

**THE USE OF MYTH IN GRACE OGOT'S PROSE  
FICTION**

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## DECLARATION

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

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my loving parents, Mr. & the late Mrs. Ojiambo, my dear husband Martin and my future investments, Natalie, Jesse & Praise.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude first and foremost goes to my parents for all your prayers, support and encouragement in my education this far. You have given me the inspiration and confidence to make it. Mom, you were a woman of excellence and your strong will towards life, even in your absence, has taught me to keep on. To my dear husband thanks for your support in many ways, even for the times when I made your office a study room and to my hope for the future Natalie, Jesse and Praise for your patience when many times I denied you my attention to pursue my degree.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of myth in Grace Ogot's prose fiction. It highlights the importance of myth as a vital artistic resource to the contemporary writer, the relevance of myth in articulating contemporary concerns, and the impact of myth in contemporary writing. According to Bernth Lindfors (1973), identifying myth in writing is not exhaustive analysis. He suggests an in-depth study of its impact on the written work. This study further investigates the importance of myth to the contemporary writer in terms of form, content and technique.

The analysis focuses on the prose fiction of Grace Ogot namely, *Land Without Thunder*, *The Other Woman*, *The Promised Land* and *The Strange Bride*, which consist of her short story collections and novels. These are examined in order to demonstrate the vitality of myth in the short story and novel genres. The use of myth in Grace Ogot's fiction has not been comprehensively examined. Hence, this study seeks to show Ogot's contribution in using myth to address modernity and its complexities. Library research and textual analysis have richly informed the analysis in this thesis.

The aesthetic approach as proposed by Isidore Okpewho (1983), forms the theoretical basis for analysis. Okpewho proposes an important relationship between myth and contemporary African writing, and perceives myth as a creative resource. The writer is seen to assume creative freedom at different levels while using myth, which Okpewho categorizes into four segments; *Tradition Preserved*, *Tradition Observed*, *Tradition Refined* and *Tradition Revised*. These form the four main analytical chapters of this thesis. In the first segment, the study investigates predominant mythic elements and how they are preserved in Grace Ogot's prose fiction. The second segment analyses the mythic elements appropriated in either form or content hence the mode in which they are observed. The third segment examines Ogot's working towards adopting mythic figures that allow or assist her in addressing modernity and in turn refines them. The fourth segment interrogates Ogot's total withdrawal from the use of myths and mythic elements and as a result works towards creating new myths that explore modernity. In so doing, the use of myth is revised.

The study findings show that Ogot extensively borrows from the myths of her community. The myths are re-appropriated in either form or content or both depending on the concerns being projected. Grace Ogot's reliance on myth to explore modernity is greater than the need to create new myths. Her achievement is seen in the way she uses the familiar (myth) to address the unfamiliar (modernity). The study thus demonstrates that myth has served as a vital artistic resource to the African writer in articulating contemporaneity.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The notion by earlier visitors to Africa that Africa was a dark continent, was a major drawback to the discovery and study of rich aesthetic resources among many African communities. Isidore Okpewho comments that:

For a long time before African nations won political independence from their European colonizers, African culture was misunderstood and misrepresented. Words such as savage and primitive were used in describing it (1992:293).

This perception was not only demeaning but misleading. Ruth Finnegan (1970:52) refers to this earlier perception as an indicator of ignorance. However, Finnegan also observes that despite this ignorance, the need to evangelize among other reasons, caused the earlier visitors particularly missionaries to develop a natural incentive in learning about many African communities, their language, cultural beliefs and lifestyles, in order to preach or spread Christianity. After this, other visitors also developed more interest in Africa for various reasons.

According to Finnegan the period between the late 1950's and 1960's marked an increased interest in African studies. She observes:

With the new boom in African studies, those who were before working in an isolated and limited way or in only a local or amateur context, found their work gradually recognized...the result has been some renewal of interest in African oral literature (41).

In addition Finnegan projects that:

There is a growing awareness by other groups of the significance of oral literature as an ancillary discipline:

historians discuss its reliability as a historical resource, creative writers turn to it for inspiration, governments recognize its relevance for propaganda or as a source in education (46).

An important aspect is introduced here that creative writers turned to it for inspiration. It is during this period that many African scholars and writers fell back to their communities to source for oral literature materials for artistic purposes. Okpewho captures this in his argument that:

It was only inevitable that when these African nations won their independence from foreign dominion, they undertook to reexamine and overhaul not only the institutions by which they had been governed but also the image of their culture that had long been advertised by outsiders. The aim was to demonstrate that Africa has had, since time immemorial, traditions that should be respected and a culture to be proud of ( Ibid.293).

African scholars began to appreciate 'the extent and the nature of African oral literature' (46). Among the things studies in African Oral traditions sought to show were the aesthetic and artistic values of oral literature. Finnegan notes that:

Oral literature in particular possesses vastly more aesthetic, social and personal significances than would be gathered from most general publications on Africa (27).

The interest in African oral literature is evident in creative writing from Africa, which has exhibited a close link between oral literature and written literature. African writers have employed various elements from the oral traditions of their communities in their creative works. Ruth Finnegan (1970), Bernth Lindfors (1973), Asenath Bole Odaga (1985), and Isidore Okpewho (1983,1985,1992) are among the scholars who have highlighted this. In her observation, Odaga notes:

The influence of oral literature on contemporary written literature has become more apparent in recent years and a number of African writers have made use of this tradition in various ways (16).

Apart from commenting on the existence of oral literature material in written literature, some scholars such as Wole Soyinka (1976), Isidore Okpewho (1983,1985), and Ofori Akyea (quoted in Heywood, 1971), have applauded the use of oral literature in written African literature. They have viewed oral literature as a rich source of materials for the African Writer.

In East Africa, creative writers such as Okot P'Bitek, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Okoit Omtatah, and Grace Ogot, have incorporated the diverse forms of oral traditions in their creative works. They have done this to demonstrate the vitality of oral traditions and their ability to address modern needs. Okpewho (1992) notes:

These writers would like to feel that even though their societies have changed drastically from what they were several generations ago and even though they communicate with the world in a language that is not their own, there must be certain fundamental elements in their oral traditions that they can bring into their portraits of contemporary life (18).

Grace Ogot is among the writers who have fallen back to their communities for oral materials for aesthetic and artistic purposes. Ogot employs oral narrative traditions from her community to creatively address modern issues. However, critics of Ogot's works of art have viewed her use of oral literature material as outdated. They have perceived her use of Orature as a venture into the past that has no relevance to the present. They have downplayed the

importance of oral traditions particularly as a medium through which contemporaneity can be addressed and understood, through comments such as:

Grace Ogot is one of those writers who dip into the past with a view to demonstrating to the colonizer that when he came here, people had a history, a culture and a civilization of their own. But Grace Ogot seems to be fascinated by “old Africa” not as a beginning of liberating the African, but as a mere available source for literary material (Wanjala 1978:103).

However, Wanjala fails to realize that Ogot’s writings are not only meant to address the colonizer but even the Africans who have experienced critical moments in the modern world and need to understand themselves and the world they live in. The use of the term ‘mere’ while referring to Ogot’s use of oral traditions as a source of literary material is also demeaning. On the other hand David Cook joins Wanjala, in criticizing Ogot’s writing and argues that Ogot lacks “literary nerve and sophistication”. While referring to *The Promised Land*,, cook says it has a simple storyline and that she is at her best bringing to us a timeless traditional knowledge of the drama in human affairs (Ibid 102).

Cook’s comment is an understatement of Ogot’s literary achievement. Cook and the other critics have failed to recognize the important role of oral traditions by referring to them as ‘a timeless traditional knowledge’. Taban Lo Liyong’s sentiments while advocating for the study of oral literature in African institutions is of great import to this study in expressing this concern.

Lo Liyong notes:

This is not a ‘return to the caves’ war cry. It is rather the transmission of the old spirit; the old fire; the re-enshrining of

our inner vitality, it is the request for the blessing saliva of our ancestors to help us face the future like men...'(xii).

Lo Liyong observes that the use of oral material cannot be confined to the past. They can be used as channels through which issues can be addressed. By using oral traditions African writers have sought to show its importance and vitality artistically not only in the traditional African setting but to the contemporary society. The past serves as a springboard for evaluating and confronting the present. The past serves as a guiding tool for dealing with the present and its experiences.

It is with the above background that this study has undertaken to examine the works of art of Grace Ogot as a contemporary writer who uses oral material from her community. It also has undertaken to examine why and how Ogot integrates oral literature material in her creative works. In examining Ogot's prose fiction, this study establishes the aesthetic and artistic value of myth to the contemporary writer in addressing contemporary issues.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Oral traditions have influenced the creative writing from Africa and have been integrated into the different genres of literature. Okpewho (1983,1992), Lindfors (1973), and Odanga (1985) observe that contemporary writers have continued employing myths in their writing in various ways. Odanga further notes that, 'the traditions and experience are rich'(xxiv). Wainaina (1998) notes that, 'Orature is a vast reservoir of the artistic material' (5). Thus, oral

traditions have been referred to as rich resources of material for the contemporary writer.

However, critics of African literature such as Chris Wanjala (1978) and David Cook (quoted in Wanjala) have questioned the existence of oral traditions in contemporary written literature. Wa-Gachanja (1987), Kieti (1987) and Kabaji (1989) project that oral traditions are on the decline and face the danger of extinction with the emergence of the modern technology and the modern ways of life.

Okpewho (1992) and Wainaina (1998) strongly oppose the above views. Wainaina articulates that oral traditions are not threatened by modernity because;

...as all other forms of social expression, orature is dynamic. Orature forms carry with them certain characteristics which endow them with dynamism...Thus, changing historical and social realities give rise to characteristic forms of verbal expression which seek to reflect and interpret new phenomena (2).

Okpewho on the other hand concurs with this view, but regarding contemporary writing notes:

As far as creative writing is concerned, the main offshoots of this program have been to collect and publish texts of the oral literature of their people as practiced by them over the time and to use that literature, as a basis for writing original works that reflect from a more or less modern perspective, some of the major concerns of today so as to demonstrate that traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals. (293).

From the above comments it is evident that oral literature not only exists in the modern world but it has acquired new forms in which it is expressed.

Bernth Lindfors (1973) however, notes that it is not only enough to identify the genres of oral literature used. It is more important to examine the impact of these materials on the written work. He suggests a critical study of the artistic functions of the material. According to Lindfors this would give a better approach to determining the relationship between oral literature and written literature as well as the writer's views and attitudes towards contemporary issues. It is thus important to appreciate the use of myth in contemporary writing and examine how writers have incorporated this material and their artistic and aesthetic value.

Grace Ogot as a prolific African writer has not been critically studied in her use of myth in her creative writing. This study therefore examines Grace Ogot's prose fiction in order to fill this gap. It also seeks to establish how Ogot employs myth to address contemporary issues.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study was undertaken in order to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To establish whether Grace Ogot borrows from her community's oral traditions.
- (ii) To identify the aspects of the oral narrative tradition found in Grace Ogot's prose fiction.

- (iii) To examine how Ogot incorporates oral traditions in her writing.
- (iv) To examine to what extent the myths used by Ogot address contemporary concerns.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) Does Grace Ogot borrow from the oral traditions of her community?
- (ii) What aspects of the oral narrative tradition are found in Ogot's fiction?
- (iii) How does she integrate the oral traditions she borrows into her creative works?
- (iv) Does Ogot effectively use the oral traditions to address contemporaneity?

## **1.5 Justification of the study**

Grace Ogot is one of the African writers whose works of art exhibit a constant use of oral traditions from her community, yet her works have not been critically examined concerning her use of myth. Although oral narrative traditions have been viewed as belonging to the past, this is a misconception. The use of oral narrative material does not necessarily relegate the writer to the past nor does the writer dwell in and explore content of the past. By use of Oral narrative materials the writer assumes creative freedom to employ and manipulate the material creatively at

varying degrees in order to address contemporary issues. Ngugi Wa Thiongo's sentiments in his article 'The Writer and his Past' gives insight into the justification of this study when he says, 'I want to talk about the past as a way of talking about the present' (1972:39). T.S Elliot quoted here also illustrates this further when he notes:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past (39).

The past is perceived as a springboard for tackling and understanding the future. Thus, the use of oral traditions can be perceived as a vital medium through which the contemporary writer deals with contemporary issues.

This calls for a critical study of Ogot's creative works in order to demystify oral traditions as belonging to the past, but ascertain their vital role in contemporary writing. Ogot's works also need to be critically examined to recognize and canonize her as an African writer who also employs myth to articulate modern needs.

The findings of this study add to the existing critical works on Grace Ogot. It will benefit readers and students of literature, authors and critics by identifying Grace Ogot's artistic endeavours and contribution in the area of myth. This study is also significant because it demonstrates the importance of myth in Ogot's writings. It further stipulates that myths not only belong to the past but

when used in contemporary fiction, they give more insight into the relationship between the past and the present. Myths can also be used to show the relevance of the past to the present. Thus, writers can use myth to articulate their views and attitudes towards contemporary concerns.

This study is also significant because it demonstrates that oral traditions allow the writers the freedom to make creative changes to the material at their disposal at varying degrees in order to suit their concerns.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

The literature review that guided and consolidated this study focuses on four main areas. The first section reviews literature that defines and limits myth to the meaning applied in this study. It further reviews literature that discusses the relationship between oral and written literature in order to establish the important relationship that exists between oral and written literature. Section three reviews literature that identifies myth as a creative resource in order to establish that myth serves as a vital artistic resource. Finally, the fourth section reviews critical works on Grace Ogot's prose fiction in order to establish that Ogot does not just write as a feminist but as an African writer who articulately projects contemporary issues.

### **1.6.1 Definition of Myth**

Myth as a literary tool has been subjected to contemporary literary studies particularly in Africa. Ogotu and Roscoe (1974) observe this when they note,

'...folk tales have an importance of a purely literary kind. They are exerting their influence on the development of new written forms of African fiction....' (p.40). African writers have employed myth to produce prolific works of art that address contemporary issues in their communities. The study and use of myth has also generated different readings and applications of myth that it is necessary to outline the particular definition that this study adopts in order to exhaustively analyze Ogot's works.

The term myth has generally been linked to the Greek word 'Muthos', meaning 'a story' or 'plot'. Chris Baldick (2001:163), Roberts and Jacobs (1998:373), Isidore Okpewho (1983), Northrop Frye (1982), G.Hough (1973), Jan Vansina (1961), among others, have acknowledged the view that a myth is either a story, plot, or narrative. However, various additions have been made to this basic meaning in order to qualify the existence of myth and/or show its importance in various fields of study.

Jan Vansina (1961) concurs that a myth is a story but adds that '...myths concern events which are not thought of as having happened in the past, but in time which is sacred and which exists beyond or side by side with profane time' (157). Vansina views myth from a historical perspective in that myth is a source of historical material. Another view shared by Vansina, Northrop Frye (1982), William Bascom and Malinowski quoted in Dundes (1966), Onyango Ogutu and A. Roscoe (1974), Okombo Miruka (2001) and others, perceive myth as a functional element in the society. Frye projects that myth has two

aspects; one of them is its 'social function' as concerns knowledge, what is important for a society to know (47). David Grambs (1984) notes that myths have a certain cultural significance (11).

The ability to serve as functional elements in the society has enabled myths to survive many generations. Concerning this functional view, Frye (1982) perceives myths as '...stories that tell a society about its gods, its history, its laws or its class structure...'

A commonly shared view is that myths tell stories about a community's gods and their religious system. Vansina (1961) argues that, '...myths not only have a didactic and moral purpose as do axiological myths and the lives of heroes and saints but also deal with and interpret, the relations between the natural and the supernatural, and are concerned with all that part of religious life that lies beyond the moral order (157).

Frye (1982) concurs with Vansina, when he articulates that myths are stories about gods that are "believed in" or are objects of a cult... but not all myths are stories about gods. Frye further cautions that not all stories about gods are myths. Okumba Miruka (2001) and Ogotu and Roscoe (1974) do acknowledge myth has a functional element in the Luo community, where Grace Ogot comes from. However, the functional approach does not fully account for Grace Ogot's use of myth in her works of art to address contemporary issues. This approach may not be applicable to this study.

Okpewho (1983) offers a recent view about the study of myth, particularly its definition and application in African literature. Okpewho argues that an aesthetic approach to the study of African literature and the use of myth would be more appropriate. According to Okpewho, myth is a creative resource. Writers manipulate myth in order to comment on issues about the society particularly modern issues. Myth is not only a story but an artistic tool for the African creative writer.

In order to conduct an exhaustive analysis of Grace Ogot's works, this study adopts Okpewho's views. Okpewho (1983) observes that the creative element of myth has been ignored by many scholars and yet it needs to be recognized. He suggests that myth needs to be viewed as a creative resource from which the larger cultural values are derivative (ix). He defines myth as '... that quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity. Therefore, any narrative of the oral tradition can be called a myth, for as long as it gives due emphasis to fanciful play' (69).

Thus, this study views myth as a story, a tale or narrative of the oral traditions of a community in which the creative impulse of the author is evident.

### **1.6.2 The Relationship Between Oral and Written Literature**

The relationship between oral literature and written literature in Africa is one that has been acknowledged by several scholars. Ofori Akyea (quoted in

Heywood, 1971), Bernth Lindfors (1973) and Isidore Okpewho (1983,1985), have given credit to the use of oral traditions.

Isidore Okpewho in his detailed study on oral material in Africa focuses on two areas namely myth and poetry. In his study on myth, Okpewho (1983) conducts a methodological study in the area of myth. Okpewho suggests a suitable definition to myth as well as a suitable approach to the study of myth in Africa. Okpewho begins by examining the schools of thought that have dealt with the oral narrative tradition. He progresses to examine approaches that have been used in the study of myth in Africa namely, the myth-ritual, structural, functional and qualitative approach. Okpewho dismisses the first three as inadequate since they do not discuss the relationship between myth and written African literature, and suggests the qualitative approach as suitable for the study of myth. The qualitative approach focuses on myth as an aesthetic resource. Okpewho notes that, 'the aesthetic has however remained the ultimate irreducible element' (71). He further adopts Richard Chases' view that 'myth is literature and therefore a matter of aesthetic experience and imagination' (quoted in Okpewho, 1983: 71). This study adopts Okpewho's view on the aesthetic approach to African literature as a tool for analyzing Grace Ogot's works. This has guided the study in determining the relevance of myth to modern writing. It forms the study's theoretical framework.

In his study on poetry, Okpewho (1985) discusses issues that have caused contemporary poets to turn their focus to their oral heritage. One of the

reasons, Okpewho highlights, is that oral poetry contains the flavour of their indigenous languages. Hence, some writers have borrowed words and sounds from their indigenous languages to enhance their written poetry. This study concurs with Okpewho's idea that oral traditions do add flavour to written works of art. In regard to this view, Okpewho suggests:

Oral poetry is a good model for these modern African poets who want to combine the best of African oral tradition with the techniques of modern European poetry in their attempt to deal with a couple of issues today (22).

Okpewho's view raises two issues. One, that there exists a relationship between oral poetry and written poetry. Two, the combination of both the oral and the written would be suitable in addressing contemporary issues. This is of importance to this study as it demonstrates that there exists a relationship between oral and written literature, and that a contemporary writer to effectively address modern issues can use this blend.

### **1.6.3 Myth as a Creative Resource**

An important contribution is made by Ofori Akyea (quoted in Heywood, 1971). Akyea notes that the existence of oral traditions in African literature is evident. African writers have consciously employed oral traditions from their communities. This has been done with a sense of pride, perhaps because oral traditions have given their works of art an African authenticity. Akyea notes:

There is no doubt that for most African writers oral tradition is the inspiration for much of their work. In turning to the 'literary' traditions of their ancestors, African writers have sought to show its worth and to give it a role, which far transcends a simple curiosity for things of the past (117).

Akyea raises the issue of oral traditions being regarded as elements of the past. He projects that it is not the past that writers seek to explore, but the importance of the past to the present. African writers have used the past as a way of addressing the present. Bernth Lindfors (1973), concurs with Akyea's idea and proposes that writers exploit new aesthetic opportunities by incorporating traditional matter in their novels (2). In regard to the above views, Okpewho (1983) justifies the relationship between oral tradition and written literature in the following way:

the relationship between tradition and modernity depends in a fundamental way on the amount of creative freedom, which the writer is willing to assume in handling the material deriving from the creative history of his people (215).

The views postulated by Akyea, Lindfors, and Okpewho, are of importance to this study. This study perceives myth as a resource material that does not belong to the past but one that enhances the creative works of African writers, particularly Grace Ogot. Ruth Finnegan (1970) strongly reinforces this point when she articulates that, 'The verbal elaboration, the drama of the performance itself, everything in fact which makes it a truly aesthetic product comes from the contemporary teller and his audience and not from the remote past'(319).

The study of myth and creative writing has further been emphasized by Wole Soyinka (1976). According to Soyinka, art performs a social function, and therefore, its content is very important. Soyinka views myth as a suitable

means through which a society can examine itself. Regarding his choice,

Soyinka notes:

I have long been pre-occupied with the process of apprehending my own world in its full complexity, also through its contemporary progression and distortion. The essays in drama will be seen as more recent elaboration of this central concern to transmit through analysis of myth... the self-apprehension of the African world (ix).

Soyinka's endeavour is of importance to this study, in that he suggests that through myth complexities of the contemporary society can be addressed. He perceives myth as a vital artistic resource as well as a channel of communication. Thus, myth is viewed as significant to the contemporary writers in articulating their concerns about their community.

Similarly, Okpewho (1992) applauds the use of oral traditions in modern writing. He strongly asserts that this is necessary in order to deal with contemporary issues in Africa. Okpewho projects that:

As far as creative writers are concerned, the main offshoots of this program (to regain a correct image of oral traditions) have been ...to use that literature as a basis of writing original works that reflect, from a more or less modern perspective, some of the major concerns of today so as to demonstrate that traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant from the articulation of contemporary needs and goals (293).

By saying '... from a more or less modern perspective...' Okpewho further justifies the appropriateness of myth in that it gives the writer the freedom to either be fully attached to oral traditions or create new myths.

Chinua Achebe (1975) concurs with Soyinka about the function of myth in African literature. Myth enables the African to understand himself and his

world. A community's needs can also be conceptualized through myth.

Achebe conceptualizes it thus:

Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories for a human purpose; they made their sculptures in wood and terra cotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. Their artists lived and moved and had their belief in society and created their works for the good of that society (19).

By 'to serve the needs of their times', Achebe acknowledges the dynamic nature of society. He advocates the use of myth in that, by using myth, the writer addresses the changes and the complexities that come with dynamism.

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1949) reinforce the view that myth is an asset to a writer. It enables a writer to achieve his goal. The writer is able to create a position for himself in his society, with the aim of ensuring harmonious living. Wellek and Warren represent their views in the following terms:

To speak of the need for myth, in the case of the imaginative writer, is a sign of his felt need for communion with his society, for a recognized status as artist functioning within society (92).

This is important to this study. The focus on Ogot demonstrates that a writer uses myth as a channel within which issues in his community are addressed. The modern writer also uses myth as a creative resource. Myth serves as a basis upon which he/she can explore his/her artistry hence an important artistic tool for the writer.

The use of myth to comment or examine different institutions of a society is observed by Northrop Frye (1982). Frye observes:

...among stories there grows a specialization in social functions that affects some stories more than others. Certain stories seem to have a peculiar significance. They are stories that tell a society what is important for it to know whether about its gods, its history, its laws or its class structure (32).

Frye articulates that each community has a canon of myths, which are categorized according to their importance. Myths too, address different institutions of a society. This study borrows from Frye the idea that myth has the potential to give information about a community's institutions. It investigates how Grace Ogot examines some of the institutions in her community by using her community's myths

Okumba Miruka (2001) affirms this functional element of myth in Ogot's community when he says, 'stories indirectly discuss normative and ethical issues and by analyzing them, one is able to discern the moral code that regulates the community's life'(p.126). To reinforce this observation Ruth Finnegan (1970) projects that, '...myths' are 'charters' which serve to uphold the present structure of society in general, and the position of the rulers in particular. Others again are said to fulfill the function of providing a model through which people can verbalize the relationships and constitution of the society...The prime function is the functioning in the society'.

The use of myths and rituals in writing is examined by Machayo Olilo (2002). Olilo examines the use of rituals as an artistic resource in Francis Imbuga's literary works. He notes that the use of rituals in writing can be understood

better by studying the myths that support them. Olilo's study perceives myths as complementary to rituals.

This study terms Olilo's study as significant because it recognizes myth as an important resource for the writer. However, it does not seek to study both myth and ritual. Myth on its own is perceived as suitable for addressing contemporary needs and goals. Olilo too studies the use of myth by a canonized male African writer. Ogot needs to be studied as a contemporary African writer who examines contemporary socio-cultural issues using myth.

#### **1.6.4 Critical Works on Grace Ogot's Prose Fiction**

Several studies have been conducted on Grace Ogot's works of art. Judith Jefwa (1997) in her M.A thesis, probes Ogot's stylistic choice. She describes Ogot as a writer who employs a variety of techniques to address issues in her community. She recognizes Ogot as a writer who deals with social issues affecting her society. In her study, Jefwa examines how both intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect the work of a writer. Jefwa perceives Ogot as a writer who is influenced by her personal experiences and background. Jefwa's recognition of Ogot's contribution is significant.

The present study however, establishes that myths serve as an artistic resource to Ogot and they aesthetically enhance her literary works. Ogot creatively explores the myths she uses to articulate contemporary issues. She explores the relationship between the past and the present and how the past has

influenced the present. Jefwa's study does not examine how Ogot explores the past in her works of art and its effect on the present. This is of central concern to this study.

Other scholars like Mwanzi (1995) and Njiru (2002) have also examined Ogot's works particularly the short story genre. Mwanzi in her PhD dissertation focuses on style in Ogot's short story genre. She examines three Kenyan short story writers. One of the writers she examines is Ogot. She recognizes Ogot as a pioneer writer of the short story genre in Kenya. Mwanzi's study focuses on Ogot's short stories in *Land Without Thunder* in which she selects 'The Old White Witch', 'The Hero', and 'Elizabeth'. Mwanzi recognizes that Ogot's short stories have their roots in the oral narrative and her thesis demonstrates that 'the short story genre is rich both as a medium for social commentary and as an aesthetically satisfying entity' (5).

Njiru on the other hand examines Ogot's exploration of the tragic mode in Ogot's short story collection entitled, 'The Other Woman'. In his M.A thesis, 'Honourable Minister', 'The Other Woman', and 'The Fisherman'. In his study, Njiru suggests that tragedy is a social concern that can be expressed in all genres of literature including the short story.

Both Mwanzi's and Njiru's theses are relevant to this study. They both acknowledge Ogot's concern with social issues. While they recognize Ogot's use of her oral heritage, they do not examine how Ogot uses myth to explore

contemporary concerns. This study investigates Ogot's use of myth in both the short story and the novel genre to articulate modern issues and its relevance to contemporary writing.

Studies on female writers from Africa have also included Grace Ogot's works. These include Taiwo (1984), Mwangi (2000), and Mwanzi (2003). These scholars acknowledge Ogot as a writer who explores issues affecting women. Taiwo also highlights Ogot's concern with various institutions in her community. Taiwo's study is relevant to this study because it explores social issues in Ogot's community, as articulated in Ogot's works of art.

In her seminar paper entitled, 'Tradition and Modernity in Grace Ogot's writing', Helen Mwanzi explores feminist issues as raised in Grace Ogot's short stories. She selects three stories namely, 'The Old White Witch', 'The White Veil' and 'Elizabeth', to discuss the effects of modernity on tradition. Sexuality is central to her discussion. The way the modern world views sex and in turn virginity, which Mwanzi refers to as 'the subject of the hymen,' is totally different from the traditional perspective. In conclusion, Mwanzi sums up Ogot's position as 'the authorial voice urges the African woman to fight to keep her sacred ground reverend'. Mwanzi's paper is relevant to this study because it recognizes Ogot as a writer who addresses contemporary issues. While Mwanzi's paper discusses feminist issues, as articulated in Ogot's works, this study has investigated how Ogot uses myth to examine various issues in her community as a contemporary writer. This study also interrogates

how Ogot uses myth to examine issues that are central to the society and not only those that affect women. On the other hand, this study investigates both the novel and the short story forms. The effect of myth on Ogot's prose fiction is conspicuously great to be ignored.

In a comparative study between Grace Ogot and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Evan Mwangi (2002) explores issues of language between male and female writers. Mwangi's dissertation emphasizes that gender is a social construct. He studies how male and female writers in trying to address social issues, use language differently.

Mwangi's dissertation is important because it recognizes Ogot as a writer who deals with social issues in her literary works. However, Mwangi, like Taiwo and Mwanzi, focuses on Ogot as a female writer and not as an African writer who employs myth to address contemporary issues. It is important to study the artistic tools available for African writers, whether male or female.

The above works recognize Ogot as a writer whose works exhibit folkloric or oral traditions from her community. However, they fail to recognize Ogot as a contemporary African writer who addresses modern needs. The above works also do not examine to what extent myths from Ogot's community have influenced her creativity in articulating modern issues. This study examines how Ogot has employed myths from her community as a contemporary writer

to articulate socio-cultural issues and how the myths have influenced her creative input.

The need to recognize women as participatory in the society's changing times is emphasized by Sophie Macharia in her PhD dissertation. Macharia (2004) proposes that it is not enough to examine women as images in African fiction. Women need to be examined in the light of the changing times as their identities also change. She focuses on women identities "within Kenyan socio-cultural spaces contextualized within the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times" with a view to demonstrate that the identity of women is not static but changes with the times. Change is perceived as an important determinant in reconstructing women's identities.

Macharia's study focuses on Grace Ogot's writing and particularly because Ogot explores the identities of women through oral narratives from her community. Macharia's interest lies in the "stylistic strategy of re-scripting women, subverting familiar tropes from oral narratives to tell them anew with the objective of constructing women from constraint to agency" (42).

Macharia's study informs this study by recognizing Ogot's use of oral narratives from her community and that through the narratives women participate as agents of change. However, the current study deviates from Macharia's by focusing on Grace Ogot's creative input while using the oral narrative tradition to address contemporary issues. It also focuses on the needs of the whole society and not just women.

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the Aesthetic Approach. This theoretical framework examines the relationship between myth and contemporary writing from Africa. This approach explores myth as an artistic or creative resource to the African creative writer. In so doing, it establishes why and how contemporary writers like Grace Ogot, have drawn from myths from their communities to nourish their creative writing. This study also demonstrates the creative freedom writers experience by using myth, and how this affects the artistic and aesthetic value of their creative works.

### **1.7.1 The Aesthetic Approach**

Thus, this study employs the aesthetic approach to the study of myth in African literature as proposed by Okpewho (1983). Okpewho views the relationship between myth and the contemporary writer in terms of the writer's loyalty to oral traditions and how much creative freedom the writer assumes in using this material. He describes this relationship by use of an arc of relationships that comprises four paradigms. These are *tradition preserved*, *tradition observed*, *tradition refined* and *tradition revised*. A writer's creative works can move along the arc to either category depending on the creative freedom the writer assumes while using myth.

In *tradition preserved*, the writer expresses the lowest level of mythic imagination. The writer is more loyal to the modes of oral tradition. This inhibits the writer's freedom to adopt those elements of the tale that would

have enabled him address the demands of contemporary culture. The writer is bound to oral traditions.

In *tradition observed*, the writer begins to withdraw from attachment to oral traditions. The writer selects elements of the oral tradition and rechannels them into his works. This enables the writer to assume greater freedom of creative license. Oral traditions are given a new outlook and begin to be transformed to modern ways of creative writing.

In *tradition refined*, the writer's attachment to oral traditions is withdrawn. The writer adopts figures from oral traditions that embody values that he seeks to explore in his/her writing. The writer adheres to contemporary modes of creative writing and his/her focus is shifted to addressing the needs and goals of the contemporary world than in seeking attachment to oral traditions.

In *tradition revised*, the writer's creative imagination is at its freest. There is no attachment to oral traditions. Even mythical figures are not used. Instead the writer embarks on creating new myths to address contemporary issues. In this stage according to Okpewho, modern sensibility champions over traditional consciousness, and the writer completely adheres to contemporary modes of creative writing.

This study employs Okpewho's postulates to examine Grace Ogot's fiction. The aesthetic approach lays emphasis on the individual writer's creative input

and its effect on the aesthetic quality of their works. It also seeks to analyze the effect of the mythic imagination on the delivery of content and the meaning of a work of art. This approach has guided this study in the analysis of the relationship between myth and contemporary writing. It has also guided the study in determining how much Ogot has borrowed from her community's myths and how this has affected her writing. The aesthetic approach has also guided the study in analyzing how the myths Ogot uses have influenced her narrative structure, the choice of characters and the delivery of content.

### **1.8 Methodology**

The focus on Grace Ogot's prose fiction in order to demonstrate the vitality of myth to the contemporary writer is approached in this thesis from an artistic standpoint. Myth is perceived as a channel through which Ogot projects her concerns about the contemporary world. The study therefore seeks to identify the myths Ogot borrows from her community, and how she appropriates them in order to express her desired interests. The study further identifies and analyzes aspects of myth that she appropriates to project her concerns. Based on the above premises, the study analysis employed library research and textual analysis.

Through library research, the study was able to collect information that led to the consolidation of the background to the study, statement of the problem, and the theoretical framework. The study was guided in the choice of an appropriate theoretical basis for analysis. The aesthetic approach by Isidore

Okpewho was selected as the most suitable as it discusses myth and contemporary African writing. Due to the contentions that have arisen on the definition of myth and the various definitions of myth that exist, Okpewho's argument clearly defines myth and its application on contemporary African fiction. Myth is demystified not as a story that tells about origins but as any narrative, story or tale of the oral narrative tradition.

The dominant existence of myth in Ogot's prose fiction also necessitated the use library research in order to identify and examine books and materials that discuss myth, those that identify myth as an artistic resource, and those that identify myth as suitable for articulating contemporariness. Critical works on Grace Ogot's writing were also identified. These were read, studied and analyzed in terms of their contribution to Grace Ogot's endeavor as well as determining the scope of analysis for this study. Texts that explore myth in Grace Ogot's community, the Luo people, were also identified and studied in order to understand and determine the appropriation of myth in writing. Onyango-Ogutu and A. Roscoe (1974) and Okumba Miruka (2000) were informative sources in this area. Library research also involved the study of both primary and secondary texts, published and unpublished materials in order to get more information about Grace Ogot as a writer, the works she has written and critiques of her work.

Guided by the aesthetic approach mentioned above, primary texts were closely read so as to identify those that exhibit Ogot's borrowing from the myths of

her community. This involved comprehensive reading of the short stories and novels to identify aspects of myth and their appropriation in Ogot's writing. A page to page reading and highlighting of mythic elements was done in order to identify the particular works cited in each of the chapters in this study. These were then grouped together in terms of how they utilize myth in terms of characters, the thematic concerns that evolve, their narrative structures and their setting. Analysis was then done to show Ogot's creative input and artistic effect in employing myth.

Grace Ogot's input in the form of a discursive interview concerning her writing would have been an enriching experience to the analysis in this study. Her busy schedule was a great challenge and interfered with appointments made to meet her. Efforts to conduct an interview with her were unfruitful. However, a few comments made on phone were insightful in understanding some of her works particularly the short stories.

The findings of this study are presented in the form of a thesis that comprises of five chapters as articulated in the abstract.

## **1.9 Scope and Limitation**

To date, Grace Ogot has written six literary works. These are three short story collections namely, *Land Without Thunder* (1968), *The Other Woman* (1976), and *The Island of Tears* (1980); a novella, *The Graduate* (1980); and two novels, *The Promised Land* (1966), and *The Strange Bride* (1983).

The choice of primary texts was done through purposeful sampling where texts were chosen on the strength of how they utilize and appropriate myth.

This study has closely examined four of Grace Ogot's works namely, *The Strange Bride*, *The Promised Land*, *Land Without Thunder* and *The Other Woman*. The two novels enabled this study to come up with a rich analysis in the use of myth in writing. The two novels were selected on the criterion that they both explore the use of oral narrative traditions but at varying degrees. Both novels explore contemporary issues experienced in Grace Ogot's community. Selected short stories from the two collections were also examined based on the criterion that they explore contemporariness. The selected short stories demonstrate Ogot's use of myth at varying degrees as stipulated in the theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER 2: TRADITION PRESERVED: ALLEGIANCE TO THE TRADITION.

### 2.0 Introduction

It is important to note that the oral narrative tradition has greatly influenced the writing of contemporary writers. Oral narrative traditions have been incorporated in contemporary writing in both form and content. This has been necessitated by the need to address the complex nature of contemporary issues. Oral narrative traditions have given a boost to the contemporary writer in terms of channels through which contemporaneity can be tackled.

According to Okpewho (1983) the efforts of the contemporary writer in using oral narrative traditions to address contemporary issues can be reflected through the analysis of the relationship that exists between tradition and modernity. He thus projects that:

The relationship between tradition and modernity depends in a fundamental way on the amount of creative freedom which the writer is willing to assume in handling the material deriving from the creative history of his people (215).

Okpewho in his study *Myth in Africa*, proposes an approach suitable in the analysis of African literature particularly in the use of oral traditions. Okpewho projects that the efforts of African writers in using oral material from their communities can only be appreciated by use of a theoretical framework that analyses how much freedom a writer may assume while using the oral material. In this regard, Okpewho proposes the aesthetic approach that comprises four paradigms namely, tradition preserved, tradition observed,

tradition refined and tradition revised. The writer's creative achievement can be analyzed against either of these paradigms.

Thus, the present chapter seeks to examine Ogot's prose fiction under the first paradigm tradition preserved. Tradition preserved stipulates that the contemporary writer here displays the lowest level of mythic imagination because he/she is loyal to the material borrowed from the oral narrative tradition. By being loyal to the oral narrative tradition of his/her community the writer is restricted in making any imaginative changes to the material borrowed. This in turn limits the writer's creative freedom.

This chapter will therefore focus on the analysis of Ogot's prose fiction with a view to demonstrate how much freedom Ogot assumes by employing the oral narrative tradition of her community. The analysis will involve identification of aspects of the oral narrative tradition used and their vitality as channels through which Ogot's concerns are projected. The aspects identified will also be examined to establish the form in which they are preserved.

## **2.1 The Choice of Characters**

According to Miruka (2001:125) Luo oral narratives made use of a variety of characters that included 'human beings, animals, inanimate objects or fantastic creatures with or without physical manifestation.' Although the narrator had a variety of characters to choose from, the most common category were those

narratives that focused on human characters since they were considered to echo everyday events and occurrences.

Ruth Finnegan (1970) in her study of oral Literature in Africa confirms this when she notes that:

Stories about people are in some areas at least, probably the most important group of narratives. These stories are of many kinds. Some are concerned with marvelous events and personages, some deal with everyday events in village life, some with a combination of all these... many of these stories are about everyday events and characters. They concern such well-known problems as the relations of two co-wives and how these affect their children or their husband; jealousy between two equals or between chief and subject; the extremes of friendship and affection shown by two companions; a series of clever tricks by some outrageous but in essence recognizably human character (354).

Ogot employs a variety of characters that are human. Some of the characters used reflect various issues that concern the Luo community and the society at large. In Ogot's prose fiction aspects mentioned by Miruka and Finnegan above are identifiable. Examples include Nyawir and Owiny in *The Strange Bride*, where Owiny shows so much love for Nyawir even though his community greatly despises her. He is committed to loving her that when Nyawir is sent to exile for having performed an abomination against the community, Owiny readily accepts to go with her to exile. Despite this Nyawir also boldly ascends the sacred hill in search of her husband. Both acts portray Nyawir as a woman of outrageous character.

In the short story 'The Fisherman' Nyamgondho fishes an old woman from the depths of the lake. The old woman brings Nyamgondho untold wealth that gives him great fame and respect. However, Nyamgondho soon forgets the

poverty he came from and begins insulting the very source of his wealth. The old woman eventually runs out of patience and decides to leave. All her wealth follows her and Nyamgondho realizes how much he was going to lose but it is too late. His efforts to return the old woman fail and he turns into a statue at the lake shore.

Tekayo in the short story 'Tekayo' is obsessed about getting some strange meat. His obsession leads to personal physical and psychological disintegration. Tekayo's strange desire makes him kill his own grandchild and discovers the strange meat was human liver. His attempt to kill another grandchild fails when he is discovered by his own son. He commits suicide before he faces the wrath and punishment of the villagers.

In 'The Green Leaves', Nyagar's attempt to rob a thief leads to his death. The thief having been beaten and left for dead disguises himself as dead. Nyagar sneaks back after the villagers are gone hoping to rob the thief assumed to be carrying a lot of money. Unfortunately, the thief takes advantage of this opportunity to kill Nyagar and escape. When the villagers call the police to collect the thief they had killed in the night, they are surprised to find their kinsman. The villagers were quite sure they had seen Nyagar enter his gate. It becomes a tragic experience that cannot be explained.

The experiences of the above characters can be classified as personal weaknesses which are among the issues the Luo moral code greatly detests.

Miruka (2001: 129) projects this when he notes, 'while presenting the community's moral code, narratives also extort against personal weaknesses such as dishonesty, hastiness, vanity, arrogance and disrespect or spite for the disabled or the infirm'.

## **2.2 The Naming System**

As mentioned above, human characters were employed in oral narratives in order to represent daily activities and events. These characters were also given names for a number of reasons. Finnegan notes that 'the names were merely taken, it seems, from everyday names in current use and given to a character for ease of reference. Or alternatively, the name itself had meaning and contributed to the story...' (360). This is also reflected in the Luo community. Names were important because they were a representation of certain virtues and values in the Luo community. Names also had meaning. Among the Luo barren or childless women were referred to as 'Migumba' which in itself had certain meanings and implications. 'Migumba' became surrogate mothers to children abandoned by their mothers or those given birth to in difficult circumstances. Girls were also metaphorically referred to as 'Ogwang' or 'nyagok' meaning wild cat and puppy respectively. The implication was that a man who had many daughters was considered childless. This is because girls were considered temporary members/residents of their parents' homes since they would eventually get married and go away. They would belong to their husbands homes (Miruka 2001: 127).

Names were also valuable as a source of identity. Miruka attests to this when he notes that human characters in the Luo oral narratives were given names according to gender, where a boy would be called Obong'o and girls, Awuor, Apiyo, and Adongo. The names also had certain meanings attached to them where, 'Obong'o was the name given to an only son while Awuor was the name given to a girl born at dawn' (125). Miruka's observations reflect that the Luo community had a well-defined naming system. The naming system was strictly adhered to and was used to determine what one would be called. In most cases names were given at birth while others were given during one's lifetime. Names given depended on when one was born. That is, the time of day or the season, the manner of birth, one's physical features and where one came from, particularly for married women.

In *The Strange Bride* Ogot employs characters whose names describe their physical features. Lwak is referred to by her husband Were Ochak as Ragwel meaning 'the bow-legged one'. Among the Luo bow-legged women were considered beautiful. Owiny Lwak's son is referred to as 'Bade-Dongo' by his peers. Bade-dongo means the one with muscular arms. Such men were also considered handsome. Important to note here is that such names were also used as pet names. They were used by the individuals loved ones and acquaintances. They were used to appreciate and praise the individuals for their beauty or handsomeness.

Another example is Were Ochak, whose name is changed by the community for what they considered a man of exceptional qualities. Were Ochak is given a name that matches his character and responsibilities. It is noted thus:

One of the elders of the people of Ogot Owaga was a man called Olum Ochak. This man was very healthy and he was extremely handsome. He had a shiny, black skin that looked wonderful when decorated with chalk and ochre. He was tall, with a proportional frame and very white teeth which made his smile really charming. This was the man that the people of Ogot Owaga made their chief.

Olum Ochak was a strong chief who had a lot of love for his people, moreover he was a great believer of justice and he passed all his judgements without favour or prejudice. For that reason his people liked him very much and they had a lot of faith in him. They also believed that he had some supernatural ability by which he interpreted the messages that Were Nyakalaga sent through thunder, winds and the songs of the birds. He could also read the secrets that were carried by the clouds, the moon and the stars. Above all he was a genius at interpreting dreams.

As time went by the people of Ogot Owaga started to call him Were Ochak and with time his other name Olum disappeared and he was only known as Were Ochak (which meant that he was the first ruler of the nation (Ogot 199:1-2,3).

In 'The Bamboo Hut' chief Mboga's search comes to an end when Achieng' his wife gives birth to a son and calls him Owiny. He becomes a source of pride to the chief as his heir, " you will be called 'Owiny' after the second son of Ramogi. You will live long and in my old age you will hold the staff of Ramogi in your right hand to rule your people." Owiny's name is borrowed from the royal family to designate the position of authority that was to be charged to him.

Twins were also considered important and had sets of names depending on whether they were male or female, or of the opposite sex. Where they were of

the same sex, the process of birth was a major determining factor in giving names to both children. Miruka notes that 'Apiyo and Adongo were names for twin girls: Apiyo for she who emerged first and Adongo for the last' (125).

The phenomenon of twins in the Luo community is seen in the novel *The Promised Land* and the short story 'The Bamboo Hut'. Twins were given names depending on their sex and the time when they were born. Owiny is born with a twin sister but because the chief had been looking for a son, Achieng, the chief's wife, decides to hide the daughter at the well but takes the son Owiny home to make the chief happy. Thus, Owiny's naming does not adhere to the Luo naming system because his identity as a twin is not revealed by his mother Achieng. He is given a name with regard to his position as heir to his father's throne. On the other hand, in *The Promised Land* Ochola's wife Nyapol gives birth to twins who are named according to the Luo customs. It is noted that, 'they called the first one Opiyo, meaning "the first born of the twins," and the second Adongo, "a daughter born last."

In 'The Rain Came', chief Labongo's only daughter is named Oganda at birth because she had a fair skin that resembled beans. The colour was considered beautiful that she even became the father's pearl. Because of her beauty Oganda is later chosen as a sacrifice to be given to the lake monster in exchange for rain. The naming system is extended further for married women where they would be referred to by their father's names or the community or place where they came from. In *The Strange Bride* Opolo calls his wife Awino

'Nyar Podho' meaning daughter of Podho. Lwak is also referred to by Were Ochak as 'Nyar gi Thuondi' meaning daughter of the warriors.

### **2.3 Formulaic Expressions**

Formulas were an important component of oral narratives in many African communities as observed by Finnegan (1970), Kabira (1983), Kabaji (1991), Okpewho (1982), Wa Gachanja (1987), Wainana (2001) and Miruka (2001). These formulas existed in the form of formulaic expressions that appeared at the beginning and at the end of narratives. They were referred to as opening and closing formulas.

In her vast study of African Oral literature entitled *Oral Literature in Africa* Finnegan projects that it was 'common for the narrator to open with a formula which explicitly arouses his audiences' attention...'(10).

While referring to story-telling sessions in Africa, Okpewho (1992) also observes that when beginning narratives the narrator used an opening formula which served the purpose of capturing the attention of the audience. He notes, 'the narration proper begins, in many cases, by the narrator speaking of the tale as "capturing" his characters... The idea of "capturing" would be considered part of the opening formula...(223). From the above observations, it is evident that opening formulas served the purpose of capturing the attention of the audience and alerting them that the narrator was beginning a story or a performance had began. The opening formulas also prepared the audience to

set off on a journey into another world through the story. On the other hand as Kabaji (1991:21) puts it in his analysis of the Maragoli folktale, they were 'invited to enjoy a theoretical production'.

Miruka (2001) further reiterates that the opening and closing formulas were also characteristic of oral narratives in the Luo community, where Ogot borrows her artistic material. He argues that the opening formula comprised of the assent 'Agannue' followed by an expression that denoted the story had begun. A stock of expressions was used and again they depended on the narrator's style and purpose of the story. Among them were 'A long time ago...', 'In the past there was...', or by naming characters in the story.

In the novel *The Strange Bride* the story begins thus: 'In the distant ancestral days, our god, Were Nyakalaga lived on the earth with his own people. But no one could see him because he was a mysterious being whose essence spread all over the surface of the earth' (Ogot 1989:1). This beginning adheres to the Luo way of beginning narratives and even names the Luo god Were Nyakalaga. It prepares the reader for a story set in the past, about the Luo god and the community.

As mentioned above, formulaic expressions also included closing formulas. Closing formulas served the purpose of indicating that the story had come to an end and hence returning the audience back from their journey through the other world. A world which Kabira (1983) in reference to the Kikuyu

community, calls 'a world of illusions, an ideal world, into which the audience and it's narrator escape within the period of the narrative time' (26). Okpewho (1992) also observes that '...at the end of the tale, the narrator talks of himself as having "returned" from or "left" the scene of the narrative, back to the world of real life (223). He names this aspect as "returning", which constitutes the closing formula.

In the Luo community closing formulas included expressions like 'Thu...Tinda', meaning 'The End'. It also marked the completion of the performance. Similarly, the novel *The Strange Bride* ends in the words 'TINDA' meaning 'The End'. The functional element of formulaic expressions as used in oral narratives is highlighted above. Grace Ogot preserves the closing and opening formulas because of their ability to invite and alert the reader about the beginning and the end of the narratives she employs.

## **2.4 The Use of Songs**

Songs were important and dominant features in oral narratives. Songs also featured in oral narratives in Africa for various reasons. Okpewho (1992) confirms this through his analysis of African oral narratives when he notes that, 'A rather large proportion of tales in Africa is told with an alteration of speech and song' (220). Okpewho explores the various reasons why song was used in oral narratives. He projects:

The song repeated in the tale has a significant role in the performance. It is one of the delaying tactics used by the girl to postpone her fate...the song is also useful in marking the stages of movement in the story. But it is even more useful, from the point of view of the audience, in bringing a melodious relief now and then to the possible monotony of the ordinary speech tones in which the bulk of the story is told...' (220).

Kabaji in his analysis of the Maragoli folktale argues that songs were popular because they intensified conflicts and conveyed important information. On the other hand in reference to oral narratives in the Luo community, Ogutu and Roscoe comment thus:

Song is a vital part of Luo story-telling. Indeed, most tales are incomplete without their song, which is usually short in the interests of mnemonic considerations, and briefly recounts the highlights of the plot. The first two lines are customarily repeated- a sort of emphatic announcement like the opening heavy chords of a classical overture which boom out to silence the audience and demand their attention. The song not only recounts and reinforces the events of the plot; it also colours and vivifies them, thus making them memorable. The song can make more poignant a situation fraught with pathos; it can add spice and salt to a tale of merriment... (31-32).

A similar statement is made by Miruka when he projects that:

One major characteristic of Luo stories is song....songs reinforce theme, create suspense, enhance plot development and divide episodes. They also summarize the tales, offer dramatic relief and involve the audience and the narrator in the performance, song is used to string together the plot in what may be called "regeneration". Various episodes that exist as autonomous episodes are strung into a single tale. Regeneration enables the expert narrator to give as much "good" narration to the audience as possible (125).

Incidences of song being incorporated in creative writing occur substantially in Ogot's fiction. In *The Strange Bride* songs appear severally. When Nyawir disappears, she begins to appear to her mother in dreams. It is recorded that

because of this, Awino's love for her daughter intensified so much that she composed for her the following song:

Sunrise finds the brown one outside  
Sunrise finds the brown one outside  
The brown one deserves a song  
Daughter of the women of Mt. Owaga,  
My co-wife used to say  
That a boy is a pole  
And the big roof  
Covering my mother's house  
A boy, indeed, is the shade  
Of a tree  
With many branches  
But where is the boy?  
Where is Oloo Rapenda  
The brother of Dulo?  
And Ong'wen Ragama  
The son of Podho's daughter?  
The brown one showed me  
That a girl is surely good.  
How sad  
That a basket full of sorghum  
Has spilt!  
The daughter of the women  
Of Mt. Owaga  
You wiped off my tears.

My grandmother used to say  
That a boy was a pole  
And a roof.  
With many branches  
Oo ... ee- The brown one  
Is the cold water  
That falls from the roof.  
The long reed that grows in the river

The beautiful bamboo  
That catches the traveller's eye (10-11).

The song can be described as a lamentation song. Awino laments about the disappearance of her child. The thought of being childless bothers her considering that she had had a number of children earlier who never survived

for long after birth. The problem is magnified when Awino thinks of her age. She agonizes over the fact that she may never have more children even if she wanted to because she was old. Nyawir was her only hope.

A childless woman in the Luo community acquired a social stigma because she was as good as a barren woman earlier referred to as 'migumba'. A 'migumba' was a tragic figure. The implications were that such a woman never contributed to the continuity of a family or clan. This was a great concern to the community. This is also captured in the song where Awino says, '...a boy was a pole and a roof, with many branches.' Awino also laments about this, that their generation would be wiped out hence 'leaving no mark on the earth' (8). This intensifies her grief and is perceived in the words 'How sad that a basket full of sorghum has spilt!'

The intensity of Awino's grief is also expressed in the rhetorical questions she poses, 'But where is the boy? Where is Oloo Rapenda, the brother of Dulo? And Ong'wen Ragama, the son of Pedho's daughter?'

Also evident is that a child belonged to the community. When Nyawir disappears the whole community is concerned and involved in searching for her. A child was the responsibility of all the women in the community. In the song Nyawir is referred to as 'daughter of the women of Mt. Owaga.' The sentiments of the the members of the community are also recounted in the song, 'My co-wife used to say...', and 'My grandmother used to say...'

In the same novel, another aspect of a song is explored. Songs were created depending on the occasion and purpose. Nyawir is praised for having been a virgin. The community is proud of her, particularly the 'mothers' as they sing:

Agoro ee  
Agoro ee.....ee!  
It's found, ee  
Its discovered, ee.....ee!  
We've confirmed ee  
We've concealed ee.....ee!  
Agoro ee.....ee!  
Agoro ee.....ee!  
We've won ee  
We've won ee.....ee! (62).

Nyawir's state is represented as a battle where the community boasts of having won by presenting a girl who had taken good care of herself; a good girl. This is done as Nyawir is showered with gifts as done in the traditional Luo community. While the song is used as entertainment during the wedding ceremony it also passes important information about the bride. The bride is held with high esteem and accorded much respect. Thus, the above song could be regarded as a wedding song as well as a praise song.

Once more the wedding song highlights the collective responsibility of the community in ensuring that a child was well brought up. The singers proclaim 'We've won ee'. The confirmation that Nyawir was a virgin gives the community great pleasure that they had accomplished their duty.

Both songs adhere to the traditional form of songs. In both songs we notice the use of repetition. The repetition of the first two lines adheres to what

Ogot and Roscoe refer to as a typical structure of song in Luo oral narratives. This was perceived as a signature tune that announced to the audience a familiar narrative. The two lines in the former song, 'sunrise finds the brown one outside' emphasize Nyawir's disappearance and that her whereabouts were a great concern. The lines also introduce the subject of the song.

Important to note is the lyrical effect created by repetition and also the flow of the last four lines, the alteration of the short and long lines.

Oo.....ee - The brown one  
Is the cold water  
That falls from the roof  
The long reed that grows in the river.  
The beautiful bamboo  
That catches the traveler's eye (11).

In the wedding song, the function of the performers is also felt in the way the song is structured. It adheres to performance order typical of the traditional song. The song outlines the task of the performers in enforcing the message. Both songs used by Ogot in different settings enhance the plot of the story. Thus, Ogot adheres to the oral narrative tradition of incorporating songs in narratives and in turn preserves the tradition.

In "The Rain Came", Oganda sings a lamentation song. She laments about unfairness, where she is chosen as a sacrifice to the lake monster in return for rain. While other girls of her age are ready/ ripe for womanhood and motherhood, Oganda is going to be denied the opportunity to enjoy the prime stage in every woman's life. As she leaves she sings;

"The ancestors have said Oganda must die  
The daughter of the chief must be sacrificed,

When the lake monster feeds on my flesh,  
The people will have rain.  
Yes, the rain will come down in torrents.  
And the floods will wash away the sandy beaches  
When the daughter of the chief dies in the lake.  
My age-group are young and ripe,  
Ripe for womanhood and motherhood  
But Oganda must die young,  
Oganda must sleep with the ancestors.  
Yes, rain will come down in torrents" (167).

As mentioned earlier songs were of different kinds and depended on the occasion and the purpose. In the short story, 'The Green Leaves' Nyamundhe's loss of her husband is expressed in what can be referred to as a dirge. She recounts:

My lover the son of Ochieng'  
The son of Omolo  
The rains are coming down  
Yes, the rains are coming down  
The nights will be dark  
The nights will be cold and long.  
Oh! The son-in-law of my mother  
I have no heart to forgive,  
I have no heart to pardon  
All these mourners cheat me now  
Yes, they cheat me  
But when the sun goes to his home and  
Darkness falls, they desert me.  
In the cold hours of the night  
Each woman clings to her man  
There is no-one among them  
There is none  
There is no woman who will lend me a  
Husband for the night  
Ah! My lover, the son of Ochieng'  
The son-in-law of my mother (99).

In recounting the experience of death the song revisits the issue of names as mentioned earlier, that names gave one a sense of belonging. Lovers and acquaintances had a number of names that they used to refer to each other.

Nyamundhe does not refer to her deceased husband by name as Nyagar but calls him 'the son of Ochieng', 'the son of Omolo', 'the son-in-law of my mother' and 'my lover'.

The repetition of various phrases is evident. The repetition serves the purpose of emphasizing the pain and short comings Nyamundhe was to experience in the absence of her husband. Nyamundhe talks of the dark cold nights that would be experienced as a result of the rains coming down. She also mentions the fact that no woman would be willing to share her husband with her as each would be clinging to her husband. Nyamundhe notes that other women's company was short-lived. They accompanied and mourned with her only during the day but at night she would face loneliness. This is emphasized through the repetition of the phrases, 'there is no-one...', 'there is none...', and 'there is no woman...'

Performance was also an important aspect of dirges. Miruka notes that dirges were commonly performed by individuals who were either male or female. Nyamundhe sings the song to express her sadness towards losing her husband. The performance included actions that were meant to demonstrate that death had robbed the community of an important member. This is reflected in the story where Nyamundhe is said to have '...torn her clothes and stripped to the waist. She walked slowly behind the mourners, weeping and chanting, her hand raised above her head'(99).

## 2.5 Narrative Conflict

Another important element common in oral narratives as observed by Okpewho (1992), Finnegan (1970), kabira (1985), kabaji (1991), and Miruka (2001), is the use of conflict. Conflict is seen as a natural phenomenon in human existence. Finnegan refers to it as presented in the form of problems caused by bad relations between co-wives, jealousy, and treachery, among others.

Okpewho (1992) observes that the process of creating conflict in a story is a measure of a skillful narrator. He also notes that a good narrator should be able to take his audience through a series of emotions by creating a conflict and working towards the resolution of that conflict at the end of the story. Thus, conflict facilitates the progress and purpose of the story.

In 'The Rain Came', the story revolves around the conflict between Chief Labong'o and his loyalty to the ancestors. Chief Labong'o cannot come to terms with the idea that his only daughter was fated to die as a sacrifice to the lake monster in order to have rain and protect the community from drought. He is torn between pleasing himself or the community by accepting to give away his only daughter. The conflict is presented in the following terms:

It was no longer a question of being the chief of hunger-stricken people that weighed Labongo's heart. It was the life of his only daughter that was at stake.... The prophecy was complete, "It was Oganda, Oganda my only daughter who must die so young." Labong'o burst into tears before finishing the sentence. The chief must not weep. Society had declared him the bravest of men. But Labong'o did not care any more... He

loved his people, the Luo, but what were the Luo for him without Oganda? How would the spirit of the village survive his beautiful daughter? "There are so many homes and so many parents who have daughters. Why choose this one? She is all I have". Labongo spoke as if the ancestors were there in the hut and could see them face to face. Perhaps they were there, warning him to remember his promise on the day he was enthroned when he said aloud, before the elders, " I will lay down life, if necessary, and the life of my household, to save this tribe from the hands of the enemy". " Deny! Deny!" he could hear the voice of his forefathers mocking him (160).

The power of the ancestors in determining a leader and ensuring the leader performed his functions is demonstrated. The ancestors ensure that the community's well-being is fulfilled. They cannot allow the drought to continue tormenting the community. It is the ancestors who chose Oganda by conveying the message through a medicine man.

Chief Labong'o's case is complicated by the fact that he had taken an oath promising total commitment in serving his people at all times including laying down his life and that of his family. Chief Labong'o is bound by the oath he had taken towards the community and the ancestors when he was enthroned saying, "I will down life, if necessary, and the life of my household to save this tribe from hands of the enemy" (161). The oath could not be reversed. It was time to be true to his word. Chief Labong'o cannot escape from the oath. He discovers that the price he had to pay for taking the oath is unbearable and too costly. It is also costly to be a leader. The chief weeps over his predicament and regrets his commitment.

However, even though chief Labong'o gives in, his daughter is saved from the lake monster by her lover. It is like Were Nyakalaga and the ancestors had heard his humble cry and saved his daughter in another way because he had heeded their request and was loyal to his commitment and community. Oganda and her lover run away to a safer ground. Contrary to this, the rain still comes.

In 'Tekayo' a greater conflict arises between Tekayo and the community where Tekayo kills his own grandchild in search of some unique meat he had eaten before. Although Tekayo as a grandfather and elder in the community knows that it is a forbidden act, he goes forth to kill a second child. Tekayo manages to please his own selfish needs at the expense of his family. When he is caught he denies it because he had been blinded by his desire. However, he is not pardoned but has to face the wrath and punishment of the community which was to stone him in broad daylight outside the village. When Tekayo comes to a realization of what he had done, he is ashamed and all he wishes is to die. He whispers to himself, "Stone me now, stone me now....Take me away quickly from this torture and shame" (60). He later commits suicide. This is a great abomination towards the community that he is disowned. He is also buried outside the village and no new born child would ever be named after him.

In *The Strange Bride*, the issue of commitment to laws and commandments arises. The people of Got Owaga had promised not to violate the

commandments of Were Nyakalaga concerning the use of the sacred and automatic metal-headed hoe. In return Were Nyakalaga promised to cultivate their land for them using the sacred hoe provided it was put in their land at the right time. Because of this the people of Got Owaga never did exhaustive work and therefore stayed young for a long time and lived much longer. However, this changes when Nyawir goes against the commandment. Conflict between Were Nyakalaga, the community is realized when Nyawir tills the land using the sacred hoe. Further conflict is realized when Nyawir also breaks the hoe. The ancestors are also not pleased with Nyawir's action.

Nyawir's disobedience is highly detested by the community. The people of Ogot Owaga are angered by the decision that they had to till the land themselves. In return, the villagers send away Nyawir and her husband Owiny to exile since they could not stand seeing her in their midst. Nyawir faces punishment from the society by being expelled from the community.

Traditionally, the cultivation season was dictated only by their leader Were Ochak when the sacred hoe would strategically be placed in the land for Were Nyakalaga to prepare the land for cultivation. It was against tradition for any other member of the community to perform Were Nyakalaga's role. When Nyawir tills the land, she breaks the tradition. She also breaks the tradition where people lived longer because they did not participate in exhaustive work. The people of Got Owaga are introduced to hard labour.

In 'The Fisherman', another kind of conflict is observed where Nyamgondho encounters conflict with supernatural forces. Nyamgondho is saved from poverty by fishing an old woman who brings him a lot of wealth. It is said that the villagers noted that in deed god had visited Nyamgondho. However, Nyamgondho gets so blinded by the wealth that he begins to mistreat Wagai, his source of wealth. Nyamgondho begins to drink and go home late because, 'his heart was filled with pride and importance and he drank until he could only vaguely see his companions' (Ogot 1976:73). When he went home late, all his wives acquired through his found wealth, would refuse to open for him. Instead, his anger was directed towards Wagai. He insulted her thus, 'Even this haggard ugly old woman whom I fished out of the waters and saved from the teeth of crocodiles defies me!' (p. 74). Wagai finally gets tired and leaves as her wealth follows her. Nyamgondho's cries do not stop her. Finally, Nyamgondho turns into a pillar calling out for Wagai to come back. This is seen as punishment to Nyamgondho for having been proud and arrogant instead of being appreciative.

Stories quoted above namely, 'The Rain Came', 'Tekayo', 'The Fisherman', and *The Strange Bride* explore conflict that revolves around an individual against the community or communal ideals. Harmony is achieved when the community seeks the intervention of their god and ancestors, a phenomenon Ogotu and Roscoe underscore as commonly projected in Luo oral narratives because 'the ancestors of the Luo play a central and vital role in the spiritual life of the community; they continue to hold their place within the ongoing

dance of life'(1974: 15). Anytime Were Nyakalaga and the ancestors are called upon to offer guidance or intervene, a conflict is designated.

The incidences cited above drawn from different stories in Ogot's works, show adherence to the use of conflict as used in oral narratives in the Luo community where Ogot borrows her material. The use of conflict is preserved.

## **2.6 The Use of Idiophones**

According to Miruka (2001) since narration usually took place in dim light drama was realized through the narrator's voice. Thus, movement was depicted through ideophones (124). Certain forms that acted as replicas of the sound desired were used to represent that movement. Incidences of ideophones are seen in the short story 'The Fisherman' where the tension created by Nyamgondho bringing the old woman to his house is thoroughly felt. No communication takes place between him and his wife. It is noted that, 'No one spoke, only the cha-ka, cha-ka of their chewing filled the hut' (1976:71). The idiophone emphasizes the intense silence experienced.

In 'The Green Leaves' the villagers find an opportunity to catch the cattle thieves who had tormented them for long. Their chase after the thieves is no secret as it involves a large number of people. Nyagar is woken up by the noises made by the villagers. Their movement is described by the sounds,

“Piti, piti, Piti, piti”. The sound of their movement enables Nyagar to approximate how far they were as he prepared to join them.

In the short story ‘The Old White Witch’ the nurses are angered when Matron Jack insists that they carry bedpans. According to the nurses such an action was a taboo in their community and any girl who touched a bedpan would be despised by men and never get married. The nurses decide to leave. It is noted ‘the nurses were not shouting any more, but the pata-pata of their footsteps attracted the attention of patients and workmen, and they came out in full force’.

In the traditional African setting performance was an essential part of a story telling session. However in the absence of the oral narrator and performance in the written text, Ogot uses ideophones in order to ideally depict the movement of characters through the action in the story.

## **2.7 Traditional Imagery**

Important to note is that the success of Ogot’s description and great detail in the portrayal of her characters has been aided by the extensive use of imagery. The images used are drawn from the Luo traditional setting. In the descriptions of the medicine-men in the *The Promised Land*, the following images contribute a great deal in the formation of their characters in the story. The medicine-man’s dry skin resembled that of an alligator; he had the looks

of a disturbed buffalo; had long nails like the claws of an eagle. On the other hand Magungu's hair was shaggy like that of a madman; his twisted and shabby moustache looked like a cat's whiskers; red eyes as those of a cattle egret.

Other images employed are, '... there as no hope that the land would ever be fertile like the cows whose udders are full of milk even during the dry season' (17). Nyapol was doubtful about the fertility of the land Ochola was obsessed about away from home. Ochola's siblings eating habits are likened to ants by their step-mother, 'you don't work but you eat like white ants'(P.32); she felt senseless with sorrow and pain like a woman who has given birth to a still-born baby' (152). In 'Land without Thunder', Owila's medicine is described as, '...The whole paraphernalia looked like a fly whisk made of strings' (152). A wide range of images drawn from Ogot's community is used to create vivid pictures of the characters and described. Images used in oral narratives were were a common feature, and were drawn from the local environment as articulated by Okumba Miruka, ( 2001:53-54), ' The figures of speech is a ...are derived from the community's immediate environment, both physical and abstract.' Ogot thus preserves the use of images in narratives in form and content.

## **2.9 Summary**

The analysis in this chapter indicates that indeed various aspects of the oral narrative tradition are preserved in Ogot's writing. These are mainly the choice of characters, the naming system, formulaic expressions, songs, *narrative conflict, and traditional imagery.*

It is evident that Ogot's fiction narrates events and experiences that revolve around human characters as was common in the Luo oral narrative tradition. Okumba Miruka (2001) testifies to this when he highlights that among others, 'characters in Luo narratives can be human beings (125)...and by analyzing them one is able to discern the moral code that regulates the community's life' (126). Human beings were used in order to reflect real human experiences as lived in the traditional setting. This involves happenings such as envy, treachery, and love relations, among others. Unwanted behavior was condemned and good behavior approved and encouraged. This was done in order to remind the community of the importance of living in harmony.

The human characters mentioned above were given names in accordance to the Luo naming system. It was noted that the Luo community had a concrete system in place that was strictly adhered to. The naming system took into account issues such as when one was born (time and season), how one was born, where one came from (for married women), one's relationship with others in the community, among other factors. Most of the names given to Ogot's characters are drawn from the Luo community.

Formulaic expressions are identified as dominant features of oral narrative sessions. A narrative session was marked by these formulas. The formulas are identified as opening and closing formulas. Opening formulas signified the start of a narrative performance while closing formulas indicated that the session had come to an end.

Another dominant feature of oral narratives is identified as song. Songs are said to have been common during narrative sessions. A number of reasons are enumerated to justify the existence of songs in narratives. Among them is their ability to convey important information, enhance the plot of the narrative, and intensify the conflict in the story. Ogot explores the aesthetic value of song.

It is also noted that each narrative revolved around a conflict. Conflict was seen to arise due to the failure to fulfill certain obligations like obeying laws and commandments and commitment to oaths taken. Individuals who violated the above conditions were subject to punishment which also extended to the whole community. Ogot's works exhibit her working within the same parameters when employing song hence preserving it.

The use of imagery is seen to have aesthetic implications. The narrator used images in order to make the experience real or vivid to the audience. This is transferred to the printed text. Ideophones are also identified as one way through which the narrator imitated movement and represented sound. Certain expressions were used to represent sound or movement.

An examination through Ogot's fiction reveals that she indeed borrows from the oral narrative tradition of her community. The aspects mentioned above are adhered to in form and content. An enquiry into her works has also exhibited her attachment to the oral narrative tradition in such a way that her creative freedom is limited.

## CHAPTER 3: TRADITION OBSERVED: A SELECTIVE CREATIVE APPROACH.

### 3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how the writer's creative freedom is limited by being attached to the oral traditions of her community. In this chapter, the discussion is focuses on showing that even though the writer still employs the oral narrative tradition and looks to it for creative input, her creative freedom is not limited. The writer is able to assume some degree of creative freedom by manipulating the oral material available to articulate her concerns.

According to Okpewho (1983) the writer assumes greater creative freedom here because:

He/she is more conscious of the need to put traditional culture in tune with trends in contemporary life, and so simply chooses in his/her fiction to rearrange select materials from the oral narrative tradition in a more or less original way that allows him/her to get across some of the ideas that will appeal to contemporary society (184).

The writer begins to take leave from the materials of the oral narrative tradition and employs only those elements of the oral tradition that are necessary and vital in addressing her concerns. The writer is more concerned about articulating contemporary needs and only those elements that can help her do this are employed. She is seen to work towards a selective creative approach.

The analysis in this chapter seen in the perception articulated above will be guided by the second paradigm of Okpewho's aesthetic approach; Tradition

observed. A selection of Ogot's works will be analyzed in order to establish Ogot's standing as a modern writer who has employed elements of the oral narrative tradition to address contemporary needs.

### **3.1 Narrative Spectacle**

Okpewho notes that one of the ways in which a writer exhibits close attachment to the oral narrative tradition is through the manner of narration.

He enforces this when he observes that:

One of the most striking elements in this regard is the sheer sense of drama and spectacle that we get in the narration. The description of characters and scenes (and action) shows a sense of detail, everything being put in to impress the outlines in our minds and to affect as deeply as possible (180).

Even though the performance aspect is lost in print, the writer attempts to capture this through extensive use of detail in presenting characters, setting and action. Hence captures the narrative spectacle.

#### **3.1.1 Vivid Description of Character**

Ogot's achievement in preserving the oral narrative tradition of her community is seen in the extensive use of detail. The use of detail is realized through vivid description of characters. The language used is punctuated with strong images that portray precise pictures of the persons being described. Characters are described in a way that suits their roles. In *The Promised Land*, Ogot vividly describes the medicine-man also believed to be a great witch in such a way that the evil and lethal nature of his medicine cannot be underestimated. This becomes evident when Ochola gets sick. The nature of

his illness is weird as the medicine-man himself. The sickness is one that no-one has ever seen. All medicine-men called to cure him attest to this. The medicine man is described thus:

'...an old man emerged from a tiny hut which stood alone at the far end of the village. He walked away briskly past his wife and stood facing Ochola. He was wearing a whitish Kanzu with short sleeves and had a small black cap perched on his head. He was very tall and thin, his dry skin resembling that of an alligator. He had an unkempt beard reaching up to the hair at the side of his head. His thin lips did not entirely cover his protruding teeth and his small eyes were red and unfriendly, giving him the look of a disturbed buffalo. His long nails were bent inwards like the claws of an eagle, and while he eyed Ochola curiously, several large snakes wriggled out of the little hut from which he had come a few minutes earlier. The snakes slithered up to him and twisted round his legs' (92).

His appearance and his accompaniments, outrightly show the lethal nature of his medicine/ witchcraft. The medicine-man's description creates a lot of fear.

When Ochola gets sick, a number of medicine-men are called to cure him however they do not succeed. Among them is Magungu whose portrayal suits his role as a healer. He is presented thus:

'Magungu was unkempt; his matted hair was so shaggy that he looked like some madman. His long twisted beard joined with the hair from his head, and his shabby moustache looked like a cat's whiskers... His eyes were as red as those of a cattle egret and one of his front teeth hung so loosely that it moved up and down while he spoke, as if it would fall out any moment. A strip of goatskin was tied round his wrists and a large cow's bone hung down his chest' (105).

Magungu's presentation is a projection of the expectation of what a medicine-man in the Luo community looked like. Medicine-men were considered to have unique powers and abilities that other members of the community did not

have. These capabilities enabled them to communicate with the spirit world and find solutions to problems facing individuals or the community.

Through vivid description the oral narrator portrayed a character either as beautiful or ugly. In "The Fisherman", Wagai is portrayed as ugly through a detailed description of her features. This is perceived through Nyamgondho's eyes. Wagai is described thus; 'Leaving age aside, the woman was a mass of ugliness, squint eyed, with a froggy nose and long teeth which were just too many for the underdeveloped lips...' (65).

In *The strange Bride*, the features of a man or woman who would be described as handsome or beautiful in the Luo community are outlined. Again the features outlined are purposeful as regards the roles given to the characters. Owiny was perceived to be handsome as follows:

He was tall and strong, with muscular arms. Like his father he had a smooth, shiny, black skin and snow- white closely – and – uniformly spaced teeth. He was friendly and sociable, and he always played the role of a peacemaker among his peers ( 3).

Owiny's leadership qualities can be seen in his description which acts as a premonition that he would one day lead the people of Ogot Owaga. This is also projected in the statement by the people of Ogot that 'In him they saw all the qualities of his father' (1989:3). Even though it was the eldest son who inherited his father's throne, this does not happen for Opii. Owiny is chosen by Were Nyakalaga through a dream as Were Ochak's heir.

Features that made one be considered beautiful are outlined in several descriptions Ogot gives to women she calls beautiful. Among them is Nyawir:

Nyawir the daughter of Opolo was the queen of beauty. Everyone marvelled at her lovely features. The slim-waisted girl was proportionally built. She had beautifully-shaped legs, a neck with natural rings and a natural gap between the fronts of her two snow white teeth. Her hair was combed out in long strands, decorated with cowries (6).

In 'The Bamboo Hut', Awiti chief Mboga's daughter is also portrayed as very beautiful and courageous that his son almost marries her not knowing that Awiti was his own blood sister in fact his twin. Awiti had outstanding features that also indicated that she was ready for marriage, as noted:

Her long slender legs would fill up with maturity. Her fingers were long and graceful; and she had a straight back and flat loveable belly. Her breasts were still young and stood erect like wooden curving on her chest. Her skin dotted with water was the colour of the rising sun. As Owiny looked at her, she reminded him of Arosi, the legendary and beautiful goddess of the sea. (34)

In another incident, in the short story "Elizabeth", Elizabeth's new boss is described as an understanding man:

He was about 40 years or so. About 5'9", jet black, he had an oily skin, chubby face, and boldly brushed black hair. His upper teeth looked too white to be real- and his dark gums exaggerated the whiteness. His deep fatherly voice was full of confidence and authority. He did not look the mischievous type, nor did he look fierce (191).

Mr. Jimbo's description is deceptive and ironical of what he later becomes. He can be described better as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Although he pretends to be an understanding and calm boss, he later takes advantage of Elizabeth's innocence and rapes her.

However, in some instances, as above, the character of Mr. Jimbo is disguised and hidden under the portrayal that he was a good man. In such a case Ogot

projects the complex nature of the contemporary life and issues; that what is seen to be is not what is. In "The Other Woman", we encounter another incident where Jerry appreciates the beauty of his wife Jedidah, in the following manner, '...You are noting but loveliness. Your skin is smoother than the surface of a pearl; your sleepy eyes have the beauty of water lilies: and your features...are as delicate as those of a wild antelope' (50).

It is important to note that the images Ogot employs greatly enhance Jedida's beauty. The smoothness of the skin being equated to the surface of pearl, sleepy eyes to water lilies and delicate features to a wild antelope are indeed drawn from images popular in the Luo community of objects whose features are appreciated as appealing.

Ogot also goes beyond describing a single character to a group of people. In *The Promised Land*, she describes the Banyaruanda people at the port as they prepare to board the ship to Tanganyika:

The morning was marred by the spectacle of the Banyaruanda, in a single, long queue waiting to board the steamer. They were scantily dressed with only coloured blankets round them, tied with a huge knot on their left shoulder. The women wore blankets tied with strings around the waist and a loose *suka* over their breasts... They carried large bundles of assorted belongings, either threaded on strong cords, or tied up in blankets. The men and young boys carried their belongings on their heads, as well as naked babies tied around their waists by a cloth (1966:63).

The description draws attention to the issue of migration by communities to better land and comfort. The Banyaruanda were moving just like Ochola, leaving their ancestral lands for better places. The art of using vivid

descriptions of characters show Ogot's adherence to the oral narrative tradition hence observes the tradition.

### 3.1.2 Vivid Description of Action

Ogot's shift towards addressing contemporary needs is also seen in the use of vivid description. Her attempts are evident in the vivid description of action. In the short story 'Pay Day', the action of breaking, the door to Awino's house is precisely described. Every detail of the process is clearly narrated thus;

It was a thunderous noise, sharp and deafening, though it did not last. The shattered old mahogany door crumbled into a heap and the deadly rock that had caused the damage rolled on dangerously towards the other wall, crushing whatsoever stood in its way. The voice of a girl, a very young girl, screamed out in terror, and the clear childish sounds tore the silent night. It suddenly cut off, without a whimper or a solo. The rock had stopped rolling too. Its assignment was now done (9).

The description creates a mood of fear and anticipation and the action that follows creates a mental picture of the kind of pain Awino experiences that is too painful to conjure. Awino goes through immense pain that the reader is forced to empathize with her situation. The action is stated in the following terms;

'The panga cut deep into Awino's neck. Her eyes, almost blown out of their sockets, could not now focus. She would not see even the powerful light of the torches. The warm fluid that ran out of her mouth could only be blood oozing from the butchered gums. Her whole body was on fire, and the perspiration, blood and tears ran down her face and found a common meeting-place on the pillow' (10).

In the above descriptions certain expressions clearly show Ogot's inclination towards the contemporary appeal. Moreover, certain expressions used have no resemblance or attachment to the oral narrative tradition. For example, 'the shattered old mahogany door crumbled into a heap', 'the deadly rock...rolled on dangerously...crushing whatever stood in its way...' The tempo with which the action begins 'it was a thunderous noise...' and the way it ends in a calm way '...the rock had stopped...its assignment now done'. These expressions belong to the modern mode of writing.

In 'The Other Woman', the incident where Jedida finds her husband in action in what Ogot describes as '...what very few human beings ever witness in their life-time' is vividly described thus:

The kitchen knife narrowly missed Taplalai's left eye, but it caught her ear and the excised organ fell at Jedida's feet, with a sheath of hair peeled from the scalp. Taplalai grabbed Jedida's knees with both hands. Jedida then aimed a dangerous stab on her twisted right shoulder. In despair Jerry leapt over the naked body of his ayah and both he and Jedida landed on the carpet, the knife sticking on Jerry's upper arm. Taplalai plucked the knife from Jerry's arm, grabbed her excised ear and flew out of the room completely naked (58).

In another incident we encounter June having been caught by Mr. Mawanga's wife having an affair with her husband. The spectacle is described thus:

As Mrs. Mawanga advanced towards the bed, I flung the pillow with all my might at her face. Somehow the minister leapt from the bed narrowly missing the sharp edge of the deadly simi. They scrambled on the floor, each trying to free a hand to grab the simi. I disentangled my foot from the bedclothes and jumped clear of the bed, quickly grabbing my dress from the chair and seizing the simi which the woman was

fighting desperately to regain. I rushed out of the room...(117).

In both occurrences the victims have room to flee to safety as they leave the couple fighting each other. They are wise as they carry the dangerous weapons used to fight them. Incidences of marital infidelity as a means of achieving other ends are portrayed as a common occurrence in the modern society. John cheats on Jedida for sexual satisfaction while June cheats on her husband Jared for material gain, a luxurious house. Both incidents demonstrate that both men and women have been involved in marital infidelity in the contemporary society.

Performance was a key element of story telling sessions in traditional African societies and in the absence of a narrator and performance, these are replaced by ideophones in writing to capture the performative element.

### **3.1.3 Vivid Description of Setting**

Ogot also engages in vivid description of the setting. A good example is seen in 'The Hero'. The hospital staff's concern about the doctor is highlighted.

'The ambulance had long sped away but none of us seemed to be in a hurry to return to the warmth inside, nor were we conscious of the chill caused by the falling dew. The moon shone dimly and the shadows looked ghostly thin and long, and the twigs did not move. The stillness was only broken by the occasional twitter of the crickets, and the sorrowful moan of the night owl. Uncertainty weighed heavy with us as we returned to the ward to wait in prayer' (43).

The description of the cold solemn night can be perceived by the reader. The images used are instrumental in creating a mental picture of the night. '...the

moon shone dimly, and the shadows looked ghostly thin and long', '...the falling dew', 'the sorrowful moan of the night owl'. Important to note is the alternative effect of the words used; 'occasional twitter of the crickets', 'sorrowful moon of the night owl', 'shone dimly and the shadows looked ghostly'. Indeed the forms used above adhere more to contemporary modes of writing than the oral narrative tradition.

In another setting, Mr. Jimbo's office is vividly described which gives the impression of Mr. Jimbo as a descent, sophisticated and understanding man.

The door leading to Mr. Jimbo's office stood open. The spacious office, with a huge mahogany desk and a deep green carpet covering the floor, was neatly arranged. There were no curtains on the windows; instead, light Venetian blinds were drawn up on the large windows facing the main road...everything was neatly arranged on the table and a photograph of a very beautiful woman holding two little boys stood smartly at one corner, like watchmen guarding the office (190).

The seriousness with which a wedding was regarded is portrayed through the precise detail given of the church, as the bride is awaited. It is said that:

St. Peter's church was packed with friends and relatives of the bride and the groom. Two candles were burning brightly at the altar. Reverend Omach and Father Hussen stood wearing their white and black robes. The groom with his best man stood in front with white flowers in their button holes. The congregation sat quietly listening to the soft organ music (136).

The mood of anticipation is clear. The description is enhanced in the way the author employs and sometimes contrasts objects in pairs, 'friends and relatives', 'bride and groom', 'two candles', 'Reverend... and Father...', 'white and black robes'.

Another incident of vivid description of setting is seen in 'The Fishing Village'. The stillness and calmness of the fishing village is portrayed vividly thus:

The fishing village stood precariously right on the sandy beach, on slightly raised ground. Row upon row of huts ran parallel to the beach and their rusty corrugated iron roofs caught the moon light and reflected the light back to the sky. In these streets where in the day-time children played hide and seek and the women roasted salted fish on open coal fires and chased giant blue bottle flies from the raw fish, there was no life now. There were only bickering dogs, and the creaking sound of the canoes dancing on the low tide (176).

The description gives a contrast of the fishing village at night. While the village was full of activity during the day, it was very peaceful and dormant at night, giving chance to people like Ojuka and Okoth to practice their mischief.

### **3.2 The Narrative Voice**

It is important to note that narratives in the oral narrative tradition were narrated in third person narrative mode or the omniscient narrative voice. The message of the narrative was meant to reflect a communal experience. On the contrary, this is not the case in the contemporary world. Some challenges facing the contemporary society have made it impossible for people to live as a community. The communal experience has disintegrated into individual experiences.

Ogot's achievements here are seen in the way she makes use of the first-person narrator. This is extensively employed in 'The Hero' and 'Night

Sister'. In both stories Ogot explores the hospital setting. In 'The Hero', the implication of modern medicine versus traditional medicine is explored. However, the narrator's concern is about losing a doctor she views as her hero. Dr. Sserwada had cured her mother of an incurable disease and this made the nurse idolize the doctor that when he falls sick himself, of an anonymous disease and dies the narrator is demoralized. Her fear is expressed through a dream that acts as a premonition of what eventually happens. Ironically, she is not crushed into nothingness by the soil as predicted in the dream, but her secret idol, Dr. Sserwada. The narrator identifies with the main character in the story. Although the narrator is relieved to when the dream does not come true, she is disillusioned that such an experienced and knowledgeable doctor dies in an expected way after saving others in worse states.

In 'Night Nurse', the narrator gives her own experience of giving birth in a modern hospital. She expresses her disappointment in the hands of a mean European night sister who almost kills her child. The nurse's negative attitude towards the patient is attributed to legacies of colonialism where Africans were treated as second class citizens. This is seen where the nurse directs a sister to abandon the narrator to attend to a white patient, a Mrs. Wilson (P.184). The narrator calls her 'Mubeberu' but feels comfortable with nurse Getrude because 'she was an African like me'(P.186). The narrator projects the perception of Africans by whites in independent African states. Ogot interrogates this perception and whether it is likely to change.

In 'The Honourable Minister', June Oyoo, narrates her experience with the honourable minister for housing, Mr. Mawanga. June desires to live a luxurious life like her friends in Nairobi. She is misguided by the group of urban women she meets who look wealthy. She is introduced to dubious ways of acquiring a luxurious house in a prosperous estate. However, this does not come easily. It involves having a sexual relationship with the minister. The deal goes sour when she is caught in a hideout by the minister's wife. Although not told in the story June seems to have lost the bargain, as well as her personal dignity and her marriage. The casual nature in which sex is treated in the contemporary world is amazing. In the traditional society sex was regarded as an exclusive activity between a husband and a wife. Infidelity was abhorred. The issue of an unfaithful wife was unheard of. By portraying June as a loser, Ogot seems to condemn the practice in the modern world.

Misuse of power is further explored in the story 'The Middle Door'. Policemen are ridiculed for not taking their duties seriously. While they are entrusted with the duty of safeguarding citizens, they use their power to intimidate those who are vulnerable and helpless. The narrator gives a personal experience in the hands of policemen who almost sexually assault her on a train. They use their guns to threaten her into giving in to their sexual demands. However, this does not happen as she uses a toy gun she had bought as a gift to her nephew to protect herself. At the end of her journey, on arrival at her destination she finds the policemen who had conspired ready to arrest her for being in possession of a firearm illegally. They are ashamed to

discover that it was only a toy gun. The narrator is excited and feels victorious for having beaten the policemen at their own game.

### **3.3 Conflict Reviewed**

In the previous chapter, we saw that the use of conflict was a preserve of the oral narrative. It was one of the aspects through which the writer exhibited his attachment to the oral narrative tradition. Conflict was experienced due to failure to adhere to oaths, laws and commandments set by their god, Were Nyakalaga, ancestors or even the community. The agreement was a binding factor. In most cases failure to adhere to the laws or agreements led to individual or communal punishment.

The use of conflict is revisited here. However, the kind of conflict discussed here is based on the perspective that conflict also exists in the modern society. Conflict is also viewed in the perspective that certain issues that affect the contemporary society stem from traditional viewpoints. It focuses on a conflict of ideologies hence conflict between traditional and modern perspectives on life. This section seeks to demonstrate that even though man lives in a modern society, traditional viewpoints still guide, govern and dominate his existence.

In the short story 'The Ivory Trinket' Semo is fated not to ever marry again hence his dream of having a son in vain. A senior executive and accountant in an international firm, is still stuck to the traditional mentality that a boy child is more important than a girl child. When his wife gives birth to girl children,

he rebukes her bitterly and blames her for it. He fails to understand that the process involves both parents and that the choice of a child is god's decision. He also fails to appreciate that both boys and girls are treasured in the modern society. His ideology leads him to misery. When he marries another wife, she is sent away by his first wife who challenges her to give birth to a boy child for Semo. Semo's fate is aggravated by the fact that whatever he does including going to medicine –men does not save him from his wife's torture. The conflict between tradition and modernity is also seen where the charms given to him do not work instead the ivory trinket develops a worm inside. The medicine-man is shocked that he gives up on Semo's case. This also questions the validity of traditional medicine in dealing with modern problems, are they applicable?

In 'The White Veil', the issue of pre-marital sex is explored. Owiny does not appreciate his girlfriend Achola because he feels that she is mean and backward. Achola refuses to give in to Owiny's sexual demands before marriage. Owiny is disappointed because his European friends although not married get involved sexually. Owiny does not understand that their culture is different from his. He eventually abandons Achola for another girl who gives in to his demands. However, Achola because of her love for him fights back till she finally marries him though against his wish. Although Achola lives in a modern society where things like virginity at marriage are not highly valued, she sticks to the traditional perception that a girl had to take care of herself and

remain a virgin till she got married. She psychologically fulfills her dream through dubious means.

Professor Miyare, in 'The Professor', is torn between serving his community's interests or his personal ambitions and career. The community sees him as their hero and they are proud of him. His position is also politicized and used as a means of achieving political gains. When professor Miyare refuses to attend communal functions it is not taken kindly by the community as noted, 'Many relatives and friends were complaining that he was unsociable, because he never attended the funerals of dead friends and relatives...' (1976:248). The conflict also focuses on the kind of issues the community laid emphasis on. While the professor struggles and dedicates his time and energy to searching for a cure for incurable diseases and helps people with difficult medical conditions, his community wants him to spend his time with them. They do not understand his predicament and what his job entails. Professor Miyare laments about it :

For a moment, Professor Miyare wished he were a European or an American or even Japanese. Their societies understood, recognized and respected a scientist. Professor Jenkins and Professor King Jones were close academic friends. They often discussed general subjects about life. But he never heard them talking about the family demands on them. They had no homes to be built, unemployed and sometimes unemployable relatives to support, dead relatives to be transported back home for burial and so on. They lived in their laboratories where they devoted their full attention to the problem of finding new cures for human diseases...(248).

The issue of identity also arises. Certain characters want to identify with their communal values like Semo and Achola. However, Professor Miyare suffers

an identity crisis. He does not identify with his people because he finds them unreasonable and not understanding. They do not value the time put into creating noble professions yet they value the people who achieve such positions.

In the short story 'Elizabeth', Elizabeth's hope to get married as a virgin is shattered when her boss Mr. Jimbo rapes her in his office. Although Mr. Jimbo had posed as a good and understanding boss, that was all pretence. He had promised to protect Elizabeth against any harm. This made Elizabeth trust him and believe that she had at last found a place where she was 'working among people who respected her womanhood and capabilities'(193). After the incident Elizabeth recalls her grandmother's advice :

When a mature girl plays with boys, it is like a child playing with fire; the child can burn herself and probably burn herself and probably burn her parent's house and cause great sadness. In the same way, when a mature girl plays with boys and becomes pregnant outside of wedlock, she destroys herself and eventually destroys the whole family (197).

Elizabeth cannot stand the social stigma associated with what happens and the fact that she eventually gets pregnant. She focuses on the repercussions of her pregnancy and reasons, 'sooner or later Mother Hellena was going to get rid of her (from the hostel). The man she loved tenderly would not understand her even if she spoke with the tongue of angels. She could not return home to face her parents and grandmother. And she knew that firms did not like to employ pregnant women' (202).

Elizabeth suffers shame and bitterness. She feels that she is robbed of her virginity and dignity and her future is destroyed. She travels to Mr. Jimbo's house and in the family absence commits suicide in the laundry-room. The traditional perspective towards pre-marital sex and pregnancy out of wedlock drive Elizabeth to commit suicide.

In another incident in the short story 'The Old White Witch' nurse Monica Adhiambo and other nurses are forced to leave their jobs as nurses in a mission hospital because they cannot get themselves to accept to carry bedpans for patients. According to Nurse Monica and the other African nurses, any girl who carried a bedpan would never get married since it was considered a taboo. The girls feel that they would rather go home and help their mothers dig as they await marriage. They return to their homes while they leave the patients helpless. Matron Jack finds their behaviour barbaric.

The use of conflict is observed in the way Ogot appropriates it from the oral narrative tradition. However, it takes a new dimension where it addresses issues that have been a source of anxiety to individuals in the contemporary world. The conflict focuses on tradition and modernity as major issues that concern the modern society.

### **3.4 Summary**

Ogot's reliance on the oral narrative tradition for creative input is indisputable. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that her reliance on the oral narrative

tradition gives her some creative freedom. She adopts the material used in either content or form. This allows her some degree of creative freedom where she selects only those elements of the oral narrative tradition that empower her to articulate contemporary concerns. Her achievement and freedom here is also seen in the way she combines the elements chosen with contemporary modes of writing in order to address modern issues articulately. In so doing, she tackles the intricate nature of challenges faced by the modern society and goes further to address tradition versus modernity. Thus, Ogot assumes greater creative freedom than in the previous chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: TRADITION REFINED: THE CONSTRAINT TO DISTURB

### 4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that the contemporary writer's loyalty to the oral narrative tradition is reduced. The writer begins to take leave of the oral narrative tradition in terms of content or form. He/she demonstrates some creative freedom while dealing with the material of the oral narrative tradition. This chapter explores the creative writer as demonstrating greater creative freedom. This is made necessary by the overwhelming nature of the socio-political climate. Thus, the writer drops the tales in their old forms and focuses on telling new tales but whose figures and virtues are drawn from the oral narrative tradition.

The contemporary writer is seen as a writer who although is aware of the vitality and durability of the tradition 'does not necessarily lie in retailing the same tales over and over even in the context of chosen fictional experiences' (Okpewho 1983: 188). The writer is more concerned with the overwhelming socio-political issues in the contemporary world in such a way that he understands that 'the leisurely atmosphere in which the old narrator told his stories, the accent on ease and entertainment as well as on morality in the more or less passé language of a foreign sanction, do not sort out well with the contemporary socio-political climate' (ibid).

The old forms are seen as inadequate and unsuitable in addressing contemporary issues. The writer adopts figures of the oral narrative tradition

on the basis that 'they contain some timeless virtues which would give the future generation a true sense of earthing in their search for selfhood in a difficult and ever changing world' (ibid).

The need to address modern issues in the overwhelming socio-political climate has posed serious challenges to the contemporary writer and has resulted in what Okpewho calls 'a tone of painful criticism'. The contemporary writer has had to adopt

A new temperament suited to the socio-political climate: the urge to please, which is the mark of the traditional performer, now gives way to a constraint to disturb the conscience of the reader/ audience so that they he may be involved in the painful duty to change society ( Ibid 218).

This chapter therefore examines the figures adopted in dealing with the complex contemporary issues as a way of provoking the reader to participate in the duty to change society. The analysis will therefore entail identification of such figures as used in Ogot's prose fiction. These figures will also be examined to show their vitality as modes through which Ogot has dealt with contemporary issues.

#### **4.1 The Essence of Names**

In chapter two the analysis revealed that characters were instrumental in assisting the oral narrator achieve her goal. Characters names had meaning which also contributed to the meaning of the story. Names given to characters matched their roles in the story and were given in adherence to Luo naming system. The writer's loyalty to the oral narrative tradition was demonstrated

here. In chapter three, it was observed that although the writer still relied on the oral narrative tradition, her adherence was not total. The writer demonstrated some freedom by giving characters names borrowed from the Luo community but which did not adhere to the Luo naming system.

In this chapter the writer demonstrates greater creative freedom in naming characters. The practice of using traditional ethnic names is no longer a priority. The writer works towards giving her characters names that have no attachment to any ethnic community as a way of showing that the concerns of the modern society affect all communities and the society at large. In a few circumstances ethnic names are used in a setting where Ogot wishes to portray the cosmopolitan nature of the contemporary society. However, in most cases English names are used to present characters as epitomes of modern men and women.

A number of female characters are given English names as representatives of the modern woman and her challenges in a modern world. The women are portrayed as having a modern outlook towards life and are no longer controlled by traditional outlooks towards life. An example of such women is Jedidah in 'The Other Woman'. Jedidah is an educated executive secretary in an international firm. She is economically empowered however, due to her busy schedule she is unable to perform her daily chores at home that she employs a cook and a house girl to assist. Traditionally, cooking was done by women but Jedidah employs a man to do it. Although these were duties every woman was required to perform Jedidah does not consider it unique to employ

a male cook. She values her job more than the traditional roles a woman was required to perform. Jedidah is thus presented as an alienated modern woman who has delegated all her house chores and duties to her servants in her home. She is also depicted as lazy and irresponsible that is why her marriage falls apart.

In 'Elizabeth', Elizabeth is a young working girl. She is employed as a secretary in a modern office where she works hard to sustain herself. The demands of the modern world are great that every woman needs economic empowerment irrespective of age.

Another category of modern women is found in 'The Honourable Minister'. They are modern women who do not work but have ways of surviving. Unlike Jedidah they do not sweat to get what they want but use dubious means to acquire what they have. This is seen in June's experience where she is introduced to the Honourable minister for housing who allocates modern and posh houses to women who have sexual relationships with him. Apart from the minister the writer seems to portray that the women use similar means to survive by getting involved with men sexually among other means of survival. The women seem to live expensive lives that make June admire them yet have no formal jobs. The concept of work in the contemporary world develops a new dimension. Ogot's use of names from different communities depicts the diversity of the modern society and that challenges of modernity cut across all communities.

Men are also given names that depict them as modern. Traditional names like Owiny and Opiyo are replaced by Jerry, Julian, and Jared among others. Again their perception towards life is modern. They are more concerned about their sexuality than the well being of the society. Modern men are portrayed as selfish and exploitative. Jerry does not understand his wife's predicament. Jedidah's beauty gives her trouble with her male bosses who demand sexual favours. When Jedidah declines she is given a lot of work which exhausts her completely at the end of the day. Due to this she is unable to attend to her husband. Instead the husband retaliates on the house girls in the house. Jedidah unknowingly keeps sending away her house girls thinking it's her houseboy who impregnates them. Jerry does not care about the future of the young girls whom he destroys.

In 'Elizabeth', Mr. Jimbo misuses and takes advantage of his secretaries who in most cases are young girls. He takes advantage of them because they are vulnerable and desperate for jobs in order to survive in the modern world. Mr. Jimbo pretends to be fatherly and very understanding. However, he attacks the girls when they least expect it as seen in Elizabeth's case. When they get pregnant he sends them away. The modern practice of men taking advantage of young girls is a major concern. Mother superior upon getting Elizabeth's note book and discovers what happened contemplates about it and wonders about 'all other girls who were trapped this way by those who were more powerful than them' (204). Thus the need for economic empowerment has destroyed and posed serious challenges to many young girls in the modern

world. The concern for the young as the future generation is absent in the contemporary world. Individual satisfaction has replaced communal concern.

The cosmopolitan nature of the contemporary society is also reflected through the names of characters. In 'The Other Woman' Jedidah's workers are named as Achola, Abedi, and Taplalai. In 'The Honourable Minister' Junes friends are diverse. They are Mrs. Osumba, Mrs. Jeneby, Mrs. Mamboleo, Mrs. Karuga and Mrs. Waswa. The need to survive in the contemporary world is portrayed as national and affects all communities.

The socio-political climate has also given rise to social inequalities. These are depicted through characters that are presented as literate, illiterate or semi-literate. The society is socially stratified. This is seen in 'The Other Woman' through Jedidah and her workers. Achola is presented as illiterate as seen in Jedidah's utterance when she discovers Achola is pregnant. She says "some of this uneducated girls can never know when they are in trouble. They need death itself to shake them up" (39). Abedi Jedidah's cook does not know any other language but Kiswahili which he uses to address Jedidah. When he is confronted for having made Achola pregnant he says, "Hapana, mama...Mimi hapana fanya upuzi, mimi Islam, mimi hapana guza msichana kama Achola ambaye bado kata" (41-42). He is portrayed as being semi-literate.

On the other hand Jedidah is portrayed as literate. She only speaks English and has very little knowledge of Kiswahili. She hardly understands Kiswahili and

even her pronunciation of words is a big problem. She shares her experience about her pregnant house girl and how her attempt to accuse the houseboy makes him make utterances that she does not understand. She tells Anna,

“ My cook?...He was wild when I asked him whether he was responsible, and he mumbled so many words in Kiswahili which he knows I don't understand. The only words which stuck in my mind were these.” Jedidah produced a book she had entered them in and stammered the words out: “ upuzi, guza, bado kata.” It was so funny that Jedidah a native of Kenya, pronounced simple Swahili words like some tourist from Bulgaria (43).

Anna is forced to translate the words for Jedidah in order for her to understand what the cook meant. Ogot highlights the effects of the western culture on elites who want to identify with foreign cultures and languages while they disregard their own. Such characters while thinking they are sophisticated they demonstrate alienation and brainwashing as argued by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o that:

English became the language of the elect...(and) the newly ordained or those ready to be servants of the new order had their minds systematically removed from the world and the history carried by their original languages'(1993: 32).

Ngugi further asserts as follows:

Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment. It starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community (1986:28).

Taplalai is portrayed as semi-literate that even though she cannot speak much English, she is able to communicate with Jedidah as noted, ‘ Taplalai knew

some English and she had been told that Jedidah spoke no Kiswahili'(49). Taplalai is informed about her boss before she gets there hence prepares herself in advance on how to communicate with Jedidah.

Ogot uses names not in the sense that we saw in chapter two where names were seen as a source of identity, here names are used in the opposite to designate a lost society that suffers from an identity crisis. Names are also indicators of a stratified society that includes the upper and lower classes. Achola and Taplalai belong to the lower class while Jedidah belongs to the upper class.

#### **4.2 An Urban Setting**

The overwhelming nature of the contemporary world is also portrayed through the setting. Modernity features greatly in the urban setting hence in order to deal with modernity the urban setting needs to be examined critically. In chapter two, we saw how loyalty to tradition made it necessary for the writer to explore the traditional setting in which the events occurred. In chapter three, the writer demonstrates some degree of creative freedom by exploring the rural setting and partly an urban setting in bid to show that although some characters seem to have a modern dispensation the traditional world still affects them. They seem to exist in the present but in the past. This chapter examines the contemporary writer\* as exploring issues that are basically modern as experienced none other but an urban setting. Most of the events captured are experienced in Nairobi. This is identified through the mention of

places like Riverside Drive, South C, Hurlingham Road, and Mathare hospital among others. In 'The Honourable Minister', this is depicted through June's journey to her friends place to meet a new group of friends. It is described thus:

We took the short cut near the upper hill school and in no time we joined Ngong Road and then Hurlingham Road. Several members had already arrived when we reached Mrs. Kamau's spacious home. I was introduced to them: Mrs. Osumba, Mrs. Jeneby, Mrs. Mamboleo, Mrs. Karuga, Mrs. Waswa and several more (91).

The names of places mentioned clearly indicate that June's experiences are in Nairobi. Also important is the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Nairobi. The women as their names indicate belong to different ethnic communities in Kenya but have come together for a common cause. They are birds of a feather that flock together. Indeed they are portrayed as rich housewives and want to introduce June to their business so that she may also live like them. The need to work together is no longer communal. They go beyond the communal outlook to a national outlook.

Another outlook towards life is projected in the same story which prompts women in urban areas to behave the way they do, as mentioned earlier. The limitations of modernity are highlighted. June observes:

When my eyes had got used to the lighting I stole glances at the women. They were immaculately dressed, making me feel almost primitive. All the hair looked wavy in comparison with my natural look. Their nails were painted red and their lips with soft petal colours. A feeling of shame and regret would have spoiled my day, but I fought it hard. I would change as they changed in the vain city. I would have wavy hair over my bleached face. I could not see any short cut to this. In my

present natural look, no man was going to look at me and be tempted. For very few men in Nairobi cared for women in their natural beauty. Nairobi was a city of overworked men who needed artificiality to stimulate them. Nature was a thing of the past: beauty of the olden days was only left in the rural areas where life was relaxed and men enjoyed the original charm of women (91).

Life in the city is portrayed as fake and artificial while village life is portrayed as enjoyable. Those who do not conform to modern standards of doing things are considered misplaced and have no place in the modern world. It is this artificiality that makes modern life complex. It is also ironical that even though village men get involved in manual work and are expected to be exhausted this is not the case. It is the modern men who engage in white-collar jobs considered less strenuous, who get exhausted.

In the short story 'Elizabeth', Elizabeth meets her fate in the city of Nairobi. After Mr. Jimbo rapes her, she hates the city and longs for the village, as noted:

Elizabeth drew up the curtains to shut out the city and its people from her. She felt out of step with the sophisticated life in towns. She wondered whether she would ever get used to it. A sudden aching longing for her home in the country, the close-knit family life she had shared there, and the security she had felt, gripped her (198).

Elizabeth's experience further highlights the artificial nature of urban life. It also narrates the insecurities experienced in urban towns as compared to village life where people cared for each other. Elizabeth regrets any association with the urban setting.

The urban setting also challenges traditional systems of governance which are seen as irrelevant and inappropriate. They are dropped and modern ones introduced. Kinship ties that dictated the next ruler are broken. The Chieftdom system and heirs is replaced by a democratic system of choosing leaders. This is done through voting. This is nexplored in 'The Honourable Minister' where Mr. Mawanga through voting is elected to parliament and appointed as the minister for housing. In 'The Professor', Mwoeso the Professor's brother tries to use the professor to address his supporters so as to gain political mileage over his opponent.

The contemporary setting also puts pressure on village life where people are forced to move away from congested and non-productive land in search of better land in order to survive. Life in the village is considered too demanding against limited resources. This is explored in *The Promised Land* through Ochola. It is said, 'he was getting tired of living in Nyanza, with its unscrupulous tax collectors, its petty tyrants and its land feuds. Whatever money anyone could make went for school fees, hospital fees and so forth'(14). When Ochola discovers a better opportunity through his friends he is set to move on even if he leaves his ancestral land. He does this against the wishes of his parents and kinsmen.

In addition to the new ways of doing things is the introduction of the white man's religion which strongly dejects traditional forms of worship. Abiero Ochola's brother is one of the convicts.

Abiero changed. He became so possessed with his faith that the villagers thought he was mad. He stole his father's precious pipe and broke it on a rock outside the village. He was hostile towards any of his younger stepbrothers or sisters who sang traditional songs. The teachers at school had said that all these were sins, things of darkness. Anybody entering the new life and starting to learn to read and write should reject such things and abide by the big books of wisdom.

Abiero took all the school teaching very seriously; even dancing to the throbbing African drums annoyed him. Eager to civilize his brothers and sisters, he sang Christian songs to them with great fervour (34).

Christianity also introduces formal education which is based on Christian principles and only those converted are comfortable in the system. Oral and informal education is slowly replaced. Converted individuals are seen as alienated hence social misfits. Abiero is one of such individuals. These are some of the issues that cause ochola's father anxiety because he sees his sons as being misled by modernity. His attempt to stop Ochola from going to Tanganyika is because he sees Ochola as his only hope.

Although the white man's religion is perceived as superior by those who get converted, it is portrayed as hypocritical. The behaviour of Father Ellis is a disgrace. He molests young girls who go to confess their sins. Nyapols sister is a victim:

Ever since the white Father had come to the hills, the people were told that the white man was married to the service of his God. It was wrong to talk to a woman. It was a sin in the eyes of God. Now that Father Ellis had in fact squeezed Apiyo's breasts, the way other men do when they desire a woman, the women were bound to take him before the clan elders. He had defiled the girl, for what man would marry a girl who had been touched by a white man?(51).

The strong rejection of the white man's religion is expressed in the fact that anybody who had close contact with him was also rejected. Due to this, Nyapol advises her sister not to ever mention this to anyone, since she risked not getting married.

### 4.3 Contemporary Realities in Song

In chapter two we saw how song was a preserve of the oral narrative and how the writer shows her attachment by adhering to both content and form.<sup>1</sup> Songs were structural components of oral tales. In chapter three, we saw how the writer begins to take leave of material of the oral narrative tradition which is displayed in the writer's appropriation of either the content or the form, depending on the message to be conveyed.

In this chapter the effects of the socio-political events are narrated through a song as seen in *The Promised Land*. While Nyapol and Ochola travel to Tanganyika in search of better living conditions they are entertained on the steamer by a local soloist. The harpist sings:

Listen, sons of Ramogi, Listen!  
Listen, you who have been spared to live and eat!  
They were young like you. They were fathers like you.  
Some were engaged to be married.  
But they had not felt the worth of a woman.  
It was a day like this.  
The sun was warm and the fields were red with millet.  
The men were resting after the midday meal.  
The women were nursing their babies.  
The brides were ripe for marriage.  
Then the hour struck.  
It was the year 1939.  
The chief's drum throbbed.

The people gathered and the chief spoke to them.  
Hear, all of you, sons of Ramogi.

The white man is at war with his brother across the seas.  
Orders have been forced down my throat.  
Let your people go across the seas to help me fight my enemy.  
When I win the war, we shall divide the spoils.  
His words were sweet and the chief's hands were forced.  
He called the elders,  
Let your sons go and help the white man.  
When he wins the war let him give you half the spoils.  
Bring them home.  
We are brave people. We will fight.  
So the men went to war across the seas to fight for the white man.

Opiyo went. Adhiambo was left behind heavy with child, their first child.  
Oigo went, he left a bride weeping.  
Nyawiwa went. He was strong and brave, he had paid dowry but his bride had not come to him.  
Sigana went, his children clung to him weeping.  
He soothed them, Papa will come home after the white man's war.

So they went, one man from each home.  
It was a day like this, the sun was hot.  
The fields were red with millet.  
But they never came back.  
The white man's battle swallowed them up.  
The *kipande* they had carried was returned- but they remained.  
They remained in the land where there was no sunshine nor the  
Warmth of a woman nor the cry of a child.  
Sleep on, sons of the soil. Sleep on.

You were taken from us young and strong.  
You were too young to sleep.  
The earth had no shame to have swallowed your souls.  
And to hide you from the warmth of the sun.  
Weep with me, you fathers. Weep with me, you, whose brothers sleep.  
Weep with me, mother, weep with me, mothers  
Who long for the warmth of a man.  
My clansmen have slept.  
My brothers are no more.  
The sun is warm.  
The fields are red with millet.

The brides are ripe for marriage.  
But you see them no more.  
Sleep, sleep, sleep in the land of the white man...'(59-61).

Formal aspects of song are realized. The use of repetition to emphasize the great loss is observed. The soloist keeps repeating the expression ' It was a day like this' and ' The fields were red with millet'. The use of repetition makes the experience more vivid and highlights the effect of the loss on the contemporary society.

Although the soloist refers to only a few of the warriors by name, it is intentional. This is done to ascertain their identity as warriors from the Luo community. He mentions Opiyo who leaves his wife Adhiambo, Oigo who leaves a bride weeping, Nyawiwa who had paid bride price but the wife had not come as yet; what a great loss! Sigana went and left his children weeping. The rest whose names are not mentioned are referred to as the sons of Ramogi, Sons of the soil, My clansmen and My brothers. The communal way of living in the traditional Luo community where people cared for each other is reflected in the use of the word 'brother'. This reference did not mean that they necessarily belonged to one mother but that they belonged to one community, the Luo people. They are also referred to as the sons of Ramogi because all Luo's are believed to be the children of Ramogi. Ramogi is a great ancestor in the Luo community.

The use of figurative language to refer to things is observed. Death is referred to as sleep. Departed members in the community would be said to have slept

and not died. Death is simplified and named sleep to reduce its impact on those left. Death was also seen as a form of transition from this world to the next ( Ogotu & Roscoe p.15). Although it was believed that when people died they joined their ancestors in the other world, it was also said that their spirits never departed, they hung around. That is why the soloist urges them to sleep on in a manner likely to suggest they were present and could hear him.

The existence of an audience was common during oral narrative sessions. The soloist adheres to this when he says, ' Listen, sons of Ramogi, Listen...Listen you who have been spared to live and eat! They were young like you, they were fathers like you. Weep with me you fathers, mothers, you whose brothers sleep'. This alludes to the existence of some audience associated with the departed kinsmen. The soloist calls upon the audience to mourn the departed loved ones, as discussed in chapter three. The soloist also makes reference to absentee subjects as was common in oral narratives.

The elasticity of song where a song was expanded to accommodate new issues is seen. In oral performance the text was not fixed. It was shortened or lengthened depending on the requirements of the moment ( Miruka 2001:85). Although the song is referred to as a war song, it goes further to include historical events. The song narrates a contemporary issue about the effects of the Second World War where many Africans lost their lives and were never compensated. The white man is portrayed as an exploiter who has made many homes lack basic human needs. This includes women who are deprived the

warmth of men, children who are denied the love of a father, brides who lack grooms, mothers who lack the love of a son and fathers who lack heirs. The song thus becomes a social commentary on history which not only affects the Luo community but the whole world.

The song deviates from the content of a war song as used in the oral narrative tradition because its main purpose is not to praise the warriors. Although towards the end it praises the warriors, its main concern is the evil the white man commits by robbing the community of its energetic young men who go to war and never return. The only thing that shows they ever existed is the 'kipande' found on their body that is returned. The villagers are also given empty promises about sharing 'the spoils' when the white man wins the war. Although the white man wins nothing is shared. The white man is perceived as liar and mischievous. He misuses the young men. The soloist calls upon the people to mourn with him their lost kinsmen. He urges the warriors to sleep on in the white man's land because they shall never return.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that Ogot achieves greater creative freedom here. She takes leave of oral narrative material and only adopts those figures that help her address modernity.

Among the features that show her creative freedom is the use of contemporary characters whose view of life and issues is modern. Their behaviour can only

be understood from a modern perspective because they are given modern names and placed within an urban setting. Their behaviour speaks volumes about individuals in the contemporary world since they are used as epitomes of modern individuals and issues. They are used to rebuke certain habits that are shameful and destructive.

The events narrated are experienced in an urban setting, which is in the city of Nairobi. The setting determines the behaviour of the characters. New ways of doing things is also explored. Among them is the paying of tax, formal education that replaces informal education as seen in chapter two and new religion and new forms of worship introduced by the white man's religion. Although the white man's religion strongly rebukes traditional forms of worship as pagan, it is also seen as hypocritical.

The use of song to articulate contemporary issues is also explored. Only the form is adopted while the content is modern. Hence the form of songs is re-appropriated to project contemporary concerns.

The features mentioned above demonstrate Ogot's creative freedom in re-appropriating features of the oral narrative tradition in order to address modernity.

## CHAPTER 5: TRADITION REVISED: A NEW NARRATIVE

### 5.0 Introduction

This Chapter explores the efforts of the contemporary writer in telling new tales. The writer is seen to achieve the greatest level of creative freedom because the writer totally takes leave of the oral narrative tradition and its features. The old tales are dropped because the writer develops a radical outlook towards them and feels that they are insufficient in providing answers to problems experienced in the contemporary African society. The writer seeks modes that he/she perceives as suitable in addressing contemporary needs that are independent of the oral narrative tradition. Okpewho projects this thus:

What is needed now is a programmatic replacement of these tales and their symbols by new ones ... whether as whole tales or as metaphors, therefore, tales about gods and heroes and other superior beings have no place in the new radical outlook...and do not take due account of the urgent problems of the contemporary society. Something else must be put in their place (204).

The need to address contemporary issues becomes a priority and an urgent concern for the contemporary writer. The writer works 'towards bestowing on the new myth a character as prospective as the old myth was wistful'(218).

This is the concern of this chapter, to demonstrate Grace Ogot's creative freedom in telling new tales, tales that address urgent issues in the modern world. This chapter focuses on Ogot with a view to demonstrate that here the writer makes no reference at all to the myths from her community, the writer

labours to find new means of dealing with modernity. Lack of dependence on myth and its features is what this chapter regards as tradition revised.

### **5.1 The Modern Character**

In the previous chapter we saw how Ogot employs characters of a modern appeal in terms of their names and disposition in the modern world. This changes in this chapter as the writer concentrates on characters whose behaviour and outlook towards life are totally modern. Names are no longer a priority, the writer adopts a new way of referring to characters by use of titles for example Professor, doctor, nurse and honourable.

In view of the above observation, it is important to note that Ogot adopts characters who are professionals. Their titles are considered more important than their other names. The characters are depicted as highly educated members of the society and respectable. In 'The Professor', Professor Miyare is a learned and respectable doctor. This is seen in the kind of reception he gets at the airport on arrival from England. Everybody wants his attention. His colleagues in the medical profession Dr. Jenkins and Dr. King Jones are there to receive him and take him to a doctors' conference on organ transplantation. A copy of the programme for the conference is bought in advance for him. On the other hand a politician from his constituency wants to identify with him in order to get favour from his supporters as he campaigns for a political post. The politician has a grand party set for him as a way of welcoming their kinsman.

In 'The Hero', Dr. Sserwadda is honoured as a great doctor because he heals the narrator's mother of a strange disease. The honour given to him demonstrates that he not only heals the narrator's mother but many others in the hospital where he works. The respect given to him is demonstrated in the way he receives attention from the hospital staff when he falls sick. The staff is ready to support him fully in whatever circumstances. He is perceived as a hero by the hospital staff and his wife Jerudine. Jerudine a south African native adores Dr. Sserwadda for having gotten her out of south Africa.

Another group of professionals is the nurses found in Watukufu hospital in 'Night Sister'. The group consists of both European and African nurses. The white nurses are mentioned as Nurse Getrude and Sister Smith while the African nurse is called Nurse Wairimu. In 'The Hero', a similar setting is found. The white nurse is called Sister Mary while the African (Ugandan) is Nurse Kigundu. The existence of both African and European professionals in the medical field is highlighted.

Apart from the medical professionals mentioned above, the short story 'The Middle Door' explores the respect given to contemporary writers as professionals. The narrator is presented as a known writer from the discussion she has with the ticket examiner and the female passenger. The role of the contemporary writer in molding the society is also highlighted in the conversation between the narrator and the female passenger when she notes, 'Oh, you are so clever to be writing books...children of today need good

books to read, they are no longer listening to their parents'(21). Writers are also portrayed as educated from the comment the female passenger makes concerning the writer being clever. Through the sentiments of the female passenger the importance of books as a major source of information to the modern generation is explored. Oral education is no longer valuable. This is further reinforced earlier by Okpewho in chapter three when he notes that the oral narrator goes to the author because he believes that the experiences of the oral narrative tradition 'may perish uncelebrated and the lessons thereof be lost to future generations; and since the new generations listen more to their books than to the words of the old ones, perhaps the best way of giving them the benefit of that old wisdom is by entrusting it to the books that they read' (184). The emphasis here is not laid on the 'old wisdom' but on the fact that formal modes of communication are necessary in the contemporary world. The writer sensitizes the society through the written text.

Politicians are also respected and honoured in the modern society as leaders. They rank close to the professionals. Their power and influence is captured by the writer in the experience of Dr. Jenkins projection thus:

In six years in Africa, Professor Jenkins had come to realize that he could argue and disagree with his African colleagues on any topic without any fear. But to argue with an African politician was to risk deportation. He is a semi-god in his country and he is always right (195).

Although Professor Jenkins fears politicians for what they are in their countries in Africa, he still influences Professor Miyare against the politician's demand about attending a communal party.

Despite the fact that politicians are honoured, they have become a disgrace in the contemporary world. In 'The Honourable Minister', the minister for housing Mr. Mawanga misuses his power by giving lavish houses to women who have sexual relationships with him. Most urban women take advantage of his dubious generosity to enrich themselves with beautiful houses in posh estates in Nairobi. This behaviour about politicians in most independent African states is disturbing. Their behaviour is considered irresponsible and wanting. While they should provide good models for others particularly the young, to emulate, they are representatives of the decaying nature of the political arena in Africa. The writer exposes this behaviour in order to provoke the society towards thorough examination of the moral standards of our leaders and cause them to change. The writer also explores the future of the marriage or family institution as endangered. Unfaithfulness has pervaded the society and those in leadership are no exception. Unfaithfulness in the contemporary society in far as personal gain and satisfaction is concerned is portrayed as a practice that involves both men and women.

Another group of professionals whose integrity is presented as questionable are the policemen. While they are entrusted with the duty to protect citizens, they take advantage of their position and powers to molest innocent people. In 'The Middle Door', appearance and presence of the policemen on the train assures the narrator of safety through the night as she travels to Kisumu. However, the policemen conspire with other officials on the train to admit passengers in the wrong compartments for their own gain. They also molest

passengers using their guns in order to scare them into giving in to their sexual demands. The narrator is intimidated by the policemen in the middle of the night while other passengers are asleep. The narrator does not give in but instead uses a toy gun to counteract their action. The policemen having failed in their attempt, use this opportunity to falsely accuse her of being in possession of a gun which is illegal. They are however embarrassed to discover that it was only a toy gun. The behavior of the policemen is portrayed as a habit they are used to while on duty. The writer portrays contemporary insecurities even in the hands of those entrusted with the duty to protect the public.

The two instances mentioned above concerning politicians and policemen, clearly demonstrates the misuse of power in the contemporary world. Their behaviour is used to examine the state of the contemporary society which is portrayed as a world full of immoral acts. Those involved do not care about the destruction their actions lead to. They work towards achieving their personal whims. Such incidences according to Okpewho (1983: 198) help us to '...focus upon manners which are external signs of the spiritual state of the society'.

## **5.2 The Contemporary Setting**

In the previous chapter, we saw that characters were placed within an urban setting. This was captured as the Nairobi city. This chapter explores the choice of setting as one that goes beyond the Nairobi city to the international world.

In The short story 'Karantina', Dora finds herself in a difficult situation away from home in a foreign country abroad. A proper immunization certificate against yellow fever is mandatory. Lack of a proper medical certificate as proof of her immunization against yellow fever causes her unperceived problems. This makes her be grounded in a secluded place in Cairo while she awaits proper procedures and finally her dismissal. Her friends are allowed to move on. The need to have proper travel documents is a major concern in the contemporary world. Although Dora's friends proceed to their destination, their journey is unfruitful and not pleasant either. They discover they had been booked in a warehouse as a hotel. Dora's stay as she awaits clearance is also unpleasant. Food and accommodation are a big problem. They all wish to return home and their dreams of a holiday away from Kenya are not fulfilled.

In the short story 'The Hero' the events narrated take place in Uganda. The mention of places like Mengo hill and Kampala city central cemetery where Dr. Sserwadda is buried is evidence of this. The names of characters are also of Ugandan origin except for the white nurses.

The concern for good health and cures for diseases in the modern world is explored. Diseases are seen as unique and complex and require serious attention. Professor Miyare is seen to work towards this modern concern. He works tirelessly attending conferences and spending long hours in his laboratory in order to acquire insights and information on new diseases in Africa. He gains more fame when he successfully performs a heart transplant on Alice Musa. Alice becomes alive again after being in a coma.

In 'Night Sister' the narrator tells of her experience while giving birth in a modern hospital in the hands of a mean white nurse. The presence of an African nurse gives her hope and encouragement. She is able to successfully give birth to a baby girl. Colonial legacies are projected as a concern in the modern world. Although many African countries have gained independence, colonial attitudes still prevail where European professionals still look down upon Africans.

The experiences cited above show the writers concern about modernity. Modern hospitals and modern medicine have become a priority. Sick people no longer seek cure from medicine men as seen in chapter two. Hospitals are considered reliable and safe. Certain diseases are portrayed as beyond traditional medicine.

### **5.3 Language Reviewed**

In the previous chapter we saw that language was an indicator of the characters social status as literate or illiterate. In this chapter language is still perceived as an indicator of the social status of people in the modern world. However the writer adopts a new perspective about language as used internationally.

In "The Middle Door", the taxi driver uses Kiswahilli to communicate with his client as he uses the word 'Bwana kubwa' to describe a boss in a Mercedes Benz.. At the station he asks for his dues in Kiswahili again, 'Pesa, mama,

Pesa' (17). Names used by natives to refer to things are also used, for example, the white man being called a 'mzungu' and a basket 'kikapu'. The policemen also refer to the narrator as 'kisura' (meaning beautiful face) and further comment 'maybe our English is not as good as yours' (p. 50). This utterance reveals their ignorance.

In 'Karantina', the use of Kiswahili as a lingua franca is acknowledged. English is acknowledged as an official and international language. Both languages are used to make announcements at the airport. In the same story the writer draws the attention of the reader to the fact that other forms of English are used internationally. A case in point is the attendant at the airport in Cairo who uses pidgin English. He says 'we do this, madam. Your sister go in Karantina now, and at nine in the morning the big doctor come. Your sister ask the big doctor to go out. The big doctor very good and kind. He let your sister to go Cairo...No madam I only small doctor – I don't give diseased permission to go Cairo' (90). Although the attendant's English is bad he is also incapable of pronouncing words correctly. Instead of saying 'Quarantine' he says 'Karantina' which is made the title of the story as a mockery of the attendants at the airport in Cairo.

The writer's concern with the contemporary society is also seen in the choice of titles for her stories. The titles used either satirize or mock certain contemporary issues. In the short story 'The Honourable Minister', the writer uses the word honourable to satirize the behaviour of modern leaders. They

are presented as a disgrace and poor role models that they are no longer honourable. Instead they are models of moral decadence which is a major concern of the contemporary world. Calling them honourable is a flattery of their titles. The author is also sarcastic of the use of such titles by our leaders when their behaviour does not reflect a dignified position.

In 'Karantina' too, the author satirizes improper pronunciation by those put in official positions in public places. The author highlights how such problems lead to a breakdown in communication. The existence of private compartments with special features is questioned. The middle door in the train is one such feature. It is used for weird purposes.

#### **5.4 A New Narrative Structure**

Important to note is that the short story 'The Professor' is divided into three sections. In section one the author deals with the arrival of Professor Miyare from England and the struggle between his colleagues in the medical field to have him attend the conference on organ transplant and his brother the politician to have him attend a party set for him in order to address his supporters. The politician and his supporters are disappointed when Professor Miyare gives priority to the conference and turns down their invitation to have a meal with him.

In the second section, the writer explores the need to recognize and appreciate African professionals in our society. So much recognition has been given to

foreigners while African scholars with even greater achievements are ignored. The Professors at the university discuss ways of appreciating Professor Miyare and choose one of the best houses on the campus to allocate to him. However, Professor Miyare turns down the offer.

The third section explores Professor Miyare's achievement in performing a heart transplant successfully and his endeavour in searching for cures for diseases in Africa. It also focuses on Professor Miyare's decision to put up a house in the village and finally his appointment as the Dean of the Medical faculty. His appointment is politically influenced.

In chapter two we noted that the writer began stories in a particular way typical of the oral narrative tradition. This was by the use of formulas. In this chapter, the writer's total freedom from the oral narrative tradition is demonstrated in the way she adopts new ways of beginning stories. The stories begin in action or through a dream. In 'The Honourable Minister' the story begins with exciting news about a friend who gets a new house and needs company to go shopping for furnishing for the house. The house introduces the subject of the story where June also wants a posh house like her friend Alice. However the story ends in disappointment where June's attempt to get a house through dubious means is discovered and the deal goes sour. The story begins on a joyous note but ends on a sad note. June loses personal dignity and also destroys her marriage.

In the short story 'The Professor', the Professor's return from abroad sounds promising. He comes back with high expectations in his profession. He arrives with hopes of uplifting the African continent by applying his knowledge in medicine in getting cures to strange diseases in Africa. However, his dream is not realized fully when the politicians interfere with his profession and he eventually gets appointed as the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine against his wish.

In 'The Middle Door', the story begins in action where the narrator is rushed to the railway station. The journey to the railway station is a nightmare as the taxi driver drives carelessly maneuvering all over narrowly missing vehicles in order to get his client to the station on time to board the train. Action continues even on the train where the night is another nightmare as police officers attempt to rape the narrator. The story ends in a bad experience where the narrator is almost arrested. This incident becomes a point of reference by the brother who teases her about holding police officers at gun point.

In 'The Hero', the story begins with a dream where the narrator struggles with death. She dreams about the earth covering her. The beginning acts as a premonition of what happens in the story. The experience becomes real though not to the narrator but to her secret idol, a doctor who had cured her mother of a strange disease Dr. Sserwadda. The beginning of the story determines the events of the story and the ending.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter demonstrates Ogot's total independence of the oral narrative tradition. She neither uses or appropriates features of the oral narrative tradition but works towards dealing with contemporary issues. This is seen in her choice of characters. The characters no longer conform to traditional characters. In the traditional setting names dictated ones identity and his behaviour or status in the community. In the modern world identity is based on ones level of education and their profession. Titles are important as seen in the use of terms like Professor, doctor and honourable.

Issues dealt with are no longer a Kenyan experience as experienced in the city of Nairobi but East African and even international. Serious modern issues are explored. Proper documentation while traveling to the other countries is portrayed as mandatory in order to access other countries. Modern diseases are also seen as complex. By use of Kampala in Uganda and Cairo the writer projects this concern. Thus the writer projects that contemporary concerns are also global issues.

The narrative style adopted is totally different from the traditional one. In the oral narratives a story began with the character being assigned a task that was to be fulfilled at the end of the story. Events revolved around the character performing the task successfully. This was done at the end of the story. However contemporary issues are portrayed as complex that the story does not necessarily end in a positive way. The emphasis is no longer on the character

but on the action and events. Characters are important in articulating contemporary concerns.

The efforts of the contemporary writer in articulating modern issues are great. New tales are told not of gods and heroes but of anxieties, pains and sufferings experienced in the modern world that need a thorough examination in order to have people live harmoniously in the contemporary world.

## **Chapter 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter encapsulates the summary of the analyses of the current study. We also present the findings and conclusions of the study in regard to Ogot's use of myth in her writing to address contemporary needs and anxieties. The chapter also makes recommendations for further study.

### **6.1 Summary of the study**

In chapter one the study examines critical works on myth as a creative resource and Grace Ogot as creative writer who employs oral traditions in her writing, in order to establish the background from which Ogot's works are examined. It also examines critics of Grace Ogot's writing in order to identify the gap this study sets to fill. The need and importance of the current study in contemporary literary studies is also projected. The study also identifies the Aesthetic approach by Okpewho (1983), as a suitable analytical tool in understanding Ogot's artistic choices. The components of the aesthetic approach namely, Tradition preserved, Tradition observed, Tradition refined, and Tradition revised are projected as forming the four main analytical chapters.

In chapter two Grace Ogot's writings namely *The Strange Bride*, *The promised Land*, "The Rain Came", "The Fisherman", "The Bamboo Hut", and "Tekayo" are explored in order to establish Ogot's endeavor in preserving the

Oral narrative tradition. Aspects of the Oral narrative tradition used are identified and examined to show how they are incorporated in Ogot's writing.

In chapter three, the study analyses selected works of Grace Ogot so as to identify the aspects of the oral narrative tradition present and how Ogot uses them to articulate contemporary concerns. It examines *The Promised Land*, "The Fisherman", "The Bamboo Hut", "The Other Woman", "Pay Day", "The Hero", "The Fishing Village", "The White Veil", "Night Sister", "The Honourable Minister", "The Middle Door", "The Professor", and "Elizabeth".

In chapter four, a selection of Ogot's works namely, "The Other Woman", "The Honourable minister", "Elizabeth", and *The Promised Land* are investigated to show how Ogot uses the Oral narrative tradition to address the overwhelming socio-political scene in the contemporary world.

In chapter five, the study selects and examines Ogot's writing to project Ogot's preoccupation with addressing modernity and how she totally lets go of the Oral narrative tradition and explores other means of articulating modernity. This is done by examining her works namely, "The Professor", "The Hero", "The Middle Door", "The Honourable Minister", and "Karantina".

## 6.2 Findings and Conclusions

An engagement with Grace Ogot's prose fiction has shown that oral traditions offer her as a contemporary writer a vital artistic resource. Ogot's extensive borrowing from her community's oral traditions particularly the oral narrative tradition, has greatly enriched her creative writing and given her a platform from which she has extensively interrogated modernity.

The Oral narrative tradition has been seen to comprise aspects such as formulaic expressions, use of songs, use of traditional imagery, use of traditional sayings and vivid description, among others. These have either been maintained or appropriated in Ogot's writing.

The use of aspects of the oral narrative tradition has also depended on the creative freedom Ogot has assumed while dealing with the material and the concerns she has wanted to articulate. We have seen Ogot express her concerns using the oral narrative tradition at varying degrees.

Ogot has demonstrated her attachment to the oral narrative tradition under the segment Tradition preserved, by selecting narratives from her community and presenting them in their "original" forms. In so doing, her creative freedom has been restricted due to the limitation of being unable to make any imaginative changes to the stories. Hence, aspects such as songs, sayings, names and images have reflected the Luo traditional setting and viewpoint, and maintained their "original" forms.

Ogot has also demonstrated some degree of creative freedom under Tradition observed. Here we saw how she begins to let go of the oral narrative tradition. Although aspects of the oral narrative tradition are found in her writing, they only maintain either their content or their form, depending on what she wants to articulate. In such cases, aspects like songs may be used in the story but the content projects contemporary issues. Characters are given names that suit their roles and character in reflecting contemporaneity. The imagery used bears a modern sensibility although in the traditional form.

Ogot achieves greater creative freedom under the third segment, Tradition refined. Although there is evidence of aspects of the oral narrative tradition, in most cases, these are formal. A good example is seen in the use of songs and choice of characters and setting. There is an inclination towards addressing modernity than traditional perspectives. The concerns of the modern world are overwhelming and Ogot no longer writes to please the reader but to provoke the reader towards a painful struggle of changing the society. The demands of the overwhelming socio-political climate are too great to be ignored.

Finally, we see Ogot achieving the greatest level of creative freedom where her creative impulse is at its freest. She no longer relies on the oral narrative tradition to articulate her concerns. In fact oral traditions are seen as unsuitable and incapable of addressing modern issues. She is more concerned about creating new myths. There is total concentration on addressing modernity hence a shift to modern themes, characters and settings.

The analysis progressively reflects how Ogot demonstrates her attachment to the oral narrative tradition to how she begins to let go of the oral narrative tradition to address modernity and finally, how she totally lets go of the oral traditions and begins to create new myths that address modernity.

The analysis also reveals that the various aspects of the oral narrative tradition are comprehensively used in Ogot's writing and have boosted her efforts in successfully addressing modern issues. The aspects have either been used in their original forms or been appropriated to suit modern needs. However, aspects like songs though written have maintained their performative aspects. An exploration of Ogot's writing has also revealed that she operates within the four segments of Okpewho's Aesthetic approach. Although the works studied were situated within certain segments, the study reveals that some of the works could be studied under more than one segment. Thus, demonstrating Ogot's integrative artistic approach.

Ogot's use of the oral narrative tradition is evident in both her short stories and novels. In her short story collections she combines stories that exhibit her working within Tradition preserved, Tradition observed, Tradition refined, and Tradition revised. None of her short story collections can be studied under one segment. A similar observation is made of her novels. Thus, the novels are examined in more than one segment. Despite the fact that the integrative approach can be perceived as a demonstration of her creative freedom in using

the oral narrative tradition, it also projects the complex nature of contemporary concerns.

The study further reveals that Ogot's attachment to the oral narrative tradition is greater than her working towards creating new myths. However, in an attempt to successfully deal with the overwhelming contemporary socio-political scene, she rewrites the oral narratives in a way that gives them a new meaning. She explores what Macharia (2004) refers to as 'constructing new meaning out of what is already familiar'(11). Hence Ogot explores what is familiar to deal with the new or unfamiliar. She chooses a mode that is familiar to her audience or readers.

Ogot's use of the oral narrative tradition is therefore perceived as a suitable and vital channel through which 'contemporariness' can be articulated

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Although Ogot explores the oral narrative tradition as a suitable creative resource to the contemporary writer, little attention is given to other areas like sayings and proverbs. These need to be examined further to show their vitality in addressing modern needs.

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