

**SELF - IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIAN WOMEN'S
AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A LITERARY STUDY OF EMECHETA'S *HEAD
ABOVE WATER* AND OGUNDIPE'S *UP COUNTRY GIRL*.**

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is written by me and it is a record of my research work. It has not been submitted to any institution for the same purpose. All quotations and sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

.....

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MARCH, 2016.

CERTIFICATION

This thesis, entitled “Self identity and representation in Nigerian female autobiography: A study of Emecheta’s *Head Above Water* and Ogundipe’s *Up Country Girl*” by Suwaiba Mohammed, meets the requirements governing the award of Master of Arts in English (Literature) of Bayero University, Kano and is approved for its contributions to knowledge and literary study.

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Signature & Date

DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to the memories of my late father, Mallam Muhammad Adamu Gwani. May Allah almighty grant him Aljannatul Firdausi, Amin.

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ABSTRACT

Through an assessment of Buchi Emecheta's Head Above Water and Ogundipe's Up Country Girl, this study seeks to show that women autobiography in particular is concerned with self identification and construction. The study also uses Postmodern feminist approach because it uncovers multiple realities, perspectives and roles so that all voices may be heard. Using the two texts, the study discusses the view that women autobiographies are relational, deal with both private and public experiences as well as the two writers progress in their careers. Through writing autobiographies, the two writers project the sources from which their dreams are realisable in real life. The two writers use autobiography to describe the various experiences of women and prove that women cannot be considered as 'single monolithic subjects' because of their diverse experiences. The study discovers how women autobiographies fit into the literary canon because of their experiences, achievements and contributions just like the autobiographies of the 'great men'. The struggle to express and depict the processes of identity construction is evident in both Emecheta's Head Above Water and Ogundipe's Up Country Girl in specific circumstances and different socio- economic conditions and backgrounds.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS OF STUDY

There are divergent approaches to the study of women autobiographies. Some critics regard it as a field of cultural, historical, social or psychological study. However, they did not look at the ambiguity especially using Postmodern Feminist approach. Postmodern feminism dissolves the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed. The study questions the assumption that women autobiographies are the same, deal with autobiographical selves rather than self and dwell on their personal issues with little about their careers. As such, the study focuses on the self identity and representation of women in Nigerian women autobiography specifically.

Self -identity refers to how a person perceives himself and what he chooses to identify with. In other words, it is an understanding a person has of himself. The self is the most important aspect in autobiography which is represented in written form. The frequently asked question “what is a self ?” is always the concern in the study of autobiography. Autobiography depicts the life of a subject which struggles to define itself. The self has a unique quality which brings out its identity. That is why a person identifies the qualities or traits in him which are unique and significant to his life. Burke (2009:2-4) describe identity as a set of meanings that define who one is when he is an occupant of a particular role in a society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person. Burke further identifies three basis of identities such as “the role identities, what it means to be in a role, social identities, what it means to be unique group or category and person identities, biologically who one is.

Slaggle (1998:578) shares the same view with Burke as he describes identity as definitions that are created and superimposed on the self. He argues that identity is “the composite definition of the self, and includes an interpersonal aspect like our roles and relationships, an aspect of possibility or potential and a value aspect that suggests importance and provides a stable basis for choices and decisions. The roles a person occupies and the way others sees a person determine who the person is. Each role has different meanings and expectation attach to it. There is a kind of internal dialogue that a person engages in when he think of himself. Slaggle (1998:581) describes it as “the experiencing self and the thought of self” which is labelled “I” and “me”. The “I” being the creative agent, does the experiencing, thinking and acting while the “me” is the perspective towards one’s self. It is also possible for a person to possess ‘multiple identities because he or she occupies multiple roles, is a member of multiple groups and claim multiple personal characteristics’. Smith and Watson (2001:32-33) argue that ‘identities materialise within collectivities and out of the culturally marked differences that permeate symbolic interactions within and between collectivities. This indicates that identity is also marked based on differences within social groups. Erikson in (Guardia, 2009: 91) describes the development of identity as the central struggle of a person with successful achievement resulting in a coherent sense of one’s role and occupational pathway, oneself in relation to others, an one’s values and purpose in life. This indicates why the struggle to identify the self is always the concern in writing.

Self identification becomes the major preoccupation in every self narrative, especially when the writers try to construct an image in which they could or identify themselves in the writing. Life writing specifically covers all forms of writing that narrate the story of the life of the subject, such as autobiographies, diaries, essays, letters and memoirs. Kadar (1992:29)

defines life writing as a genre of documents written out of life or unabashedly out of personal experience of the writer, comprising fictional and non fictional texts that are linked by the thematic concern of life or the self. One of the forms of life writing that deals with the experiences of the author from the past is autobiography. Autobiography, as Olney (1980:10) describes it, is:

The way experience is transformed into literature... as a study of the creative process, a humanistic study of the ways of men and the forms taken by human consciousness.

Therefore “autobiographies are not essentially fabulous, they are experiential, [they] share experiences as their way of reversing reality” (Mandel, 1980:55). Lejuene (1975:4) describes autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his own existence”. The self is considered the most important in autobiography because it deals with the experiences of the individual. Individuals who write their autobiographies feel it is necessary to create awareness and celebrate their lives. This is because, as Gusdorf (1980:29) explains, the man who takes delight in drawing his own image believes himself worthy of special interest. The awareness of the individual for his own personal values as a unique and unrepeatabe being in relation to other individuals is the metaphysical situation that allows him to perceive his own individuality and the intimitability of his own life (Tsigas, 2011:21). That is why the individual creates awareness through the acts of identification so as to represent himself.

The individual performs a work of self construction and identification through narrating his experiences and stories. This is because there is an inter- play of what we are and what we say we are. Therefore, the task of autobiographical narrators is to identify themselves to the reader, to make themselves known through the acts of identification. Scott (1966) argues that

identities are 'multiple', 'contextual' and 'contingent'. This means a person comes to consciousness through multiple identities and multiple voices.

In other words, a person cycles through a number of identities. As such, autobiographical narrators come to consciousness of who they are, or what identities they might adopt through the discourses that surrounds them. That is why autobiographers incorporate and reproduce models of identity in their narratives as ways to represent themselves to their readers. Writers of autobiography ask the question 'Who am I?' and they answer the question through describing and identifying themselves. They tell themselves and their readers through producing responses, which help the readers to identify the 'I' who is writing the life. Therefore, self identification becomes the major concern in autobiography and it is equally of great concern to this thesis. The study seeks to examine the processes of identity construction in Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and Ogundipe's *Up Country Girl* and also use postmodernist feminist theory to uncover the female identity each autobiography produces. This follows the fluidity of postmodern feminism's ideology which allows the examination of multiple roles, identities and diverse experiences because the theory argues that there is no one way of identification and therefore, rejects universality.

The issue of self representation in women's autobiography is another area of concern in this study. Women too write their autobiographies in order to discuss women life issues. The concern earlier was on autobiographies written by the 'great men' who were seen as role models. These "great men" include St Augustine, Montaigne and Franklin and their works set the foundation of men's autobiographies. Gilmore (1994:2) indicates that what men write is considered autobiography and women writings belong to some homelier or minor traditions. This

form of gender categorisation, as Gilmore (1994:2) further explains it, affects the production and reception of women's self-representational texts. Marcus (1994:1) also states:

Autobiography was a central case for feminist criticisms in the late 1980's exposing processes of exclusions and marginalization in the construction of literary canons. Not only were women autobiographies self-evidently outside the great men tradition with which many autobiographical critics operated; generic definitions served to exclude forms of life writing such as diaries, letters and journals often adopted by women and those outside mainstream literary culture.

This equally indicates why Cavendish in Mason (1980:207) in her *True Relation* asks the question "Why hath this lady writ her own life?". Similarly, Julian Dame also had asked, "but because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God when I saw at the same time that it is his will that it be known?" This points out how women write their autobiographies in order to celebrate their lives and also gain recognition. They write their autobiographies in order to identify themselves as successful models by challenging the notion of being weak and lacking in identity. Among the prominent autobiographies that set the foundation of women autobiographies include *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1420), Margaret Cavendish's *True Relations* (1666), Bradstreet's *Spiritual Account* (1650) and Julian's *Revelations* (1395) (Smith and Watson, 1998:8).

In Nigeria specifically, women have also written life narratives like Ighadaro's *A Life of Service* (1994), Ejueyitchie's *Reminiscence of a Teacher* (1996), Emecheta's *Head Above Water* (1996), Ogundipe's *Up Country Girl* (2005) and Eugenia Abu's *In the Blink of an Eye* (2007). Since the self is the centre of discourse in autobiography, the women put themselves at the centre of their narration thus fulfilling the conditions of the autobiographical acts. They use

autobiographies as a mirror through which they reflect their own image, examine themselves and give reason or justification for their actions based on their assessment. This is because, as Gusdorf (1980:36) explains, “no one can better do justice to himself than the interested party”. Also Christine de Pisan in Benstock (2002:153) puts it, “in that I am a woman I can better bear witness on this aspect than he who has no experience of it”.

That is why women autobiographers too take up the challenge of narrating their experiences and stories in order to offer personal justification. Mason (1980:17) describes women’s autobiography as a writing that involves justification of the other through which women come to write themselves, whether that other is God or husband. Mason further argues that female identity is grounded in relationships and produces textual representations that are in contrast with the masculine self representation. This is because as Friedman (1986:79) states “a woman’s autobiographical self does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community”. That is why early theorists of women’s autobiography often define the differences between men’s and women’s self narration through the framework of relationality and individuality. Gilmore (1994:xii) explains:

Men are autonomous individuals with flexible ego boundaries who write autobiographies that turn on moments of conflict and place the self at the center of the drama. Women by contrast, have flexible ego boundaries; a view of the world characterized by relationship (with primarily given to the mother daughter bond) and therefore represent the self in relation to others.

Autobiography’s ability to incorporate various issues into its definitions, as opposed to the earlier assumptions, makes it easier and soothing for women to identify and represent themselves. This

is because women's writings were earlier regarded as "salty" and "unreliable"; therefore, did not fit in the literary canon. The growing interest in women's autobiography now, as Smith and Watson (1998:4) argue, is as a result of the interplay of political, economic and aesthetic factors. Women use autobiography to represent themselves, "selectively engage their lived experiences and situate their social identities through personal storytelling" (Smith and Watson, 2010:18). In Africa, particularly Nigeria, women have written their autobiographies so as to depict their experiences emphasizing on their lives and personal achievements.

1.2 BRIEF ON THE AUTHORS AND THEIR TEXTS

1.2.1 BUCHI EMECHETA

Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta's autobiography chronicles her life experiences. She was born on July 21, 1944 in Lagos. *In Head Above Water*, Emecheta recalls the many angles of the story of her birth told by members of her family- particularly the version told by her aunt referred to as 'Big Mother'. Emecheta began her elementary school in Lagos in 1951 and secondary school in 1954. Her father died during her early school years and that had a devastating impact on the family. She states in her autobiography "unfortunately my father died... I was young... I love my father so much that I still think I am going through life looking for him" (p.25). Though the death of her father meant poverty for the family, Emecheta won scholarships and was able to attend secondary school. She attended an all girls missionary school and later got scholarship into the Methodist Girl's school. She was lucky because "if she had stayed at home, she would have been forced to marry at the age of twelve. At the age of sixteen, she got married to Sylvester Onwordi who moved to London to attend the University and Emecheta later joined him in 1962. She gave birth to five children in six years. Her marriage was an unhappy one as she

portrays in her novels and autobiography. Emecheta writes: ‘I set my heart on making a successful marriage because they had taught us at Methodist Girl’s High school that prayers and devotion could have move mountains. It did not work for me that way’ (p.23). Her husband burnt her manuscripts as he was suspicious of her writing. At the age of 22, Emecheta left her husband. She “packed her dripping four siblings and pregnant self and faced the streets of London (p.90).

Her career began when she started writing out her black experiences in *The New Statesman* and a collection of these pieces became her book in 1972. Though both *Second Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch* draw from her experiences, they were later published as Adah’s story. She has written many books and articles, like *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *The Moonlight Bride* (1996) *Naira Power* (1982), *Double York* (1983), *Kehinde* (1994), *New Tube* (2000). She has published many articles and plays. Emecheta admits to influences from English writers, like Dickens and Shakespeare. Emecheta recalls in her autobiography how she was humiliated for being late for school because she was dreaming of the poetry of Shakespeare and Keats. When she told her teacher that she wanted to become a writer, she was told “pride goes before a fall” and was asked to leave the class (p.21). She also got influences from her old mother at Ibuza (p.22). She has travelled widely and received various awards including an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Farleign Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey and an Order of the British Empire.

1.2.2 HEAD ABOVE WATER

Emecheta describes her personal experiences, ranging from her early childhood experience to her literary career in her autobiography. She describes the relationship with her family especially

with her mother which had a considerable impact in her life. Emecheta was opportuned to get scholarship into the Methodist High School and later got another opportunity to study abroad. She narrates in her autobiography that her scholarship was supposed to bring hope to her family, but things turned out to be different as she ended struggling with her ‘head above water’.

Emecheta discusses various issues in her autobiography, which include her family, marriage, children and her literary career. Her achievement is as a result of her hard work, which is among the fundamental things that a woman should do in order to earn self dignity. Emecheta’s autobiography from the beginning captures her difficult situation until towards the end where she narrates her success. It is spread in thirty three chapters and she is satisfied that it truly reflects her:

I did look back a great deal in my early novels, dwelling mainly on the first twenty years of my life, but *Head Above Water* is me in the almost now: the last twenty years during which I made England’s North my home (p.2)

Her achievement clearly symbolises the effort of hard work and determination. *Head Above Water* projects the issues of women who are caught up in the same situation with her and serves as a mirror for them to see, think and reflect.

1.2.3 PHEABIAN AJIBOLA OGUNDIPE

On her own part, Phaebian Ajibola Ogundipe’s autobiography, *Up Country Girl*, also portrays her experience, both in Nigeria and the diaspora. Born on 6th May, 1927 in Esa Oke to Yoruba parents, she attended the Elementary School in Esa Oke, Wesley College, Ibadan and the Queen’s College in Lagos. Ogundipe narrates how she discovered her own date of birth written “in a scrap exercise book put away in the loose ceiling of the parlor, the simple information “ *A*

bi omo ni 6th May 1927” meaning, we had a child on 6th May 1927. I was delighted – this could be me (p.33). Even though her father died in 1945, Ogundipe was able to overcome certain challenges when she won approved government scholarship to study abroad. This was because her father had encouraged them as children by sending them to school. She states that “ if only he could have lived long enough to see the successful results of his belief in putting the future welfare of his children ahead of his personal convenience” (p.198). She got a full scholarship and attended St Andrews in Scotland and did her postgraduate certificate in Education in London.

Ogundipe’s teaching experiences gave her the opportunity to co - author some books. Her first book was a collection of folktales from West Africa titled, *Folktales and Fables* (p.161). She also made the beginning of what later became the foundation for the textbooks of English that have made the names Ogundipe and Tregidgo well known in and outside Nigeria. (p.220).

Ogundipe has worked at both the state and federal government levels. First as a teacher of English, Principal of the Government Teachers Training College Ilesha, Secretary of UNESCO and later Deputy Chief Federal Adviser on Education in 1975 and, subsequently, acting Director. She retired in 1976.

1.2.4 UP COUNTRY GIRL

In this autobiography, Pheabian Ajibola Ogundipe chronicles her life experiences, describing her childhood experience as a happy one that is full of memorable events. *Up Country Girl* is divided into twenty eight chapters. She describes the relationship with her parents, teachers, husband and children. She considers the relationship with all of them as crucial because it had a tremendous impact on her life.

Ogundipe describes her community with regard to its social and economic background. She describes the people's simple and communal way of living and their ideologies and beliefs. She describes the problems in Nigeria before and after independence, especially the issues of military intervention. Her autobiography touches on so many issues, like those of women, marriage, family relationship, military rule, corruption, education and her career. She offers an account of her personal journey and career in her autobiography. *Up Country Girl*, according to the publishers:

Is the story of an African girl from a rural community, and the notable achievements and developments in her life which coincided with many national events...interwoven into her story are the authors personal views from experience, on old and new polygamy, corruption, sex education, the upbringing of children, business partnerships, the problem of a pluralistic society, work ethics and other issues... (*Up Country Girl ; the blurb*).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Identity construction and representation are such defining concepts that characterise every writing whether fiction or non fiction. They are such protean concepts that are multidimensional. There are divergent approaches to the study of women autobiographies ranging from historical, sociological and psychological studies. This study is limited to the literary study of women autobiographies as a constructive writing because even within women autobiographies, there are divergent views. Women writings specifically autobiographies are also concerned with identity formation and representation but the form of representation and concern of the two selected autobiographers form the problematic of this study. Women have different experiences, ideologies, and concerns which make their writings vary and help bring out the different voices and experiences in them. As such, their identities as women cannot be used as the yardstick to

conclude that they speak in a unified voice. That is why the study through a comparative analysis examines Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and Ogunipe's *Up Country Girl* to see how the autobiographers indicate their processes of identity construction, illustrate their awareness and emphasise on the female identity.

1.4. OBJECTIVES

The study has the following objectives:

- i. To indicate the relationship between representation and how Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and Ogunipe's *Up Country Girl* represent female identity.
- ii. To demonstrate the way the two autobiographers' experiences vary especially in terms of contexts and concerns.
- iii. To demonstrate the correlation between ideology, self construction and identity ; and
- iv. Demonstrate how Postmodernist Feminist theory is a vital tool for analyzing self construction.

1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The research is motivated by the researcher's interest particularly in women's autobiography. Women autobiographies has gained recognition and women writer's in Africa particularly Nigeria, have also written their autobiographies in order to indicate how their autobiographies produce particular versions of identity framed by social contexts in their writings. As a result, this research is anchored on the assumption that autobiographical writings can produce versions of identity; and women autobiographies in particular emphasise on their female identity. The second issue is that women's autobiographies vary and their narratives deal with autobiographical self rather than selves. The third issue is on

the assumption by (Jelinek, 1980) that women autobiographers write little about their careers instead they dwell more on their personal issues and their writings are fragmented, non linear just like their lives.

The research focuses on the two chosen writers because they are both women and their texts are interrelated through several circumstances, even though some of their concerns vary. The study seeks to use postmodernist feminist approach because it uncovers multiple perspectives, multiple roles and realities so that all voices may be heard and the study seeks to show how women autobiographies vary. Postmodern feminism dissolves the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed. By accepting diversity, it provides the opportunity to explore the two women autobiographies under study which vary to some extent in terms of concerns and contexts. The two women autobiographers got scholarships to study abroad, worked as teachers, became writers and come from different socio cultural backgrounds but did not face the same challenges.

There has not been much research on women's autobiography especially on the issue of self identity construction. The study will be relevant in the academic circles because it questions the assumption that women autobiographies are the same, deal with autobiographical selves rather than self and dwell on their personal issues with little about their careers. It is expected that this study will contribute and suggest more views for further research.

1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The study is limited to the autobiographical works of Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and Pheabian Ogundipe's *Up Country Girl*. The study attempts to compare the two

autobiographies, which are written by women from Nigeria in order to show how the two writers identify and represent themselves.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the fundamental tools involved in judging or interpreting a text is literary theory. It is the theory that will help one to develop a framework through which principles are established in order to assess and interpret a text. In other words, it is the methodology of a chosen literary theory that guides the analysis or interpretation of a text because each literary theory has its own theoretical basis and methodology that a reader applies. The use of literary theory in the analysis of a text is not limited to a particular genre as such it is used as the general theory of interpretation and can be applied to non-fiction as well. In view of this, this study uses the Postmodern Feminist theory in its analysis of Emecheta's *Head Above Water* Ogundipe's *Up Country Girl*. Postmodern feminist theory is selected as the analytical framework of this study because of its concern with plurality, diversity and multiplicity of roles. It also rejects essential nature of women, of one way to be a woman hence emphasising on difference. Postmodern feminism critiques generalization about sex and gender and emphasize the importance of intersection within identity.

Feminism is an ideological movement aimed at changing the existing power relationship between men and women. Many writers of literature continue to stress the need to update the image of women in their literary works. The emergence of the women's movement that seeks to advocate for challenging the positive roles of women is what is described as Feminism, a movement that Bressler (2003:145) traces back to the seventeenth century. This is evident in the works of Mary Wollstonescraft, Margaret Fuller, Simone De Beauvoir and Susan Gilber.

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Virginia Woolf's *A Room for One's Own* (1929), Beauvoir's *A Second Sex* (1949) and Schowalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977) discuss and raise concern on the way women are oppressed and how they are considered inferior or secondary.

Bressler (2003:150) states that:

American feminism is essentially textual stressing expression; British feminism is essentially Marxist stressing oppression; and French feminism is essentially psychoanalytic; stressing repression.

This indicates the different forms of problems that affects the lives of women. Despite the various schools that emerged, they seem to have a collective motif, which is trying to rescue the women from being considered “the other” and update their image. The concern with women as “other” emanated largely from the writings of white western middle class women, whose generalisation was grounded for the most part in their own experience. The feminist theory explained women as if the reality of white western women applied to women from all classes and regions of the world.

Feminist concerns with female “otherness” have often ignored the possibility of differences among the women themselves. For centuries, women have been denied the position of the subject and are seen and identified as the other lacking in identity. The Postmodern Feminists seek to replace unitary ideas about identity with the fluid “plural and complex constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending to class, race, age and ethnicity” (Fraser and Nicholas, 1988:101). Butler (1993:29) emphasise the importance of a kind of double movement which allow feminists to have both political identification and recognition, multiplicity of identically sites rather than advocating for

a single identity. The postmodern feminist focus on difference has offered opportunity for women who had previously felt excluded. Postmodern feminism has provided space that legitimises the search for the voices of the displaced, marginalized and oppressed black people (Hooks, 1984:25). Third world feminists have accused western scholars of creating third world women as an undifferentiated “other” oppressed by gender and third world under development. Mohanty (1998:62-63) argues that western feminists:

...colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing a composite, singular third world woman - an image which appears arbitrary constructed but nevertheless carries with it authorizing signature of western humanistic discourse... third world in the context of a world system dominated by the west on the other..

Third world women are presented by western feminist as uniformly uneducated, poor and vulnerable while western women are the reference point for modern, educated and liberated womanhood. The way women differ, think, perceive and the way they experience situations, make them deal with issues of women in different ways. This is evident as Tadi (2012:2) states:

In the context of American studies for example, feminists like Barbara Smith, Jane Jordan, Pauli Murray, E Francis White, Alice Walker and Deborah Smith... deal with issues of black women which they see as different from that of the white women. They became the silent voices of the subaltern women.

This suggests that even the black and white women perceive feminism differently; hence, the white women and the black men are considered oppressors. That is why female writers and feminists in Nigeria, like Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onueme, Helen Chukwuma, Flora Nwapa and Zaynab Alkali refuse to be associated with the term “feminism”, describing it as a western terminology. This is because they feel alienated from the western feminism; hence, they coin

various terms like: Womanists, Feminists, Accommodationists and Gynandrists(Nnolim2010:114-118). These group of women advocate issues of women in different ways. Some preach mutuality and accommodate both sexes; some demand equality with men in a rebellious manner, while others refuse to recognize the role men play in their works and reject reconciliation. The first group comprises “Zaynab Alkali, Helen Obiagele and Ifoema Okoye. The second group consists of Rose Aholonu, Juliet Okonkwo and Chikoye Ogumyemi. The last group includes Buchie Emecheta, Tess Onueme and Flora Nwapa. This is evident as Buchi Emecheta, in Adaji and Uzoma (2012:6) states:

I am a feminist with small ‘f’. I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital ‘f’ who say women should live together and all that, I say no. personally I’d like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn’t work for goodness sake cut it off.

This suggests that even in Nigeria and among women writers, feminism takes different dimensions. One important feature that is relevant to this study about postmodern feminism is the rejection of the feminist label. Postmodern feminists reject all encompassing statements, like “man is this” or “woman is that”, and assume there is no one way to be a feminist. Postmodern feminism dissolves the universal subject and the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed. Butler (1990) argues against the assumption that all women share a common oppression and emphasise on the differences among them and how such differences shape both literature and our approach to it. Waugh (2001:344) describes how feminist theory manifest a number of overt postmodern ideas:

An infatuation with such concepts as the sublime, with the idea of radical alterity (otherness) or the possibility of a feminine ‘space’ outside of rationality and patriarchal

hierarchies, and a fondness for images suggestive of fluidity or hybridity such as the cyborg or the normad.

Postmodern feminism criticises a “conflation of sex and gender, essentialist generalization about men and women and the tendency to view gender as fixed, binary and determined at birth rather than a fluid, mobile construct that allows for multiple gender expression”. That is why Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* (1986:157) advocates for a gender free model of freedom as the normative ideal for women’s aspirations:

Women is enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play at being a man will be for her a source of frustration but to play at being a woman is also a delusion: to be a woman would be the object, the other- and the other nevertheless remains subject in the midst of her resignation. The true problem for woman is to reject these flights from reality and seek for self fulfillment in Transcendence (Butler, 1986:36).

By seeking for self fulfillment in transcendence, the woman should not sit, relax and see herself as inferior or be pessimistic or incapable of performing the task. Instead, she should achieve success through hard work and dedication. This is because one’s body can never be denied and the woman cannot continue to deceive herself to be a man. Therefore, the woman should try and make herself free from being considered the ‘other’, by working hard to earn self respect and dignity.

The research therefore, reads for the different views, forms of representation and identity constructions in the two primary texts understudy. This will enable the researcher to show the variation that exist among women autobiographies. This study using the Post modern feminist theory examines the versions of identities framed by social contexts and also uncover the personal and female identities each writer produces. Since Postmodernist feminist theory

rejects any mode of feminist thought that aims at providing a single explanation that all women are oppressed and steps to be taken to achieve liberation, it enable the researcher to compare the two autobiographies and suggest a possibility of considering them as distinct forms belonging to writers who do not share the same concerns as women.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Self identification and representation particularly among women in Nigeria is a major issue in their autobiographies. The women construct and identify themselves through narrating their life experiences. This indicates why an individual is concerned with self construction and self identification. Women autobiographies have been identified as unreliable because of their experiences. Critics like Mason (1980) and Jellinek (1980) are of the view that women autobiographies are fragmented, which virtually touches on their personal lives with little about their careers and the historical happenings of their time. In between these arguments and ideologies lie the desire and passion for the two autobiographers to reveal their experiences and prove that women are not only concern with their private experiences but also with public achievements. The study is primarily concerned with examining the extent to which these writers owing to their differences and in some cases similarities of experiences, use their autobiographies to represent themselves. In other words, it is an appraisal of women's identity construction and representation in *Head Above Water*, and *Up Country Girl*, respectively.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Autobiography as a distinct literary form provides room for the exploration of so many ideas and issues. Autobiography is fluid, it accommodates virtually different situations and there is no agreed rule concerning its nature or form. This is evident as Cosset et al (2002:2) indicates that the indefinable nature of autobiography arises out of its disruptive interdisciplinarity. This is because, it links together different disciplines- Literature, History Sociology and Cultural Studies even within these disciplines, autobiography is unbounded and fluid. Nietzsche in Olney (1980:5) opines that “little by little, it has become clearer that every great philosophy has been the confession of its maker; as it is his involuntary and unconscious autobiography. That is why Tsigas (2012: 1) concludes that “any other writing that aspires to be literature is nothing but an autobiography”. Critical debates are still ongoing with regard to what it should include or not. As a result of autobiography’s diversity and fluidity, it becomes open to a variety of studies, with each critic approaching it from different perspectives.

Critics like Wellek and Warren (1962:25) oppose the classification of autobiography as a literary genre because they believe imagination is an essential tool in literature. Also, autobiographies deal with verifiable and factual experiences and, as such, cannot be called literature. Wellek and Warren argue that autobiography does not fit into “works in which the aesthetic function is dominant”. Other critics (like Frye 1968; Renza: 1977; Oriaku 1998) question the arguments of Wellek and Warren with regard to the non-literariness of autobiography. They agree with the definition of autobiography that accommodates both the fictional and factual aspects. Frye, Renza and Oriaku believe in autobiography that will provide the readers with an interesting story through combining the elements of imagination and fact. For

Hunsu (2010:119) both elements of imagination and fact are indivisible, bringing to the present a past from the writer's memory mediated by language and the act of writing which on their own terms make certain demands on the writer's ability to fill in the gaps and provide interpretation of the past in the present. In his influential essays, Olney (1980:24-25) suggests that "autobiography, just like the life it mirrors, refuses to stay long enough for the genre critic to fit it out with the necessary rules, laws, contracts and pacts. Tsiga (2010:2) also describes the nature of autobiography as "a mode of myriad dimensions each cutting across the traditional boundaries in literature to add value to its overall richness and complexity... because its strength lies in its artistic creativity as a story". That is why Cossett et al (2001:1) argues that "autobiography makes trouble" because of the way it incorporates various issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender and culture.

2.1 SELF IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

The idea of self identification and representation is also found in women writings as opposed to the early assumption of the early critics who believe that it is only peculiar to western culture and men in particular. Women writers from Africa, especially Nigeria, also write against this background; thus, challenging the notion that it is only found in western cultures. Critics, like Georges Gusdorf (1980:28-29), argue:

First of all, it is necessary to point out that the genre of autobiography seems limited in time and space; it has not always existed nor does exist everywhere...it would seem that autobiography is not to be found outside of our culture; one would say it expresses a concern peculiar to western man; a concern that has been of use in the systematic conquest of the universe and that has communicated to men of other cultures; but those men have been annexed by a mentality that is not their own.

Gusdorf considers autobiography as a Christian form of self writing that emphasises on art rather than history. He describes autobiography as “ an act reconstructing the unity of life across time” which requires a historical rather than a cyclic notion of time, a concept of individual as separate from the collectivity and the highest achievement of civilization. Olney extends Gusdorf’s notion of the creative process of autobiography by indicating that it creates “metaphors of self”. For Olney, autobiography is a unique form of writing because it postulates “self reflection as a process rather than an essence, through the doubling of self observation”. However, Smith and Watson’s (2001:84) have challenged Gusdorf’s definition of self representation as they argue:

The widespread use of self representation in both pre literate, literate and non western cultures contradicts the allegation of an earlier generation of literary critics that autobiography is a uniquely western form and a specific achievement of western culture as a moment of individualization in the wake of enlightenment.

Smith and Watson’s argument indicates that autobiography can be found in non western cultures. This is because experience plays a great role in writing autobiographies as evidently depicted in autobiographies written by various autobiographers with vast experiences. Writers of non western cultures also use the same medium to give an account of their cultural, social, economic and political identities and present themselves fully with good qualities. This is also in line with Olney’s (1980:13) position on autobiography, who believes that it describes virtually every experience covering different perspectives and places. As he puts it:

Autobiography – the study of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within – offers a privileged access to an experience (the American experience, the Black experience, the female experience, the African experience) that no other variety of writing can offer.

This indicates the diverse nature of autobiography, with each autobiographer depicting from his or her social, economic, political and cultural background and experience. Women use this opportunity to ‘define for themselves and for their readers’ woman as she is and as she dreams’ as Spacks argues in Olney (1980:17). In trying to define themselves, women autobiographies take different forms and express various ideas. This unique feature makes women autobiographies interesting as they continue to portray their struggles and achievements for other women to see, learn and emulate.

Almost every autobiographer has his/ her focus, which includes the mission of portraying his or her life experiences. Writers of autobiography try to give accounts of their lives. According to White and Epston (1990:13) “persons give meaning to their lives and relationships by storying their experience”. Also in the words of Gusdorf (1980:29) “the man who takes the delight in thus drawing his own image believes himself worthy of special interest”. Women autobiographers take the challenge to narrate their past experiences because they believe they have important stories to tell. This is achieved through careful recollection, selection and narration. For instance: *Head Above Water* and *Up Country Girl*, respectively, lack sufficient coverage of the lives of the authors. They reveal various types of personal experiences, but withhold some information. Emecheta does not give account of the happy moments with her husband, Sylvester, but only relates negative experiences. Also, she is silent about her relationship with Chiedu and the reasons that stopped her from marrying him was not revealed. Ogunديpe on her own part does not give us the intimate details about the relationship with her husband. This confirms autobiography as a process of reconstruction, selection and interpretation.

Writers of autobiographies try to make meaning out of their lives when they write their experiences. They explain some situations surrounding their lives and this act is what Gusdorf calls “an act of personal justification”. Writing an autobiography requires a reader in order to confirm the writer’s existence. Both the reader and autobiographer engage in “an act that is aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life (Smith and Watson, 2010:16). Gusdorf (1980:39) argues that the man who recounts himself is himself searching his self through his history; he is not engaged in an objective and disinterested pursuit, but in a work of personal justification. It is achieved through the autobiographer’s ability to manipulate his story in an interesting manner to the readers. It is indicated repeatedly in Emecheta’s *Head Above Water* and Ogundipe’s *Up Country Girl* as the writers report their actions, explain circumstances and argue for different interpretation because they believe they are telling the truth. In Emecheta’s *Head Above Water*, she uses her autobiography to depict her feminist view and explain how why she is concerned with the plight of women in her works generally. She states:

Reading my first novels years later, I saw that using the fictitious name Adah gave the book a kind of impression that of being written by an observer. I was writing about myself as if I was outside me, looking at my fellow friends and sufferers as if I was not one of them.(p.58).

Emecheta also explains how her earlier works truly reflect her:

In writing an autobiography...one has to simply look back into oneself, lift the lid of the great past and its timelessness to overflow into the present through the channel of one’s pen on paper. This is because most of my early novels are too real... they are too me. (p.1).

Ogundipe on her own part explains the reason why she could not stop working:

... the main reason I could not stop working was not because we could not have survived on my husband's income. Civil service salaries were good. The main reason was my feeling that it would be selfish of me not to use my qualification for the benefit of my developing country (p.220).

Emecheta and Ogunjipe depict how they discover the differences of their past and try to fix their experiences and explain the situation in which they find themselves now. It is in line with Gusdorf's argument that "autobiography is a second reading of experience and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience the consciousness of it". It also explains why Gusdorf (1980:30) argues that "the man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present is different from the past and it will not be repeated in the future. He has become aware of differences rather than similarities given the constant change, given the uncertainty of events... believes to fix his own image so as to be certain". This indicates how an autobiography gives room for explanation and justification. Emecheta and Ogunjipe look back from the moment of writing to the past. They indicate that their writings follow a line of development in which they become the subjects. They offer explanations so as to make sure their readers harmonise between their past and present.

Smith and Watson (2010:2) define autobiography as "a writing embodied with the concept of the self interested individuals intent on assessing the status of the soul or meaning of public achievement". Smith and Watson's definition sums up the nature of Emecheta and Ogunjipe's autobiographies. The two autobiographies dwell more on their personal experiences as well as their careers using the same modes of representation. It equally indicates why there is always an "I" which shapes the artistic organisation of an autobiography. This is because the emphasis is on the "self" as the writer maintains a triple identity. It includes "the self" as the

“autos”, “bios” and “graphein”. Since the writer’s definition of the self is the subject in autobiographical writing, the reader gets convinced with the statements of the autobiographer because his confidence depends on the authority of the writer. Both Emecheta and Ogundipe communicate their experiences. It is through their experiences and the way they describe them that their ‘selves’ emerge. It is also through the two authors’ reaction to experiences that the reader makes personal connections.

Even though the term autobiography appeared in print in (1797) in the review of Isaac D’Israeli’s *Miscellanies* by William Taylor, it existed in many forms and terms all emphasising on the self. Many terms of self referential writing were coined in earlier centuries like the memoir, confessions and essays. This is evident in the *Memoir of Madame de Stael*, *The life by Avila*, *The Book of my Life* by Cardano, Montaigne’s *Essays of Myself* and St Augustine’s *Confessions*. Among the concepts that were coined by Avila, Cardano, Montaigne and St Augustine, ‘autobiography’ as a concept became the term that is widely used and recognized. This recognition creates the avenue for experimenting, through revealing life experiences because “the term privileges the autonomous individual and the universalising life story as the definitive achievement of life writing (Smith and Watson, 2010:3). As a result, women too, take up the challenge and recount their experiences in order to identify, represent themselves and prove their capabilities.

Women autobiographies too have become a terrain for feminist analysis because they are fruitful ground in studying the recent theoretical debates concerning ‘the self’, ‘the subject’ and ‘the author’(Saresma, 1998). Saresma describes autobiography as both a description of self representation and reading practice. Autobiographical narrators construct and identify themselves to the readers. Women use autobiographies and other forms of writings to identify and represent

themselves because they believe they are worthy of recognition. Heilbrun (1988:11), in Smith and Watson (1998:3), explains that:

There are four ways to write a woman's life: the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, a woman or man, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it unconsciously and without recognizing or naming the process.

Buchi Emecheta for example, depicts her life in two ways. First, she has written works of fiction which are generally motivated by her life experiences in England and secondly in her autobiography.

Coupled with the usual problems of the African women, such as the negative perception of women and the contradictory social values in Africa, Emecheta and Ogundipe's autobiographies focus on the challenges and struggles of the African women as they struggle to overcome such problems. Gayatri Spivak, as cited in Silku (2010), considers the condition of 'the subaltern women' as problematic since she has to struggle against the dominant system of power either at home or on the global scale to deserve a respectable status in the society

In her essay 'African Women, Culture and Development', Ogundipe (2007:561-567) considers self perception as the most important challenge for the African woman since the woman is the one that defines her own identity and perception. Ogundipe argues:

The sixth mountain on the woman's back herself is the most important. Women are shackled by their own negative self image, by centuries of interiorisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Her own rejections to objective problems therefore are self defeating and self crippling. She reacts with fear, dependence, complex and

attitudes to please and cajole where more self assertive actions are needed.

However, women are now gaining recognition as they struggle to define themselves as successful role models. They no longer react with fear as they make decisions, reject the gender hierarchy as they see themselves as capable and equal to the task. Emecheta and Ogunjide's autobiographies represent modern women who struggle for their own identity and dignity. They emphasise on their public and private lives because each experience helps them to discover themselves, thereby connecting their lives.

2.2 WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND REPRESENTATION

Women life narratives written earlier were not considered by the early critics and scholars worthy and interesting because it was believed that their narratives were fragmented and non linear, just like their experiences. Women autobiographical writings were not deemed appropriately 'complex' for academic criticism or literary canon because academic and popular historians regarded it as a mine of biographical information and salty citation which is unreliable (Smith and Watson, 1998:4). For that reason, the emphasis is on the lives of 'great men' who are seen as role models and successful. Early critics like Gusdorf and Spengemann focused on the works of Rousseau, Franklin and Augustine. Women too write their autobiographies in order to project their ideas and revise women life issues in general. Women writers employ autobiography in order to write themselves into history and identify themselves as successful models.

The status of autobiography has now changed because it incorporates various issues that are of great concern within and outside the academy. The growing interest in women's autobiography as Smith and Watson (1998:5) puts is :

As a result of an interplay of political, economic, and aesthetic factors. The growth of gender, ethical and gender area studies programs to address the interest of new educational constituencies has created a demand for texts that speak to diverse experiences and issues... also, women reading other women's autobiographical writings have experienced them as 'mirrors' of their own unvoiced aspirations.

The Book of Margery Kempe (1420), Margeret Cavendish's *True Relation* (1666), Bradstreets *Spiritual Account* (1650) and Julian's *Revelations* (1395) were among the prominent autobiographies that set the foundation for women autobiographies in English (Smith and Watson, 1998:8) Women autobiographies adopt a distinct style relative to their experiences as opposed to the styles employed by the early male autobiographers, like Montaigne. This is because, as Mason (1998:321) puts it:

The dramatic structure of conversion that we find in [male autobiographical writings] where the self is presented as the stage for a battle of opposing forces... simply does not accord with the deepest realities of women's experience and so is in appropriate for women's life writings. [Instead] the self discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness.

As a result, women autobiographies are distinguished from men autobiographies in terms of content, narrativity and experience. Estelle Jellinek (1980:10-19) outlines the features of women autobiographies:

Women's life narratives emphasise on personal and domestic details and describe connections to other people. Their stories reveal a self consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding; their texts are irregular which have a disconnected and fragmentary... pattern and diversity in discontinuous forms. Their life writings are analogous to the fragmentary, interrupted and formless nature of their lives.

Early theorists of women's autobiography often defined the differences between men's and women's self narratives through the framework of relationality and individuality (Wong, 1998:168). Mary Mason (1980) also describes women's life writing as writing grounded in the relationship, which produces textual self representations that contrast with the masculine self representation. It can be argued that women autobiography emphasises on the 'female identity' and relationships with 'the other'. It also points out that a person's identity is the essential centre of a self and the task of autobiographical narrators is to identify themselves to the readers (Hall, 1992:275). Women autobiographical writings can be used to debunk the arguments by early theorists like Gusdorf (1980:28-29) who believes that individuality marks the presence of autobiography. This is because as Friedman (1986:79) explains that the individuation process of women differ from men's because women's 'self' is collective and relational. Also, women writings deal with "autobiographical selves" rather than "self" because "woman's autobiographical self does not oppose herself to others and does not feel herself to exist outside of others". For Eakin (1999:43), all identities are relational because man cannot live and survive in isolation.

Writers of autobiographies discover who they are when they write their life experiences. Emecheta and Ogundipe discover the differences between their past and present. They offer personal explanation and justifications for their exactions and reactions to particular events in their lives. Emecheta and Ogundipe depict themselves as heroines who succeeded in their lives through hard work. For instance, Emecheta in *Head Above Water* portrays herself as a mother, a student, an orphan, a graduate and a writer. Ogundipe in her *Up Country Girl* depicts herself as a mother, a student, a teacher, a principal and a director. This points out the fluidity of identities in their autobiographies as both autobiographers depict themselves as role models.

However, women themselves have different experiences; and women in postcolonial nations in particular are said to experience double colonisation: the domination of the colonisers and that of the white feminists and men. They are not considered as a coherent group due to their differences in social, cultural and economic background. Gilmore (1995: x) argues:

First, the differences among women are so pervasive, specific and significant to both political and aesthetic interpretations that any effort to consolidate women as a unified group risks homogenising differences that feminists are now in a position to explore.

Chandra Mohanty (1994:196) in her article, “ Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, challenges the idea of considering women as ‘singular monolithic subjects’; instead, they should be considered based on ‘particular local contexts and identified within the historical contexts’. She further argues that ‘the third world feminists have engaged in the re writing of history based on the specific locations and histories of struggle of people of colour and postcolonial people on the day to day survival utilise by such people’. The struggle to address the diversity of women’s political and personal experiences becomes an important issue in women’s life writing and it is also a significant aspect of Emecheta and Ogunjipe’s narratives. In her *Introduction to Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Mohanty (1991) outlines some of the challenges faced by third world women, like issues of resistance, race and postcoloniality. She explains how mainstream feminism has historically focused on gender as the only basis of struggle and ignored the racial, class and sexual axis of oppression. Not only that, white feminists marginalise third world women. Hutcheon (1988:12) argues that postmodern theory offers perhaps the clearest example of the importance of an awareness of the diversity of history and culture of women: their differences of race, ethnic group and class.

Women in Africa, particularly Nigeria, venture into life writing in order to represent the women folk and show their capabilities, as portrayed by Emecheta and Ogunjide in their autobiographies. Slivia Navy Zekmi (2003:175) affirms this when she argues that:

Women writers... try to develop a language in their own and often turned into autobiography or to other types of memorialistic discourse as their genre of preference in the representation of the female subject. [This] is because Autobiography as a genre permits women to write in a contestatory mode not only as women who challenge the patriarchal discourse but also as postcolonial subjects refuting the colonial frame of representation.

Spivak, (Harysm1990:42) also stresses the need for women to take for themselves the challenge and the position of the questioning subject, not just who they are as women but should also question men in terms of the text produced'. In other words, Spivak suggests replacing the old problem 'What is a Woman' with the question 'What is a Man?'. She also acknowledges the fact that women have started challenging this notion and are giving fair roles, which equally help them to succeed in life. As a result, she views the formation of structures from a wider perspective when she states:

I would not say that as a woman that my particular enemy is the male establishment of the most privileged western tradition. They are my enemy in the house where I give interviews, where I teach and so on. But the house of the world is much bigger than little house.

In a way, Spivak urges women to question the formation of structures not just to reverse the content and order of categories. Since women are questioned in terms of the text produced as defined by men, the women too should do the same.

Many feminist literary critics perceive great potentials in the Post-structuralists' emphasis on language and the position of the speaking subject. The influence of poststructuralist emphasis

on language and subjectivity is perhaps, more evident in feminist investigations of autobiography (Benstock, 2002:174). Mills (1997:30) notes that many Post structuralists:

Moved away from the notion of the cartesian subjects, the subject whose existence depends on its ability to see itself as unique and as self contained, distinct from others, because it can think and reason. They focused instead on the subject in process or the subject in crisis rather than the unified subject.

Female writers specifically, emphasized the complexities of subjectivity and self definition. De Beauvoir's (1986) observation, "He is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the other", sums up the way self is such an important issue for women. To be the other is to be the non subject, the non person, the non agent. In their introduction to *Life/Lines* (1988:1-2), Brodzki and Schenick argue that masculine autobiographical tradition:

Had taken as its premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: his universality; his representativeness, his role as spokesman of the community... female autobiographers by contrasts, take as a given that selfhood is mediated and localizes the very program of much feminist theory – the reclaiming of the female subject- even as it foregrounds the central issue as contemporary thought- the problematic status of the self.

Women's autobiography demonstrates that women's subjectivity is framed by definitions of femininity and conceptions of social, racial identity and ethnicity. Emecheta and Ogundipe's autobiographies challenge the idea of individualism. Their texts demonstrate that identity emerges within a community as they focused on the stories of themselves, their parents and other women.

The autobiographers under study select the language that will manifest their identities by creating texts that exist outside of themselves and tell themselves and others who they are.

This is in line with what the Post structuralists call a 'presence' that speaks for its absent author, which becomes a sign of an author's existence and identity. The two writers under study, use language and tropes of the Eastern and Southern culture of Nigeria in order to define themselves in relation to their culture and make their voices heard. They rely on the figurative language and tropes to present their inner truths and show the differences that exist between women. In the same view, Derrida in his (1966) paper titled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences", argues that the basic principle of language is difference. He argues that we know the meaning of some of the binaries because of their differences with one another. As such, the present is known through our pre-conceived notion. This means that our notion of trust in language is uncontrollable and meaning is always contaminated and subject to the process known as "deferral". Writing is "a systematic production of differences because it is structured by absence and iterability". (Derrida, 2002:28). As a movement in which the "relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a being are always deferred" (2002:29). As difference the "play of differences" for Derrida (2002:26) precedes and structures everything. Derrida acknowledges that both language and writing share common characteristics because they both involve "encoding and inscription" and can all be considered as signifying systems.

Derrida specifically reverses a wide range of metaphysical conceptions in his works such as the issue of the subjective self, which he argues is found only within a discourse. Similarly, Foucault (1972:62-66) asserts that discourse produces the subject; while Barthes (1977:79) notes that the subject can be defined as an effect of language. In his essay, "The Death of the Author", Barthes criticises the readers tendency to consider the author's identity in his essay. For Barthes, to give a text an author and assign a single corresponding

interpretation to it is to “impose a limit on that text”. Readers must separate a literary work from its creator in order to liberate it from “interpretative tyranny” for each text contains multiple layers of meanings. The essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader, rather than the “passions” of the writer; “ a texts unity lies not in its origins or its creator, but in its destination”. The origin for Barthes lies exclusively in language in itself and its impressions on the readers.

Roden in his “The Subject” (2004) argues that one key notion of the subject is that of a centre of psychological life; a self which remains numerically identical or behind one’s actions and experiences. Hart (1970:49) argues that autobiography is an expression of the inherent individuality of the writing subject. For Hart, ‘autobiography is riddled with intentions that “interact and shift”... and truth is arrived at through the relation between the autobiographer and his personal historical subject. Weintraub (1978:22), like Hart, suggests that the self expressed in earlier writing reflects the general or model self conception of the time, aimed on the search for conditions of self conscious individuality. For Olney (1980:20-23), the autobiographer, is:

surrounded and isolated by his own consciousness, an awareness given out of a unique heredity and unique experience... separate selfhood is the very motive of creation. Autobiography projects a single and radial energy in the subject centre, an aggressive, creative expression of the self, a defence of individual integrity in the face of an otherwise multiple confusing, swarming, and inimical universe”.

This is also in line with Freud’s (2005) argument that human beings have elements of deception in them because they do not always know themselves. This is because human beings do not always give a truthful account of themselves and the stories they tell about themselves are sometimes coloured by their quest for recognition and approval. Freud in his “Introductory

lecture on Psychoanalysis” argues that “it is inherent in human nature to have an inclination, to consider a thing untrue if one does not like it... society make what is disagreeable into what is untrue” . In the same view, O’Dowry (2013:103) indicates that human beings do not always know themselves because they do not always understand what lies behind their behaviours or towards what aim it is directed. As such, many of their relationships repeat the trauma and disappointment of earlier encounters. Their hopes and ambitions have their origins in past attempts to satisfy their needs. This indicates why autobiographers only narrates the events that they feel the society will approve and also make claims in other to defend themselves and justify their claims. That is why in Emecheta and Ogundipe’s autobiographies through the use of their authorial positions record one side of their stories which is either positive or negative without acknowledging or giving room for other people to express their opinions.

The autobiographical subject continues to witness changes and shifts, particularly in its preoccupation and concerns. Olney and Hart in their essays “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment” and “Notes from an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography”, respectively, categorise autobiographical criticisms into two forms: The first wave of critics were concerned with the ‘bios’ of the autobiographer and understood autobiography ‘as a subcategory of the biography of great lives and acted as moralistic of sorts, evaluating the quality of the life lived and the narrators telling of that truth (Smith and Watson, 2010:200). For the first wave critics, as Olney (1980:20) explains:

There was nothing problematical about the autos, organizing question of identity, self definition, self existence, or self deception- at least the reader needs attend to- and therefore the fact that the individual was himself narrating the story of himself had no troubling

philosophical, psychological, literary, or historical implications.

Second wave critics, in contrast, provided new ways of understanding the concepts of self, truth and autobiographical subject. Smith and Watson (2010:201) describe their focus of the second wave critics:

Critics shifted from the concept of a universal self-achieving self discovery, self creation, and self knowledge to a new concept of the subject riven by self estrangement and self fragmentation; and they explored the problematic relationship of the subject to language. As a result, the project of self representation could no longer be read as providing direct access to truth or the self. Truthfulness becomes a more complex phenomenon of narrators struggling to shape an identity out of an amorphous subjectivity.

The Enlightenment scholars argue that the “I” is the universal transcendent marker of man. Descartes (1996) for instance, is of the view that the act of thinking presupposes the existence of the “I” who looks for the very act of thinking or experiencing which implies the existence of the psychological subject. Kant also in his *Critique of Pure Reason* sees the “I” as a transcendental subject, which is a condition for possibility for knowledge. Similarly, Husserl (1970), like Descartes, asserts that the transcendental subject is not in the world but is the framework within which it ‘refers’ to some object thought or experience. Derrida, on the other hand, deconstructs the idea of subjectivity as self presence using time and meaning. He argues that the temporal structure of experience cannot be accessible from a first person point of view. Secondly, signifying items are characterised by relationships or structures which deprive them of the stability or ‘self identity’ that would enable them to be grasped by a reflecting subject. Derrida proposes, instead, that we should account for the representability of conscious life in terms of the

essential repetition imposed by the trace of a past that inflects each instant of consciousness a bending back and fold irreducible in presence or “self presence” (1973:68). For Derrida, the experience of a thing is thus, already a ‘ sign of text’ or a grapheme, in so far as its content depends upon temporal, cognitive and linguistic context (1976:49).

For the Post- structuralists, the self is highly incoherent because the principle of binary opposition applies to both senses of the self. That is why it is impossible to say that the text can be interpreted. For them, the real centre for literary composition is destabilization. Similarly, Smith (1995:108) argues that autobiography is performative. This is contrary to the assertion that autobiography is self expressive and represents a coherent and unified self. She argues that the self’ is not a documentary repository of all experiential history running uninterruptedly from infancy to the contemporary moment, capaciously current and accessible. This being the case, we must not assume that there are uniform ideas found in a text. All thinking must revolve around the principle of erasure. Since the self only knows itself best, it then follows that textual interpretation is a kind of dialogue between text and the self. Since the essential centre of the self is a person’s identity, Hall (1992:275) regards identity as fiction, intended to put an orderly pattern and narrative on the actual complexity and multitudinous nature of both psychological and social worlds. In autobiography, the principle of unity, coherence and consistency through time have remained central to its shifts in the criteria of individual distinction. The task of autobiographical narrators is, thus, to identify themselves to their readers through the acts of identification and by implication differentiation.

The shift on the concern of the autobiographical subject as a unique and autonomous individual pave the way for heterogeneous views from numerous critics and theorists. The most

radical shift in the twenty first century in life writing, particularly on self conception, has been a shift “away from the traditional emphasis on the autonomous individual who stands out of his or her milieu in favour of the consideration of relationality inherent in individual lives (Culley and Styler, 2011). Feminist theorists, specifically, have challenged in different ways the conception of the self as an individual and unified entity in favour of relational selfhood, with theorists and critics like Mason (1980), Friedman (1988), Brodzki and Schenik (1988), Miller(1994) and Eakin (1999). For them, women are relational, in the sense that they express a self conception that is bound up with a sense of an ‘other’, which is, the other of the self.

Apart from the issue of subjectivity and the self, another important argument is that gender stereotyping and discrimination are also considered to be limiting or stopping the women from progressing in life. In this regard,, Akorede (2012:34) notes:

Gender stereotyping and gender discrimination are closely tied to the issue of sexuality. These are barriers to women sense of worth and achievement. They affect women’s progress and advancement so that pre designed roles assigned by culture and tradition limit the women from attaining self fulfillment.

However, this is not entirely applicable to Emecheta and Ogundipe. In the case of Emecheta, despite her agony in her failed marriage and lack of support from her husband, her gender as a woman did not stop her from achieving success in life. It gave her more courage to dedicate herself towards fulfilling her dreams. Ogundipe’s commitment in her career shows how women can take the challenge in order to become role models. Her role as a woman and a mother did not stop her from progressing in her career. That is why Simone De Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* (1986:157) advocates for a gender free model of freedom as the normative ideal for women’s aspirations:

Woman is enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play at being a man will be for her source of frustration but to play at being a woman is also a delusion: to be a woman would be the object, the other- and the other nevertheless remains subject in the midst of her resignation. The true problem for woman is to reject these flights from reality and seek for self fulfillment in transcendence (Buttler, 1986:36).

By seeking for self fulfillment in transcendence, the woman should not sit, relax and see herself as inferior or pessimistic or incapable of performing the task. Instead, she should achieve success through hard work and dedication. This is because one's body can never be denied and the woman cannot continue to deceive herself to be a man. Therefore, the woman should try and make herself free from being considered 'the other' by not denying or rejecting the social hierarchy or seeking strictly for equality, but by working hard to earn self respect and dignity.

2.3 NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

Ochs (1997:187-190) describes narrative as a simple chronology of events or an account that contextualizes events by attempting to explain them or persuade others of their relevance, and it concern past, present, future hypothetical habitual or other culturally relevant mode of reckoning time. Narratives applies to all genres such as films, reports, diaries and chronicles which comes in either spoken or written language. Personal stories, like the stories narrated in autobiographies are also called "narratives of personal experience" and such stories as Labov and Waletzky (1968:287) describe them as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred".

Both Emecheta and Ogunjide in their autobiographies attempt to recapitulate their past experiences through representation of their selves. The two texts expresses in different ways the concerns and achievements of women in the modern world. Both writers indicate how they

acquire new identities as they struggle from one point to the other. Emecheta in her autobiography reveal her identity in the beginning as a married woman in the diaspora, becomes a student, struggles with her marriage and family and her literary career. Emecheta through her experiences depict how she circles through a number of identities. Her identity as a black woman poses a lot of challenge and difficulty in her life as she struggle with the issue of accommodation and schooling. Despite the challenges, her identity as woman did not make her feel inferior or incapable of achieving success rather it helps her to keep on with her struggles. This is similar in Ogundipe's autobiography as she also circles through multiple identities and roles. She depicts herself as a student, mother, teacher and a Director. Even though both autobiographers are women, they do not have the same experiences. For instance, Emecheta's husband is brutal and Ogundipe's is calm and responsible. Emecheta repeatedly complains about the irresponsibility of her husband whom she believes is a total failure and not being supportive. Ogundipe on the contrary praises and portray a positive picture of her husband whom she described as hard working and supportive. This indicates why the two writers have different opinions and views concerning their identities as women. This is because, Ogundipe's experience and narration denies such issues of oppression not only in terms of her marriage, but also the circumstances surrounding her life. Her narrative tone is positive expressing joy, achievement and a kind of fulfillment. On the contrary, Emecheta's autobiography expresses the writer's regrets, hardships from the beginning of her narration until towards the end where the writer describes her achievement.

An important aspect in a narrative is its ability to depict event from one point to another which allows the event to be patterned chronologically. Autobiography also use plot and the writer structures the plot in such a way that it persuades and convinces the reader on the events

narrated. Both autobiographers selectively begin their narration with what they considered the most significant aspects of their lives. They depict the events by arranging them in a sequential manner emphasising on the significance of each event so as to give meaning. That is why Ganzevourt (2011:216) suggests that narrative include all forms representation of real or fictional situations in a time sequence. This temporal dimension is what Ricouer (1988) calls “chronological dimension” which connects events into “patterns of casuality, desirability, development and meaning.

Also, both writers present a subjective account of their lives because they use their authorial positions to describe and comment on the events in the texts. This is because they are the narrators’, the readers get the account through their own view points. The two writers in their texts do not allow other people to speak rather they speak on their behalf. That is why only one side of the story is presented to the reader. Both writers try to give an account of their personal experiences, their successes in their careers and as women who have made enormous contributions to the society. Emecheta dwell extensively on her personal life while Ogundice mixes both personal and public experiences. This indicates why her autobiography suggests that she is a woman who faces limited challenges in her life. Emecheta portrays the life of a women who struggle to keep her head above water. This also indicates the different ways in which women autobiographies can be written and the issues it can explore. The variations in terms of concerns in their narratives indicate the diversity in women experiences and points out the reasons for their perceptions about people and things in the society. The two writers’ narratives help them to understand and define their selves through the stories and experiences they presented. That is why Abbot (2002:11) describes narrative as a universal tool for knowing as well as telling, for absorbing as well as expressing it.

2.4 REPRESENTATION

Another area of concern particularly in autobiographical writing is self - representation. The act of representation enable writers to construct their images, prove their capabilities and illustrate their awareness. Pitkin (1967) suggests that representation involves the act of making something present again. This makes it possible for writers to represent and discover who they are and construct their images again. Both Emecheta and Ogundipe in the process of representing themselves project their feelings, concerns and aspirations which to an extent bring out their differences. They use their autobiographies to represent themselves in different ways especially in terms of their ideologies and personal experiences even though they are both women. For example, while Ogundipe in her autobiography represent a happy woman with no experience of oppression and subjugation, Emecheta on the other hand, represent the oppressed. The two writers come from different socio- cultural backgrounds representing the Southern and Eastern part. Ogundipe gives an account of the Yoruba culture with emphasis on their way of lives and beliefs. She vividly describes their type of food, communal living and even draw sketches to show the kind of activities the people engage in. There is little explanation on the Igbo traditional way of life because Emecheta is only concerned with her personal experiences. Their backgrounds which varies to an extent in terms of beliefs, moral and social values indicates an important factor that influences their perceptions, actions and decisions.

Autobiography is a medium through which different ideas and issues are expressed. The two writers use the medium to present different issues that are significant to their lives. Emecheta in her *Head Above Water* deliberately narrate her experiences which are personal and refuses to incorporate the people that are of great help to her during her stay in the diaspora. She presents herself as a woman that is helpless with no support. Ogundipe on the contrary, relate her

experience with the people she met who had impacted her life positively. These include Mr Abel Guobadia, Jibril Aminu and Micheal Okpara. This indicates that Emecheta's autobiography represent an autobiography that only calls for justification on her life while Ogundipe's is typical of an autobiography that celebrates her life. Further more, the reader notices the varying concerns in the two texts with respect to the issue of representation. Both writers portray themselves in a way that soothes the title of their autobiographies. Ogundipe keeps emphasising her experience as an up country girl who is exposed to modern way of life while Emecheta on her own part attempt to justify her claims that she struggle with her head above water.

Both writers glorify themselves and work to confine their self representation to particular identity. They paint the picture of their selves in a positive light. They depict themselves as people who are lucky to win scholarships to study in the various colleges such as the Methodist Gilrs' High School and The Queen's College.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Self representational writings are now gaining ground and recognition because the women believe they are worthy of special interest and their achievements need to be recognized. These prompt women, particularly in Nigeria, like Emecheta and Ogundipe, to write and represent themselves as models just like the great men. They equally believe that their autobiographies are also concerned with self identification, particularly female identity. They use their autobiographies to depict their social, cultural and economic background and experiences and also try to define for themselves and for their readers the woman as she is and as she dreams.

CHAPTER THREE:

FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION IN *HEAD ABOVE WATER*

Self definition is one of the important aspects in women's writing and female writers are concerned with redefining their image and roles in the society. Autobiography gives them room for the exploration of such issues. In the writing, they narrate their experiences, both the pleasant and unpleasant, identify their problems, struggle to overcome such problems, discover their selves and achieve success at the end.

Writing an autobiography is a form of self expression and it helps in the construction of the writer's identity. Individuals write their autobiographies so as to share with others who are different and who want to learn about them. The writers are challenged to write about themselves as individuals and as members who are part of the community. They view themselves beyond their identities as men and women. The presentation of the knowledge of the autobiographer's self to others through the writing of autobiography provides the readers with personal perceptions that determine the writer's self identity.

Emecheta's autobiography gives her the opportunity to discover who she is and uncover the circumstances surrounding her experience. Apparently, she believes that writing autobiography helps her to understand the meaning surrounding her life, as in her argument that:

Writing can be therapeutic, and autobiographical writing even more as it offers one a kaleidoscopic view of one's life. For instance, it was only when I started writing these autobiographical episodes that one question that had been nagging me for a very long time seemed to be answered.
(p.3)

Emecheta creates the illusion of her past in the present and makes meaning out of it. As Tsiga (2010:7) puts it, in writing the autobiography, “what the individual discovers about himself is often the vain desire to purge himself of the experiences as well as take revenge on history, as it were”. Emecheta uses her autobiography to depict her feminist view and explain why she is always concerned with the plight of women in her works generally. She also states that:

The white European from the North will regard the black woman from the South as her sister and that both of us together will hold hands and try to salvage what is left of our world from the mess the sons we have brought into it have made (p.1)

Emecheta depicts how she discovers the differences between her past and tries to ‘fix’ her experiences and explain the situation in which she finds herself now. She narrates how she regrets some of the incidents that happened, particularly the relationship with her mother:

Ai was worse to my mother. I told her I would never talk to her again for marrying my uncle who was only a grass cutter when my father was in the army... of all the men chosen for me to marry, I ran to the one she most disapproved of. I felt I was getting my own back... how I wished I could take back those horrible things I had said... then I remembered that I was only fourteen (p.215).

That is in line with Gusdorf’s argument (1980:30) that ‘autobiography is a second reading of experience and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience the consciousness of it’. All these are depicted in her autobiography as she tries to explain how her earlier works truly reflect her. She explains:

[In] writing and autobiography... one has to simply look back into oneself, lift the lid off the great past and its timelessness to overflow into the present through the

channel of one's pen on paper. This is because most of my early novels are too real... they are too me (.p.1)

This also explains why Gusdorf (1980:30) argues that “the man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present is different from the past and it will not be repeated in the future. He has become aware of differences rather than similarities given the constant change, given the uncertainty of events...believes to fix his own image so as to be certain”. The autobiographical task is like searching for a missing person and perceptions, changes and varying intensities make up the life.

Emecheta recounts many incidents in her narrative like her schooling, hunting and vacation. Her experience in The Methodist Girl's High School was memorable as she keeps referring to the experiences in the school. It has influence on Emecheta as she recounts how she finds escape in literature. Emecheta explains the various offences she committed in the school as a new student. She narrates how she was always late for the morning assembly. Her experience in the school explains how Emecheta was exposed to and picked interest in literature. She admits in her autobiography that she finds escape in literature when she read stories. The stories she read in English were that of Hansel and Gratel and Snow white, which makes her dream of the same situation like the characters in the story. She states:

I read the book several times at my primary school, so that I knew some of the words by heart. I used to imagine myself lost like that in the bush, so that the relatives with whom I was living at that time would be kinder to me and stop beating me for the lightest thing I did, so that my mother would come and stay with my brother and I, like she used to before our father died. (p.19).

This suggests that Emecheta had many problems which she wished to be solved since was young. Her dreams were not realized at the early stage because of the different circumstances and situations she found herself.

The narrator's vacation in 'The Deal' in 1973 was another experience that she believes was horrible. The house in which Emecheta and her family were given was not conducive but they used it because it was cheap. She took her children on vacation because she wanted to make them happy and comfortable. She describes how horrible the house they were given:

The former occupants of our room relieved themselves inside. The toilet was useless. One has to top the flat pan and it would bring out everything inside. The kids thought it was curious but fun... we only returned to that horrible place to sleep; it was a very deaming experience and I never forgave myself for exposing my family to it (p.182-183).

Emecheta struggles to become an economic success by seeking for jobs and looking for better places to stay with her children. She keeps moving from "Pussy Cats Mansions" to "Match Boxes" houses all in search for a better place. A major climax of the text occurs when Emecheta purchases her own home, signifying that she had not only entered the British Middle class but also achieved a kind of British identity. Emecheta and the family have experienced a lot of hardships and in some cases humiliation and rejection because of their skin colour. By owning a house, it symbolizes achievement and relief for the family.

Head Above Water regularly registers her ongoing sense of guilt, especially about her inability to jettison a traditional ideology of gender. She asked in her text, " why do I always trust men, looking up to them more than the people of my own sex even though I was brought up

by women”? (p. 72). This was a result of the relationship that Emecheta had with her mother. Emecheta refuses to follow her mother’s advice not to marry Sylvester and the guilt continues to disturb her. The man that “caused the rift between mother and child” betrayed her and things started falling apart. She further states that “whenever I failed in anything I always remembered what I considered my greatest failure – the inability to make my marriage work” (p.154). And at the end she states “ I had felt to be a careful human being, I had to be a mother, a wife, a worker and a wonder woman” (p.228). However, Emecheta refuses to succumb to the psychology of self imposed gender inferiority and does not see herself as a tragic victim of female oppression. She reconciles herself to herself. Emecheta continue with her studies despite the financial challenges and earn a degree in Sociology. She did not allow the failure of her marriage to destroy her instead she moves on with her life. Despite her inability to retrieve her manuscripts that was burnt by her husband, she started afresh and was able to publish many books apart from her *In the Ditch* which eventually paved the way for success in her life. Despite’s Emecheta’s problematic self, she did not allow it to become a tragic problematic self by working hard and achieving success.

Writers of autobiography leave various gaps in their autobiographies. The agonies, pains and betrayal that she totally claims to have experienced cannot be exactly trusted because she only presents one side of the story, without giving a good account of her husband’s. That is why female autobiographers vary in their concerns. Emecheta and Ogundipe for instance are both women but have different notions about men. While Emecheta’s husband is brutal, Ogundipe’s husband is calm and responsible. Emecheta describes her husband below:

I married... Sylvester Onwordi- a dreamy handsome local boy who, though older than myself thought he would make it in the United Kingdom but I soon found out that under

his handsome and strong physique was a dangerously weak mind.(p.25)

Emecheta depicts her husband in a negative way so as to justify the incidents that happened to her because she believes it was his inability to manage the family that led to her painful experiences she shifted the blame on her husband without considering her own mistakes. The writer has forgotten about her inability to obey her mother's instructions and her people's instructions and warnings not to marry Sylvester. She refuses to explain the positive side of their relationship.

This indicates that autobiographers give only the personal accounts of events that are unique and significant in their lives. *Head Above Water* centres its chief attention on the life of the author as it was lived though not all because only the selected and edited version is presented to the reader.

One of the functions of autobiography in the words of Gusdorf is to offer personal justifications to situations surrounding the lives of the author. This is evident in *Head Above Water* as the autobiographer struggles to explain the circumstances surrounding her life. All the incidents narrated by the author had cause and effect right from her marriage which is the main cause of her problems. She explains her own actions and reasons for making decisions. Her inability to overlook certain weaknesses in her marriage compounded her own problems which had a devastating effect on her life and family. Her call for justification in her autobiography did not deny her readers to see the reasons for her own actions in a positive way, rather it brings out her own weaknesses. Gusdorf (1980:36) states that “ it is precisely in order to do away with misunderstandings, to restore an incomplete or deformed truth, that the autobiographer himself takes up the telling of his story”. Emecheta justifies and explains why she could not leave school

because she was safer and also how she was betrayed by her husband. She describes her situation:

One of the reasons I for my keeping all my imaginative thoughts to myself came about the day I was late for morning assembly. My class work was steadily going down and this was making life more difficult. The situation was circular. I was afraid of leaving school- it was not a beautiful idea, but it was at least safe and reliable. As a result of this fear, I began to dream of another world, but the funniest thing about this world was that I was always the mother of many children (p.20).

Emecheta narrates her experience as she recalls the day she gave birth to her child, Christy, thus:

The day I brought Christy home from hospital, I caught Sylvester sleeping with a white woman friend. I telephoned him for hours from hospital to ask him to come and pick us but he ignored my calls. I packed my new baby and arrived on a sunny May day. The sunshine disappeared as I went upstairs to and saw why my husband could not come for us (p.30)

It was as a result of the writer's radical reactions to events that her husband also neglected her. His own attitudes and behaviour indicates why Emecheta develops radical ideology and perception towards him because of the circumstances surrounding her as she struggles to overcome various challenges. *Head Above Water* reveals and explains the writer's reactions to certain incidents which was equally surprising to Emecheta herself. She uses her autobiography to call for justification by interpreting her deeds as described below:

My husband was taken aback; I was too. This was a new me! I never used to hit back in the old days , to say nothing of striking first. When overcome I used to bite and cry but then I had not been through Pussy Cats Mansions, neither

had I forgot the rent collectors nor learned to challenge 'fate of my Chi', instead of accepting it all or learning it all to God in prayer. The depth of my rebellion surprised me and so did the intensity of my sense of self preservation (p.87).

Emecheta always dreams of becoming a good housewife so as to make things easy in her marriage, but her dreams are shattered. 'I was going to be an ideal house wife with all our meals ready on time. I was going to teach our children to read and write before they went to school and take them to music and ballet classes where they will acquire confidence' (p.31). These dreams and hopes were dashed as her husband Sylvester could not take up his responsibilities. In an effort to emphasise her husband's brutality, she describes how he denied his children:

Sylvester denied his children and recommended that I should have them adapted because being a student, he do not want to be saddled with five kids. He said that we never married, so I had no claim on him (p.33).

Emecheta could not bear the burden and could not overlook her husband's weak points. She claims that she needed help and their marriage could only be successful if Sylvester would support her a little. In *Head Above Water*, the writer explains how she cater for Sylvester despite the fact that they were not living together. She says:

I caught myself buying Sylvester a beautiful suit for the wedding, and took the trouble to nag him into cutting his hair to make him look presentable. All m efforts were beautifully superficial, so much so that we put on a convincing front at the wedding... But after the wedding that very evening when I was driving my tired family home, I felt deflated (p.85).

This suggests that Emecheta is willing to accept her husband back home only if he will assist her and change for the better. Her subsequent actions indicate that she has also contributed to the

problems because she stopped caring for Sylvester at a point simply because he does not take some responsibilities as the head in the family. Emecheta explains her reasons:

I could no longer look after a grown man who would not lift a finger to help me. I no longer had the energy for it; I knew I had only just cope with my children, my degree and my writing. If he could come back and help in a smallest way in making lighter all these responsibilities, I could learn to live with him for my children's sake but if he was going to come and saddle me with his own burdens, I no longer was prepared to shoulder them (p.86).

The Nigerian society is patrilineal, where men are the heads of families. Division of labour is also separated along gender differences. This is typical of the Igbo traditional society where the writer comes from. In Emecheta's autobiography, her narrative experience reverses the order, where she happens to control the family and bear the burden of the responsibility. This is contrary to the role of the traditional woman who is supposed to be passive. Emecheta becomes a single parent and disregard the traditional norms so as to move ahead. Though she tries to explain herself by saying that 'any woman black and white will find herself in the ditch unless she came from a rich family or her husband supported her'. Judging from her situation, it shows that Emecheta was not supported by her husband and she had to bear all the burdens. The love and affection was denied for the children and their father also at a point rejected them, which had a negative effect on them. That is why the children did not have respect for him as a father because Emecheta and Sylvester were not living together. She describes the relationship:

I noticed that the children started to be difficult. IK wanted to know why his father started sitting on his seat whenever we are going out together. Chiedu wanted to know who gave him the right to order her about without saying please. Jake started calling him Sylvester instead of Daddy. (p.87)

Emecheta's idea of walking out of her marriage and deviating from the normal traditional norms of upholding to marriage institution no matter the situation, depicts the idea and perception of the modern woman. It also indicates how the modern woman can survive the hardship, no matter the consequence, without a husband. This new ideology describes the radical thinking of women who do not allow marriage to destroy their dreams. Oniemayin (1998) describes this form of representation and advocacy as a way of challenging male subjugation, not just because the women have been victims of such a system, but also because they wish to assert themselves as important and indispensable to humanity. *Head Above Water* describes the struggles and achievements of the writer. She has contributed a lot despite challenges. she has taught at Quintin Taynaston in St Johns Wood and has written a number of books like *The Moonlight Bride*, *The Slave girl*, *The Scape Goat* and a BBC Play. All these achievements are described in a chapter titled "Women's Year".

The year 1975 was one of those years on which I now look back and wonder where I got the energy to do what I did. I had full- time job almost the whole year, I re wrote the *The Bride Price* for non Nigerian readers, I finished *The Moonlight Bride*, worked a little on *The Scape goat*, and finished writing *The Slave Girl*. By the end of the year , I had written and has approved a BBC play " A Kind of Marriage"(p.172).

Another important issue that Emecheta raises in her autobiography is that of racism which equally clashed with her personal problems. Emecheta responds to racism with a strong sense of her own identity and dignity. *Head Above Water* contains a sequence of lessons about resisting racial discrimination. Her children were rejected in schools and even accommodation became difficult as 'SORRY NO COLOUREDS' was written in bold and advertised. She describes the situation below:

I watched helplessly... as we faced rejection after rejection. No respectable landlord wanted black family. We realized that however well educated we were, our colour which we regarded as natural was repulsive to others and posed a great problem. Our new hosts in our new community simply refuse to see beyond the surface of our skin (p.29).

This equally explains why Emecheta was disturbed to own a house because of humiliation.. this virtually put the family in a difficult situation as she struggles with the issue of accommodation and marriage. That is why she considers purchasing a house in England as the biggest triumph in her autobiography.

In essence, Emecheta's autobiography touches on her personal life, including her ability to cope with many issues, such as racism, failed marriage, oppression and culture clash clearly depict her experience and struggle in a foreign land. Her situation explains her radical perception about men and concern with the emancipation of women. Her autobiography dwells so much on her personal life and struggles. Emphasis was not given to her career despite the fact that it was one of her greatest ambition in life. Even though she was opportune to publish a lot of works, which gives her the opportunity to be heard, she still emphasizes her marriage and family. Within Emecheta's autobiographical consciousness, we find a revelation of a life characterised by many experiences. This made Emecheta perceive life a difficult journey through which she must pass. She employs various defense strategies for survival. The write tries to be persuasive in trying to convince the readers about her innocence and trying to justify the title of her autobiography that she struggled with her head above water.

3.2 NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION

The act of storytelling requires an interesting narrator and a narrative, so as to add colour to the text. A good narration also captures the attention of its readers thereby giving the text the

required result. In writing an autobiography specifically, the autobiographer uses narration to construct and recreate past events. In doing that, the author controls the narrative by describing events from his own point of view and perspective. The narrator involves the readers in a persuasive manner by constructing the plot structure. Gray (1999:189) defines a narrative as a story, tale or recital of facts that recounts and establishes some connections between a series of events. Bennet e tal (2005:230) define narrative as a story told by a narrator about events which may be factual, fictional or mythical. Lyotard (1984) recognises the centrality of a narrative to all humanity and communication. This identifies the productive aspect of narrative as a way of constructing and not just representing selves because it shapes our beings and structures our lives. Abbot (2002:11) argues that the narrative is a universal tool for knowing as well as telling, for absolutely knowledge, as well as expressing it.

Emecheta uses her narrative to discover and describe her situation. She employs the technique used in a narration which is the first person point of view. She uses the technique so as to emphasise the significance of the incidents in her life. Emecheta allows her readers to understand that she is the character in the story and the situation surrounding her experience all happened to her despite the fact that she depicts the same situations in her novels. For her, *Head Above Water* is different:

I noticed a difference with this type of writing. I found it almost therapeutic. I put down tall my woes. I must say that many a time I convince myself that nobody was going to read them anyway, so I put down the whole truth, my own truths as I saw them (p.58).

She finds herself in recounting and retelling her experience including the reasons for taking her actions. She admits that what is described in her autobiography is her own ideology and perception, the way she see the truth. She explains the reasons for each action taken. Emecheta

explains how she substituted her name with Adah in her *In the Ditch* because according to her the truths were too horrible.

Even though Emecheta is the narrator, she was older than she was when describing the events. She looks back on her younger self and emphasises the things she did not know then or the things she would have done differently. This is evident from the close reading of the texts of the text that Emecheta speak from the perspective of a child when she recreates experiences from her childhood. She recalls and depict her experience as a child in Ibusa and how they react to the call songs to stories:

It happened the third day after our arrival in Ibusa. We had finished eating our evening meal and I could hear my cousin Ogwugwu shouting... I loved this moonlight call... by the time she reached the end of her call- song, many of us were puffing at the feet of Nwakwaluzo Ogbueyin. We gasped our final heap and wrestled ourselves playfully on the white brilliant sand at Otinkpo (p.7)

Emecheta becomes the protagonist whose inner thoughts are expressed to the reader. She takes actions, makes judgement and expresses opinions, thereby not allowing the readers to comprehend other characters thoughts and feelings or perception as much as the narrator's own. She re- constructs her characters to match her perception of reality; the more she reconstructs and event, it becomes evident that it is just one side of the story because she is both the narrator and the subject. As such, we are only made to understand the narrator's view point only. This indicates why autobiography involves recollection and reconstruction. This is depicted through the character of Emecheta and that of her husband, Sylvester whose negative qualities are portrayed. She describes Sylvester as the man who never keeps a job and in fact who is lazy.

After their reconciliation, Emecheta still doubts whether she can cope living with Sylvester. She describes:

Could I cope? Could I cope looking after Sylvester? He was one of those people who wanted women to run around him while he sat down too busy, just being a man. I could see that he was not only going to find it difficult to keep a job, but even more difficult to keep one. He had got used getting up exactly when it pleased him (p.85).

She only describes Sylvester as a man who does not change but she did not allow the reader to hear his own view or explain why he fails to be successful. The instances where Emecheta depicts Sylvester's voice in the text only indicates his politeness. This is evident in a chapter titled "mock reconciliation", where Sylvester pleads: "Why don't you let us go home together? The children look so lovely today. Let us go home together"(p.86).

Also whatever Emecheta asks her husband to do, he sometimes agrees and in some instances gives reasons. For example, she asks him to get a job but he replied that he did not finish his accountancy exams.

. Emecheta decides to withhold a lot of information concerning her experience with not only her husband, but also her boyfriend Chidi, whom she did not allow us to see her relationship with him deeply. This gives room for doubts and gaps in her narrative. The reader is introduced to Chidi in the narrative in a chapter titled 'The Sociology Degree' where Emecheta only describes how he listened to her complaints:

Luckily Chidi came to see us that evening and I poured out all my woes to him. He listened, screwed up his narrow face, scratched his baldly head, drank what he called

‘sergeant major tea’ and said nothing for a while. Chidi like to play the male, though he was lanking where Sylvester was stucky and his eyes roamed like mine.(p.47)

The narrator tries to be persuasive and uses a stylised expression by translating her experience into literary form and her private thoughts into revealed actions. This, she achieved through the use of many devices such as focalization, distance and voice. Focalization has to do with the lens through which the reader see characters and events in the story while distance means the narrators degree of involvement in the story he tells. These devices shapes or guide the way readers examine the truth of the narrator when he offers an interpretation. Stanley Fish, (Smith and Watson 2010:15) argues that ‘autobiographers cannot lie because anything they say however mendacious, is the truth about themselves. In line with Fish’s argument, Smith and Watson (2010:15) also point out that:

Any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted is alternation of its writer. Thus, when one is the narrator and protagonist of the narrative, the truth of the narrative becomes undecidable; it can be neither fully verified nor fully discredited.

It means that since we cannot verify the truth in an autobiography, we should adjust our expectation of truth when reading life writings. This follows Smith and Watson’s (2010:16) view that ‘autobiographical truth resides in the inter subjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding’. A case in point is the persuasive tone of *Head Above Water* . The reader gets her story from the authors perspective and since there is the merger of the three ‘Is’, Emecheta imposes her own views on the reader by revealing her social, economic and cultural identity. She lyses the foundation for the reader to kow her Igbo background in a chapter titled “What They Told Me”.

Emecheta presents her story of life successes by using “I” several times in her autobiography to describe herself and her personal achievements. The narrating ‘I’ begins her narration by telling us how her autobiography truly reflects her:

I also have to stop looking back into the past of too long ago... thinking about what might have been is lovely, but after forty years I don’t want to be another Lot’s wife. I did look back a good deal in my early novels, dwelling mainly in the first twenty years of my life, but *Head Above Water* is me in the almost now: the last twenty years during which time I made England’s north London my home (p.2)

The narrative chronology continues with further recounting of personal successes. For example, the autobiographer describes her feelings when she got her Sociology degree on the graduation day:

I wished my parents were alive. My father would have been just about sixty five. My brother? He would not understand why I had to read for a degree after having five kids in the first place, and my children? They were at home telling their friends and teachers that “mum is going to be gowned today” (p.100)

The final segment of the autobiography refers to another change in life circumstances, that is the narrators ability to publish most of her works, own a house and sign a contract with the BBC for the play *A Kind of Marriage* . She states:

Just two weeks before christmas, the letter and first deposit of the Granda Crown Play ‘ Juju Landlord came. I felt so rich... Christmas that year was wonderful, financially speaking. I made up to the children what they had lost; or I felt they had lost, during all those years we had little money... we welcomed the new year with so much hope. Somehow, I could see that my very, very poor days were coming to an end. (p.194)

Emecheta condenses her life up to the autobiographical present by using its highlights to create a new being which encapsulates what she considers to be its essence. Her life is presented interpretatively and significance is attached to each event or experience. This is indicated in a chapter titled “The First Novel” where the narrator describes the significance of the publication of her novels and what it means in her life. She states:

I have always compared the feelings I have for my books and their arrival to the ones I used to have after going through child labour and then being left for a few minutes with my new baby. Each of my books was a child to me. I felt every paper; smell the shiny cover but unlike my babies, I even imagined it on a shelf (p.69-70).

She cares for her children and she did not make the mistake of leaving them when they had problem with their father, instead she carried them along and make sure they are comfortable.

The self applause which characterises Emecheta’s autobiography echoes what Conway (1998:179) in Oraiku (2007:16) “calls the myth of the maternal female, always nurturant, always able to process everyone’s emotions, the caregiver who is at her best when those around her are in crises”. Emecheta shares prominence with her husband who was not successful. She had to keep struggling from one job to another so as to maintain the family. She considers her marriage to be a mistake, as she admits that she refused to marry all the men [her people] kept for her and married Sylvester instead:

I refused all the men kept for me and married the man called Francis in my other books, but whose real name is Sylvester Onwordi. It did not take me long to realise my mistake, and see that on this score my mother was right... Sylvester never change but he wanted to drag us all down with him (p.25-26)

Emecheta's experiences constitute the main sources of materials for her narrative. Her autobiography portrays a woman who was oppressed, but was, nevertheless able to overcome the difficulties. As such, she dwelt more on her adulthood and her achievement. Her narrative tone continues to be that of complain, expressing regrets and hardship, until towards the end of the autobiography where she describes her success. This is indicated from chapter two:

As for my survival for the past twenty years on England, from when I was a little over twenty, dragging for cold and dripping babies with me and pregnant with fifth one – that is a miracle and if for any reason you do not believe in miracle, please start believing because my keeping my head above water in this indifferent society, which is probably succeeding in making me indifferent and private too, is a miracle (p.5)

This follows the writer's struggle with the circumstances in her life. Her experiences in England had a considerable impact in her life as she admits in her autobiography that it has succeeded in making her indifferent and private. This also suggests why Emecheta focuses on more on her personal life in her autobiography. Similarly, the epilogue of Emecheta's narrative, indicates success and triumph as she describes:

A world of literary evenings – book launches, poetry readings, literary talks – opened up... I became so busy that I kept wondering how it was that only a few years back I had felt that to be a full human being, I had to be a mother, a wife a worker and a wonder- woman. I now realised that what I was doing then was condemning myself to earthly hell. With careful management and planning, I found that I could keep my head and those of my family through God's grace above water (p.228-229)

She depicts her struggles with her studies, her family's upbringing; such as her children and her literary career, which give her the opportunity to be heard. She remains defensive as she

struggles to explain her situation. This equally points out the importance and emphasis on the theme of progress in the narrator's autobiography, despite the challenges of getting education, employment and accommodation. The issue of housing is quite prominent in the narrator's account because of its impact on her image and this warranted her constant reference to accommodation, landlords and other issues pertaining to housing. She considered living in rented flats and council houses like the 'Pussy Cat Mansions' as living in the ditch and so it was exciting when she decided to relocate to her own house. This is indicated in the chapter titled 'The Move'. A glimpse of this joy is depicted in chapter 29 when Emecheta and her family attempted to move to their own house:

At last, I said, as I breathed a sigh of relief. We rushed to the estate management and paid the first deposit of E500, for them to remove the house from the notice board... so we were going to move into our new house before christmas. We were jubilant (p.188).

Emecheta portrays her autobiography in a unique style. She creates suspense to the readers by arranging it in chapters, with chapter headings and backgrounds to episodes. Most of the sub-headings in the autobiography create suspense, in the sense that Emecheta delays describing the incidents. This is indicated in the titles of the chapters like "Pussy Cats Mansions", "The Sociology Degree", "That First Novel", and "Mock Reconciliation". It is in chapters like "What they Told Me", "Lole Onye Burma", "The Methodists Girls' High School" and "The Zoo" that the writer describes the incidents relating to the titles in the first paragraphs of each chapter. Emecheta uses 'the miracle' as a chapter heading, but she does not go straight in discussing what she believes is the miracle, instead she digress and narrates other experiences, like her relationship with her mother and how it affects her. It is nearly at the end

of the chapter that she describes the miracle after the lengthy background information. This is described below:

As for my survival for the past years in England from when I was a little over twenty years dragging from cold and dripping babies with me and pregnant with the fifth one- that is a miracle (P.5).

‘The miracle’ sums up Emecheta’s hardship and struggle with the challenges of her school, marriage and children in a foreign land. Another instance is indicated also in the chapter titled ‘The Wait’. This time around, the narrator does not take much time to explain what she was waiting for, but goes on to describe the situation:

I stepped out of the building into narrow road. I was going to walk as long as I possibly could. That way, I would have to think of all the thinkables, about the job, this project and the members of the club... waiting for the reply to an interview is an ordeal in itself. You wonder time after time if you have given all the correct answers to the questions you were asked (p.122-124)

The reader finds continuity in her narration as each chapter relates to her experience like the ‘The Interview’, ‘The Wait’ and ‘Job Acceptance’ (p.109-157). Her narration flows from one chapter to the other. Each event described in a chapter leads to other events in the next chapter. Also, the seventh chapter titled ‘Holiest of Holies’ accounts for the narrator’s preparation and journey to England with a link with the chapter that follows it which is titled ‘Culture Shock’. The narrator uses the expression culture shock to engage her readers on the various experiences she had while she was in England especially her struggle to find accommodation. She describes how the family faced rejection after rejection because no respectable landlord wanted a black family (p.29). Even though the narrator narrates a number of incidents in the process of explaining some situations, her digression does not affect her narration as some enable her to

reflect on her circumstances and describe her feelings. An instance is depicted in the chapter titled “Mock Reconciliation” where the writer started describing how she felt when she passed her part one exam and the description of her cousin and his wife. She describes:

Judging from the way I celebrated the passing of my part one, one would have thought that I had received a PhD or something. My passing the exams coupled with the fact that *In the Ditch* was already published and serialized... so I was surprised at the major events that threatened to rock my semi firm life (p.82).

The essence of describing her own success in her exams clashed with the attempt by her relatives to negotiate her marriage. For Emecheta, the negotiation shattered her happiness because it did not work the way it was planned. Sylvester insisted on sharing and Emecheta could not withstand the situation. This in a way makes her narration to flow from one incident to another bringing out the cause and effect of each experience.

Emecheta carefully selects and begins her narration with what she feels is the most touching and memorable in her experience, like the death of her mother and the relationship they had. She believes that the relationship with her mother had a considerable impact on her life. The people in Emecheta’s village as described in her autobiography believed that it was a ‘curse’ on her because her mother did not bless her marriage with Sylvester Onwordi. She describes the incident:

[my mother] never understood the short, silent, mystery daughter she had. That hurt. It did hurt and for twenty years I carried the hurt. But on going to Ibusa in 1980, the image of that tall, lanky black woman nicknamed Blackie and black seem to loom over me. Then I felt the warmth of her presence, then I knew right there inside me that my mother did not die cursing me. Signs showed me that that was said

to make me feel guilty, especially now that the marriage that caused the rift between mother and daughter did not work out for me...(P.3-4).

The references to her mother especially in the narrative reinforce the importance of kinship and it indicates the closeness of the relationship between them. She describes:

My mother, Alice Ogbanje Ojebeti that laughly loud voiced, six foot tall, black glossy slave girl, who as a child suckled the breasts of her dead mother; my mother, who lost her parents when the nerve gas exploded in Europe...my laughing mother who forgave a brother that sold her relative in Onitsha so that he could use the money to buy Ichafo Siliki- silk head ties for his coming of age dance. My mother, who probable loved me in her own way but never expressed it; my mother that slave girl who had the courage to free herself and return to her people in Ibusa and still stooped and allowed the culture of her people to re-enslave her (p.3)

This suggests that Emecheta's mother also suffered and struggled to overcome certain challenges in life, just like Emecheta.

The autobiographical narrator recounts her childhood experience and how she happened to know other incidents relating to her life through the act of storytelling. She introduces Nwankwo Iuzo Ogbueyin, her father's eldest sister who narrates how she was given birth to and the circumstances surrounding her birth. Nwabueyin, the story teller begins her story thus:

Ah, only a girl to Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta Emecheta when a little girl was born to them... what trouble did she not cause when she ran out of her mother's belly in seven months when others stayed nine? And there was nothing like a pre mature baby unit at the Massey street dispensary in Lagos where she was born. Most normal mothers do not have to go to such places. But because this little girl came into the

world before her time, her poor mother had to be taken to those white people birth's places. (P.9).

The title of the chapter 'What They told Me' explains Emecheta's perception and source of some of her information. She got some of the information she narrates in her autobiography through her relatives. The narrator reconstructs her past in a textual form and in an orderly manner. She narrates the situations surrounding her birth, the death of her parents, her schooling, marriage and her struggles in the diaspora. The events follow sequentially and the life seems patterned and well structured. Even though Gusdorf (1980:41) warns against too perfect an arrangement of one's story, by stating that "the original sin of autobiography is first one of logical coherence and rationalization, Stratobinski(1980:73)on the other hand, the critic suggests that:

The conditions of autobiographical writing... require that the work be a narrative and not merely a description... the narrative must cover a temporal sequence sufficiently extensive to allow the emergence of the contour of life. Within these conditions, autobiography may be limited to a page or extended through many volumes, it is also free to contaminate the events that could only have been witnessed from a distance.

Head Above Water in Stratobinski's description because it is a narrative that deals with the experiences of the author which develops logically and covers a temporal sequence. It is also depicted in several pages.

The writer incorporates and reproduces models of identities in her narrative so as to represent herself to the reader. She presents herself as a 'student', 'mother' and 'writer'. She first narrates her experience as a child and relied on what she was told, secondly she experiences the events which changes her own identity in each circumstance. Her experience as a student is

different from that of a mother and writer. It is all these experiences that help her circles through a number of identities. This point out the fluidity of identities through time and across political and geographical space (Smith and Watson, 2010:42). The narrator's ability to narrate her public and private experiences makes her autobiography interesting with great emphasis on her personal life as each experience helps her to discover herself thereby connecting her life. Her autobiography explains her radical perception about men and her concern with the plight of women in general.

3.3 CONCLUSION.

Emecheta's autobiography narrates the story and experiences of her life. Through identification, which is the central function of an autobiography, the narrator identify and represent herself to the readers by incorporating models of identities in her narrative. Her autobiography proves that women autobiographies are concerned with identity formation and reconstruction. It is also through identification that the narrator enable the reader to see her own personality ideology. *Head Above Water* fits into Lejuene's (1989:4) descriptions of autobiography as a " retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality. The writer's personality is revealed in her autobiography through her attempt to answer the question "who am I". In an attempt to answer the question, Emecheta carefully selects, recollects and represent herself to the readers.

CHAPTER FOUR:

NARRATIVE AND THE SELF IN *UP COUNTRY GIRL*

In the autobiography, Ogundipe attempts to represent the fluidity of female self identity and its struggle against societal codes. She identifies herself as a woman with enormous responsibilities. She depicts herself as a teacher, a Principal, mother and a Director. She carried out each responsibility with passion and dedication which eventually helps her to be hard working. Her autobiography dwells on herself, her core concern. She carefully constructs her own image by offering proper explanations and justifications because she believes her life and contributions as a woman are worthy of note. She explains various situations surrounding her life with each experience playing a role in her life. By doing that, Ogundipe is creating awareness and also celebrating her life. This is because women autobiographies were not considered worthy or interesting, but now, the female writers have challenged the long-held notion by writing their lives, portraying their identities and achievements. This is in line with Parke's (2002:2) argument that "the primary urge to celebrate, commemorate and immortalize, the pulse of life against death have continue to be the chief notes for writing lives."

Spender in Watson (2001:5) argues that autobiography presents not one life but two: "one is the self that others see, the historical person with achievements, personal appearance, social relationships... but there is also the self experienced by that person, the self felt from the inside that the writer can never get out of". This indicates that autobiography provides the opportunity for constructing the outer self while the inner self remains hidden. Autobiography describes the experience of the writer by trying to convince the reader that it is depicting the truth of the individual self and its struggle with the situation around.

Africa, especially Nigeria, has produced female writers who write their autobiographies as distinct forms that are quite interesting. Even though the writers narrate their life experiences, the historical aspects and happenings are also included. This follows the arguments by various theorist of women autobiographies who believe that women autobiographies deal only with the personal lives of the autobiographers without depicting the historical events and achievements. Ogundipe's incorporation the historical happenings of her time makes her autobiography fits into the description of scholars like Friedman (1986), Mason (1980), and Eakin (1999) who believe that women autobiographies are relational and collective. The historical happenings for Ogundipe is also part of her experiences and she does not feel herself to exist outside of the situation. Even if the issues virtually touch their lives, it is not all autobiographers that seem to forget the historical perspectives. One important feature in the work of Ogundipe is her ability to establish self identity through representation of history. Her major experiences are depicted through comparing them with historical happenings at her time. Many events happened in Nigeria, and for each event that happened, it marked another experience in the life of Ogundipe. Such issues include politics, the military coups, schooling and marriage. This idea of historical progress is tied to modernity, whereby the period's history is conceived through different versions of the same event narrated by voices belonging to a wide array of sources (Zekmi, 2009:176). For instance, Ogundipe's *Up Country Girl* depicts the military coup de tat and military intervention which happened in 1966:

When the first coup happened in January, 1966, we were in Ondo. It was from Doris, the African American Librarian that told us about the Akintola party even before the election.(p.252)

Ogundipe was able to experience the second coup when she took leave which coincided with her husband Bayo's , transfer to Lagos as Deputy Permanent Secretary. She also states how it affected her:

The short leave become memorable because I was in Lagos at the time of the second coup de tat of July 29th July, 1966... The three or four days in which everything happened were very very confusing to the general public... This touched me brieflt because in all the confusion, a call came to our house in Ikoyi and it was the military Governor of the East Odengwu Ojukwu wanting to help reach my brother. (p.253-254).

This reflects Ogundipe's involvement with the issues relating to the coup, because it was an uneasy time. This is contrary to Jellinek (1980) assertion that women dwell only on their personal lives. Jellinek (1980:10-19) has outlined the features of women autobiography:

Women autobiography is unique in three ways. First, women autobiographers focus on their personal lives rather than on broad historical issues of their time... secondly, women use irony, humour, understatement and a straight forward style rather than the idealized self confident, exaggerated and sometimes nostalgic style used by male autobiographers. The structure is rarely chronological, fragmentary, disconnected and are organized into chapters that stand alone frequently, women autobiographers interrupt themselves to tell an anecdote or relate a mental association.

The writer attempts to incorporate and reproduce models of identity in her narrative as a way to represent herself to the readers. Each identity she reproduces, it indicates the change of life that the narrator experiences right from Esa Oke, Queen's College and her life in the diaspora. She circles through a number of identities as each context and situation has different experiences. An example is indicated in the title of her autobiography. The title *Up Country Girl: A Personal*

Journey and Truthful Portrayal of African Culture announces the limit of identity that the narrative produces. The narrator depicts herself as an ‘up country girl’ who rose from a very humble and traditional way of living and was opportune to experience a modern and sophisticated way of life. In her autobiography, narrator incorporates models of identity in succession or alternation to tell a story of a serial development. She presents herself in successive chapters as an up country girl, a student, a mother, a teacher , principal and director. All these identities are depicted in particular occasions so as to prove and give explanations to the various experiences.

The autobiographical narrator carefully selects her narration by emphasizing what she feels is the most memorable in her experience. One important feature in the story is that of wearing shoes which she to explain how the act of walking barefooted is not a sign of poverty but as part of the African culture specifically, Yoruba culture. She repeatedly gives instances of the effects of shoes four times in her autobiography. For example, on the first page , Oguncipe explains:

I did not own a pair of shoes until when I was a secondary school pupil and nearly thirteen years old. This was not as a result of poverty (p,1)

Another instance is indicated in chapter seven:

One important item I had to buy was my first pair of shoes. I had no shoes before then merely because shoes are not essential part of life in the farming community of Esa Oke. (p.83).

Similarly, the writer explains the same issue of shoes in chapter eight which is titled ‘Queen in the Forties’:

I had proudly bought my nine-nine to me a symbol of my new status and eagerly put them on, that first Sunday in the boarding house. I was expecting to step proudly in my new shoes all the half a mile we would walk to the cathedral from the boarding house in Onikan. But what a shock I had never before been subjected to the rub of any shoe, and the rub of the hard leather of the back edge of my nine-nine soon become agony! (p.88)

The emphasis on the incident of wearing shoes indicates the memorable experience the writer had and its significance in her life. She repeatedly describes the incident so as to emphasise and explain the importance of that experience. This indicates why autobiography is concerned with selection and reconstruction. She justifies the reason for her experience with shoes which she was not as a result of poverty but as part of the way of living in the Esa Oke community.

This is one of the essential issues in writing an autobiography which is to offer personal justification and it is indicated in *Up Country Girl* as the writer carefully reports her own actions and explains the situations surrounding each and every experience. She explains how she suspended her plan for voluntary retirement and at the end how she was asked to withdraw her notice. She states:

Naturally... I had to suspend my own plan for voluntary retirement, for the simple reason that if I had gone on with it, people would have assumed that I was going because I had something to hide, and therefore I was leaving before being forcibly pushed out of the service. (p.286).

Another instance is indicated in the autobiography where the writer justifies the reason for scolding a headmaster in a school in Ikire when she learns that :

The headmaster was at home ill with guinea worm. I felt that an educated headmaster in an area where guinea worm was common, should have given an example of how to

avoid the disease by boiling his water... I scolded the headmaster in no certain terms, said I was ashamed of him and that I expected him before my next visit, he would have started teaching people, starting with his family the simple lessons of avoiding guinea worm (p.175-176).

Through self justification, the writer is opportuned, in the words of Gusdorf (1980:36), to do away with misunderstanding, to restore an incomplete or deformed truth. Her autobiography gives her the opportunity to explain her decisions and actions even though it is one side of the story that she depicts. The writer did not in her autobiography reveal the instance where the headmaster explains how he contracted the disease.

Up Country Girl chronicles Ogundipe's life experiences both in Nigeria and the diaspora. The writer organises her autobiography in a unique way. She narrates her experience of the simple life in Esa Oke, her school, career and retirement. She begins her narration with a simple description of the communal living, travelling and ways of making African dishes. The narrator's parents are described as literates who are exposed to education and are not poor. She states:

By the standard of their time, my parents were enlightened folk far from being illiterates, or people who had never stepped outside the confines of their hometown. Both John Folami and Rachel Illori were educated and literate. They were well versed in the reading of Yoruba, especially the Bible and Hymn books, and in addition had a smattering of English (p.1).

This indicates that the narrator did not encounter any difficulty in attending school as a woman because of the influence in her background. Her father sent both boys and girls to school.

The writer employs the first person point of view to narrate the events that happened. By narrating events from this point of view, the narrator becomes the authorial voice who makes

decisions, reports her own actions and makes judgements. She becomes the narrator and the subject. The reader is only left with the option of accepting the incidents reported. She allows us to witness her early childhood experiences because she was an inquisitive child who was usually scolded. As a result of curiosity, the writer had many questions unanswered because of the distance created by the Yoruba culture ,which demanded a considerable respect between father and child. She states:

If I had grown old enough to earn my father's respect for an independent, educated adult, it would have been acceptable for me to ask what had taken him to the Gold Coast, and why he had returned home at the time he did. I would have got answers to my questions and most likely also would have been regaled with the details of life as a railway worker so far away from home (p.9).

It indicates that Ogundipe was not opportune to have her questions answered because she could not get the story even from other sources particularly her mother. It also suggests there is a kind of distance created between the writer and her mother because she did not spend much time discussing her mother in the autobiography.

In addition to that, she describes herself as a lucky child that brings good luck which makes her to be identified as “an Alaye” meaning someone who attracts wealth to those around her. She explains:

Some neighbours... had the impression that I was a kind of good luck mascot. It was customary for someone about to go hawking to say “call me Jibola”. When I went to her, she would say something like “Jibola I want to see you before going on my way selling around. I know it will bring me luck and my goods will sell fast (p.9).

The impression the people in her village had on the writer prove to be correct because the writer faced limited challenges in her life, right from her childhood. Her experiences as a child, a student, a teacher and mother prove to be successful and hopeful even in her marriage. Ogundipe believes that her name was behind her success as it helped her achieve her dreams.

The narrator introduces the readers not only to her personal experience but also the African culture, particularly the Yoruba culture. Ogundipe explains the significance of drums, which encourage farmers to work hard. She exposes the reader to the way a particular dish is prepared. She describes the process:

Moin- moin takes a lot of time to prepare. The maker first must first soak and then skin the beans, grind them smoothly, mix the ground beans with oil, salt, pepper and other condiments to make a special cup of wrapped leaves, put measures of the bean mixture in them and then steam the wrapped mixture for nearly an hour (p.7)

By doing so, the narrator gives an insight into how the African food is prepared, which according to her is equivalent of the European fast food.

The description of the simple way of life in Esa-Oke, communal living, respect and traditional beliefs symbolises the typical African culture as evidently described below:

In Esa oke, like in most rural communities, it was just not done for anyone to walk past, unconcerned when a neighbors matter was about to spoil. For instance, if it was about to rain, and you noticed that the woman next door had left clothes on the line and gone off to the farm, it was your duty as a good neighbour to bring in the clothes and keep them for her till she returned (p.15)

Ogundipe's narration is chronological and flows from one chapter to another. She gives her chapters headings like ' Olden Days', 'Keeping Old, Accepting New' (p.411), 'Career

Progress' (p.216), Coup de dat and the Military(p.252) and 'A Federal Civil Servant'(p.260) . These titles are short and simple. The titles are depicted to capture the reader's attention and provide suspense. The titles introduce the readers to the incidents in the chapter which are of significance to the narrator. The writer does not deviate from the title she gives her chapters and she explains what she means using a particular title. For instance in "New Life, New shoes", Ogunjide explains from the first sentence and first paragraph of the chapter:

Settling down as a student in Queen's college was not difficult for an independent farmer's daughter from up country who had grown up in a community with the culture of not pampering children (p.94).

This explains the writer's new life and how she adjusts to the situations she finds herself. In the previous chapter titled "Up Country Girl Goes to Town", the narrator has provided a clue to the issues she is going to discuss in the chapter. She keeps narrating her experiences ranging from her journey to Esa Oke to Lagos by train, her experience with experimenting with shoes, her relationship with the other students in Queen's College and how she adjusted to the new life. Even though the writer digress and describe some incidents in her narration on a particular chapter, the reader finds continuity as each event narrated shed light on her experience. For instance, in (p.94), the writer did not only describe the way food is served in the dining but also included the story of some kitchen staff regarding stealing of some food items. She also relates the incident with the story of her house help Vivian:

The tables in the dining room were meant to seat eight students, with a girl at each end of the table. Eating in this new way was part of the interesting social adaptation of becoming a boarder and a town girl...After the meal, a collection of drumstick bones was made, and the girls discovered only half the number of legs they should have seen, six legs instead of twelve for six chickens. They then

dramatized by telling the authorities ... that the cooks had been buying one legged chicken for the boarding house meals. (p.95-96).

In an effort to make her story flow, Ogundipe reminds her readers on the incident she was describing earlier by using this statement “to get back on to my life as a boarding school student in Queen’s College”(p.96). This statement serves as a link and reminded her readers on the issue she was describing.

The autobiographer presents the story of the beginning of her life successes, which began when she took an entrance examination to a secondary school. The narrator considers herself to be lucky because she believes it was the scholarship that made it possible for her to attend the Queen’s college. She notes:

My full scholarship made it possible for me to attend Queen’s college for my secondary education. The cost of tuition and boarding in Queens college in the forties was seven pounds ten shillings per annum. If I had not won a scholarship, I know my father would not have found it easy to produce that kind of money for my education (p.75-76).

This indicates the opportunity the writer had to be among students in Queen’s College. Her experiences in the College had a considerable impact in her life because it was in the College that she started wearing shoes, eating on dining tables, clear a lot of misconceptions about various people and exposed to modern way of life.

The narrative chronology continues with the recounting of achievements and experiences. The narrator’s opportunity to study abroad pave the way for lot of successes and interesting experiences as the narrator explains:

Getting a scholarship to study abroad was a fantastic piece of good fortune. Everything was arranged for us. Kind expatriates gave advice about weather, so different from the tropical weather we knew; about the shortages, which were part of the aftermath of the world war... we also got a clue about the British way of life and British manners (p.124).

The final segment in her autobiography describes the narrator's achievements especially in her career when she rose to the rank of the Deputy Director and later retired. Her autobiography ends with a sense of self fulfillment as the writer realized her dreams. Her narrative tone right from the beginning of the narration was that of hope without much difficult challenges up to the end. This points the unique feature in her autobiography and a different version of experience in women's autobiography.

One important feature in the autobiography is the act of remembering incidents. Ogunidipe in her autobiography proves to be a witness to the events that happened. This suggests that she narrates only the events that she could recall and select the ones she feels are memorable and significant to her life. She keeps using 'I remember' in (p.80, 121, 68, 34 and 35) consecutively in her narration which indicates that she relies on her memory as her source of information as she evidently depicts in her autobiography:

I remember another occasion when we were returning from the farm, and I had a load in a basket on my head. The load turned out to be too heavy for my small neck. It must have been me, not my parent, who was responsible for this situation. I was born into a culture where the good child considered it her duty to please the adults by impressing them with her ability to do adult work at an early stage (p.53)

Though she mentions how some aspects of her story was narrated to her such as the story of her grandfather Ajaso who was a brave and confident person:

As a child, and for my years after, it never occurred to me to wonder how our house happened to be where it was. It was only later, when I learnt more about the character of my paternal grandfather, Ajaso, that I knew to build a house there had been a deliberate act of bravery. I was told that Ajaso had shown bravery and self confidence by choosing to live at a time when the safest place to be was in the middle of the town (p.12)

This act of remembering indicates that she was a witness to the events that happened to her which is significant to her life. She therefore merges the three 'I's in her narration, Ogun-dipe the subject, the object and the writer. She recounts what she believes is the truthful account of her experiences even though she may not recall other aspects. She bridges the gap by structuring the plot of her narrative in an interesting manner so as to convince her readers. She therefore selects, arranges and reconstructs her story.

Not only that, she uses photographs to present her progress in her career, like the opportunity to co-author a number of books such as *Brighter Grammar* and a number of secondary textbooks (p.146 to 172). This is contrary to Estelle C. Jellinek's (1986:10) assertion that most women write very little about their career that made them famous. Many women autobiographies discuss personal experiences only, which make early critics to conclude that women autobiographies are "salty" and "unreliable". Her autobiography contradicts their arguments because it touches not only on her private experiences but also her career. The photographs give a vivid picture of the events and convince the reader that what the writer is narrating is a truthful account of her experiences. Where photographs are not used, she uses drawings or sketches of people and the things described so as to explain and capture the attention of her readers. This is evident in chapters two, three and six respectively. *Up Country Girl* indicates the writer's interest in her teaching career which leads her to various offices and

positions, like serving as the principal of various institutions, Deputy Chief Federal Adviser on Education and Director in the same ministry. She describes many people in her autobiography whom she interacted with over the years. They include her family members and friends. For instance, the writer describes how she met Jibril Aminu and Abel Guobadia:

I was a kind of a liason officer between the ministry which was the founding father of the growing Universities and the national Universities commission which actively looked after their growth and administration, over and above the University vice chancellors and the governing councils of the institutions. This was when I came to interact with Jibril Aminu, at that time secretary to the commission... I also met Abel Guobadia, the most senior professional officer in the commission. (p.272)

The way the writer describes men in her autobiography is quite unique because she gives a good account of her husband as being responsible and calm; her marriage was basically different from Emecheta's. This is because of her commitment and the importance she attached to her family. She describes Mr Adebayo Ogundipe, her husband, as a hardworking teacher who happens to teach difficult subjects- Physics and Maths. She describes her ideology towards marriage:

The early years of marriage are the time when each spouses learn to understand the other, discovers their likes and dislikes and the habits of the other and learns to adjust to compromise until they can live harmoniously together, strengthen each other's joys and lighten each other's problems... The happy marriage is not the one where there are no difficulties because such marriage does not exist.(p230).

This means that the writer also encountered many problems, but she does not allow the readers to see into her marriage. She rather decides not to expose or talk about her personal relationship with her husband. By not allowing us to see the difficult situations, it gives room for narrative

gaps thereby allowing her readers to doubt some aspects of her story/ experience. It also points out that Ogundipe presents the edited version of her story since other aspects are hidden. She narrates only the positive sides and withholds information regarding the difficult situations.

The writer's experiences constitute the main sources of her narrative. Her autobiography depicts her life as a woman with enormous responsibilities. Even though she had a happy childhood experience and marriage, she dwells more on her career. This is because she feels her contributions are worthy of note and wants other women to learn so as to become models. She narrates her experience as a woman who is free from oppression and male domination. Just like Emecheta, Ogundipe takes actions, makes judgements and expresses opinions without allowing the reader to comprehend other characters thoughts and feelings.

Part of her style, the writer supports her narrative with songs both in English and Yoruba language especially when she was narrating her childhood school days. For instance:

We're almost home
We're almost home
We're almost home
Kini O wa nibe(p.46)

Also:

Ewa Yawo elewon o,
Ayat'o duno ayawani;
Ayat' ho dun o, ayawa
Ayat todun o ayawani..(p.5)

Her ability to recall, write and interpret the songs clearly shows the writer's familiarity with Yoruba language. The writer at various places in the texts uses language that works to persuade

readers that she is identifying herself as southerner. She gives instances in Yoruba language to illustrate her points and the village Ogundipe comes from indicates her identity as a southerner.

More so, the narrator takes the reader through her struggle, both private and public. The way she accounts some of her experiences during the military regime and the first and second world war indicates her point of view. She tries to describe her relationship with the then Military Governor of the East, Odumegwu Ojukwu, Colonel Yakubu Gowon, Jibril Aminu and her brother in law Brigadier Ogundipe (p.254). She describes the situation and their feelings:

It was an uneasy time, a time of tension, for citizens like us, still trying to understand what had happened in January. We could only hope that the nation would not suffer disastrous damage from the unexpected intervention of soldiers, who had made themselves new rulers in the country in place of the politician (p.254)

It is also through her experiences, that the writer was able to clear a lot of misconceptions about the places she visited and the people she met. She explains in her autobiography:

My earlier misconceptions about all these ‘kobokobo’ being strange people, possibly with strange habits vanished when I met them in the flesh in the boarding house... another misconception I got rid of was about people from the north of the country, when I met Affiniki Audu... in the untraveled ignorance of my childhood days, I could never have imagined ever come to admire someone from the north (p.89-90)

This enables the writer to discover a lot of incidents and issues. Self discovery is an essential aspect in autobiography as clearly indicated in *Up Country Girl*, it enable Ogundipe to discover the differences between her past and present circumstances which equally help her to make meaning out of it. She explains another situation and the interesting discovery she made, thus:

That the nationals of the francophone neighbors of Nigeria did not have our own attitude to the European nations who colonized us. They seemed quite happy with their relationship with France (p.269)

In essence, the writer is able to describe the simple way of life in her culture, such as communal living, how to show respect and traditional beliefs; thus, providing the background description of a typical African culture. Due to the opportunities she had, which led her to go abroad and study, it serve as an eye opener as she discover various situations surrounding her. Oguno does not have such radical thinking about men, because her husband is supportive and caring. Her progress in her career clearly shows how women can rise to a higher status without blaming their male counterparts. The writer's experience denies such things, like oppression and female subjugation. That is why women are not considered as 'a single monolithic group', because their experiences vary and they have different concern and perception about things generally. She depicts herself as a woman of enormous responsibilities and describes how she grapples with the challenges of her career together with her marriage, which equally gives her the strength to maintain her family. By doing so, she is in a way updating the images of women in a dignified way, thereby challenging the notion that women's roles are limited and their gender too is a problem.

4.3 UP COUNTRY GIRL AS A NATIONAL AND CITIZENSHIP NARRATIVE

Up Country Girl depicts the story of Oguno who portrays her experiences, especially those relating to her career which gave her the opportunity to rise to public prominence. Despite the fact that the autobiography is written by a woman, it fits into the autobiographies that reveal relationships and contributions to their nations. This is because she has contributed immensely to the education sector as she describes her experience as a teacher, principal, and Adviser in the

sector. Her autobiography indicates how women can be completely successful when given the opportunity. That is why Smith and Watson (2010:13) describe this form of autobiography, particularly the women's narratives, as:

Retrospective narratives that rehearse through performative self narrating the progressive goal of women's advancement in the public sphere as viable candidates and effective politicians, despite the obstacles placed in their way. These subjects too claim their lives as embodiments of modernizing nation.

This is contrary to Emecheta's and other autobiographies, which dwell more on the issues of gender. Ogunjipe's autobiography emphasises on her career. Her concern is not strictly about gender, but promoting moral and educational values in her country. Her narration depicts how she is concerned with the well being of her people, no matter where she finds herself. An example is indicated in her autobiography on the issue of scholarship, where she ensures that qualified students get the scholarship. She tries to avoid giving the awards to a particular area because she complained on the way the selection is done. She describes:

I soon discovered that I had to watch out for something like 'shifting of goal posts during the deliberations of the scholarship Board. This was because when awards in one particular academic field were being considered, if merit, in the form of the highest marks brought out a majority of candidates from one particular ethnic area, that merit would be the criteria for the award in that field. But if the principle of higher marks will not favour their own area, they would then shift the criteria to the principle of geographical distribution (p.273).

She makes sure that priority is not given to one particular ethnic area so as to avoid having "unbalanced results".

One significant aspect in the life of the writer, which had a great influence on her at all levels was her experience as a student at the Queen's College, Lagos. The Queens College context had taught her a number of lessons as she explains:

Settling down as a student in Queen's College was not difficult for an independent farmer's daughter from up country... I learnt a lesson from the fact that an independent farmer's daughter had got into this good school, and on full scholarship too, purely on merit as a result of performance in the entrance examination, and not because she was the daughter of an influential somebody, or the bearer of one of the 'aristocratic' Lagos names. This lesson has remained with me all my life and never made it easier for me to always consider myself bound to favour merit, and never to give to the child of a known friend, or influential senior, what should by right go to some unknown but more deserving person (p.94).

The lessons learnt learn in the Queen's College remained with Ogundipe as she applies it in her life and career.

Another significant event in the life of the writer was her participation in the co- authorship of the secondary school English text books. She narrates how she happened to be involved in the co- authorship. These textbooks contribute a lot in the teaching of English language in secondary schools. She narrates:

The only memorable thing that happened during my smooth stay as principal of GTTC Illesha was having my unexpected visitors from Ibadan in the form of two gentlemen from Longman, the publishers. Their mission was to ask if I was interested in the co-authorship of a new long man project, an English textbook for secondary schools. They have already found one author, Phillip Tregidgo and were looking for a Nigerian to join him (p.236)

Ogundipe made up her mind and agreed to participate. After a series of discussions and debates with Mr Tregidgo, they agreed and came up with *Practical English*. She feels that it was necessary to work and contribute her own quota to the development of education and her nation.

As she explains what motivated her to work:

...the main reason I could not stop working was not because we could not have survived on my husband's income. Civil service salaries were good. The main reason was my feeling that it would be selfish of me not to use my qualification for the benefit of my developing country (p.220).

This indicates the writer's concern with her country because she feels it is necessary to contribute in her own ways. She is a strict teacher who keeps an eye on her staff when she was the Principal of the GTTC. She discouraged the issue of bribery among her staff like, when she:

Discovered that one of the Nigeria staff, whose duty was to supervise the buying of foodstuffs for feeding the students who all lived in the college, had been accepting gifts from the contractors who supplied the college... I threatened to get him sacked and made him pay for the oil (p.226).

This indicates her commitment and dedication to her work as she succeeds in all aspects of her life. The autobiography describes the achievement and progress in her career. She virtually demonstrates her capability by using each and every opportunity she had to contribute her own quota. Ogundipe symbolises the modern sophisticated woman who did not reject traditional roles of being a wife, and mother; in addition to her career as a civil servant. This exemplifies how a woman grapples with her career as she struggles to serve her country. This equally points out that women autobiographies are not strictly concerned with the issues of gender but also with their careers and also indicates that their concerns are varied.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The writer demonstrates that what she documents highlights her life and represents the achievements of women. Ogundipe's autobiography depicts how women can be successful in a dignified manner. The writer's ability to describe both her personal experiences with her career indicates that women autobiographies vary. Ogundipe's autobiography fits into Smith and Watson's (2010) description of women narratives which narrates the progressive goal of women's advancement. Ogundipe through her experiences, depict the picture of her experience and the reality.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

Women's autobiography has often been a source of identity formation and construction. The two women autobiographies studied in this presentation, *Head Above Water* and *Up Country Girl*, have revealed the fluidity of self identity and the writers' struggle against societal codes. Emecheta and Ogunديpe reveal their experiences through self examination of their lives. They depict their own perception and views on the events that happened to them

The current study has examined the struggles, achievements and transformation of Emecheta and Ogunديpe within the discourse of autobiography as presented. Both writers through their deep authorial intent express their views and achievements. The study has attempted to demonstrate that through the cross examination of the texts, irrespective of their concern and contexts, Emecheta and Ogunديpe have depicted in an interesting manner in their autobiographical works, the plight, concern and achievement of women.

The message contained in both *Head Above Water and Up Country Girl* is simply that autobiography serves as a medium through which women identify and represent themselves ideologically, culturally and socially. Emecheta and Ogunديpe's concerns and ideologies manifest themselves in the two autobiographies through the presentation of two autobiographers' achievements, and actions. Their narratives depict their experiences and visions.

The issue of racism is among the problems the two autobiographers encountered in their lives. Both Emecheta and Ogunديpe had responded to it with a strong sense of their own identity as depicted in the autobiographies. Emecheta's *Head Above Water* in particular, contains a sequence of lessons about resisting racial discriminations. Her children were rejected in schools and even

accommodation became difficult to secure for the family, as they frequently met the “SORRY NO COLOUREDS” sign written boldly on any vacant property she inspected. She depicts herself as a woman living with the burden of her colour and race, which cannot be changed.

However, Ogunidipe, uses a different approach in protesting the same issue of racism, because her own experience was not as harsh as that of Emecheta. This suggests that blacks in the diaspora are considered as “the other” who are judged based on the colour of their skin. Emecheta and Ogunidipe, however, were able to overcome such prejudices as they worked hard. These experiences are depicted in the two autobiographies in a form of response to the situation in the two countries they found themselves.

The two autobiographers share a number of similarities, especially in terms of their desire or passion about literature. Emecheta began to have interest on literature when she was in the primary school as she dreamt of the poetry of Keats and Shakespeare. This encouraged her to write later and depict her own experiences in novels, like *In the Ditch*, *Second Class Citizen* and *Joys of Motherhood*. Ogunidipe also has the passion for reading and teaching. Her desire to find a suitable textbook for the teaching of English reveals how committed she has always been to literary studies. This gave her the opportunity to co - author secondary schools English textbooks, which have now made the names Ogunidipe and Tregidgo household names. Not only that, she produced a collection of stories titled *Folktales and Fables*. This equally indicates that the passion of the two autobiographers studied for literature is guided by their early contact with literature as a subject.

The structural technique employed by Emecheta and Ogunidipe are basically the same. Both attempted to bring the reader close to their thoughts, actions and realities as women, so as

to make the readers comprehend how women can achieve success through hard work. Ogun-dipe specifically uses photographs in her autobiography and where there is no photograph she uses sketches and drawings in order to emphasise what she is describing. The significance of this is that it captures her readers' attention and persuades them that she was really a witness to the events that happened. Through their experiences, the two autobiographers reveal the different aspects of a typical modern woman who can rise from a traditional background, get educated and become a successful model in the society.

The two writers explain the situation in they find themselves. They offer explanation and justification for their personal lives and achievements. They narrate their experiences as students right from their secondary schools, and the university, as well as life in the diaspora, their literary career and experiences as public servants. Emecheta and Ogun-dipe's ability to narrate both their public and private experiences can be used to debunk Jellinek's (1980) assertions that women dwell or focus on their personal lives rather than the broad historical issues of their time and career. Emecheta and Ogun-dipe define themselves for their readers' woman as she is and as she dreams. Despite the fact that the two autobiographers are both from Nigeria, they have different experiences and they use different ways in overcoming them.

Autobiography is a discourse of identity delivered in the stories we tell about our lives and reflects our way of living. Both *Head Above Water* and *Up Country Girl* focus on the two writers stories and their individual personality. The writers take the readers to a deeper level of understanding about their inner self, society and the human condition. They also re- create the stories to make them more dramatic during the narration.

Both Emecheta and Ogunjipe tell their stories in the first person voice and the reader gets the story from their point of views. The writers depict the socio cultural, economic and political situations in the Eastern and Western Nigeria. Through the use of the first person point of view, the reader gets a subjective account of the narrators' thoughts, feelings and reactions to events. This is achieved through careful construction and reconstructions of their stories. Both writings are in English and in some cases where the events are described in their indigineous languages, the incidents are translated. They were able to produce narratives that represent women as worthy and honest people in their autobiographies. Both autobiographers stress the theme of identity and representation in their texts through the emphasis of certain events and selection and arrangement of details. The tone of the narrative voice in both autobiographies is that of self importance. Emecheta and Ogunjipe portray a picture of themselves to assert their identity as women and models. Their autobiographies ended with a promising tone of self fulfillment and self celebration.

Both autobiographies provide access to knowledge about Emecheta and Ogunjipe's experiences. They use their autobiographies to create identities for themselves by presenting themselves as models for the women. The two autobiographers justify their actions and reasons for taking decisions and making judgements in their autobiographies. In Emecheta's case, her retrospective account attempts to justify her claim that she struggled with her head above water, while Ogunjipe's is an attempt to document her life and the history of Africa, particularly Nigeria from the military regime to independence.

The narratives created by Emecheta and Ogunjipe are of interest because they present the reader with different life stories. Each text presents various layers of meaning. Their autobiographies are concerned with the experiences, and the symbolic spaces they occupy during

their life course. Their texts not only present life stories through the voice of the autobiographical 'I', rather at another level we find that their life stories are concerned with the autobiographers in relation to their cultural identities. This level of meaning is understood through an interpretation of narrative discourse that focuses on family genealogy, education and cultural practices.

The autobiographers narrate their stories, first of all, through the narrative discourse that is produced by the act of storytelling within the text, especially in terms of the symbolic spaces in which they develop and which give coherence to their lives stories. The question of the autobiographical subject's identity and our understanding to it is central in women autobiographical writing. Mills (1997:30) notes that many post structuralists have "moved away from the notion of the Cartesian subject, the subject whose existence depends on its ability to see itself as unique and as self contained distinct from the others, because it can think and reason. They focus instead on the 'subject in progress' or the subject in crisis rather than the unified subject.

Both autobiographical narrators begin the chronology of their texts by emphasising their places of birth. Although the narratives begin with the autobiographical 'I', the reader encounters digression in the chronology of events even though it does not affect the flow of narration. They use the medium to narrate their past experiences and history as well as account of the life of their parents, friends husbands and children. Thus, from the very beginning of the narration, the autobiographers take on the function of describing to the reader the incidents concerning their family, rather than focusing on the self. The two autobiographers present their personal history of life successes as 'subjects in process'. They use 'I ' several times in their narratives to refer to themselves and their achievements. Their autobiographies depict how women gradually move from the private home to the public space of research, writing and publishing. It is important to

note that both the two texts examined provided us with interesting experiences that point to the development of the autobiographical subjects in their lives.

Finally, it is quite apparent that in both *Head Above Water* and *Up Country Girl*, Emecheta and Ogundipe create a voice for the women and prove that no incident in their struggle is too small to be narrated. The two women autobiographers want the world to value what they have done and through their stories, indicate that experiences shape who we are and what we become. This equally demonstrates how the two texts are structured within the same theme : an attempt to construct and assert their identities.

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