are at times not able to verbalize. When there are situations that baffle a character, the omniscient narrator steps in to clarify these thoughts to the reader. An example is when Paulina has just been shown the toilet (6) and she is disgusted at the thought of people knowing what you were going to do. Paulina is thus portrayed as a normal woman, conscious of what people may think of her and desirous of
concealing certain obvious facts of life such as this. As such, Macgoye’s ideological concerns emerge at an early stage of the novel when the female characters begin to adjust to the new situations they find themselves in, and also are conscious to present a positive image of themselves.

The omniscient narrator in *Coming to Birth* also affords the fiction an inclusiveness through which the reader senses the multiplicity of human life. The omniscient narrator performs an integral role of weaving together the experiences of a number of characters, snippets of factual information and geographical descriptions into a coherent whole. Macgoye’s intention in this is to lead us through to an understanding of the underlying ideologies such as how women deal with change in their society. The attention given to the common women and against the background of a few wives of ‘prominent’ men enhances their dignity, especially of these ordinary women who are able to express strong opinions about the great debates about the nation such as the political murders and detentions (112 – 114). Paulina is outspoken on the detention of Chelagat Mutai and it is the women who are able to overcome ‘fear’ and discuss these deaths, such as that of J. M. Kariuki, and detentions without trial. From these we see how Macgoye uses the omniscient narrator’s voice to show how caring women could be, thus building the stature of women: concerned and courageous in the face of injustice in the society.
At times the omniscient narrator allows some of the characters to explain to others things which they do not know. In the first chapter of the novel, Martin explains a lot of things to Paulina. Other characters like Rachael also assist in trying to demystify the city for her. These characters, mostly female, seek to have a personal contact and relationship: indicative of the social function of language and voice. During this time of adjustment, Martin tends to get impatient while the women characters display a bigger sense of solidarity and mutual helpfulness. Martin, representative of domineering men, is easily irritated and protective of his ego to the point of being unreasonable; for instance, after beating Paulina he expects her to find charcoal and prepare supper. That becomes her first lesson in survival: she is forced to beg from a neighbour. This is in keeping with Macgoye's ideology: Paulina's harsh experience of her reality spurs her into action. She therefore does something – might not be so great, but in itself significant - to improve her social life. From now on, the power relations begin to change and she provides more for the family than the 'real' breadwinner.

The omniscient narrator also presents Martin as not knowing everything. He goes to "school" to improve on his grade at work, attends political meetings in order to learn and socialize, and listens to political speeches. Even though he eventually is more 'learned' than Paulina, he is not intellectually removed from her. The studies he undertakes are only geared to taking him from the counter at the shop where he works to the field as a salesman, thus indicating the limitation of this kind of 'study'. His is not education for life or to serve humanity but rather for
‘selfish’ ends. The education does not translate into an improvement of his life as a husband since Paulina has to supplement his role as the breadwinner. It is a contrast to Paulina’s education at Kisumu which enables her to serve her community. Macgoye therefore seems to be saying that ‘academic distance’ between a man and his wife can be transcended and reversed. Socially and emotionally, the novel is a testimony of Paulina’s growth.

Narrative distance and omniscience are linked to the authorial narrator’s tendency to generalize. The combination of distance and omniscience enables the narrator to obtain an overview not possessed by any of the characters. Thus the omniscient narrator ends up widening the scope of the novel beyond Pumwani, where Martin and Paulina initially live, and Nairobi in general to acquire a Kenyan significance. On the other hand, Paulina becomes representative of a general experience by women.

The combination of narrative distance and objective information is dramatic in the opening paragraphs of chapter one where Macgoye describes Martin waiting for his new wife. This gives it a dramatic and evocative potency;

Martin Were pushed a ten cent piece into the slot and marched on to the platform to meet his wife. He was twenty – three and the world was all before him. Five feet ten, a hundred and fifty pounds, educated, employed, married, wearing khaki long with a discreetly stripped blue and white shirt and plain blue tie, socks and lace – up shoes, he had already become a person in the judgment of the community he belonged to (1).
The above citation implies men are conscious of their status and their thinking is inward and self-centred. Martin should be excited about the arrival of his new wife, but instead, we find that his thoughts revolve around his 'achievements' instead. In describing the above in an impersonal way, the omniscient narrator seeks to present the flipside of her ideology, i.e. men are more likely to be selfish than women.

In the above opening paragraphs also, the omniscient narrator provides information on Martin and Paulina which blend into a philosophical reflection and evaluation of the living conditions in the urban centres occupied by Africans. The omniscient narrator says that: Martin could feel older, since for him things were on the upgrade (1). She also says:

Martin thought it was more impressive than the other way between the public convenience and the factory at the side and crossing the filthy little river at the bottom. Here she had to set down her burdens to go and retch... but she was ashamed to be seen with him carrying it (the suitcase) (3).

And adds:

He took her outside then and showed her, not a patch of private ground, for there was none, but a the stinking latrine blocks where you had to remember which side was for men and which for women and pick your way among the mess...(8).

The omniscient narrator describes in the above citations the filthy environment in which Martin (still smartly dressed after meeting Paulina) lives. In spite of the filth, Martin is condescending, chauvinistic, tribalist and self-conscious.
On the other hand, Paulina’s simplicity and apparent naivety cannot cope with the murk. The omniscient narrator presents her as long suffering. We can see in Macgoye’s ideological dispensation an attempt to make a comparison of the basic hygienic standards and a hint of the need for change in the environmental cleanliness thus giving Paulina the initial opportunity to commence the change Macgoye is advocating.

In spite of their different experiences so far, the omniscient narrator’s use of dialogue is aimed at a phatic function of language: to maintain some contact between husband and wife, since it is through this way that the ideological orientation is conveyed.

Another observation to be made is that the general narrative technique used in the first chapter applies to the rest of the novel. The use of dialogue is very limited in the text. Dialogue appears restrained and is inclined towards reported speech, for example:

He was ashamed to say that he must be back at work at half past nine, that his boss had been sarcastic at the idea of such a young man being married, thought he was pitching a yarn (3).

This is a demonstration of the ‘social distance’ that an arranged marriage creates between a husband and wife. It is a manifestation of the woman’s inferior position and lack of intimacy within the cultural marriage situation. The omniscient narrator, by creating this ‘social distance’ between husband and wife
is being reflective about the institution of an arranged marriage. However, we observe that the narrator is more guarded in this criticism and at the end of the day, re-unites the couple after years of separation.

We also observe a trend between the characters where if one speaks, the other does not give a direct response, but rather the omniscient narrator offers a description or explanation which serves as the rejoinder, for example:

‘You are lucky. They might have made it much worse for you. Do you forget that the Emergency is still on?’
She did forget sometimes. The elections and the gradual disuse of the restrictions that were still technically there on the boards but the boards in Swahili were hard to read) made people feel so much better. Besides, Emergency for her meant living in the town. She had never known Pumwani before and might not have found it free either (31 – 32).

In this way, the omniscient narrator’s voice has been used to sustain and constantly remind the reader of the social and political contexts from which the female narrators emerge to make their contribution and mark in society.

Macgoye employs vocal alterity in the dialogue between the characters through which she is able to represent certain social classes especially the ‘common’ or lower class. By letting Paulina’s voice to be heard occasionally, besides the narrator’s voice, Macgoye allows Paulina to subvert the traditions and customs that would otherwise confine her to the lower social class. She is, thus, able to act as a spokesperson for the grievances of the common people. This helps us
understand her better – thus building up on the sympathy for her and women in general.

In addition to the vocal alterity, this movement between literary and oral narration accounts for the narrator’s capacity as a dynamic unifying and diversifying force in the novel. The individual narrators’ voices have been used to attain the collective ideological structure of the omniscient narrator’s voice. The individual characters, when allowed to speak, present voices laced with emerging ideologies enabling the reader to identify their socio-linguistic communities, for example, Paulina and Atieno when they were still staying at Pumwani.

The manner in which the omniscient narrator employs an all-embracing knowledge to comment authoritatively on minor characters also contributes to the narrative technique of the story. The way Rachael is introduced gives the impression that there is no secret in this estate unless it is a conspiracy where the matter remains a public secret such as Martin’s first illicit affair with Fatima (35). We may make a contrast between Rachael’s advice to Paulina about bars and prostitutes (8) and the way Amina conceals the extra-marital affair between Martin and Fatima (35) as an illustration. By giving narrative space to minor characters, Macgoye seems to be saying that all people are important and that women tend to be more accommodating due to their unique position created by migration to urban centres. The women appear to have more free time than the men, are fewer than the men, face more exploitation than the men and at the same
time are sensitive not to hurt the feelings of one another, at times even where an injustice against one appears to be taking place. The narratorial voice is therefore representative and acts as a bridge between the diverse backgrounds of the female characters that 'converge' in the estate.

The omniscient narrator's voice is also used to highlight certain general social attitudes. Whereas Paulina is largely accepted and respected, there are others whom the omniscient narrator says 'sneered behind their hands' (94) on account of her childlessness and broken marriage. The same voice offers her consolation by saying, 'but the Good Lord knew when enough was enough' (94).

The language used by the female characters is unique, and different from the one the men use, for example, it suggests friendship, inspiration, encouragement and even warning to one another than we see in the few conversations among between men. This enables us to make a comparison of collective and individual voices. The collective voice is heard, for example, in the communal sharing of ideas (and words) which contributes to the learning process Paulina goes through. In addition, the communal language demonstrates simple human diversity, through which the individual voices are filtered.

At the level of collective voices of the women we observe an underlying mutual helpfulness. This genderlect reflects how women are able to integrate and
collapse their ‘social classes’ for a common good. In this way we can account for the general success of women characters in the novel.

However, in all these incidents the narrator allows us to access information which is both external and internal to the character. The internal refers to the mind / psychological dispensations of the text. The external refers to the camera-point of view as seen through a lens. These revelations of the information are relevant and therefore plausible since they are consistent with earlier descriptions of the protagonists.

Even though many characters’ ‘consciousness’ are revealed, there are some who remain closed. These are only seen through such external devices as physical action, descriptions, and the response and the reactions of others. Characters in this category include Okello, Simon, the maids and Mr. M among others. These characters are not developed – they are flat characters and interestingly, the majority are male. Their voices are either filtered through women’s voices or through the omniscient narrator’s perspective thus giving the women prominence.

Frequently the narrator depicts actions and settings through the perceptions of the “open conscious” character. Through Paulina, the reader is able to see the filth and squalor that dots Nairobi on her first day in the city. She is almost unable to use the dirty toilet which, in Martin’s view, at the moment is “clean” (5-6). This trend goes on throughout the novel and even in Kisumu it is her perspective that
shapes the action and influences the geographical and historical explanations that are offered such as the description of her house in Kano (near Kisumu) and the circumstances surrounding her son’s death.

Paulina’s influence is even felt by her employers, thus, they treat her well and even rely upon her at times to offer advice or make decisions that are important in the family for example financial matters at Mr. and Mrs. M’s house where the services she gives make her more than a house help and serve as further example of vocal alterity mentioned earlier. Paulina is indeed able to narrate the story convincingly from her lower social standing.

By focusing on Paulina, it can be argued that the author shows sympathy for her thus highlighting the ‘weak’ people. Even when she tends to withhold some information from Paulina, there are times when these are revealed in an emphatic manner. An example is when Paulina senses Martin’s unfaithfulness (48, 52) while she is in Kisumu. On the other hand, the narrator alerts Martin to Paulina’s unfaithfulness too. It should be noted that the authorial narrator seeks to justify Paulina’s affair with Simon within the context of the Luo custom whereby a barren woman could look for a child from a ‘brother-in-law’: ‘she was a married woman denied a married woman’s rights and respect, in custom she could seek a child where she could. She had the right (54).
The omniscient narrator is also seen as manoeuvring events and providing transitional assists as well as interpretive comments from that privileged position that at times almost breaks the action she is displaying. It is such techniques that lead a reader to see the hand of the author in the work and her sympathy to a fellow woman, for example, when the female neighbours rescue Paulina from a second beating:

He lifted his hand to strike again, but Amina and her friends started making a lot of noise in the front room and he let his hand fall (26).

As a result, Paulina is spared further harm after the beating she has received that morning. Ironically, during the morning beating, these same neighbours had kept away. The narratorial voice therefore seems to conclude that: women’s collective voice, when made public and loud, becomes a safeguard against many forms of abuse. It therefore condemns violence and stirs a conscience in Martin that violence against women is abhorred – hence, he stops beating Paulina.

It is interesting to note that in the three incidents, the male voice is conspicuously absent. Interventions by men are lukewarm and do not contribute to rescuing the survivor of the violence as Paulina learns:

She appealed to the headman to testify to her industry and modest behaviour at home, but the headman shook his head, spat and said that it was not his business to interfere in domestic matters (57).
Fauzia also experiences the same attitude (58). This suggests that males perpetuate and condone violence against women and therefore should not be expected to come to a woman’s rescue. Women must be at the forefront in fighting for their rights.

In addition, the omniscient narrator uses the knowledge of the people’s past to create ideas of the ideal society. She does this by capturing the change taking place in society. The historical events are significant in that they affect the plot development and Paulina’s emotional and intellectual growth. For instance, as the country gears up for political independence, so does the narrator prepare the readers for Paulina’s separation from Martin which sends her to Kisumu, and eventual employment there. Paulina’s personal life also reflects major fractures in society, for example, the assassination of Tom Mboya. This indirectly results in the death of her son and she is forced to relocate to Nairobi. In both instances, we can see a lady maturing and gaining wisdom in ways of handling sensitive matters. This is in sharp contrast with Martin whom the narrator describes thus:

Martin was still in essence the Luo boy he had been when he got married seven years before, whose whole world picture revolved around an idealized ‘home’ to which he would return in plenty and comfort after making a mark on the big world (51).

The omniscient narrator also shows the characters’ attitudes and transformations. The novel is about Paulina’s transformation from a timid, naïve country girl who is newly married to a woman who is in control of the affairs that affect her life.
Her maturation is physical, social, intellectual and emotional. This growth is paralleled to the country’s growth, thus giving it a bigger significance. In drawing this parallel, the omniscient narrator’s voice is not only being reflective, but takes an ideological position that uplifts the role and stature of womanhood. The voice is thus being philosophical.

The omniscient narrator also knows the deficiencies of each woman character, whether living in the urban or rural area. The narrator appears to hesitate on the men’s deficiencies except for Martin due to the unique role he plays in the novel. The men are thus confined to the closed consciousness category of characters. This leads to an apparent contradiction: if one of the novel’s aims is to uplift the female character, why does the narrator judge the male characters rather harshly? The answer to this could be that Macgoye does not want to elevate for the sake of it and thus extend her bias into the novel. In an effort to maintain the spirit of equality she lets every person, man or woman, be judged by whatever action they do. For this reason, the omniscient narrator presents the men as experiencing certain pressures which they may not have understood and which propel them to behave in the way they do. Martin, for example, finds it demeaning to say he searched for his lost wife (23), to fetch water or cook (25). He is driven by beliefs about the ‘importance’ of fatherhood, and idealized ‘home’ expectations (51). In the case of Simon, he is at a loss; his in-laws will not approve of polygamy yet he desires to maintain the friendship with Paulina (68).
Paulina breaks new ground by opting to be a single mother – quite willing to raise her baby alone, from within a community which attaches a lot of significance to marriage. That this happens in Kisumu, the ‘headquarters’ of the Luo community is symbolic in itself.

At some points the omniscient narrator integrates various points of view. This technique is closely linked with the exploitation of dialogue between characters but the dialogue is told through the narrator. Through this kind of editing Macgoye seems to draw a textual reality that resembles an external reality. Her descriptions of Eastlands in Nairobi and Kisumu are factual and graphically vivid. The historical events described such as ‘operation anvil’, the deaths of Tom Mboya, Argwings Kodhek and J.M. Kariuki, the detention of Oginga Odinga, and, country enjoying independence actually took place. We recognize the fact that Macgoye relies on Kenya’s history in this novel. She uses it selectively to develop the plot but is careful not to allow the Africans to lose their sense of identity through either alienation or undue Western influences even though they may have English names. This is achieved by keeping whites as far as possible out of the picture and letting Africans be the key players in the story. We see direct reference made to the whites only once in the novel (20).

From the aforementioned, it may seem the narrator becomes ironic towards the women’s cause. Far from it, she is only being realistic and presents society in the
manner through which her ideology will be manifested. In *Coming to Birth*, it should be mentioned that the women characters display a greater sense of loyalty to each other than to their husbands. Paulina receives more support and assistance from women — both those who know her and strangers — than from her husband. Martin, on the other hand, would rather die in silence than indicate his weakness, a trait leading to his violent tendencies (21 - 23).

The narrator records the tensions in the society such as the state of Paulina’s mind: the uncertainty over whether her actions will please or displease Martin and her mother-in-law (and to some extent her own parents). The moment she stops looking at things from this perspective aimed at pleasing Martin or her mother-in-law, life takes a turn for the better and she prospers. Thus, in this respect, Paulina’s actions urge people towards a better understanding of themselves.

In the 1st person narrative voice, there is a shift from one character to another. The point of interest is how these inter-character dialogical patterns are harmonized and concretized. There are very few instances of actual dialogue between characters in the text. The first person, where used fits within the reported frame given by the third person point of view, for instance:

> Then a woman’s voice called in her own language, ‘May I come in?’
> ‘Who are you?’ she asked, trembling.
> ‘*My* name is Rachael Atieno. I live in the next house. *I* met Martin going to work and he said you had arrived so *I* came to greet you’ (7).
By employing such a shift in the narrating voices, the omniscient narrative voice allows the other narrators to speak for themselves and engage at that personal level. The vocal rhetoric allows the narrator to express the content matter such that moods and feelings are easily discernible: from the apprehension after being left alone to the intimate sharing of secrets and caution to be wary of the dangers in Nairobi. The narrator therefore seems to be telling the readers that the concerns she is raising are neither new nor unique: they are issues they live with and take for granted, yet these are important such as sisterhood.

The omniscient narrator’s voice runs through the text, determining which sections to report and in which portions to allow the speaker’s voice to filter through. This achieves specific effects within each section such as Paulina’s naivété soon after her arrival in the city. At times there is an enhancement of the stylistic devices in order to further the concerns expressed in the novel such as:

‘It is long,’ said Paulina awkwardly, when the next customer waiting had been served. I did not know you were in Nairobi. And how are things at home?’

‘We are well,’ said Rhoda, a little uneasily. ‘My husband is in the Ministry now, and we have five kids – one doing CPE this year and three others in primary and one in Nursery. And my goodness, the expenses of that. It is enough, I tell you.’ Paulina’s heart sank, but no questions followed. Rhoda already knew from home that there are things that one must not ask (122).

In this dialogue, omniscient narrator expresses irony in the lives of the two women and the added burden of looking after children, while also hinting at the social disdain at childlessness.
We also see how Macgoye uses dialogue to avoid monotony of a single narrative voice and create an illusion of reality as it supposedly was at the time the narrated events took place. In *Coming to Birth*, we note that Macgoye is more inclined to produce verbatim the words of protagonists rather than other minor characters. Where the minor characters' words are produced, it is to complement those of either Paulina or Martin. We hardly come across these other characters speaking among themselves. In fact, even their thoughts are limited in the extent to which they relate to Paulina. For instance, we do not find Amina thinking about herself. Instead, she goes out of her way to ensure Paulina's well being and the snippets of information she provides on Martin and other former neighbours go a long way in this line. We observe a general tendency among the characters: they hardly think of themselves but of others, especially in a positive way.

As the novel draws to a close, the kind of dialogue we observe between Paulina and Martin undergoes a metamorphosis from one which is tension-filled, and basically one-sided information passing process, to a friendly and relaxed exchange such as the news of the pregnancy towards the end of the novel:

I have no reason not to be happy. All has not been well with us. You know it. I know it. There were women, and none of them gave me a child. You had another man and his child was lost to us. I thought you were only eager now to become a new woman – perhaps to go into Parliament.' They both burst out laughing.

‘or get your photograph in the paper again waiting at one of Mrs. M.’s parties.’ He swallowed. ‘Do I understand what you are telling me, or have I got it wrong?’

‘You understand it, Martin. This is your baby. Since I came to Nairobi – in fact since I was carrying Okeyo – there has been no
possibility of it not being yours, and I hope you will help me take
good care, so that even if one of your safari wives gives you a dozen
children still you need not be ashamed of your house in Gem.’ (147)

With dialogue, the omniscient narrator records the reporting verb that each
narrating gender uses in direct speech and indirect speech. Free indirect speech is
used to filter character’s description (of feelings) and filter narrated events so that
even though staying as husband and wife, there seems to have been a wide gap
between them such that the reader is not surprised when Paulina leaves. The
narrator uses indirect speech between the couple to give hints of the growing
distance between them. For example, when Pauline raises the matter of the
women / their experience in Pumwani (146) Martin is not keen on the discussion.
The narrator makes it easy to discern Paulina’s voice as jovial and free while
Martin’s emerges as distant and cold.

These incidents also allow the third person narrator to use the present tense in the
narration. These serve to reduce the narrative distance between the reader and the
narrative, besides giving the actual characters an opportunity to express
themselves.

In the course of the narration, there are a number of social contradictions, for
example, when Martin takes girlfriends, no one raises questions and it is as if the
neighbours help him to conceal the matter from his wife. Among the many
- girlfriends he has are Fatima, Fauzia and Nancy (34 -35, 39, 49, 52, 56, 60).
On the other hand, a woman who engages in love affairs is frowned upon and is most likely to receive a beating. Martin, for instance, beats both Paulina and Fauzia (22, 58). He seems to get better at the act of beating women as is described by the narrator: ‘His fist was pummelling into the small of her back and he began pulling at the bed as though to overturn it on top of her’ (22) and ‘He beat her, this time, slowly and methodically ... He threw her things piecemeal into the road...’ (58)

Martin engages in relationships knowing very well he does not intend to commit to them. For example, Fauzia:

He had no serious thought of taking this butterfly creature home to mud floors and the care of heavy children. If he had any plan at all it was, vaguely, to retain the child and let her go away (49).

The attitudes towards single women by members of their own family are also telling. Paulina is ‘respected’ on account of her position in society, such as teacher, and the material support she can offer; yet her state is spurned:

But still her mother – in – law refused to admit it to be the truth, so though the older women envied her training and were eager to belittle her and expand on what they knew of Martin’s life... (52)

These thoughts come against the background of their separation and Paulina’s knowledge of Martin’s current relationship, which is excused. Paulina’s mother seems scandalized by her separation from Martin but softens when she realizes that she can get material benefits from her:
Her own mother had visited her and made stern enquiries about the accusation against her, but they were proud of her position and glad she could sew for them and send a little money, so they did not pursue the matter (60).

Through these attitudes, the narrator ‘voices’ the societal disapproval of what goes against their expectations. At the same time, society is at a loss since it is dependent to an extent on the individuals whose ‘conduct’ it may disapprove of. Hence: the confused and mostly hushed voice, often whispered behind the back of the concerned person (68).

The tension that marked Paulina’s departure from home after her father’s burial has its origins in the nature and extent of the material support she can offer. Even though Paulina goes back to Kisumu her sister-in-law and brother expect her to feed other expected visitors and mourners coming long after the funeral ceremony (66 and 67).

Eventually Paulina avoids going home because she is aware that even the community spurns her state:

People made up to her because of her good clothes and the expectations of gifts, but they sneered behind their hands, she thought, at her childlessness and broken marriage (94)

The author also particularizes and synchronizes the narrative voice i.e. the events, ideas and time. These are pinned to an exact historical and geographic locale. The emphasis on the urban areas highlights the change that is taking place in the country. The place itself, Pumwani, has its historical significance, having been
established as a transit point where sojourners were welcome to ‘catch your
breath’ before proceeding (Kurtz 2005:14). It is also the oldest African section of
Nairobi, having been established in the 1920s. Initially it was in the outskirts of
the city, which has since surrounded it. The estate has since become a slum
hosting a cross-section of Kenya’s population. Its historical significance is
enhanced by the fact that many of the early nationalist leaders, such as; Jomo
Kenyatta, Paul Ngei and Njoroge Mungai, either lived or used the place as their
base of operation in Nairobi.

The narrator is made to participate in the story in several ways. Besides being all-
knowing, the narrator gives comments especially with regard to history and
customs of the Luo, for example:

She was a married woman denied a married woman’s rights and respect, in custom she should seek a child where she could. She had the right (54).

At times the narrator engages the reader by using Dholuo expressions e.g. mandas
(a type of home-made bun). She does this to add to local colour and give it a
d geographical location as mentioned above.

The omniscient narrator in Coming to Birth has been used to entice the reader to
sympathize with Paulina and condemn Martin’s inconsistency and lack of
consideration; hence the narration becomes an effort to restore the woman’s
position and dignity in the society. Macgoye elevates the woman’s position in a subtle way that does not degenerate into a war between the sexes.

The omniscient narrator in the novel uses other means to communicate to the reader and between the characters. There are hints of letters and non-formal channels of communication (either rumours or word of mouth). These condense time and space, for example:

Though she did not write letters except about work, the news filtered through to her mother and Martin’s mother and Martin, and people came from home expecting bus fare and blankets as from a big person. The facts of separation were accepted without comment (for after all not everyone can be a teacher and have a house to herself) (59).

Through the narratorial voice above, we note that the society was well informed about the progress made by Paulina in her life. Though separated, the family did not sever links with her. If anything, the extended family took advantage of this to benefit from her by asking for favours that they could not have asked a married woman, either because she was ‘gone’ or would have to consult the husband. This newfound freedom then serves her well in the eyes of some people in the society. The author therefore seems to be saying that when a woman is single she may do much more than when she is in a marriage situation. She is now regarded as a ‘big person’. The fact that she is a teacher also contributes to the social image and expectations, thus the shame and rejection of being childless is in a way compensated through the social service that Paulina offers. She is able to acquire a larger family as a result of her work. For example, she becomes more than a
worker to her employer, and, to the street-children she is more than a benevolent passer-by.

We can also see a contrast in Martin’s ability to offer help to his family members. Before the separation we note how Paulina has to make tablecloths and other items in order to supplement his savings so that he can pay fees for his sister. Later Martin is forced to move to smaller houses, if not to share houses, in order to make ends meet. There is no time Paulina makes such a move. Whatever she does seems to be well – thought out and increases her stature in the eyes of many readers.

Macgoye also brings to light the channels through which the protagonists maintain a disjointed link. Paulina asks people, especially those with whom she had lived in Pumwani like Amina about Martin:

Paulina managed, between compliments to the child, to drop a casual query to Amina.
'Martin is no longer in Makadara then?'
'No, they moved to Kibera.'
'They?'
'Yes, he and the young man he was sharing a house with. Did he not write to you?'
'I did not know till last week that we were coming here,' muttered Paulina, stretching the truth a bit (59).

On his part, Martin’s methods of tracking Paulina remain shadowy and secretive, for example, ‘Paulina never knew who in Nairobi could have heard of her move, but on the second Sunday Martin appeared at the little house, neat, polite and
distant, like someone with a message (87). In spite of an apparent lack of interest in Paulina, Martin has set up a mechanism which keeps him informed of every move she makes. He doesn’t seem to have graduated from his boy-hood shyness (seen when she got lost coming from the hospital) but has perfected the surveillance system. This is the second time he demonstrates deep knowledge of what she’s doing – the first being the affair she had with Simon, and he beat her up for it.

Even though they ‘hunt’ for information about each other guardedly, the omniscient narrator still keeps some information from them, but seems to conspire with the reader as far as these are concerned. The reader, for instance, knows more about Martin’s affairs with other younger women than Paulina does. It is ironic; on the other hand, that Martin is quite well informed about Paulina’s life. The omniscient narrator does not disclose to the reader all of Martin’s sources of information concerning Paulina. In this way, the omniscient narrator strikes a friendly bond with the reader whereby they collude to ‘conceal’ information from characters and thus heighten suspense in the novel.

There are apparent contradictions in the way that information reaches the protagonists. There are gaps as to how the information is shared among all the characters. Probably Macgoye wants to echo what happens in real life situations. In addition, she seeks to demonstrate men’s chauvinistic and secretive nature as contrasted to women’s openness. These men are such schemers that on many
occasions they catch women unprepared, forcing them to give in to their desires. That is one of the ways through which we may justify or understand Paulina’s opening the door for him to come in on page 87.

The narrator is generous with hints of Paulina’s growth and maturity. Her perception of the city changes and becomes more realistic (59). Paulina takes the beating over Simon differently (56) and even discusses the circumstances under which she lost her first child (146). The development portrays a woman who is a sharp contrast to the naïve girl from Kisumu who gets lost in chapter one section three. The maturity is seen in her language (vocabulary, manner of reasoning, register) as well. At the beginning she is so unsure of herself and is constantly worried that Martin might send her back to her parents. Eventually all these change so that even her employer can reason with her and take her advice.

The narrator also conveys a marked understanding and friendliness towards Paulina. The narrator makes excuses for her affair with Simon (54, 55) and, in fact, seems to tolerate it. Instead of Simon being the ‘beneficiary’ of the affair, Paulina sends him packing when she gets what she has been yearning for - a child (68). This is against the expectation in most African communities where children, especially boys, are seen to belong to their fathers. The narrator therefore gives Paulina her life-long desire and at the same time tells us that this heralds a new beginning in men / women relationship: gone are the days when men were seen
as the only force that could raise and own children. Women are capable of performing the dual role of parenting and earning a living.

The narrator treats Martin’s affairs with disdain - the ‘usual male flings’ with people who do not add value to their lives. These affairs leave him worse off than he was and most end with him physically abusing the women (58). Martin therefore counts among men who rely on threats to settle matters and who are basically insecure with themselves. When Martin comes to Paulina’s house having been ‘subdued to submission’ by life they live happily and soon a birth is expected.

As the story progresses, Martin’s fortunes dwindle. He is portrayed as a restless man who is unsure of what he is looking for, something which makes him slide in social status from a married man we meet living in his own house, to a married-bachelor sharing a house with a bachelor in Makadara and later he moves from a ‘better’ estate to the slums of Kibera before finally settling in Paulina’s room at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. M.

Paulina’s fortunes, on the one hand, keep rising. Doors keep opening for her and she is contented with her life. It is not the material wealth that enriches her life: rather she discovers other ways through which life becomes meaningful and rewarding (68): she’s had a baby boy; she’s had her education; she’s taught the
community; she’s had employment; she met her father’s funeral expenses; she has supportive friends.

Paulina’s decisions and discoveries also come gradually. They appear to have been well thought out before execution. In fact, her actions are not driven by malice or revenge. Take for example, the reason to go back upcountry which leads to the affair with Simon. She was torn between pleasing her husband and mother-in-law. The desire for a child, when it comes is also understandable. In fact, according to custom, she was perfectly right to have done what she did: her husband had abandoned her and she was childless. When Paulina lost her father, Martin did not attend the funeral (66) and as a result failed to abide by the custom that he should have ‘come and sleep with her at her home, when the mourners disperse, to signify his protection and the continuing of the line (66) and for such reasons the community in Kisumu seems to understand her relationship with Simon as ‘Nobody ever questioned her about Simon, whom she referred to casually as ‘my – in – law’ if introductions were necessary ... many knew that she was a wife of Gem and did not doubt she lived alone on account of her childlessness’ (68).

Paulina is portrayed as learning new things gradually. It takes time before she quite comprehends things around her fully. This learning is closely linked to her physical growth, for example:
There was one club trip to Nairobi in which she saw afresh with a country woman’s eyes – parks, parliament, big shops, not at all the homely Nairobi she had known … (59)

This ‘discovery’ marks a sharp contrast to the naïve newly married girl whom the reader met in chapter one. She is able to make observations from a mature point of view and soak in details that as a young girl she had failed to notice and here Macgoye seems to suggest the sufferings that people in urban areas experience is clouded in the splendour of parks and shopping complexes that interest first time visitors. It is only after several trips from the city that its dwellers can comprehend it better: both good and bad sides. This is a metaphoric statement too: after the separation of several years, Paulina and Martin are able to understand one another better and therefore make the ideal couple they eventually become. In their first habitation, there were many unimportant concerns that clouded their vision of what each had that could complement the other. Martin, for instance, is obsessed with his work, study and lording it over Paulina, while on her part she seeks the recipe for being the perfect wife, instead of just being herself.

In making references to the characters, the omniscient narrator uses pronouns such as ‘she’, and ‘they’ to indicate a kind of detachment from the characters. The distancing effect is created in order to maintain an objective narration, rather than an engrossed and involved narration. In addition, this approach attempts to
focus on a character and avoid the overuse of nouns which would otherwise make the narrative monotonous.

The omniscient narrator has a definite differentiated gender preference and acts as the consciousness of the events taking place, thus portraying the females more convincingly than the males. This narrator is therefore most likely placed on a female character due to the gender conscious subversion in the text in which she seeks to empower female characters and disempower the male characters. In this regard there are very few digressions from the protagonist. The spotlight is on Paulina. When we are not with her, we are looking at Martin. Amina comes in to fill us with information concerning Martin or to reinforce the reader’s confidence in whatever Paulina is doing: she will succeed just like Amina who is also single. The narrator seems to be subtly saying that a man’s presence in a woman’s life may at times hinder her from fully realizing her economic and intellectual potential.

The choice of narrators in Coming to Birth is also telling of the dominant ideology. Traditionally men have been regarded as the guardians of knowledge and information, hence power. The novel opens with Martin standing on a higher pedestal giving Paulina little doses of knowledge. She displays her ignorance of the curfew when the police knock at her door searching during an operation against KEM KEM (31). The narrator’s initial portrayal of Paulina’s voice as weak and timid shifts to being courageous and reasoned is part of the
empowering process used to add an aesthetic value to the novel. Over time, Paulina learns quite much and almost becomes a political activist. In fact, she is at the forefront in the campaign to have Chelagat Mutai (a former member of Parliament) released. As Paulina gets empowered, we note that Martin has either stagnated or become ‘disempowered’ such that his comeback to Paulina can be interpreted as a willingness to renegotiate their relationship, giving rise to the sense of equality that characterizes the last section of the novel. The narrator is thus balancing a scale, rather than diminishing one character, in a process of gradual change that is beneficial to both.

It is therefore evident that while Paulina gains from the knowledge and walks past the gates of ignorance, Martin seems to have been marking time at the gates he once held for Paulina. Eventually, there is little to show for Martin’s education. He ‘stagnates’ so much, which contributes to his coming to Paulina’s house from where we believe they can hopefully make a new start, and now the relationship is based on equality, love and to an extent, monetary gains.

The female characters are portrayed as being more willing to help each other to overcome their material and intellectual wants. They do not need to be prompted in order to offer help as they rally to do in the case of Paulina as a newly married ‘woman’. This is done from a sense of sisterhood more than a fight against the male gender even though it is in a discreet manner thus reinforcing the view that the women are not actually at war with the men. The beneficiary of the ‘lesson’ in
the long run is Martin, a man. Such is the relationship which convinces readers that Macgoye is not out to advance feminism _per se_ as an ideology. Rather, the relationship that exists in the selected texts fits in well with those recognized by Africana Womanism where women and men are not essentially at war. It is apparent that Paulina understands Martin and is sympathetic so that by accepting him back she is not only giving him, literally, a second chance, but desires to bring him to an awareness of their common destiny. We observe that, on his part, Martin also treats Paulina with respect as the novel progresses. He loosens up and they have better quality of dialogue as well in contrast to the initial stages of their relationship.

The narrative voices in _Coming to Birth_ are placed within frames of reference which also shape and contribute to the ideological discussion. For instance, whereas the characters are Africans, mostly Luo characters, they have been given English names or Swahili names with an English origin. It is on this ground that the protagonists are able to abandon the strict cultural expectations and values that would have tied them to the communities. Paulina, for example leaves her parents' home before the mourning period is over and asks her mother to 'see her as a man who has to go back to work' (66). On his part, Martin is able to come and live in a woman's house, something which was not expected in the Luo customs. We also observe that European characters are more sympathetic and supportive at the initial stages of the relationship than the Africans (20, 45) and that without their assistance Paulina's destiny would have taken a different turn.
In conclusion, this study observes that Macgoye has used the omniscient narrator to explore the problems and attitudes that women experience in her adopted society. Through an interrogation of various kinds of narratorial voices in Coming to Birth we observe how Macgoye has used these characters to subvert the roles assigned to women in order to elevate and portray them positively, which in our opinion is part of her wider ideology.

By allocating the omniscient narrator's voice more space than other voices, Macgoye allows the omniscient narrator to act as the conscience of the novel. As a result, it is the omniscient narrator who seeks to persuade the reader more than the characters. This accords the characters, who are still trapped in their cultures, an opportunity to gently navigate themselves through weaknesses in their cultural institutions and open or be guided to avenues through which a better life, or an even more fulfilling and satisfying life can be experienced. That voice is generally gentle, and persuasive, showing weaknesses and gradual growth of characters. Through their tone of voice, hesitations, gestures, bodily posture among others, these characters complement the dominant ideology embodied by the omniscient narrator through whose voice we are able to meet and interact with them. The shifts in narratorial voices; from single to collective, from subjective to balanced and one that is predominantly reflective of the social position of women, especially in marriage, accords the omniscient narrator's voice the authority with which she propagates the ideology in Coming to Birth.
CHAPTER THREE

Multiple Narrations as a Fusion of Ideological Voices In The Present Moment

Story-telling can occur at many different levels and scholars have labelled some of these ‘tales within tales’. What this means is that there will be circumstances when a character who begins to tell a story of their own ends up creating a narrative within a narrative. Thus, according to Bal (1985a: 43), the original becomes a ‘frame’ or ‘matrix’ narrative and the story told by the narrating character becomes an ‘embedded’ or ‘hyponarrative’.

Similarly, there are narratives with more than two characters telling their stories. In this case it is possible to establish a hierarchy among them. Thus, the one who ultimately introduces the entire narrative is the main character, while the others are tertiary characters. A novel with many narrative voices has a stratification of levels of narratives whereby the inner level is subordinate to the inner narrative within which it is embedded.

In a narrative with such a collective focalization, one character may be at a higher or lesser distance from the others. This may be intellectual, emotional, age-related or moral. The distance may also shift as the narrative progresses. At the level of narrators, the one who ultimately introduces the others is at a higher plane.
Such a narrator may be an omniscient narrator. There is also a likelihood of one of the other narrators being given prominence over the others. In The Present Moment Wairimu is the one granted this prominence. It follows that her extent of participation is greater than that of the other narrators.

The narrators in a narrative with multiple narrators are also likely to be interdependent. They need each to enrich the narrative. Such narratives also have both flat and round characters and their 'collisions' parallel life more accurately (Forster 1976: 76) than a narrative which is not multi-voiced. Through transgressions of narrative levels the reader is enabled to cross the narrative levels along the discourse and read the various connected levels in terms of one other. In Macgoye's novel The Present Moment there are several women characters telling us their story or stories. These voices are mediated by an omniscient narrator in a strategy in which "characters are given opportunities to be reflectors of the actions that the novel is preoccupied with" (Ngugi 1981: 76 – 77). Macgoye's preoccupation in the selected texts is the elevation of her female characters.

In order that the writer successfully presents her ideology, she must assign each character to a particular part of the story where she can tell / show with a precise degree of reliability and exercise freedom to comment on her experiences and how those of others affect their relationship. Some of these characters are predictable and limited, such as the male characters in The Present Moment. They are not allotted names, a feature which Bal (1985) argues that is motivated and
a character’s gender, social status, geographical origin and sometimes even more’ (84). In imposing these restrictions on the male characters and children, Macgoye seeks to propagate her ideology in the text by allowing the dominant narrator’s voice to condense the sequence of action / events into a thematically focused and orderly account.

Bhaktin (1981) observes that the use of several characters who are on the same level is useful:

The being in the novel is first and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language (332).

What he means is that people in a novel speak like people in everyday life. For that reason a novel has many centres of ‘voice’ and a ‘voice’ is not just a mechanical means through which thoughts are broadcast. The ‘voice’ has an ideological dimension. According to Hawthorne, (1985) each “voice” (therefore) represents a different viewpoint and perspective’ (110). The more voices a narration has, we believe, the more the variety of views expressed and the closer to reality it is. In addition, these voices enable the author to explore different angles of the ideology being propagated, thus reinforcing it.

Third person multiple narrators may serve several purposes in a narrative. They may be used to facilitate exposition of information about events that lie outside the primary action line of the main character especially of events that occurred in the
past. They may also be used to integrate the events, thus enrich the plot and enhance its aesthetic value. Through analogy, third person multiple narrators’ voices help corroborate, or at times offer contradiction, to the story advanced by the main narratorial voice.

The Present Moment is presented from a perspective of multiple narratorial voices. The seven elderly women’s stories are woven around Wairimu's story (through her voice) which forms the foundation of discussion in this chapter.

In The Present Moment, Macgoye tells the story of seven women as she traces more than sixty years of Kenya’s national history. The women have been witnesses to experiences such as colonization, resistance against the colonial masters and events in post-independence Kenya. The novel begins with the women sharply divided along ethnic and religious lines: one of the women is Luo, one comes from the Seychelles, and several are Kikuyu. Their differences emanate from their backgrounds; for example, some were born in the city and have no connection with their traditions, some are converts to Christianity from Islam, and some fought with the Mau Mau during the Emergency.

However, as the novel progresses and the elderly women sit around the fire in ‘The Refuge’ - a mission run home for destitute elderly women, they begin to tell their stories to one another and to a younger generation of nurses who occasionally visit to attend to them. The elderly women begin to discover that it is their personal
histories that connect them as women. They tell stories of struggles for self
determination, of conflict, violence, loss and survival. For instance, they have all
lost husbands, lovers and children. Their personal tragedies which unite them at
'The Refuge' lead to the formation of a new community, in which they can share
their collective history, strengthen one another and share in each other’s affection.
Their personal crises, combined with the national crisis, bond them together like
the blood shed at circumcision (46).

The female characters realize over the course of the novel that their paths through
life have crossed in various ways; one woman knows someone whom another
person knows, one woman has been to a place another woman came from and so
on, and in the end, in spite of the factors which had initially divided them, each one
can hear their own story in the narrations of the others. They discover that their
histories connect and bind them in a way that Bessie – one of the characters -
summarizes by saying:

But you see, as your young years you never saw, that all your
experience presses bitterly upon the present moment and all the
things you have shared are separately enfolded in someone else’s
life (154).

The characters in The Present Moment serve as narrators to each other.
Consequently they show a willingness to listen to one another’s voice (story)
which in turn sparks off some of the narration. Their sympathy for one another
enhances the narration and increases the revelation of their traits. Most of their
narrations border on the praise of the resilience and endurance of womanhood.
Their own sympathetic narrative voices therefore help the characters themselves to understand each other better and cope with their present moment.

The way in which Macgoye treats history and literary events in The Present Moment is in itself an ideology. She portrays Kenya's societal and political change in a way that subverts popular presentations which chronicle the exploits of 'great men'. Instead, she places these men in the background of the women's lives and makes them act as signposts of the women's privatized accounts of their personal lives. These women have aspired, struggled, endured and triumphed within the matrix of the country's history. At the individual level, the women's histories are shaped by the precise location where character, choice, desire and hope coalesce with opportunities, tragedies and possibilities which have been enabled by radical social, cultural and political change taking place in the country. At times that past is painful. But the women cannot run away from it as Rahel (10) says 'sounds of the past kept reverberating' and the omniscient narrator adds that 'the memory of that past need not speak in loud voices but rather may gibber at a tantalizing distance like a bat in the rafters, or swoop upon you like a moth, soundless but soiling you with a residue of filmy substance' (34 -35). The outcome of this is that the women discover that though they have walked different paths, their experiences have been basically the same. Each woman's story is therefore a piece of the experience the others have had.
As a result, for these seven women in ‘The Refuge’, history is much more than the reconstruction of collective experiences, or the knowledge drawn from catalogued and stored artefacts from the past. Their history stems from a ‘ragged bundle of hopes’ that has seen them overcome their forceful relegation beyond society’s formal boundaries. In this regard, their sense of history differs from that of the men, or that of those at the centre of power. In their personal narratives, the focus is on the personal rather than popular or national paradigm. This enhances the meaning of their collective experience; one that has a real depth and social meaning to most women and many men.

The omniscient narrator’s voice is reflective of the women’s experiences and presents these from the different female narrators’ own perspectives. Women have usually been left out of world history because it has been considered only in male-centred terms. Their voices, their contributions, and their experiences have all been obliterated by the focus on the male factor. Gerda Lerner (cited by Showalter in Lodge 1988) observes, ‘we have missed women and their activities because we asked questions in history which are inappropriate to women’ (345) In an attempt to rectify this scenario at the Kenyan level, Macgoye focuses on a woman-centred narrative which suggests the possibility of the existence of a female-centred culture within the general culture shared by men and women. Macgoye is saying, in other words, that history must include an account of the female experience. For this reason, Wairimu, who played a major role in the struggle for independence, is foregrounded more than other women whose lives were also affected by the events.
Wairimu and other female characters 'rebels' against convention and restrictive set up of the African family and are determined to make / have their own way in a male dominated world. They become forerunners in the fight for independence of the country and are among the women who challenged the men in their fear of the colonialist. She is also a pioneer in the fight for women’s rights/women’s liberation. Wairimu’s voice sounds lonely as she pioneers the journey heralding a new era, thus attracting a curious reaction of curiosity mixed with disdain from those who know her. Similarly, Rahel makes a big sacrifice when she refuses to get inherited and her ‘voice’ sounds haunted in the dream she experiences (3 – 4). These mark the genesis of Macgoye’s ideology: the elevation of women.

Wairimu is portrayed as an individual who revelled in the ability to learn (24); and this opens her up to the world beyond the narrow village life in Central Kenya as she travels as a coffee girl (working on different coffee plantations), then to Nairobi as a hotel worker. The motivation to be a worker is so strong for the young Wairimu since: ‘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’ (18). Thus, Wairimu acquires the identity and stature she has because she leaves her home to look for, and finds, employment in the environs of Nairobi. Later she joins the men in the struggle for independence. In these endeavours, she ‘acquires’ an individual identity just like men (56), because she is able to read, which is a contrast to the women who had remained in Nyeri and became ‘anonymous’ house – wives: Wairimu thus
occupies a privileged position like men. This offers her a freedom to speak and this ‘free speech’ threatens to destabilize patriarchal structures when she visits her home after years of absence. Her father is not comfortable with her un-married status. He shares the thinking of other men that a woman is safer in marriage, as evident in the tense discussion they hold on the topic:

‘Have you come back for us to find you a husband on the ridge?’ my father asked, embarrassed, staring into the fire.
This was not the way these matters had ever been discussed.
‘That was not in my mind, father.’
‘The time, you see, is past,’ he went on gravely, ‘it would be difficult. And I hear that out there people make their own marriages.’ (60)

Wairimu’s father is also equally concerned about dowry. His social construction views femaleness as being important for continuity – procreation. He doesn’t therefore understand how a woman (his daughter) can live alone ‘like a man’. Her mother is equally pained that Wairimu, at her age, is still unmarried and childless. During the difficult conversation above, Wairimu’s perception of the institution of marriage may seem ironic: while others crave for it, she desires a different kind of freedom. She asks: ‘Was this what I had meant by being free, like a boy? If so, I was glad to be a woman instead’ (61). Her status of being neither child nor woman baffles other people in her community causing her to be restless and so she leaves for Nairobi. By rejecting marriage which is normally on the men’s terms, Wairimu undermines their potential to exercise authority over women. The narratorial voices in the family discussions above combine to enhance the ideology being
propagated: marriage is one of the institutions that impact on the position of
women in society.

It is our opinion that Wairimu’s voice is not that of rebellion. It is that of one who
is fully aware of what she wants – her personal freedom. She is also aware of the
implications of the systemic oppression of women in the institution of marriage.
Her voice is therefore calling to the individual women to exercise their latent
power to take a future – oriented action and tilt the pre-existing power relations
between the sexes.

At the metaphoric level the book recounts, not only the women’s personal
struggles but also the social and political struggles of the nation. The omniscient
narratorial voice echoes the struggles and challenges the nation which has gone
through as she seeks to find herself in a fast changing world order. These narrators
allow Macgoye to present a rich diversity of human voices and ideologies on the
one hand, while on the other hand, collect those diverse, particularized voices and
ideologies into a resounding social protest against the marginalization of women.
The dialogic nature of the novel allows the stratification of the omniscient
narrator’s and other voices that comprise the discourse, leading to a diversity of
speech acts through which Macgoye’s protest against women’s lowly position and
mistreatment is evident.
From the women's experience, it is clear that the colonial government brought change and destabilized an erstwhile 'stable' environment in Africa. This change was both good and bad in the lives of both men and women. In the lives of women, this change was registered as both an opportunity and a loss. It was an opportunity as it gave women the possibility of employed work, autonomy, mobility and freedom of choice. In describing these, the omniscient narrator's voice is being reflective and studious.

On the other hand, this change marked a loss in social security as the structures that ensured women were protected by their communities collapsed; communal ties that initially bound them got strained and at times snapped. One example is the case of Mama Chungu who finds herself barricaded out of the house into the streets (126). Besides being rendered homeless, women were left to look for their own resources in order to survive in the mushrooming urban settlements. As a result of these weak and uncaring structures, women face new threats such as brutality perpetuated by government agents. Nekesa, in spite of having her business licensed, is beaten and the business destroyed by the police (136 – 137). Wairimu also has her stall at Muoroto, near Machakos bus station demolished, rendering her a pauper and forcing her to 'The Refuge'. This marks an anticlimax for a person who not only fought for the country's independence, but who has endeavoured to be self-reliant all her life. From these women's experiences we can make out how men, generally, have used any means at their disposal to weaken, if not destroy, the gains made by independent women. In addition, the narratorial voice describing the
above experiences is full of sympathy and connects them in a way that reinforces the ideological baggage of the (dominant) males in authority that is bent on destruction of every developmental venture initiated by women.

By placing the women in ‘The Refuge’, the omniscient narrator is trying to make a political accommodation following the post - independence destructions of the women’s livelihoods, and the women’s voice is generally one of courage and resilience. Understood in this context, Macgoye is using ‘The Refuge’ to further her ideological dispensation: women have the capacity to rise from the ashes to rebuild their broken lives. For example, Mama Chungu sounds cheerful and shares jokes with the others despite the fact that she is the one who has suffered most among the women in ‘The Refuge’ (63 – 64).

Macgoye also uses narrators we are familiar with from other sources, for example, Harry Thuku, and shapes the images of these characters by the ‘confrontation’ between our previous knowledge and our expectations of them in this narrative. Harry Thuku (the famed pioneer freedom fighter), for instance, appears to depend upon others – in particular women – to get a voice and stature, unlike the ‘towering and forceful’ historical figure that we encounter in history text books. It is the challenge that the men received from the women that made them bold enough to face the governor in agitating for their rights. The women therefore catalyze the men into action, then men take all the credit, and women’s contribution is marked by a loud silence. Macgoye seems to lament at men’s unwillingness to make
women positive symbols. She, therefore, questions the position of women as a vehicle of transformation rather than playing the active and involved role in the future of the country.

'The Refuge' offers accommodation for the vulnerable and physically weak. From the diversity of the women's experience, the narrator arouses aesthetic 'fore pleasure'. Thus, The Present Moment compels us to recognize the inherent power of the woman and identify with her whatever vicissitudes she may undergo. The women are not described as being desperate and moaning their former lives. On the contrary they can afford to joke about the rules governing their lives such as, 'She (the matron) thinks we'd be entertaining our boyfriends if we didn't always have somebody's eye on us' (70). They suffer normal loneliness and miss their grandchildren, but this they do accepting the change in present lifestyle. Above all, they draw strength from each other in a way that can be summed: 'The community had a strength of its own' (8). What is important here is not just the strength. It is also the kind of voice describing the kind of voices that bind these women, enabling them to joke about their predicament. It is a vivacious voice.

'The Refuge' acts a source of unity and divergence. It also reinforces retrospection: the discourse - now is in the present while the story - now is in the past. This hostel that the women live in provides the venue from which the omniscient narrator can recollect NOW and talk about the women's experiences THEN, during their younger days. The narrative organization also allows concurrent narration in which
the omniscient narrator uses the narrative present to foreground the story - now and
downplay the discourse – now which is evident when the women take up their
individual stories. The convergence of the voices describing the ‘then’ experiences
‘now’ bridges the diverse experiences and enriches the representative role each
voice plays in a manner that is candid and personal.

The events described in the narrative have their origins in the women’s presence in
the hostel. There is a direct causality between the events and the levels of narrative
which confers the second level an explanatory function, hence: metadiegesis. This
explains why the omniscient narrator tells us a character’s story, then allows the
character herself to take it up and narrate the ‘gaps’ to another character or add her
own portion to the story especially the circumstances that have contributed to her
being in the present situation. This exposition is satisfactory to both the other
characters and reader’s curiosity, in addition to the ideological concern of
presenting women as survivors.

The omniscient narrator opens the ‘closed’ conscience of the characters more than
allowing them to tell their own story. The effect of this is to allow the fiction an
inclusiveness in which the reader senses the multiplicity of human life and
therefore a reflection of the reality of human experience. The omniscient narrator is
able to manoeuvre into the mind and feelings of the characters and provide
transitional assists and interpretive comments on and about the characters being
depicted, thus enhancing their reliability as narrators such as Nekesa’s personal account detailing both positive and negative aspects of her life (72).

The narrating instance is used to infuse authorial comment into the narration and thus enable the readers understand or even sympathize with the characters, for example:

'It was difficult to think Priscilla had ever been young. She was all bones and corners. Her voice was sharp and her ears sharp, and though her eyes were a bit blurred she never seemed to forget which day it was, or whose turn it was, or what everyone was called, the baptismal name and the birth-given name and the mother-of name for those who had been lucky and the place they were attached to' (2)

The narrator has respect for the women whom she treats kindly. If there are any harsh words, they are targeted at the men, not women. By showing how differently each woman views their common destiny, the narratorial voice makes an attempt at neutrality. However, going by the span of attention given each, we can discern where the omniscient narrator’s sympathy lies.

Macgoye adopts a multi-voiced narrative strategy in *The Present Moment* in which ‘characters are given opportunities to be reflectors of the actions that the novel is preoccupied with’ (Ngugi 1981: 76 – 77). Wairimu’s voice is given prominence in the expression of the dramatic irony in the disjunction between pre-independence expectations and the post-independence realities. The other interjecting voices are given adequate space to express the ironic twist of events too. The many voices are used to show how the characters view their common destiny. It is an attempt at being ‘neutral’ by shifting attention to the women rather than the narrator though
Wairimu stands out because she was the oldest (35). As a result, Macgoye reveals a sociolinguistic community of women who are sensitive, feminine and subverts and shatters the framework of institutions which propagate masculinity.

The other female characters in The Present Moment add their distinctive voices to the narrative. The limitation of their voices, however, emanates from the women’s particular individualizing character traits, sometimes reinforced by their unique experiences. Mama Chungu, for instance, prefers anonymity due to her Seychellois background as she has no legal papers. Besides, her involvement in the smuggling of information from Kamiti, she is forced to largely keep silent due to her limited knowledge of English (80). Bessie, for her part, has been subdued by the trauma of the Mau Mau experience and so largely remains silent during the discussions taking place among the women.

For Rahel, her voice largely echoes the loyalty and humility expected of a person who has followed the path of conformity to a tradition demanded and enforced by a strong system of taboos. It is by placing her with the other women that her strong character is portrayed. The stories of Rahel, Priscilla and Nekesa’s past grant the women an opportunity to experience closure. At the end of the day, their stories are not self-pitying, and in fact Rahel can afford to laugh (44).

Though not given much narrative space, Bessie’s voice reveals the trauma experienced by women during the Mau Mau when families experienced death,
detention and even rape at the hands of the home guards. Unlike the other women above, Bessie does not quite experience closure but rather remains incapacitated by the pain of her history.

Ultimately, the atmosphere in ‘The Refuge’ is one of joy and contentment (10 – 11) and the women have not erected boundaries between them. Much of the narration is taken up by the omniscient narrator who mediates the narration by the female characters, though apportioning Wairimu the bulk of narrative space. The other women do not contest this, probably since they acknowledge the role she played in the struggle for independence and also her vast exposure compared to theirs.

The use of multi-narrators gives the novel a structure which reflects and challenges complex conventions that determine the power relations between the men and women. For example, the entry of women into employment threatens / challenges the male claim to power and domination. Wairimu acquires an identity, for instance, because she goes out to look for and gains employment. Later, she joins the struggle for liberation and in these endeavours she becomes an individual entity: she occupies the position of privileged men. This position offers her a freedom to speak and this ‘free speech’ threatens to destabilize the patriarchal structures. As a result, she is not able to fit in her hometown – Nyeri. Similarly, the marriage institution is not for her. Her stature undermines the men’s potential to maintain authority over women especially at the domestic front.
These multivalent points of view expose the patriarchal structures that the female characters operate within and their effort to break free from them. In addition, these points of view demonstrate the women's diversity: they come from different circumstances but operate in the same setting. In a way this is a pointer to Kenya's cultural diversity. Macgoye presents them in this way so that she can conduct a comprehensive survey of how women in different communities in Kenya are treated.

Wairimu's fate is not so different from that of her house-mate, Rahel. Being a member of the Luo community, Rahel is expected to undergo certain rituals, including being inherited, following the death of her husband. She refuses to succumb to pressures to observe these customs. As a result, Rahel is excommunicated by her clan thus showing the 'power' of the customary social set-up. It is painful to note that even her own children have deserted her in keeping with the traditions. The family is the basic social unit and the narrator seems to question the efficacy of a system which would destroy this important social organization. Rahel's case offers a sharp contradiction to Wairimu's parents' plea to their daughter to find a man and 'settle' down. The juxtaposition of the two women's experiences therefore raises the different community perceptions to some fundamental human institutions whose backbone is women. However, in both, compliance to societal expectations is aimed at subjugation of women. Macgoye
therefore uses these contrasts to illuminate the universality of suffering experienced by women.

The character of Wairimu is used to explore women’s contribution to the public sphere, the realm of social climbing and (social) status. In view of the fate that befalls her resulting to her confinement in ‘The Refuge’, it might look as if her efforts were in vain and that the socio – cultural forces had overpowered her. On the contrary, Wairimu’s characteristic optimistic voice serves to demonstrate women’s resilience and focus in the light of an unjust social system. Macgoye therefore seems to be saying that there is urgent need to dismantle social structures that hinder the economic and social prosperity of women (and by extension, all people).

There are many forces of change that influence the lives of women in The Present Moment, such as colonial power, Mau Mau, the 2nd World War and economic regression. As noted earlier, the forces affect women positively and negatively, leaving it for the individual woman to demonstrate personal strength. No single category of males can be isolated and named as being responsible for perpetuating oppression against women.

Rahel’s ex-communication is blamed on culture, thus begging the question: who determines culture? Culture is a negotiated entity between men and women, both of whom subscribe to it thus validating it. Therefore, in a way men too are made to take responsibility for the fate that befell Rachel. This situation is remedied fast
when other women take her in ‘The Refuge’ so that the inherent power of women can be demonstrated. While the retired world war soldiers, for example, ‘the military man’ (5) have no fixed abode, the women have somewhere decent to live and be cared for.

In presenting the movement for independence the omniscient narrator does not celebrate Harry Thuku or Jomo Kenyatta. She has chosen the simple women-folk instead and Wairimu stands out as a representative. The simple woman has been preferred because she speaks a language most people understand – the so called language of the common man (woman) and she remains authentic to them as one of them. Language is used here as a powerful means to represent the ideological voice that appeals to the masses rather than the elites. It is in this way that Wairimu’s voice becomes representative of the common people as she can express better than Thuku and Kenyatta their thoughts and tribulations. Wairimu’s greatness is also to be found in her personal determination to become more than what she is, which makes her visible in her society as an emerging role model. She is therefore a more realistic role model to the common man / woman than the ‘would be great men’ represented by Kenyatta and Thuku. In her narration of the encounters with these men, Wairimu’s voice is reflective and counters condescending male voices.

In The Present Moment, there is ‘conflict’ between blacks and whites, but not a confrontational one as such, leading to questions such as ‘who really oppressed
Africans? In this way Macgoye is subtly subverting colonial history. Her portrayal of the race factor in all the texts under study raises such questions too because in these texts we find Africans assassinating others and it is the whites who show more sympathy to the Africans in distress. Where there seems to be a violation by the whites, these reach the reader in form of reported speech, and mostly are rumours and therefore distanced, while violations on Africans by Africans are reported more authoritatively and are immediate. In such instances we feel that the omniscient narrator’s voice is guarded.

There are external influences to the narrative voice, for example, historical happenings as presented through the activities of people or groups of people like Thuku and the colonialists. Thuku is significant as he was among the earliest Kenyans to demand for freedom and he paid for it by being exiled at Kismayu. During this time of political agitation, there was also industrial unrest and workers all over the country were demanding better terms of employment. Such historical events give credence to the narratorial voice and enable the readers to appreciate the female characters in ‘The Refuge’ better since some of them were first hand witnesses to the incidents.

There are also geographical factors that make the narrative traverse the country from Nyeri to Nairobi and Mombasa. These in turn combine with the cultures that are found in the regions as well as the people’s background to lend a shade of ideology to the text. Macgoye presents a variety of experiences by women from
across the country, who, have all been subjected to some form of injustice by men. Thus she is telling us that injustices against women are universal and transcend historical moments. Besides the women coming from diverse geographical backgrounds, some have gone out of their way and actually visited these other geographical areas thus providing a bond among the women. Women are therefore portrayed as being flexible and willing to look beyond their localities. They are progressive and willing to assist one another.

The information about the seven women in ‘The Refuge’ is also retrieved from a frame of reference familiar to Kenyan readers. Names like Tom Mboya, Jomo Kenyatta and Harry Thuku are historical and to a certain degree, legendary in their exploits. As a result, they are expected to exhibit certain stereotypical behaviour and set of attributes. Macgoye makes them depart from these expectations by distancing them. They are part of the reported story: visible yet ‘silent’ except from the women’s voices hence manipulated to give credence to the women’s experiences. Macgoye does this in line with the presentation she makes of men in the other novels under study.

The women characters find themselves in their present circumstances partly because of socio–cultural forces. Rachel refuses to get inherited after her husband’s death. This in a way renders her an outcast and the only place she gains acceptance is ‘The Refuge’ which she does not regret (44). Wairimu, for her part, feels that loyalty to customs was in vain since these have had an influence on their
fate (35). Through them, Macgoye seems to be saying customary practices such as inheritance are outdated and modern equivalents have replaced them, for instance, 'The Refuge' accommodates those women who would have otherwise been outcasts in their communities. In describing the women's present state, the omniscient narrator's voice is mostly reflective and to a point proud since the women found ways of subverting and overcoming oppressive systems as part of the wider ideology.

Socio-cultural forces against the women are so strong that women seem to have value and limited voice only when they contribute to prop up these structures, for example, when Wairimu is paying dowry for her brother no one asks questions yet she is single. The omniscient narrator's voice is on the point of hysterical laughter as she highlights the 'climax' of irony when Wairimu is instrumental in her father's second marriage after the death of her mother (93). The family is, however, not comfortable with her unmarried status.

As part of her ideology Macgoye creates little space for children in The Present Moment. In her treatment of the women, we have observed how either there is general anticipation of children or the lack of interest in giving birth. In the societies forming the background to Macgoye's texts under study, inability to have children is almost regarded as a curse. Interestingly, the children in Magoye's texts are not destined to enjoy maternal company just as they do not enjoy their father's. She deliberately makes them 'old enough' to have left their parents' homes and
therefore they are independent. In their old age, the women may reflect on the impact their lives would have had on children, if not reflect upon the direction their lives would have taken had they settled for parenthood. Macgoye is not against children. However, what she seems to be saying is that it would have appeared irresponsible for these women to 'abandon' their children to follow the desires of their hearts which Macgoye is at the moment glorifying.

In addition to the issue of customs, Macgoye raises other concerns of the elderly such as their health needs. The women have not only a shelter but also a reliable medical scheme. They undergo regular medical check-ups and even death, when it comes, is dignified. These are some of the benefits the changing society owes the elderly but it rarely offers. Had the women been left within their indigenous societies they may have died – by virtue of being 'outcasts' – much earlier than when we meet them. Macgoye allows women to grow older than men. This is in line with her ideological dispensation – women are survivors / resilient. In spite of the tribulations they undergo, they still live on. At this point, the narratorial voice adopts a philosophical approach to serious situations in life.

The principle connecting the women's experience is additive, rather than integrative. The Present Moment is built upon episodes that typically derive their significance from their contribution to the overriding theme: women's concerns. One consequence of this principle is that the women are able to add to the voice of the narrator – to clarify vague segments of narration, or just come out to tell their
story in their own words. A result of this variation in the narrative voices is that
sometimes the characters appear autonomous beings for whom the narrator wants
us to have sympathy, especially Wairimu, sometimes they may seem artificial for
the sake of the ideological concern, and sometimes they seem incidental in order to
highlight the workings of the society, so that the narrative fluctuates the reader’s
attention between mimetic, thematic and synthetic components of the narrative.
Because of the additive structure, Macgoye takes advantage of the narrator’s
freedom to make the narrator’s performance one of the sources of interest to the
reader in the text. It is interesting how from the characters’ relationship they help
the reader understand them as they too understand one another and become more
open to each other leading to the realization summarized by Bessie, who is being
humble and truthful in her submission that:

... as in your young years you never saw, that all your experience
presses bitterly upon the present moment and all the things you have
shared are separately enfolded in someone’s life (154).

The way they interrogate each other is another example of the additive structure:

‘So your father; asked Priscilla, hardly raising her eyes from the
Kikuyu Bible where she had been trying to find a place. ‘Where was
he from? Kiambu, Murang’a, Nyeri? (71)

Priscilla’s voice is inquisitive when she seeks to understand the padre who has
come to minister to them thus adding to the information the reader already knows,
which is that the padre did not know his father.

Another example is seen when the narrator says:
Bessie did not return to her line of questioning when Jane came again, but she did manage to speak to her. She felt freer with the young than with these old people who might have knowledge of the struggle and shame which had been locked down below the layer of conscious speech in her - the fire ... except the boy (127 – 128).

By revealing their limited knowledge of each other the omniscient narrator limits the voices of the other narrators. This ensures that when it is appropriate to be polite or guarded about some facts, the narratorial voice can safely do so. In this way, the narrative voices provide the safety valves through which peace and harmony are maintained in ‘The Refuge’. On the other hand, gaps existing in the narrations serve to attract and bind the narrators, thus enriching not only them but also how the readers understand each woman and their intertwined backgrounds.

The Present Moment explores the tensions of power and identity represented by men and its counter pressure marked through change. From Macgoye’s postulation of the politics of power and control, we can argue that within the Kenyan community, gender is the fundamental contradiction. Women lose out on national issues not on account of other factors. For instance, the circumstances under which Wairimu is edged out from the centre of power in the independence movement are unclear. It is evident that a lot of changes are taking place in the text and for this reason Macgoye ‘asks the men to step aside’ so that the women can freely talk about their experiences during these moments of change. It is no wonder that the men form the subject of discussion in the text, especially what they did that directly or indirectly contributes to the women’s present condition. In such
moments, the narratorial voice subtly vilifies men for the suffering women have to endure.

The narrative voice in *The Present Moment* thus negotiates the tension between patriarchal imperatives and enlightenment politics, and between individual desires and collective control. These are placed within historical events that happened in the country. It is in this way that Macgoye enhances the ideology that pervades the novels under study; women are the most socially united group. They have one unifying characteristic — the suffering under patriarchy and common historical injustices that have placed them in the role of second class citizens. ‘The Refuge’ therefore presents the women with a reasoned and unified response to social and economic problems they had faced prior to their admission in the home.

We have argued that the action takes place NOW though heavily interspersed with events from the past. In order to facilitate transitions in time, the book is divided into chapters. Divisions made in this manner are obvious and do not have much aesthetic value to the narration. However, within the chapters there are ways through which the reader is enabled to traverse through time with the characters as they narrate their experiences. Expressions like ‘She was summoned from her reverie by the kitchen attendant’ (26); ‘All the same, Wairimu continued with the recital of her memories to herself (55); ‘a memory stirred in her of chasing someone out of the gate...’ (78) serve as signposts indicating changes in the story – time.
Other indicators of transition include the following examples:

‘Even Rahel,’ the Vicar went on, ‘– Rahel is the one who may have had a stroke – has a story you could hardly bear to hear … once roused, tidied, introduced, Rahel was more than willing to go over it all again … (38).

In the foregoing example, it is noteworthy that it is the other characters who provoke Rahel to talk about herself. Without this provocation she might have kept the information to herself. This allows Rahel to talk about her past without her story seeming misplaced. Rachel’s revelation is yet another reminder of the ideological disposition: women heal and use their experience to heal one another in spite of the hurts in life.

The paragraph links also assist in indicating time shifts, for example:

Mumbling something, Bessie obediently began to fill a tin with water. They understood her to mean she would be prepared to look after the chickens if there were any. Bessie was the newest comer and also the newest comer. She had lived, as long as anyone around could remember, in one of the wooden shacks on the edge of Eastleigh (81).

There are numerous examples of the above kind where in the course of a discussion attention is deliberately shifted to a particular character and the character forms the subject of the following paragraph. In this way transition of character gets intertwined since the information being made available touches on the past of this character.
In conclusion, we can argue that The Present Moment narratorial voice dwells on the fate of the elderly woman in Africa and sums it up with the following words:

To be eighty years is to be tough. Particularly for a woman, because she has learned from childhood to look after others rather than to be looked after (38).

To which the matron’s voice comments on and contrasts with the situation in Europe and America where women live longer than men because the social structures care for them:

In Europe and America ... women live longer than men because they are exposed to less hardship. But in our pastoral areas, men live longer, because the women’s work is much harder (38).

We have observed that the women’s voices, speaking as widows, businesswomen, freedom fighters, migrants and daughters, speaking about their personal experiences, and overlapping these with ‘bits of experiences’ by other members of The Refuge, blend to give the narratorial voice the ideological boost in advancing women’s concerns.

The fusion of several elderly narrative voices advocates for the protection and promotion of the rights and lives of women and discarding of those that threaten their existence. Each individual narrator’s voice offers a different perspective to the myriad problems faced by women. The fusion of these voices – and experiences – therefore justifies a call for a rethinking of attitudes and structures that shape and influence relations between men and women in a changing African environment.
CHAPTER FOUR

‘The “Foreign” Female Voice as a Site of Ideological Tension
in Homing In’

The main narrative voice in any story is manifested distinctly at the beginning of that narrative. This is because the actual narrative mode begins with the first word of the narrative. It is also at this point that perspectives that govern the ideological position from which the narrative is told may be discerned. All other voices emerging as the narrative unfolds are carried and structured within this main narrative voice.

Homing In places women at the centre of its thinking and creates a historical and cultural matrix which enables women to claim autonomy and independence over their own lives. This autonomy is realized in the establishment of a racial and cultural integration that binds Ellen and Martha in their old age.

This chapter examines the way in which Macgoye uses different voices, mostly from the same narrator, to offer a variety of ideological facets. The plurality of ideological positions created at times appears to be in conflict so that the narrators are left to reflect on their past life, an example is how memories come fleetingly into Ellen’s mind – triggered at times by trivial objects.
The multiplicity of voices, situated in different geographical locations and historical moments presents a fertile ground to investigate the ‘tensions’ that arise when the narrator tries to cope with her reality and how these tensions enrich the present version of the narrator.

On the surface, Homing In appears to utilize as its basic point of view the third person omniscient narrator. However, a deep look at it reveals another un-named narrator who is inside the events through whose consciousness the experiences are filtered. It appears that the mediating narrator ‘has been replaced by a reflector: a character who thinks, feels and perceives but does not speak to the reader like a narrator’ (Stanzel 1984:5). It is through the eyes of this reflector that the reader sees the other characters in the narrative and hears their narrative voices. These events are presented through the eyes of an omniscient character, thus giving the narrative a semblance of immediacy and spontaneity, as seen in Homing In, in contrast to the limited omniscient character whose knowledge is minimal.

According to Stanzel (1984: 107, 144) the inconspicuousness with which the third person becomes the first person is due to the absence of a personalized narrator: the bearer of the consciousness himself functions as the reflector – character into whose thoughts, perceptions and feelings the reader seems to have direct insight. The absence of personalized thoughts of a narrator gives the reader the freedom to formulate these thoughts either in the first or third person.
The search for the first person narrator in Homing In reveals an elusive narrator. It is not easy to distinguish between the narrator and an experiencing subject which would lead to a first person narrator. The author avoids the direct usage of the experiencing first person yet the events and experiences narrated are as immediate as those of the first person. In a way, the ‘embodied’ narrator, Mrs. Smith, seems best suited to fill the largely anonymous narratorial voice ‘I’, whose motivation to narrate is existential: it is connected with her practical experiences and a search for meaning on the part of the matured ‘I’ who has outgrown the ‘mistakes’ and confusions of her former life.

Homing In originates from the narratorial ‘I’ and then places the ‘I’ at the distance of the third – person in order to invite the reader to keep in mind an existential unity of the experiencing self and the narrating self. The availability of an alternate first-person role places the novel in third-person category which the novel seems to portray as discussed by Stanzel (1984: 105). The loss of structural significance of the first and third person occurs easily with the presentation of thoughts, observations and feelings so that the shift between the ‘I’ and ‘he’ may not have much significance especially when no narrator is there to function as mediator of indirect quotations.

The main narrator in Homing In is located in the present but talks about the events that happened to an earlier version of herself. In the process, she does not, however, subordinate other narrative voices. The importance of these other
narrators is fundamental to the achievements made by Mrs. Smith, since it is upon
them that she has become what she is today. It is for his reason that the past events
are told from the point of view of that past, and even the events happening now are
told from the point of view of the present. This alteration between the past and
present stems from an anticipation of the present within the past. It also enables
Maegoye to employ several voices whose overall effect is to underlie the theme of
Otherness as espoused by the dominant ideology in the text: the shifting power
relations between the sexes, races, political and economic groups.

In Homing In the reflector – character experiences these actions as an event in
which earlier experiences and observations of the Smith family are reflected. The
internal perspective predominates in such a way that the novel might read as part of
an interior monologue by a third person limited narrator on the issues affecting
Mrs. Smith at the narrative time as she settles down in Kenya.

The reflector – character narrator is further suggested when the teller foregoes her
omniscience for a moment and uses verbs like 'thought' which express an element
of doubt (p.1): ‘there had been a time when Ellen thought the ayahs never fussed
enough: she understood now that she herself had fussed far too much about the
wrong things...’

The effect of reflectorization is also reinforced by the use of ‘familiarizing article’
whereby the experiencing self or 'I' is made to approach the role of a reflector –
narrator. In addition to the referentless ‘she’ behind which the reflector-character stands, there are other familiarizing articles, for example; ‘...the gate. She was ...the old lady nearer the house ... but which Ellen preferred the gate’ (1). The use of the definite article here suggests a part of the story which is not presented in the text. This presupposes that the reader knows the events that had transpired before the textual story actually begins.

Mrs. Smith is presented as an old lady. The effect of this on her own speech acts is of interest, for example, we observe that the older self dominates the narration over her younger version. This is yet another factor reinforcing the reflectorization technique used in the text. Her old age is also symbolic and makes her a credible narrator; she seems more self-assured and firmer in her opinions, and also more resigned. A younger narrator would not be credible in addressing such weighty matters which women have endured and overcome such as freedom (6) and discrimination in employment (17).

Homing In has numerous representations of and reflections on women in patriarchy, leading to Ellen speaking in two voices – the older self and the younger version of the self. Consequently, Homing In provides fertile ground for an investigative voice on the inherent tensions related to the ideologies influencing the female gender at different historical moments:

Really, there was more to it than that, though she did not know how to make Jack see it. Mrs. Smith inhabited the same body as Miss Mountford, still wore some of her clothes, recited in her head the same recollected poetry (88)
The narrator in *Homing In* provides no introductory remarks about the two women. Instead, the narrator assumes the reader will fill the details about the characters as the story unfolds. At this point in the story, the identity of the characters is hazy, yet she introduces others, for example, who Ellen is and the relationship she has with Angela. The effect of this type of narration is to make the story immediate to the point that the reader appears to be directly confronted with the action. It is our observation that narration given through the point of view of a reflector-character seems to be direct and has an illusion of immediacy superimposed over mediacy for example the narrator’s remarks appear to contain phrases from both narratorial ‘I’ who in this case is Martha and the other character, Mrs. Smith.

The beginning of the narrative in *Homing In* lacks all those preliminaries which introduce the story to the reader. The novel employs the personal pronoun ‘she’ without defining it more narrowly. For instance: ‘Martha wheeled Mrs. Smith out to the gate. *She* was always a little anxious (1). The personal pronoun lacks an antecedent. Personal pronouns are ‘sequence’ signals which indicate that they have been preceded by information which determines their meaning. In the sentence above, which is actually the second sentence in the novel, we observe that the pronoun lacks an antecedent. According to Stanzel (1984: 159), almost all narratives that open with a non-sequential sequence exhibit a predominantly figural narrative situation in which the person to whom this personal pronoun refers is almost always a reflector – character. The narrative’s point of view is also
communicated through this referentless personal pronoun of the narrator - character.

The narrator observes and narrates the events using a duality of voices and perspectives afforded through the reflector character demonstrated through streams of consciousness and internal monologue. These present a disordered play of observations, feelings, reminiscences and ideas triggered through the observations of objects which allow the omniscient narrator the liberty to enter into the character’s mind.

The result of the duality of voices is the juxtaposition of these narrative voices and the creation of a plurality of ideological positions, for example, the younger settler woman and the older settler woman who depend on Africans for her survival. This is in contrast to the advice she had been given about the very same Africans by settlers who had come before her such as uncle. At times the ideologies demonstrated through these versions of the same person and narrative voices seem to be in conflict leading to a situation of ‘ideological tension’.

The transition from the ‘observer’ point of view to Ellen’s mind is so abrupt that it is noted through graphological change. However, the paragraphing does not necessarily change. This type of narration reinforces retrospection which this study identifies as being predominant in *Homing In*. Genette (1980: 40) posits that such a narrative mode occurs when a character reports her present thoughts and
remembers past events and returns to present events without subordinating the other characters (102 - 103, 104). This narrative mode could be used for among other purposes to enable the character come to terms with the events that had happened in her life. It may thus have psychological connotations. Such a narrative mode is known as 'analepsis' i.e. any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment. In this way Macgoye reinforces the ideological tension affecting the female voice in this 'foreign' land she has adopted for her home.

The graphological change in Homing In relies on the use of italics. Miller (cited in Richardson 2002: 114) argues that italics are a modality of intensity and stress; it’s a way of making a common text one’s own. Following the growing concern about women’s rights around the time of writing, Macgoye then individuates her work from other voices clamouring for attention on the plight of women by highlighting the narrator’s voice through italics to propagate her ideological concerns such as women’s claim to autonomy and independence over their own lives, for example:

But we set up private schools, those who can afford it and are not satisfied with the government system. So why should they not do the same? (100)

Italics can be viewed as an emphasis which is added by registering a certain quality of voice. It therefore acts as a form of intonation and in Homing In it serves to underscore the gender identification of the participants in the contexts of communication. The italics in Homing In concern Ellen and mostly are in reported speech – even when direct speech occurs within a reported clause (124, 128 - 129).
These serve to give Ellen prominence over her maid – Martha, and from the sociolect we can determine their relations: Martha talks less which signifies acceptance of her position, relative to Mrs. Smith who is her more talkative boss (68, 70 – 71).

The omniscient narrative voice uses the present tense within the past tense discourse in Homing In.

"Lunch, Madam, Martha shrilled in Mrs. Smith’s ear. (Really Martha was becoming quite noisy nowadays as though one were not paying attention). Mince meat, mashed potatoes, peas, carrots, fruit salad, all quite easy to manage. Martha must have ducked back into the kitchen to eat hers. She had learned to bolt it, no doubt, so as to be ready for the next chore – some employers had no consideration. All the same, not like the manners Mummy had been so fussy about when she was still hoping to make a lady of you. (42)

This shift in tense is mainly used to express a given viewpoint which marks locations where the thoughts or inner speeches / monologues by Mrs. Smith are represented, hence creating a 'visualizing' plane as opposed to a 'recounting' plane as if the narrator were watching the events take place.

The past progressive form of the verb is also used to underscore an internal perspective from which the events are described. The narrative voice also stresses the duration of the events / action by use of the same tense, for example, (44) ‘A car was coming in the gate...’ The description that immediately follows it is in the perfective. This prepares the reader for the reminiscence which becomes clear when it is said on page 46 that, ‘... at the end of it she remembered enthusiastically
her first sight of Nigel’, thus indicating the elderly women’s feelings about children.

Homing In explores the dialectics of race and gender. It tells the story of two women, Mrs. Ellen Smith and Martha, who have spent almost an entire lifetime together as maid and companion. It opens with the two women together in their old age, and then takes them in different ways in order to reveal their past lives, especially Mrs. Smith, and finally re-unites them at the end in order to foreground their dependence upon each other. Martha has been a house help within the farm while Mrs. Smith came from England. Mrs. Smith was initially a teacher before turning to farming. In spite of the difference in their races and social classes, the two women demonstrate a deep sense of inter-dependence.

Mrs. Smith was born and brought up in England and migrated to Kenya upon her marriage. She was initially a teacher and taught Indian girls in Nakuru. She is a mother of two, Nigel and Angela. During the Second World War she temporarily takes up the farm management when she takes leave to look after her daughter Angela, before she resumes teaching due to ‘public demand’. The experience prepares her to eventually take over the responsibility upon her husband’s death. By consistently reflecting upon and revealing the relationship between the two women, Homing In comments on the careers women can engage in and links these to gender issues, which is the guiding ideology in the novel.
Relations between the African and Europeans have been hinted at in *Coming to Birth* i.e. the encounter between Paulina and the white police - officer when she had got lost, and also when Paulina trains as an instructor at Kisumu, leading to her employment in the community centre. These Europeans were portrayed by the narrator as being more understanding and helpful than fellow Africans. In *The Present Moment* the white man’s presence is relegated to the background of the happenings that had contributed to bringing the old women to their present situation in ‘The Refuge’. There is little direct contact between the African women and the European men in these texts.

Throughout the texts we observe that Macgoye has a pronounced bias for the ordinary women. This is probably because of the universality of the problems and challenges women face. As a result, we can hear an insistent and forceful voice behind the narrator’s voice, influenced by historical experiences of whites in Kenya and also their existential awareness as seen in the reflection on Ellen’s and Martha’s life (66). The narrator allows the women characters to bond faster and easily than men (5) and shows that women in both worlds had experienced some form of bias and segregation.

*Homing In* takes up the race - related concerns but subverts them in order to examine how the women from the two races interacted. The omniscient narrator paints a picture of a harmonious, interdependent relationship characterized by respect and concern between Mrs. Smith and Martha (102, 125 – 126, 129). The
women also demonstrate a strong sense of friendship across the racial divide, such as Asians, Africans and whites (46, 47).

_Homing In_ makes the greatest use of the domestic scene in comparison to the other two texts under study. The female narrators are presented as existing within an inescapable condition of identity which distances them from the mainstream of the culture they live in. Though Macgoye stresses their ‘separation’ both from husbands and cultures, the two women are not too keen to pursue matters related to either. They look to each other for support and companionship.

It is also evident from _Homing In_ that Macgoye devotes much energy to elevate the European woman just as she has worked to lift up the African woman in the other two texts under study. The relations Ellen Smith has with the Indian women also serve to highlight universality in the kind of problems women undergo in the hands of men in different communities or races. It therefore appears there is a continuation of the discussions of relations among women across the colour bar albeit at a deeper level as is portrayed in _Homing In_. Moreover, this seems to be the best opportunity for the Africans to reveal their active role in the mentoring of the Europeans as they settled in the country. These African servants helped the Europeans weather off their fears and anxieties despite their elevated positions, for example, Ellen says of Martha: ‘She was a treasure …’ (3).
The story of Mrs. Smith examines how old European ladies who were ‘detached’ from the country but could not leave eventually got attached to it. A loose connection can be made between Mrs. Smith’s experiences and the title: a targeting and closing in upon a goal or destination and a process of fitting in to a place, to the point where it becomes home (Kurtz 2005: 187 – 188). The focus is on the settler experience centred on Mrs. Smith, the widow of a colonial settler, and her African maid and companion, Martha. Homing In is set in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Much of the action revolves around Mrs. Ellen Smith’s farm which is located in Njoro, near Nakuru, an area that had been the heart of settler farming. Her ‘detached’ attachment is like marriage (9) – it seals her destiny.

Macgoye uses Ellen’s background to comment on Victorian England, which was famous for its negative attitude towards women. Listening to the narrative voice we can establish a connection in voices which reveals Macgoye’s attitude towards Victorian patriarchy, thus furthering her ideological commitments. She has placed Ellen in an African set-up to enhance her voice. This voice could not have been loud or forceful enough if it had been placed in a European background given the fact that she is not of the royal class.

Ellen’s privileged position is only possible because she is in Kenya. Back at home in England she would have probably been on the same level as Martha since she is not of royal or upper class. The level of her family wealth is described in the opening pages. The descriptive approach adopted by Macgoye offers the narrator
the necessary shifts that enable change from one narrative level and voice to another. Macgoye, more often than not, transgresses the discreteness between the narrative levels by not making the transitions obvious – except for the graphological change. She treats the narration as if it were contemporary with the narrated events when an insignificant object triggers that memory – usually with little shift in the tense. Another result of this is the collapsing of the hierarchy existing between the characters and narrators so that the older and younger Ellen are more or less on the same plane; Martha is also made to take bigger responsibilities and decisions affecting the family even though she is only a maid.

In addition, Macgoye illustrates the similarities and contrasts between Ellen and Martha. Ellen’s background is given while Martha’s is slightly obscure. Ellen’s narration is also always at a higher level than Martha’s, the purpose of which is to perform an explicative function and answer questions such as ‘What were the events leading to the present situation’ (Rimmon – Kennan 1983: 92). At the narrative present we can see that women have achieved a lot in terms of empowerment regardless of their races.

By the omniscient narrator giving prominence to the ‘foreign’ female voice, on the one hand, she builds the contrast that exists between the two women, and on the other, creates a site for ideological tension. Mrs. Smith enjoys her advantages on account of being a European. These include the social class and economic power she wields over the Africans. The narrator notes that at the existential level they are
human and equal. For instance, Ellen cannot wheel herself out of the house and Martha, who does it, is equally old.

The narrator shifts her access into the mental frames from the older Ellen to the younger Ellen with relative ease. The same applies to the shifts involving Martha. These changeovers are, to a large extent, matters of chance, triggered by objects Ellen sees, thus, they are a reflection of the randomness of ordinary life. The effect of these is that they do not add much to the plot. According to Chatman (1978) they 'constitute a fortuitous dipping into the thoughts at a given plot moment' (217) whose only connection is thematic. The differences arising illustrate the different preoccupations by the characters/narrators. As such, these serve to enhance one of Macgoye’s concerns in the text: an examination of the social contexts which spur women to take courageous steps that affect their existing social order.

Mrs. Smith offers an outsider’s point of view of the happenings in the country, while Martha offers the insider’s point of view. Both, however, are limited in their knowledge, such as about each other; they are more of familiar strangers. This kind of relation is a further reflection of the ideological tension that exists between the two races. The narrator’s voice seems to appreciate the women’s efforts to bridge the gap. The narrator says of Ellen:

At least she thought she knew her: how else would this intimate care and the double dependence be tolerable? But at sixty – six it was only decent to admit that one knew less than think … (1)
In spite of their different races, the two women depend on each other. This is a departure from the norm where the employer’s voice manifests ‘benevolence’ to a ‘poor’ worker and independent of the employee. Being cross-racial, the narrative is telling of human nature especially the motherly instinct that enables women to bond faster than men: regardless of our stations in life we still need each other as human beings.

From the two women’s voices, we can conclude that problems encountered by women are universal. Comparisons can be made to the experiences of Paulina in Coming to Birth and the seven women in The Present Moment too. In this case, Ellen was a witness to gender-based segregation and discrimination in England before the law was changed to allow women to vote. We are told: ‘Ellen was sixteen when the last excluded English women got the vote (7).

For women, both in male-dominated England and Kenya to make such a mark as made by Mrs. Smith, the role of education cannot be understated. Ellen Smith spends years teaching girls and she is aware of the emancipating role of education. An example is seen in her focus on the education of the Asian community. In Macgoye’s texts under study there is an added emphasis on the importance of education as a pathway to independence and self-definition which transports the individual woman beyond the reach of traditional shackles to their aspirations and ambitions.
Through professions such as teaching and nursing, women are also able to play another emancipating role. Nursing as a profession was only available to women as opposed to doctors who were predominantly men; the latter profession has more prestige attached to it than the former. We must acknowledge the tough job these two professions i.e. teachers and nurses do to inculcate decency and knowledge, on the one hand, and restoration health, on the other, which are crucial in any society. These jobs require patience, a virtue best exemplified by women. Their roles cannot be taken for granted and soon the few male voices in the novel begin to appreciate the tough chores women perform, for instance, before he dies, Uncle expresses gratitude for the care he receives from Mrs. Smith.

Genette (1988: 100) says ‘Narration is (thus) that literary form which exhibits the very structure of modern thought’ and adds that every narrative is ‘an act of communication’ (101), hence narration can be viewed as a process of social relationship in which the narrator finds a voice. In Homing In that voice need not be taken literally. Rather, the voice does a more significant role than individuating and foregrounding various characters. The narrative voice asserts a woman-centred point of view in which patriarchal pressures are given a back seat.

Lanser (1992) posits that ‘the female voice ‘is a site of ideological tension made visible in textual practices’ (62). Macgoye’s narrators do not conform to the dominant social powers and therefore create the tension which reveals a conscious subversion of the dominant social and literary powers. For example, they are not
entirely feminists yet 'resist' the men’s domination. In giving prominence to the female voice, *Homing In* acknowledges further (as have the other novels under study) the changing power relations which include ‘race, gender, class, nationality, education, sexuality and marital status and how these power relations interact within a given social formation’ (Lanser 1992: 62). Mrs. Smith’s and Martha’s voices have subverted almost all of these and have been able to manage the farm effectively.

The narrative in *Homing In* is partly motivated by existential factors. It is directly connected with Ellen Smith’s practical experiences, with the joys and sorrows she has experienced, with her moods and needs – both present and past. According to Stanzel, motivation to narrate a retrospective narration also stems from the ‘need for an organizing overview in search of meaning on the part of the matured, self-possessed ‘I’ who has outgrown the mistakes and confusions of his former life’ (93). Through this type of mediacy experienced in the text, Ellen constantly invites the reader to keep in mind this existential unity of the experiencing self and narrating self through which Macgoye traces the experiences that leave an indelible mark in a woman’s character or life.

Through Mrs. Smith’s voice, the narrator is able to raise some of the concerns that underlie the narratorial ideology. Among the concerns, the whites in the novel who interact with Africans Mrs. smith is one among the few who are able to freely interact with her African employees despite the warning from her uncle not to do
so. Interestingly she does this when she is still unable to communicate with them in their language. The way she handles their salary issues also contributes to the elevation of her employees. Mrs. Smith also listens to her employees and her relationship with Martha attests to this. Through her, Macgoye presents female voices invading and subverting male voices and projecting the dominant ideology.

The narratorial voice embodies the discourse in speech, actions and convictions of a given person / character. The authority or force of the voice creates a particular image of a particular person. In Homing In the dominant picture of characters is that of Martha and Mrs. Smith which paints a picture of their sociolect and to a lesser degree their genderlect: the gender-specific style preferred by women and men respectively.

In addition, the presence of several narrators allows Macgoye the freedom in the use of voice. It is possible to distinguish between the specific characters on the basis of their sociolect: speech characteristics of the social groups to which they belong such as workers and the European bourgeoisie. It is interesting to note that within these diverse 'human – voices' another level of voice runs through and connects them: the female agenda.

From the descriptions underlying the narrator's voice we can hear an insistent and forceful voice, influenced by historical experiences the whites underwent in Kenya. An example is the description of Mrs. Smith's loneliness that forces Martha to re
read her old letters to her several times, making creative adjustments that make them 'relevant' while concealing their remote past. The voice also demonstrates the helplessness of the European farmers at the hands of the colonial government as it forced them to make concessions and extracted quarters from them to meet the cost of the World War. This action forces them to ration farm produce thus impacting negatively on the economy and also the lives of their African workers. Some white farmers become bankrupt as a result. Mrs. Ellen Smith manages to survive, and her reflections demonstrate an existential awareness which in its own right reflects that forceful voice which performs an explicative function.

Mrs. Smith and Martha are not in conflict yet they offer an ‘opposition’ to one another in the way they are contrasted. The narrator manipulates this ‘opposition’ to demonstrate that some Europeans had respect for Africans, without whose active support the Europeans could not have survived or made their wealth. As such the narrators are strategically placed in a way that their voices animate each other. Hence, she is reminding us that all humans are equal and for survival we need one another.

For her part, Martha offers another perspective of Mrs. Smith from that of the omniscient narrator’s voice. She reveals her ordinariness (compare Paulina and Mrs. M in Coming to Birth). Through Martha, the readers are able to evaluate the degree of dependence and inter – dependence between the two women, and judge to what extent each influenced the other.
Martha’s relationship with Mrs. Smith reflects the polar experience and behaviour characteristic of the races during the colonial experience. It is revealing how unequally the presentation of the inside views is distributed – the reader constantly receives insights into Ellen’s thoughts and senses, but is largely denied direct insights into Martha’s consciousness. However, by tying them together, Macgoye expresses a deviation from the norm of behaviour which was obligatory at the time for a woman in the racial circles described. The recurrence of alternation of degrees of knowledge in *Homing In* has its significance in terms of Macgoye’s ideological implications of mutual need among people across the racial or social divide.

By placing the two main characters together as if they are one, the narrator enhances textual intensity. At the surface level there may seem to be discrepancy; Ellen having been a teacher ought to have ended up teaching. Instead she ends up as a successful farmer. She ought to have been the boss to the end of her life, but instead she relies so much on her maid, who in addition, turns out to be more than a companion.

The power of the novel lies in the method through which a combination of memory and imagination enables Macgoye to dramatize some of her deepest concerns with human solidarity, human loneliness and vulnerability. The interplay between the voices gives rise to the reflector-narrator and, therefore, emphasizes the ideology
by explaining women's experiences and ability to cope through different value systems.

The narrative levels are related and enriched with the advantages of hindsight. The principle linking these two women's stories are integrative and portray the two women complementing each other. An understanding of one narrator invariably leads to a better understanding of the other especially of their deep interdependence that transcend racial and social divide. It is through these that authorial consciousness is conveyed. The shifts in the expressions by older Ellen determine the narrator's relation to the younger Ellen. The gaps between their 'dialogues' are filled by authorial intrusions through which authorial consciousness can be traced, for example, 'The cracked sounds could hardly obey the precision of Ellen's thoughts, even when these were not submerged in the pictures that rolled in her head' (3). The narrator also summarizes characters thoughts and affords the reader an insight into authorial consciousness. Ellen works as a teacher mostly teaching Asian girls. Through this vocation, Macgoye expresses her attitude towards the profession and its importance in serving the girl-child from potentially harmful cultural practices such as early marriage. In addition, she portrays the power of the working woman: she is independent, is able to 'revolutionize' society, adaptable, respecter of other people. All these are reinforced through the tense-shifts that have been discussed already.
Transition of the narrative focus is made possible by a disruption in the thoughts, for example, as Ellen gazes at a flower she recalls an event that took place years before (5) or a comment by Martha: 'Mrs. Smith appeared not to hear, but in fact the story reactivated her memories' (111). These past events are triggered by some objects or remarks that would otherwise have no significance to any other bystander. These shifts eventually lead to a merging of the narrating consciousness. The merger has been anticipated as the temporal distance representing the past is narrowed since the characters are trying to recapture a past life. The purpose of these shifts is to demonstrate that 'problems' experienced by women have been there over the ages and are universal. This helps us to better understand the present person we meet, as well as the circumstances that have made her the admirable character she is.

The transitions also seem discreet on the surface. However, a deeper look reveals Macgoye's tendency to shift from one narrative level to another. In addition, the graphological variations employed signal that change. Other means that signal change include: figural narrative situation – with a dominance of the experiencing self; interior monologue, the loss of meaning by the simple past tense so that it is reinforced by the progressive aspect / form of the verb instead and the use of the familiarizing article such as 'here' and 'now'.

These transitions also mark an authorial interruption thus advance Macgoye's ideology. They enable the author to treat past injustices / painful experiences
women went through as if they are contemporary events so that the reader does not lose track of these and feel that these forms of injustice / experience are either new, recent or isolated cases. The author, therefore, through the narrators’ voices advances the cause of women’s rights. She aims at influencing the reader to be sympathetic to the women’s cause.

According to Chatman (1978:155, 156) narrators can look back at their own earlier perceptions as characters’ and therefore, accord the reader the narrator’s own conceptual point of view. The implication of this is in Homing In is that the reader looks at the ‘present’ / older Ellen Smith and Martha for Macgoye’s ideology rather than their earlier ‘versions’, for example, the Ellen who resides in Kenya is more committed to serving other females than the ‘Ellen’ we meet in England, who did not care much about African women:

Ellen as a student was well aware of privilege ... She would have been surprised to learn that many farm labourers were also undernourished or that the girl in the draper’s shop was in tatters under her regulation black dress. That knowledge had come to her by later reading when all her assumptions had shifted (7)

Macgoye uses this as part of the socio-historical inspirations that influence the authorial consciousness. Through the primary narrator Macgoye wishes to recognize the African woman’s presence and address her historic primacy for the responsibility of mature parenthood and sisterhood beyond her race. From the text some of these socio-historic events that inspire narration include the effort to liberate women in England which culminated in them being allowed to vote for the
first time, i. e. 'Ellen was sixteen when the last excluded English woman finally got the vote, yet the world of new promise was slithering into ..' (7); discrimination in job allocation with the males being favoured over women; migration and its inherent challenges in the British colonies of India and Kenya and the fast spread of ideologies like feminism.

Homing In also attempts to heal the wounds created by the colonial experience. Macgoye seems to say, 'even we white women suffered, not like Africans, but we still suffered: loneliness, loss, fear and discrimination from the government. We may argue that she acknowledges the loss suffered by Africans in the hands of both colonial government and the white settlers. Most of the workers in Homing In are Kikuyus and this parallels the historical situation where they had more direct contact with the whites especially farmers than other communities and also suffered most or had their land was taken away. In this regard, it may be argued that Macgoye is making an attempt at racial reconciliation by drawing parallels to the experiences of the two races through the reconstruction of history from Ellen’s perspective. From this we may conclude that loss is experienced by both Africans and Europeans regardless of the form it takes.

Ellen’s story comes to us through a series of flashbacks and reminiscences by both women. These are intermittent, disjointed and sparked by apparently trivial items in their immediate environment such as a piece of tinsel glinting in the grass (4) or a shade of bougainvillea in the sunlight (5). The objects are significant as it
is through them that flashback flows and these enable Ellen to overcome historical amnesia and come to terms with her present self.

The use of flashback as a stylistic device marks a shift in the narrative tense. The events / action might appear to be in the discourse – NOW, denoting the narrator’s present moment but in reality these are in the narrative past. This combination of tenses may serve to justify our earlier assertion that narration in *Homing In* can be described as retrospective. From the flashes in Ellen’s mind we observe how Macgoye uses the narrative present whose effect is to foreground the story now and background the discourse – NOW. Another effect of this is to create a immediacy in the narrative – which easily confuses some readers, hence the need for graphological differentiation to demonstrate the ideological tension taking place.

The discourse in the text is tied to a conventional reporting phrase in Free Indirect style where the thoughts and universalized speech of the characters are presented without reporting tags – hence the voice of the narrator mingles with that of the character without the conventional reporting phrases, but also mixes with the double focus of more than one character which can be traced in an older and younger version of Ellen.

The narrative is also told from other angles such as the use of songs, radio, notes (64) and letters. The omniscient narrator has access to the intricate letters written
by characters in privacy for example, between Ellen and her father (62). These serve to broaden the voices that narrate the story and expand the point of view. They are, in addition, able to capture what the narrator does not. The radio and documents (64) as well as letters are used to complement dialogue and description. Through these media, the narrator narrates, records, informs, writes letters, includes documents, cites reliable informants, refers to her own narration, addresses the readers and adds comments on the issues which have been narrated.

It is worth noting that like in other texts by Macgoye, Homing In has limited space for children. In her treatment of the women, we have observed how either there is anticipation of children and when they come, are not allowed to grow in the mother’s company, or that the children are grown ups and have left their mother’s care in The Present Moment. In Homing In, for instance, had the children still been at home would the mothers have time to enjoy the sun or moments of relaxation that give rise to the memories. The narrator is hereby placing emphasis on the opportunities that marriage offers because it is first and foremost a mark of ‘responsibility’ – and not the child – bearing aspect. Children come at a prize – they tie one down to certain social / traditional expectations. One can walk out of an abusive marriage, but not out of her children. Instead, of children being seen as an indicator of maturity and responsibility, they have been many a times the catalyst for women’s oppression by men.
Characters serve as an indication of specific use of space. Bal (1985: 25) says they guard the boundary between the inside and outside. As a result, some may appear as if they have been disregarded; for example, the Asians, men, farm workers, and students. This doesn’t mean they lack significance - it only means they do not form part of the functional category which makes the ideological description possible. The African woman is given prominence in Macgoye’s texts under study. This deep identification with the African woman is suggestive and might lead us to ask whether she is indeed a black – masked ‘white’ woman. It is evident that no other white (woman) writer has been so involved in such presentation of the African characters in their novels.

It is through Ellen Smith that the Asians are given a voice. One may be tempted to forget the Asian factor in Kenya’s colonial experience especially given that they are not vocal about most issues that affect the country. Being such a closed society, the kind of injustices that their womenfolk go through is hardly discussed. Probably this is why their voice is filtered through Ellen’s, who manages to penetrate their circle courtesy of her profession as a teacher. Being an alien in the country, it is interesting that she is able to interact to that depth with them. This is a part of human experience where if two strangers meet at a place where both are minorities they easily bond and develop friendship akin to the one demonstrated by Ellen and Mrs. Mistri or Mrs. Banerjee (2). Their story also demonstrates that Africa is a melting pot that at its best accepts and respects those who accept and respect it.
Macgoye’s voice is heard in the text through several modes such as the introduction of characters by name / background. These deviations are not objectionable because of the subversion of the woman’s role such as providers. Macgoye, however rarely names the men in the text. Instead, she refers to them by generic terms such as ‘the soldier’, ‘her father’, ‘the watchman’ or ‘guard’. On the other hand, the women’s names are a non – African, such as Martha, Paulina and Bessie. This may have been done to give them a universal look and appeal, rather than confine them to a local flavour.

In conclusion, the narrative voice in *Homing In* appears to be saying of the female characters: they are neither in exile nor displaced. They belong here, especially Ellen who has moved from England and has settled in Kenya. It underlies the strong sense of adaptability that women have regardless of the historical time or geographical location, and their ability to make all these ‘a home’. 
It is our observation that the three novels studied in this thesis are motivated by the need to organize and find meaning in the practical experiences of women living in Kenya. It is for this reason that in the novels under study the personal and public are fused as one: women and the nation struggle, often at great odds, to ‘come to birth’ by finding an identity at this ‘present moment’ after a successful ‘homing in’.

Novels by women, including Macgoye have ‘interrupted’ the male tirade against the negative portrayal of women in Kenyan literature. Many male critics and writers have been compelled to review their thoughts and writings have taken an interest in the thoughts and writings by women. From the literature review carried, most of the scholars who have shown interest in Macgoye’s works are men. This is a pointer to the wider interest and change in attitude that Macgoye and other female writers’ works have contributed to.

Macgoye is not inventing a new image of women. Her choice of characters – the elderly mostly – is metaphoric: they are conservative, have experienced it all; they have nothing new to look for in life, but are not hopeless because they have lived a full life. These narrators look at their past relations or emotive relations and at the end of it they emerge as the main achievers. The main characters
become our heroines because in their lives they have exited the doors of their
domestic prisons, journeyed into the world, slain the dragon of patriarchy and
finally found their ‘selves’ and their dignity.

Macgoye has used various levels of the omniscient narrator in three texts who
have a differential gender preference and acts as the consciousness of the events
in order to foreground her priorities. She deliberately chooses to produce some
characters’ words verbatim, for example, the socially powerful like Paulina, Ellen
and Wairimu, while subduing the supporting characters whose words mainly
come from either indirect speech or reported speech, especially the male
characters, thus obliterating their voices. These enable them to re – define
themselves and name their experiences as they tackle issues / challenges they face
on account of their being human, rather than females.

Macgoye’s narrators focalize the action through the female characters more than
male characters. The female characters are more convincingly portrayed, rather
than the males, who occupy a peripheral position, hence are given less positive
traits in order to reveal a gender – subversion of the texts: that a woman is
capable of taking care of herself as we have seen in the lives of the protagonists
in the texts under study.

The female characters are self – assertive and aspire to be self – reliant. This is in
line with the governing ideology: subversion of the structures and institutions that
have facilitated gender discrimination. The image painted of Macgoye from the narrators' voices is one of commitment as a writer, a woman and a third – world person. Most of her characters are therefore portrayed as multi – dimensional agents who no longer wish to remain marginalized from the plot.

In the texts under study, Macgoye has raised the relations between women and men to a level of equality and respect, where 'distance' is 'closeness' (Homing In) where 'then' becomes 'now' (The Present Moment) and where 'somewhere' is 'everywhere' (Coming to Birth). In pursuing her ideological beliefs Macgoye uses a variety of narratorial voices in the texts under study. These voices create a dialogical environment within each and among all hence, an interplay that initiates analysis.

The women are given prominence in many ways. For instance, Macgoye presents women either with other women or occasionally with men around them. For their part, the men are hardly alone. They always appear in female company. This is telling in itself. However, at the end of the day, they still come together and appreciate one another leading to a better understanding among themselves. Their new found respect originates from an understanding that hostility and conflict between genders does not yield positive results.

In expanding of the notion of power relations, Macgoye produces a new image of women, that is, independent woman yet loyal to her family and community. The
women characters seek fellow women so that they may share their problems / console one another / discover their new ‘selves’. She demonstrates an understanding of her adopted home and places this understanding within the framework of womanism and sidesteps the gender wars associated with feminism.

Maegoye’s rejection of feminism is demonstrated in her presentation of characters who do not constitute a coherent group with identical interests. These women characters do not also make unsubstantiated universal experiences (compare the characters in *The Present Moment*) and they are not seen through a binary categorization. Maegoye also tries to be balanced in her characterization and avoids a form of reverse discrimination in which male bashing replaces female exploitation. She ensures that neither male nor female is a victim. As a result she subtly condemns the adversarial gender relations perpetuated by Western feminism. Hence, Maegoye makes the novels more intense by portraying some of them as having experienced pain and degradation at some point in their relationships with men, but on their own they find female solidarity, independence and power sharing.

In *Homing In* Maegoye explores the relationship between the colonizers’ wives and African women at a personal level thus countering the arrogance displayed by the colonial male. Maegoye uses this text to bridge the gap between Western and African women’s experiences by creating something ‘new’ out of the
challenges and continuities in the two women’s experiences, allowing a structural irony signifying the need to revamp and recognize both race and gender – not one or the other, or one without the other.

Characters in *Coming to Birth*, *Present Moment* and *Homing In* may look as if they are opposed to each other. On the contrary, they are uniquely strategized in the novels to animate each other and therefore produce a mutually generative unity that affirms the ideological dispensation that threads the texts, through which Macgoye is able to subvert the norms where females / women form the backdrop for male achievement. The women represent different strands of the debate on male – female relations and make the feminine voice stronger in overcoming the oppressive facets of the patriarchy.

The choice of Paulina is not only to illustrate the situation of women in (post-)colonial Kenya, but to stand as a metaphor for the entire political situation in Kenya. To make that clear, Macgoye weaves in historical details, emphasizing at the same time her goal of chronicling recent Kenyan history.

From the experiences of the main characters, Macgoye seems to be saying that women must deal with their problems: social, marital or economic and that they must all strive for their advancement. In fact, the absence of the men has the ironic twist of empowering women in the novels to provide love, security, a voice, personal growth, status, acceptance and a positive self – image. The female
characters have been able to make a 'break' from their traditions: Paulina - Luo culture, Wairimu - Kikuyu traditions and Ellen - from European traditions. Despite their break, they are not completely detached from the psychological hold of tradition and it is not easy for them to ignore the plight, or need of their suffering kin: Paulina accepts Martin back, also assists him and his family meet certain obligations, while Wairimu pays dowry for her brother and facilitates her father's second marriage. Ellen, for her part, takes care of the ailing Uncle. It is on the basis of such transformations on the way the characters treat fellow human beings irrespective of race, gender, tribe and class that we conclude Macgoye embraces the tenets of womanism.
Chapter Six

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has investigated how Macgoye establishes a relationship between the narrative voice and characters' voices and how the interplay between these voices foregrounds the portrayal of both narrators and characters in the text; how and to what effect Macgoye uses the narratorial voices to present her ideological positions; why Macgoye prefers particular narrative strategies, and what meanings are derived in the interaction between the various characters.

The specific objectives of the study were to examine how Macgoye uses the narrative voice as a vehicle to express her viewpoints, perceptions and visions of life; to study how various modes of narration between narrators are maintained and the narrative method observable in the selected texts.

The study was guided by three premises: Macgoye uses narrators who are sympathetic to female characters; Macgoye uses narratorial voices to express her viewpoints, ideology and world view; there is a complex relationship and interplay between the narrative method and theme as shaped by the diverse narrative methods in the selected novels.

It is our observation that there exists a relationship between the narrative voice and the characters' voices and that this interplay foregrounds the portrayal of both narrator and character in the text. This study has demonstrated that each of the
novels uses a particular narrative strategy different from the others. These diverse strategies create the dialogical environments within each and among all the texts, thus exciting ‘collisions’ which when added to the plot development illuminate the writer’s ideological disposition.

The study also recognizes that the deliberate choice of a narrative perspective is tainted with ideological positions from which the subject is viewed. This results in Macgoye foregrounding and endorsing women’s voices in the texts.

The findings of this study are an important contribution to the study of narrative voice. It demonstrates that the study of narrative voice offers an avenue through which analysis of a text can be made and that through the narrators’ voices an author’s ideological commitment as a writer, and as a woman, is demonstrated.

It is hoped that this study will pave the way for further studies on the other ‘subdued’, alternate voices in Macgoye’s texts and how these ‘silent’ voices relate with the dominant voices to create the ideal world of Macgoye’s ideological preoccupation.

Other possible areas of study would be the overlap in the treatment of female characters by female and male writers in Kenya, as well as the changing picture / face of the female character in the ever – growing literary canon of female writers in Kenya.
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