

Concretizing the Emerging Subverted Normative Portraiture in the Metaphor ‘Unbowed’

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Abstract

Autobiographical discourses written by women globally in their perceptions indicate that women are struggling to dismantle patriarchal structures, seeking to deter them from mainstreaming gender. The paper looks at a subverted portrait from the normative gender identity in Wangari Maathai's Unbowed, sampled purposively. Tenets of New Historicism and Gender theory are used in analysing data. Analytical research design with data collected through textual reading and analyzed by content, are used. Findings indicate that Wangari defines herself as 'Unbowed' to imply defiance and resilience. She seeks to be viewed differently from how the society has viewed women in the past. She narrates how she helps shape up and transforms Kenya's government into a democracy in which she later serves. Wangari's fearless strength in adversity, creative approach to building a peaceful, healthy planet; hard work inspiring and empowering women are accolades that culminate into her being crowned a Nobel Peace laureate.

KEY WORDS: Portrait, Subversion, Unbowed, Normative, Gender, Identity

1.0 Introduction

The use of the metaphor *unbowed* in Wangari Maathai's autobiography attempts an explanation of a unique character that has chosen to do her things differently from what the society expects. Wangari gives her book the title "Unbowed" to imply being free and not bound by any traditions or laws. The term could also imply astute/ assertive/ erect/ not bent and not therefore a receptacle of the male phallus (masked to imply the patriarchal order) but a contributor toward its erection (she is also contributing in decision making) alongside the male folk. Just like the male phallus can erect, so can Wangari's ideas withstand the test of time. According to New Historicism, such a character in literature is dismantling the patriarchal structures inherent in the society. In trying to unpack the title of this memoir further, we get a totally different female member of the society; portraying self in deviant mannerisms from the norm. It is how differently subverted from the norm Wangari succeeds in depicting self, through the autobiographical genre that the paper is about. Butler (1999) sees gender as a kind of improvised performance and that an autobiographical work of art is a powerful means of subverting normative gender identity. The argument that a borrowing from Foucault (1970) idea of culture recreating itself, as put across by literary artists as bearers of gender, reflect in female autobiographies in as far as the categories of the persons being described are concerned. Both Butler and Foucault's arguments indeed give way to a primitive ontological concept that enforces in language a division of beings into sexes as an ontological concept that deals with 'the nature of Being' along with a whole nebula of other primitive concepts belonging to the same line of thought, gender seems to belong primarily to philosophy. A line of reasoning develop to negate what has been in existence in the social order and which for the members of that society go without saying, for they exist prior to any thought, any social order, in gender identity that uncritically employs the inflectional attribution of 'beings' to genders and to 'sexualities.' The unproblematic claim to be a woman who is unbent or unbowed would be symptomatic of that metaphysics of gender substances. In the case of Wangari Maathai's autobiography: *Unbowed*, the claim tends to subordinate the notion of gender under identity and to lead to the conclusion that a person is engendered according to culture which may reproduce itself.

The idea that gender is naively rather than critically confused with sex, serves as a unifying principle of the embodied self that maintains unity over and against an 'opposite sex.' Wangari in her autobiography is elbowing away from this presumed order, hence the term 'unbowed.' Wangari *Unbowed's* recreated structure is apparently trying to maintain a parallel but oppositional internal coherence among sex, gender, and desire. The articulation 'I feel like a woman' by a female or 'I feel like a man' by a male presupposes that in neither case is the claim meaninglessly redundant, posits Foucault (1970). Hence, one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair. Bem (1980) sees gender as an oppressive stereotype used by the patriarchal society that should be eliminated in order to promote gender mainstreaming.

Foucault argues further that gender can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the Self and desire where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional position. The term 'Unbowed' as used by Wangari in her autobiography therefore goes against the accepted order that is institutionalized by the patriarchal order to

denote a totally different woman portraying self as deviating from the norm. She desires to be viewed differently.

2.0 Literature Review

Autobiography is a form of witnessing what matters to others, which makes it a popular genre. Writers of memoirs and life stories never lack an audience states (Anderson 2001: 126). Anderson says that in 'autobiography' people are interested in the actual lives of others and want to know about others' pasts and feelings and desires (Anderson: 5-7; Quigley 2000: 2-15). They both state that "the explanation for the special appeal of autobiography is a fascination with the self and its profound identity." The endless mysteries of autobiography are a way to organize the story of a life and reflect on the past in order to better understand the present. Crafting of identity in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* to concretize an emergent portrait intrigued this paper.

According to Berryman (1999) the features of autobiography are the grammatical perspective of the work, the identity of the self, self-reflection and introspection. Wangari's autobiography is written from the first person singular perspective. This is fitting because "autobiography is usually a story one tells about oneself" (Berryman: 71) It would not naturally follow then that the writer would recount her past from a second or third person perspective. Quigley (2000) confirms this point in her book *The Grammar of Autobiography* by saying that "As soon as we are asked about ourselves, to tell our autobiography, we start to tell stories. We tell what happened, what we said, what we did" (Quigley: 144). Similarly, Wangari is writing about herself. She is giving us the identity of the self through introspection. The inquiry of the study is to find out how *Unbowed* concretizes the emergent normative portrait.

Theoretical Framework

The study used a theoretical framework derived from tenets of the theory of New Historicism propounded by Greenblatt (1980) and the Gender theory as advanced by Bem (1981)

Miles and Huberman (1994) define a theoretical framework as a visual or written product, one that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied; the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them" (Huberman 1994: 18). Here, we use the term in a broader sense, to refer to the actual ideas and beliefs that the research holds about the autobiographical portrait of a subverted normative gender identity in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed*. New Historicists concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. These critics focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority, not a 'truth' but a 'cultural construct' reflected in a given work. The selected text; Wangari's *Unbowed* is testimony of such a reflection.

The New Histo- Gender Theoretical Framework allows the Researcher to view the literary data that has evolved historically, through the gender lens. The lens demonstrates that there have been social changes that allow women who were previously marginalized to take more active roles; although minimal acceptance of women in public service and politics could be demonstrated as still standing on the way of strong women. The defined gender portrait of a subverted normative gender identity provides an avenue for a recreated self, that

this paper is interrogating. The exploration of the metaphorical term ‘Unbowed’ informed the research in this paper.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted qualitative analytical research design. This design allows for extraction of information and analysis from the selected text. The study area was literary and Wangari Mathaai’s *unbowed* was purposively sampled to give the study a realistic perspective and portraiture of the being of a woman articulated in literature. The autobiographical narrative permits for the female portrait to be defined in reality and space, allowing for the emerging identity to be re-enacted through concretization of the metaphor Unbowed. Data was collected through textual reading and analyzed by content.

4.0 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Metaphor ‘Unbowed’ Concretizing Portraiture

In writing an autobiographical work of art, one is writing for the self to discover the meaning of one’s life by recording it down. Concretization of the emerging subverted normative gender portraiture denotes artistry in autobiography. The setting is described vividly with interesting details unveiled. Wangari’s autobiography uses objective and subjective details as well as anecdotes to tell her life story. Objective details as depicted by Wangari can be proved. Subjective details are based on her personal feelings and opinions and cannot be proved. Point of view is the perspective from which her autobiography is written. Since her autobiography is written by herself as subject, she tells us her story from the first-person point of view and uses the pronouns I, me, and mine. As readers we experience events through the writer's eye; knowing only what she thinks and feels about any given experience. Wangari’s autobiography is told from her perspective or own point of view; where the self is significant.

4.2 The Metaphor ‘Unbowed’ in *Unbowed*. The author, Wangari, who is the narrator, shares a common identity with the protagonist as is typical of an autobiography as Anderson (2001) maintains. This common “identity could be similar, but is not identical” (Anderson: 3). The ‘self’ that Wangari constructs becomes a character within the story that may not be a completely factual representation of her; ‘the author’s actual past self’ (Anderson: 4-5; Quigley: 106-7). The first-person point of view reflects only the writer’s thoughts, feelings, opinions, and biases. The author's purpose is the reason for writing. As author of her autobiography, Wangari often wants to make sense of the events in her life and communicate an important personal statement about life. She also wants to give credit to people who influenced her life. As a controversial individual, she often writes to explain or justify her actions.

4.3 The current study maintains that Wangari wrote her autobiography to **explain and justify** her actions, taking the readers along and telling them why she did certain things the way she did. In a chapter she entitles; “Independence- Kenya’s and my own,” (Wangari: 100), Wangari narrates about her return from the United States of America and how her family members receive her warmly. She juxtaposes her independence as an individual and that of the Nation Kenya, to imply that just as the country Kenya is born so is this new woman coming back home, acquiring transformed traits- ‘newness of sorts’. Wangari therefore discusses how she

seeks accommodation from the then high-class New Stanley Hotel in down town Nairobi where she stays for several days upon arrival. She adds:

This would have been unthinkable before independence because of the color bar then in effect that stratified society into three racial layers: white, brown and black. As black Africans, we would not have been allowed to eat or drink let alone sleep, at New Stanley ... (Wangari: 100).

Nevertheless, Wangari depicts a performance of self independence whereby separate existence that enhanced racism in Kenya is now gone and she can easily go to a previously white only zone. Wangari's self independence at the decision she arrives at to go and seek accommodation at the hotel depicts her as subverting the norm. It was unthinkable of a woman, and a single one at that, to pay for her own accommodation in the then Kenya. In all these, Wangari exhibits excitement in her return home and in the fact that she exudes a rare confidence, unlike majority of women at the time. To that extent we see an unbowed woman. According to the New Historicist Montrose (1996) the author in a literary text depicts the issue of subversion by representing a dominant order and giving self capacity to generate power which in our case, Wangari uses to her own end.

4.4 Wangari also **witnesses** to other forms of corruption that would deny Kenyans the joy of thriving in their country's independence. She says: "What I didn't know then was that tribalism and corruption were going to become some of the most divisive factors of our society, and they would frustrate the dreams of the Kenyan people after independence" (Wangari: 101). Anyone who has worked and lived in Kenya witnesses to what Wangari is telling the reader because indeed these two vices; corruption and tribalism have grossly interfered with virtually everything independence brought or would have brought. Wangari requires wearing the gait of a bold person who is astute and assertive to try and address the evils in her society. Hence reference to self as Unbowed.

4.5 Autobiography is a form of **introspection**. When Wangari writes about her past, it is not free from emotions. When she reveals her intentions, thoughts, and emotions; it is another opportunity for the reader to evaluate why events occurred as they did. By explaining what happened in the past, Wangari is able to express to the reader how the self evolved. For instance Wangari tells us that when she came back to Kenya, she already had a job lined up for her from the US, but to her utter dismay, it was given to someone else. She says:

In those early days of 1966, of course, I had no inkling of what would happen in the coming decades. I simply got ready to report to work that, January 10th Monday. With great enthusiasm I presented myself to the Professor of Zoology, my new boss. To my dismay without blinking an eye, he had the audacity to inform me that the job had been offered to someone else. I was shocked. "but you wrote me this letter," I protested, showing him the hand written letter of appointment on official University letterhead and signed by him. "I've come all the way from the United States" The Professor was immovable; I might as well have been speaking to a stone. In my desperation I went to the office of one of the Professor's superiors to plead my case, but he supported his colleague... it

was the first time upon my return that I encountered that kind of discrimination.

Was it because I was a woman? (Wangari: 101)

In introspection Wangari says that both ethnic and gender barriers were placed in the way of herself advancement. She would have wanted to be competitive but she realizes to her disappointment that there were many hurdles. While serving at the university, Wangari would continue to encounter sexism, ethnic and gender barriers. She therefore resolved to be resilient in order to survive; hence, the metaphor ‘unbowed.’

In another instance of introspection, Wangari depicts another heart rending episode where Mwangi her husband packs himself out of a house they shared and publicly divorces her, subjecting her to humiliation. In order to stay sober after the harrowing court proceedings of divorce, Wangari decides to be ‘unbowed’. The self-now; ‘unbowed’ is the person she is because of the events of the past. For instance, having tried to do her best to stay married and failing so miserably to secure her marriage, she decided that from then henceforth, she would be unbound. She never remarried either. According to Butler (1999) Gender as an identity can be improvised performance. When Wangari decides that from the time the court case is ruled against her, she would define things differently from how she had done previously; she is acquiring a new identity. In other words, Wangari acquires the gait of an unbowed woman.

Wangari in retrospect recalls how she fails to meet her obligation to the children one time when she had taken them swimming. Previously she cost-shared her financial obligations with the husband but now that he walked out of their marriage she was short of money. She says in retrospect:

‘...we were at the pool and the children wanted to eat sausage and chips from the pools snack bar. I didn’t have enough money to buy them each a plate of chips, so I ordered one plate and asked the children to share. But Waweru understandably wanted for each to get their own plate. He was the oldest and had been swimming hard and was hungry. “I don’t have any money,” I told him. I have never forgotten that day! I was without money and my children wanted chips but I couldn’t buy them. They didn’t understand how I couldn’t buy them. There was nothing I could do. (Wangari: 151-152)

By relating this incident, Wangari explores herself as a new person, as a single mother deserted by her husband and left with a heavy responsibility. When she was married they cost – shared in their family budget and she would not experience such shortage.

4.6 The story proceeds with the help of **pictures, dairies and documentaries**, as well as use of the First Person Narrator to authenticate the autobiographical work of art and seek a sense of human connectedness in its final cathartic closure. The pattern formed strikes a perfect unity here which goes beyond any conscious intention and which as Cocks hut (1984) would say, goes beyond witnessing to the truth of the interpretation of self. Wangari has attached an assortment of up to sixteen pages of photographs taken at different points in history, indicating the dates when and the localities where they were taken. To explore the use of the First Person Narrator further, we argue that the story’s point of view determines and influences the reader’s response. Influenced by an authorial stance and pictures to substantiate; Wangari gives her views about the society that had unbearable expectations on the union called marriage.

4.7 By use of the **First person narrator strategy**, Wangari is auto- diegetic, telling her story from the point of view of the present. Wangari uses comprehensive and continuous retrospection, based on memory- this makes her governing and structural semantic principle. Wangari's *Unbowed* oscillates between the struggle for truthfulness and creativity, between oblivion while focusing on a sense of historicity. The narrating 'I' and the narrated 'I' give *Unbowed* dual narrators hence the duality of the autobiographical narrator. As the 1st Person narrator, Wangari ultimately personifies the agent of focalization, the overall position from which the story is rendered. Greenblatt (1980), a chief proponent of New Historicism reckons that a writer in a self fashioning way uses the first person narration to gain authority. The position gives the writer authority to ascend to a hierarchal subject position of power and to be able to select, and synthesize facts from the passing history. While narrating her experiences, Wangari's self comes to prominence in the fragmentation of the text; her authority of self expression and female subjectivity comes to the fore. She occasionally steps back to adopt an earlier perspective. For instance when Mwangi insists that Wangari drop his name after the divorce; Wangari looks back, she auto self- positions herself and says:

To add insult to injury, after our divorce Mwangi did not want me to continue using his surname and let me know it through a letter from his lawyer. I remember thinking to myself, "I'm not an object the name of which can change with every new owner" And I had resisted adopting his name in the first place. (Wangari: 147).

Wangari argues that in order to cope with the terrible feeling of rejection, she but merely added another letter 'a' for the name to read 'Mathaai' from the original name Mathai. The extra syllable also signifies that a part of her would always be connected to Mwangi. So she adopts to use a name that would suit both purposes; that of mother to his children, a fact she could not easily erase, and that of acquisition of a new identity. At another level, it is an interesting symbol worth exploring further. It is ironic that Wangari had to be forced to drop the husband's name when she wanted to hang on to it. Ordinarily, we should have expected her to drop it without being pushed. This denotes some kind of defiance on her part, therefore qualifies self as an unbowed person. According to Montrose (1996), the New Historicism ideology seeks to change the worldview with regard to domination. Wangari shakes off the shackles of dominance by defining self in her own terms. According to one of the chief proponents of the Gender theory, Bem (1980), all social differences between men and women are the result of oppressive stereotypes and should be eliminated in order to promote gender mainstreaming. Wangari therefore uses the metaphor to this end.

4.8 Wangari's autobiography has used short, **humorous anecdotes** (stories) to enliven the story and illustrate a point humoring the reader in the process. Some humor is verbal; jokes or play on words, some physical (slapstick humor), and some require readers to use their imagination. There are some standard criterions for creating humor, one being the use of material that is outrageous. Another is to focus on the unexpected. Wangari takes advantage of the fact that her readers enjoy situations in which she makes fun of things that the readers themselves find annoying such as divorce. When Wangari realized that Mwangi moved out of the house they shared, she says that she picked a broom from the kitchen and literarily swept his presence out of her life. She says: "Then a strong force pulled me out of my chair to look for a broom "sweep!" an inner voice ordered me; sweep...as I swept I realized that that might be it...(Wangari:141)." She is cracking a joke out of a very serious situation; a joke out of an imminent divorce.

In an anecdote, Wangari treats her readers to an interesting and amusing episode at the school, at St. Cecilia, explaining how the school helped her grow into a conscientious person. St. Cecilia imparted the virtue of self discipline to her. Wangari explores self as a disciplined person having acquired this from the strict nuns who raised them up to be orderly and responsible. For instance, she relates how one of the girls wrote a letter to a friend, and because the letters had to be taken to the post, passing through the disciplinarian, Sister Christiana; she read it misconstruing the message. She got so angry because the girl wrote in the letter that they eat fire at St. Cecilia. This is because their English was still rudimentary and the girl used a Kikuyu saying: '*turaria mwaki.*' Sister Christiana misinterpreted the context of meaning and punished the girl for the perceived misdemeanor. The Sister had rendered this expression in English- in its literal form "we continue to eat fire" (Wangari: 58) where it had no obvious meaning. The girl had implied that they were having a great time.

Unfortunately, sister Christiana misunderstood it for disrespect for the school administration. Therefore that evening, when the girl went to the dining hall, all the girls had food on their plates except the girl who had written the letter who found pieces of charcoal on her plate. Sister Christiana read the letter to the whole school. "She was appalled and angry." The girl had lied and scandalized the school...that evening, the rest of the girls could not wait to get outside where they burst into gales of laughter" (58). The shallow interpretation of this is that it is a short and amusing story told to make readers learn to understand others and try to be patient; often proposed to support or demonstrate some point and make readers derive delight and excitement. The anecdote explains how Wangari acquired self discipline and caution during her early schooling. Nevertheless, failure by the nun to make full sense of an African metaphor means something beyond itself. It could symbolically imply that one's own life narrative is best understood by those with whom they share similar experiences. Or better still, that the European colonialists often failed to fully understand the rich African knowledge of culture leading to misinterpretation and misconception of the same.

4.9 The journey motif Wangari evokes in her autobiography leads to an interpretation that Wangari has regard for and recognizes the opportunity to stay and study in the US. She is in support of the view that the long journeys she makes in pursuit of education, initially to St.Cecilia and later to the US, contribute to defining her differently from what she would have become. Wangari says in anticipation: "during the next several weeks, not a day passed without my thinking of the major journey I would soon be making" (Wangari: 54). The journey motif is the author's strategy in concretizing the efforts she makes to realize her dream of seeking a difference. According to Frank (1987), journeys into the great world slay the dragons of a patriarchal society, as she "triumphantly discovers the grail of feminism by finding herself" (Frank: 24)

Wangari indeed does turn out as a feminist pilgrim through the journeys she makes in her educational pursuits. Frank further refers to these efforts as the quest motif. The journey the female character makes allows her to find her individuality and define herself differently from how other women have been socialized to do. Indeed, one of the characteristics of the journey motif is that the character in question emerges significantly transformed. Wangari is therefore attributing her success to the academic journeys she makes, both in Kenya and in the US. She is completely transformed and her world view is totally changed. She champions women rights and human rights out of this difference, indeed a depiction of unbowed features!

4.10 Autobiography and Fiction, Fiction is also an element of Wangari's autobiography, *Unbowed*. When telling her story, Wangari engages in a lot of imagination, persuading her readers to share in her thoughts. Much as she avoids conscious fictionalizing we realize it in her narrative at the onset when she is describing the landscape at Ithithe, her birth place. She narrates:

In anticipation of my birth, my mother fattens a lamp that slept and ate inside her house. When I was born, it was slaughtered and roasted. My father sacrificed the lamp and gave part of it to her. She would eat the meat, chew sugarcane and put some of the juice into the baby's (me) tiny mouth. This would have been my first meal. Even before breast milk, I would have swallowed the juice of green bananas, blue purple sugarcane, sweet potatoes, and a fattened lamp, all fruits of the local land. I am as much a child of my native soil as I am of my father, Muta Njugi. My parents named me for my father's mother, Wangari, an old Kikuyu name (Wangari: 4).

Wangari is imagining and writing along, filling gaps in her story where memory fails her in narrating the circumstances' of the period surrounding her birth. She is merging the autobiography and fiction elements, since fiction refers to imagination. Auto writing also involves reshaping and reorganizing, this genre therefore has a place for fiction. According to Brodie (2000; 14) "a man's memory is bound to be a distortion of his past in accordance with his present interests...What he writes may mirror less what he was than who he has become." So indeed, Wangari's autobiography uses fiction to a considerable extent to help portray her as unbowed.

A work of art is a human mirror skit that is a good illustration of a perspective subjective matter, and no autobiographer can represent exactly "what happened back then," any more than a historian can definitively describe the real truth of the past" states (Porter and Wolf 1973:5). This is due in part to the fact that words are not adequate to fully express memories and emotions. Of great interest in fictionalizing is the fact that focusing on facts can kill a good story as it may cause public embarrassment but cutting off a little does not harm a fascinating story. Nevertheless, the autobiographer has the poetic license to only keep what excites and be silent about what would harm. Wangari keeps silent about her children in her *Unbowed*; their identities and her identity are different. She has undergone a transformation and has become a new person. Since unlike her, her children had not chosen to go public about their lives she decides to keep quiet about them. Reliving and reconstructing experience amount to playing around memory. With memory being both a constitutive faculty and a creative reliability, Wangari only cleverly mentions their birth and the names they were given at birth. She also says that she would want to equip her children with the kind of education she received in the United States of America. She does not give any further details about them.

4.11 Truth in Autobiography. Truth is a major element of the autobiography as a genre. In Wangari's autobiography, we see an element of truth when she discusses 'Freedom Turns Corner' (Wangari: 206) in one of the chapters of her autobiography. In this chapter, Wangari discusses the forces that gathered to fight President Moi's dictatorship; marking a turning point in the struggle for a truly representative democracy in Kenya. Indeed, to date there is a corner at Uhuru Park named 'Freedom Corner' where disgruntled political

elements have continued to air their grievances. Wangari planted trees at this corner, which continuously inspired her in her struggles for just governance and has continued to inspire millions more.

4.12 Trauma and Autobiography. Trauma afflicts Wangari's mind as narrator during her autobiographical rendering. An experience of trauma is alive when Wangari relates incidences of her husband, Mwangi packing himself out of a house they shared and two years later, relates of her being publicly divorced in a court of law. Roy Pascal (1960) views autobiography as a strategy creating the illusion of unity and coherence in a text. Pascal does an intensive study of the art of autobiography to establish the element of truth in it. Pascal discovers that the truth of an autobiographical work of art appears in the inter- subjective exchange between narrator and reader, aimed at producing a shared understanding between them and the meaning of life. An experience of trauma is alive when Wangari relates incidences of her legally wedded husband dealing her a ruthless blow in the name of divorce. Wangari reminisces' her trauma:

When marriages fail, maturity and thoughtfulness take a backseat and emotions drive you forward. Even though I held out hope we could make it work...Marriages have challenges and I thought we would find our balance... Then one day in 1977, I came back ... Mwangi had taken all the material possession he brought to the marriage, including his clothes and special gifts from his friends... "What happened?" I asked the woman who cared for the children and assisted with the housework." Papa Mathai packed his things in his car and left," She replied... I was stunned. This was real: Mwangi had made a decision to leave me. I sat down to listen to myself and reflect on the hurricane of emotions now quickly building inside me. In an instant I ran through our life together. Our courtship and wedding, the joys when the children arrived, the laughter, the quarrels and tears and now...this! I replayed the past like a film, my eyes fixed on nothing in particular...How could I have done so much for somebody, only to find it had not been enough to keep him with me? How was I going to cope with three children all by myself? These thoughts ran over and over through my mind... The children did not realize a tornado had just passed through our home. They went through their routine as usual that night and then I tucked them into bed...I felt insecure and lonely. I went to my bedroom, turned off the last light, lay down my weary body on what was a big, cold, and lonely bed and cried myself to sleep... The following day I felt as if a close relative had died. (Wangari: 142)

Mwangi's leaving traumatizes the narrator and she clearly reminisces making the reader share in the trauma. She is able to give voice to that which she could not at the time of the traumatic incident. As readers, we identify with Wangari's situation and as she releases pent up emotions in a cathartic effect, so do we. Wangari's autobiographical work of art is therefore therapeutic granting the reader the chance to look back and draw a comparison to a more or less similar situation in not so distant a past or a present. Wangari's '*Unbowed*' as a literary work of art is therefore highly therapeutic to victims of trauma and those of public scandal. By Mwangi making the divorce public, he had subjected Wangari to public scandal. Trauma afflicts

the mind of the narrator during her autobiographical rendering but is also highly restorative. So to Wangari this autobiographical work of art is a tool for self care. A good way of steaming off buried emotions just as much as it is to her reader/audience.

4.13 Autobiography and fascination. Wangari gives an account of her period of study in the United States with a colouring of rich metaphorical frames of reference so as to underscore its significance to her in her life. Writing about her first encounter with a Catholic nun, she describes the nun's habit as having been impressively "...as white as snow and a long black rosary around her neck" (Wangari: 55) a quality of sincerity, elegance and self-discipline that she quickly emulates. The trait of elegance that Wangari tries to model later in life fails to augur well with the top leadership in the country then. This is because the leaders were crafty and could not stand the forthrightness in the individuality of Wangari, a characteristic quality she emulated from the Nuns. The literary implication here is that the women folk are depicted as being more forthright than the male counterparts when serving in positions of responsibility. Our study at this point wishes to argue that Wangari is representing views of a liberated woman who was a self appointed Human rights activist, having travelled the globe and transformed her world view. We are therefore not surprised when she equates New York City to "... landing on the moon" (Wangari: 75) and describes the escalator as Irimu-powerful and noisy, slithering between floors, coming from nowhere and returning to nowhere ..." (Wangari: 76). It is necessary at this juncture to explain what "Irimu" means. It means "monster" therefore capturing her bewilderment at the encounter with modernity. Amongst the Agikuyu of Central Kenya; Irimu is equivalent to an ogre.

These expressions clearly capture the narrator's fascination with the United States of America when she arrives there for the first time. In a close rejoinder, she refers to the historical parsonage, J. F. Kennedy, with a lot of admiration... "President Kennedy will always remain the young, energetic, and charismatic leader who was not allowed to realize his dreams for America and the world" (Wangari: 91)' These are characters Wangari come across in her educational pursuits, and who leave indelible marks in her as a person. In fact her going to the United States is pegged on this historical parsonage, because she describes herself as one of the pioneer beneficiaries of the J. F Kennedy Airlift.

4.14 Experience is also an element of Wangari's autobiography. The author is recreating her experience of having been to the US and the resultant transformation. The writer is one of the trail blazers of the J. F. Kennedy Airlift Scholarship Program, an academic venture she is proud of. This opportunity to study in the US changes her life totally and determines her career path. This experience reclaims urgency in her self portrait for the female subject. She is inspired by the American leadership style and says as much. The interaction with this icon definitely had a trickledown effect on her, so as to seek to emulate him, or the American leadership style in her future roles as a leader in Kenya. This is because just as she is adapting to life in the US, her own country, Kenya is undergoing change, what we view in her autobiography as a rebirth of character. She leaves for America in 1960, three years before Kenya attains independence, and returns home in 1966, three years after independence. Her arrival in America puts on what she refers to as "a light bulb went on in my head" (Wangari: 77) and she discovers herself as an African when she faces racism for the first time in her life. The image of a light bulb concretizes her discovery of a totally new world and experiences that change her perspective to life totally as a woman.

The story in Wangari's *Unbowed* is beautiful and inspiring, and the writer's comments like "I knew the sky was the limit" (Wangari: 100) and "I knew I could do anything I put my mind on" (Wangari;100) bring out the book's purpose as highly inspirational, that her audience is looking for her to show how she achieved what she did. We argue that it's important for her to establish that she is nobody special, that what she has achieved is the result of curiosity and perseverance, which anybody could do. We admire her prowess and are greatly inspired by her artistry, as her readers. The crafting of the memoir which tends more toward a live story telling session hold the reader spell bound with a magnetic field of significance, with the linear plot arranged in such a manner that we keep asking for more from the writer.

4.15 Wangari uses the **geographical map or the locality of places** to enact her autobiography confirming her great interest in the environment. She writes of flying over the Sahara Desert for the first time as she was going from Kenya to Kansas for college in 1960, of landing in Luxembourg, which sounded so romantic to her, a US she had only read about in books during school. Things change for her when "geography...come alive," (Wangari: 75) when she stands at the top of Mt. Gatumbiro in Kenya and sees a new view of the fields of crops that feed many Kenyans (Wangari: 31), when she marvels that "Valleys were new to me" (Wangari:32). The image of her standing at the source of the Kanungu River, wondering at those people who had never stood at the source of a river, is particularly evocative and explorative. Wangari juxtaposes the sceneries in Kenya to those in the US as she writes of long walks along the Missouri River, "known to me from maps but now very real" (Wangari:82). Wangari describes the sensation of the solid sand under her feet dissolving. Such a moment describes an experience in Mexico with butterflies, a "visceral experience and imagery to tighten the connections" (Wangari: 81). Only with the global view of a map can anyone really comprehend the significance of what is below our feet at any given moment and how it connects to other parts of the system. Wangari confirms self as a lover of nature and therefore the immense nurturing efforts at its preservation confirmed by the presence of the Green Belt Movement that she single handed, forms. In a nutshell, the geographical map of the globe leads Wangari to appreciate her country Kenya with its rich diversity of natural resources and good climatic conditions. She contrasts it to the cold climatic conditions of the United States and realizes that Africa, and Kenya specifically, indeed has warm weather conditions, natural resources and environmental conditions that she explores to great literary merit.

4.16 Distance is explored further as indeed a rich element of Wangari's autobiography. Without the elevation that an educational perspective provides in Wangari's '*Unbowed*,' as reader you don't know the distance of what you are looking at. Wangari is educated and has the experience and is equally confident enough to talk about herself. Wangari would most likely never have achieved what she did without moving away from Kenya and viewing it from a distance. That distance provided her with both a wider view and a narrower view of Kenya and what was happening to it. It is this experience that triggers Wangari's autobiography. Evidence is a primary trigger which the reader uses to corroborate and qualify the tale being told. Wangari uses several evidences of her experience to tell her story. Not only does Wangari use distance and the evidence of years but changes and gradual transformations are also put into good use in this autobiography.

4.17 Wangari's self narrative in the autobiography is **transcendental and chronologically** arranged. Wangari gives us a chronological story bearing the time span covered and adept with years, seasons and sometimes time. She gives us stories surrounding her early childhood, mid adolescence at St. Cecelia, entry into early adulthood when she travels to the US. She also narrates events surrounding her early career development, her marriage and consequent divorce. Smith and Watson (2001) suggest the idea of the 'ideological self' signifying the concept of personhood. Wangari is fulfilled and is proudly telling her story as a narrator who is happy with the way she has lived her life. At the same time, Wangari stages the self in relation to others on the level of influence and recognition. She recognizes periodically certain individuals as impacting on her life like J.F Kennedy the President of America who was not allowed to live his dream, to meeting the Norwegian Ambassador to issue her with the Nobel Peace Prize.

4.18 Wangari uses the **biospheric perception** to ring through her familiarity to the audience. She believes that after one learns to pay attention, the only choices are to become politically active. Of course, this works well for Wangari, who goes the political route. In 'Freedom turns a corner' (Wangari: 206) she demonstrates how she goes political saying "I realized that I was now a political figure and that I had to take care, even as I knew that I couldn't stay silent." In a chapter she entitles 'opening the gates of politics' (Wangari: 254), she narrates: "In the run up to the 1992 elections, I had been asked by friends at home and abroad to run for Presidency... I thought seriously about a career in politics... they told me; practice through mainstream politics what you have been preaching." The supporters convinced her that she had a gait for politics and would say: "If she can do so much and she is not in politics, guess what she could do if she was" (Wangari: 255). Wangari convinces us as readers that indeed she needed to join active politics to help save the country from the plunder of dictators. There are, of course, benefits to favoring the narrow, local view on a map. Wangari might not have completely explored the implications of such tree planting as she was only concerned with the local problems caused by the lack of firewood, the disappearance of clean water, the erosion of the soil needed to grow crops but by the end of the book, she's aware of the role that trees in this particular part of the world plays as one of the world's lungs. Wangari becomes a Member of Parliament of her south Tetu constituency and is appointed Minister for Environment and Natural Resources in the Mwai Kibaki era. She emanates as one of the first women to join active politics in Kenya. In this way, it seems very artificial to separate the global and local perspectives, as paying particular attention to the local in this instance gives insight to the overall sense of the global realized in the formation of 'The Green Belt Movement' which she single handed forms; and for which she is famed. All of these thoughts seemed to come together in one place, at one given point in time. Wangari uses timescapes as well as landscapes; to see things and places for herself and her readers, and to test her own ideas of what it means to be 'biospherically perceptive' against those who have unfolded their maps in this place before. Her use of history alongside the biospheric is also alive to her audience.

4.19 Unbowed and History Wangari uses her autobiography in historical perspective. She gives the year of her birth as 1940, a historical datability to authenticate her work of art. She narrates:

When I was born in 1940, as a child, my surroundings were alive, dynamic and inspiring. Even though I was entering a world where there were books to read and facts to learn, the cultivation of the mind, I was still able to enjoy a world where there were no books to read, where children were told living stories about the world around them, and where you cultivated the soil and the imagination in equal measure (Wangari: 6)

Whereas *Unbowed's* origins ultimately date back to antiquity together with the author, she refers to her place of birth as the small village of Ithi in the Central Highlands of the then British Kenya; a prominent ancient landmark. The history of Wangari's autobiography as a factual literary genre and critical term is much shorter to imply a true account of historical data as authenticating her work of art. For instance, Colonialism in Kenya is a historical fact and a recurrent thematic concern with the East African literary artists. Colonialism as a historical fact, punctuates her work. For instance, Wangari goes on to narrate that for the Agikuyu people, Mount Kenya known as Kirinyaga, or the birth place of brightness was a sacred place. She narrates that everything good came from it: 'abundant rain, rivers, streams, clean drinking water.

Whether they were praying or burying their dead, or performing sacrifices, Gikuyu faced Mount Kenya, and when they built, they made sure the doors faced it...' (Wangari:5). Wangari is authenticating her autobiography and substantiating certain claims in her work of art by quoting from historical data and from the myth of a community. The story goes that the explorers Johan Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebmann upon encountering the mountain asked their Guide, a member of the Kamba community 'what do you call that?' 'it is called iinyaa,' pronounced 'Kenya' by the British. The neologism' later became the name of the mountain and much later the country kiinyaa' became the name of our country 'Kenya'. This reflects the writer's preoccupation with the History of the colonial time.

When the European came to Kenya, they distorted a people's History. In her narration Wangari narrates that:

'...They taught the local people that God did not dwell on Mount Kenya but rather in heaven, a place above the clouds. The proper place to worship him was in church on Sundays, a concept that was unknown to Kikuyus (Wangari: 22).

According to Wangari, as the Agikuyu people were changing their ways to accommodate the western culture, so were the women creating more space for selves. Hence, through the gender theory, this study construes the emergence of autobiography as a literary genre and critical term that coincides with what has frequently been called the emergence of the modern subject around the being of a woman. According to Bem (1980) the author subverts self differently so as to acquire new roles. There is an emerging totally different person from the female character perceived by the patriarchal society and as previously depicted by the male author in literature.

Wangari expresses how she sets out to subvert the societal normative gender identities by quoting from a revered source: the Bible. In the blurb of her book she quotes from the book of Ezekiel: 'The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crop; the people will be secure in the land. They will know

that am the LORD, when I break the bar of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslave them' (Ezekiel 34:27, NIV). According to Gusdorf (1980), the Christian context is important in autobiography because it enables the soul to find itself through communion with God. Wangari evokes God's presence in her autobiography through the biblical allusion. By comparing herself to prophet Ezekiel in the Bible, Wangari is celebrating her multiplicity of roles enacted in her entire life as brought out in *Unbowed*. Like Ezekiel, she has tried to grow trees fighting deforestation; she has had to assist political prisoners put behind bars wrongfully; she has helped increase the democratic space for Kenyans and helped in championing women benefits and freedom from manmade fetters hence unbound them from the yoke of discrimination. Above all, she has helped in rebuilding Kenya from the ravages of corrupt governance.

5.0 Conclusion

Wangari signifies an exposition narrative that undertakes to tell her own life, or a substantial part of it, seeking to reconstruct her personal development within a given historical, social and cultural framework, concretizing facts about how she becomes who she is at the time of writing.

A pseudo-static present point of narration as the ultimate end of autobiographical writing is strategically implied in Wangari's rendering of her story, exposing the trajectory of the narrative circular, as it were: the present is both the end and the condition of its narration. We start by reading the autobiographer's acknowledgement of those who supported her, her dedication; then revert back to the first chapter that deals with her birth and early childhood on to the narrator as an adult. However, this apparent circularity bid is frequently destabilized by the dynamics of the narrative present, as the child narrator, Wangari continues to grow and live while composing her narrative, thus leaving the perspective open to change.

Wangari moves back and forth in her narrative as she connects the significant events in her life. She is concretizing the subverted normative gender identity; in telling the story of how she undergoes all the transformations to become who she is at the time of writing. Wangari uses explication to illuminate women subjugation, the remedy of which is empowerment through education. She is rendering a story of personality formation, the character of an ordinary woman slowly transforming to become one of the most formidable women Africa and the entire globe has ever had. The metaphor 'Unbowed' implies strength in character, Wangari has had to wade through enormous storms narrated through a sense of historicity, frequently implying, in the instance of writing, a close link between her life and the literary work. '*Unbowed*' thus constructs an individual life course as a coherent, meaningful whole.

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